Kyoko Kawabara is dealing with a lot in life. Her mother recently passed, her father barely acknowledges her, and school sucks. She finds her solace posting her All Might fanart online, where she happens to stumble upon another big fan of All Might: a boy named Izuku Midoriya.

As the months pass, their relationship changes, as well as life testing them both while they try to find comfort in each other. But as they keep secrets from each other--Izuku with One For All, and Kyoko with her inner turmoil and even withholding her true face--Kyoko wonders if they even have a future at all.
Notes

Yes. I know I have a lot of fics I'm working on. Have another one.

Happy New Year, y'all. Fair warning: there is a lot of dealing with depression in this, including suicidal thoughts and a possible attempt. If this is triggering in any way, please stop reading now.

This is going to be a very ugly story dealing with the realities of depression, grief and mental illness. It's something personal to me, as I deal with it everyday.

This fic is NOT meant to exploit mental illness. Merely exploring it, combatting it, and hopefully helping others try to overcome it.

Please reach out. Seek help. Find your own solace.
The television was flipped on to the morning news, where a one-horned man prattled on about the latest in a string of robberies near the financial district. They'd caught the robber, at least from what they were saying. Kamui Woods, the latest professional Hero, had put a stop to the robbers. The fangirls were already going nuts over him online. Personally, he wasn't Kyoko's type, but she didn't particularly mind his heroics. Her black hair was up in a high ponytail, away from the eggs she was making for breakfast at the small kitchen of the tiny apartment she shared with her father, who was still asleep in his room. She had tried waking him twice now, but he hadn't budged. Kyoko safely assumed he wasn't working late last night, like he had claimed. She sighed, opted not to go there first thing in the morning. She was simply going to make breakfast for them both and then head off to school. Nothing more.

Her wrist touched the side of the hot pan, and Kyoko hissed in pain, snatching her wrist away before running it over cold water in the sink. She tried not to cry at the sting, instead bit down hard on her lower lip to not cry out. She wished her father was up to help. And then her heart bitterly tugged and made her wish for her mother instead.

Kyoko turned her attention back to the television, where the weatherman was talking about clear skies and little to no winds. There was a happy tug at her lips at that. They'd had several days of rain, so it was nice to see some sun. She turned off the water, finished cooking the eggs and bacon, served them both on two separate plates before setting them down at their respective places at the dinner table. She purposely ignored the empty chair beside her father's usual place, headed to her father's bedroom.

Kyoko pushed the door open, where it creaked incessantly. It still didn't cause her father to stir. He was snoring lightly, his body sprawled out in a bed that was clearly made for two. The digital click on the bedside table read 7:18am. Kyoko tiptoed over the discarded clothes, thrown in a heap on the floor. She stepped on a plastic water bottle, where it croaked loudly. She almost tripped on the discarded pizza boxes before reaching her father, gently shaking him.

“Dad?” She whispered. He groaned, turned his head. His hair, a messy brown, poked about in different directions. “Dad, I made breakfast. Most important meal of the day, remember?”

Another groan. Kyoko eyed the clock before shaking him again.

“Dad. You're going to be late for work. Wake up.”

He finally opened one sleepy eye.
“It’s 7:18.” Kyoko reminded him. “I have to leave for school soon. And you have to get ready for work.”

He immediately sat up, causing her to jump back a bit. He eyed the clock, seized it and looked at the time closely before scrambling out of bed, tripping over the mess before going into the closet, rummaging through clothes for the day.

Kyoko paused, watched the closed closet door as her father scrambled to change. “Erm….I made breakfast, Dad….eggs and bacon…we can sit together and you can tell me about your day yesterday--!”

“--I'll have to take it to go, sweetheart! I've got a meeting first thing!” He said in one breath, clearly in a rush. Kyoko's heart fell, but she tried to recover quickly. It wasn't like she was surprised. “…Okay. I'll just eat my breakfast and then head out...okay?”

“Sure, sweetheart! Have a great day at school!”

Kyoko left without a word, plopped down at the table and quickly ate alone. The minute she ate her last piece of bacon, she dumped her plate in the sink, grabbed her bag and headphones, and left their apartment.

She thought the sunshine would improve her mood. Instead, as she rode the public bus to school, it felt like it mocked her. Kyoko kept her music on full blast, ignored the stare from the old man sitting beside her. She sighed, decided to message the only person she could think of messaging first thing. She went to her favorite app, realized she already had a message from him. A rare, genuine smile tugged at her lips, as well as a faint blush heating her cheeks as she read his message.

*Hey! Good morning! Hope you're doing okay today. I saw your newest All Might fanart, and it was amazing as always! You're probably heading to school now. Message me when you can. I mean, if you want to....be safe, okay?*

She giggled, felt happy for the briefest of moments as she typed back, *I'm doing okay. I'm so happy you liked my fanart. It really means a lot coming from you...oh did you hear about Kamui Woods’ newest rescue? It was amazing, right?! You've got to tell me what you've gathered about his Quirk.*

His reply was instant, *I've got notes! But...are you sure you want to see? I don't wanna bore you...*
Don't worry. I love when you talk nerdy to me ;3

She sat back, wished she could be nearly as flirtatious and playful in person. But alas, it was much easier flirting through text than in person or even on the phone. Besides, they’d only just started talking about a few months ago on the All Fans for All Might chatroom. He commented on one of her drawings (her art classmate Ayu made her post it online after weeks of begging), and she thanked him and, well, the rest was history. Two avid fans of All Might and all professional heroes, speaking via text and social media.

She didn't even know his real name. Just his username: MightyMidoriya715. That and he went to Aldera Junior High, across town. But she liked talking to him. He liked her fanart, didn't think she was a total loser. And he was really nice.

Kyoko got off the bus, prepared for the worst as she stood in front of her junior high. At least it would be over soon. In ten months, she'd be in high school. Just ten more months. She huffed, slung her bag over her shoulder as she walked up the steps to the building.

And as if on cue, she was knocked into, sent falling on the curb, her books scattering all over the place. She sighed, looked up at her usual bully, Touya Haru.

“Watch where you're going, freak!” He teased, laughing along with his group of friends as they headed inside.

“...jerk...” she grumbled as she stuffed everything back in her bag, everyone else stepping over or around her instead of helping. The late bell rang, and she swore, getting up and trying to run to class only to find she had skinned her knee. By the time she hobbled into her class, the teacher gave a stern look and a detention slip for after school.

Kyoko huffed as she sat down, ignored the sniggers from Haru.

It was going to be another one of those days.

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“How are you feeling today, Kyoko?”

Kyoko tried her best not to roll her eyes as she glared at the school's grief counselor. Every discussion started like this in the past six months. Every lunch period, before art class, she would sit in an empty office on a red sofa and confide to Miss Akizuki about how she was feeling, what was bothering her, etcetera. Kyoko wished she didn't have to go, but since her father and her principal mutually agreed she “needed” this, she didn't have much of a choice.

Miss Akizuki was young, perhaps fresh out of college, but Kyoko never asked. She remained cross-legged on the couch, picking at the skirt of her school uniform.

“Kyoko?” Miss Akizuki tried again.

She shrugged. “I feel fine. I guess.”

“What is fine?”

Kyoko huffed. “Just fine.”

“Did you sleep well last night?”

Kyoko nodded, lied, “Sure.”

“Did you take your sleeping aids?”

Kyoko snorted. “It's just pills, Miss Akizuki. Just say that.”

“We prescribed them for you because you were having trouble sleeping. And you used to be up for three days straight. You know that isn't good for you.”

Kyoko didn't reply.
“Did you do what we decided to try?”

“I made breakfast for Dad. Offered my time. He was running late for work so he didn't have time to sit with me.”

Miss Akizuki sighed, wrote something down in her notepad. She looked up, found Kyoko unlacing her boots and lacing them again. She gave a small smile. “And how’s everything else?”

“Everything is fine, it's just my mom who's dead.” Kyoko snapped. “Can I go have lunch now?”

Miss Akizuki paused. “You're angry.”

“No, I'm hungry. Can I go?”

Miss Akizuki regarded her for a long moment. “You aren't a prisoner, Kyoko. You can go if you'd like. But I still want a full report tomorrow.”

Kyoko glared in response, got up as she grabbed her bag. She threw it over her shoulder, left the office to an empty hallway. Her footsteps echoed as she walked to her locker, plopped down by it as she fished out the peanut butter and banana sandwich she made that morning for lunch. Finally. Some alone time. She lifted her sandwich, ready to take a big, hefty bite--

--before she knew it, her sandwich was on the floor, slapped out of her hands and stepped on. She clenched her fists, looked up at Haru, who was with his stupid friends yet again.

“What're you doing here, freak?” He sneered as his buddies rummaged through her lunch bag. They took her chips, began eating them in front of her. “Can't even eat lunch like a normal person?”

“Yeah, peanut butter and banana? Gross!” One of his friends laughed.

Kyoko rolled her eyes, got up, snatched her lunch bag away. “Very funny, Haru. Now leave me alone.” She snapped. She tried to move, but Haru got in her way, glaring at her.
“Whoa, hey, someone's feeling a bit feisty today…”

“Go away, Haru.”

“What, missing your mommy aga--?”

He barely finished the sentence before Kyoko's fist met his jaw, sending him flying backwards onto the linoleum floor. He was a sniveling mess, holding his mouth, where there was blood. His friends were busy staring in shock as students poured out classrooms to see what the ruckus was about.

“I'd say watch your mouth, but I think I already chipped one of your pathetic fillings.” Kyoko grumbled.

“You're crazy!” One of Haru's friends yelled.

“Kawabara!” One of the teachers shouted at Kyoko. Kyoko deflated. “One week of detention for you! And I'll be notifying Miss Akizuki about this!”

Kyoko rolled her eyes, marched down the hallway to her next class, art. At least something good could possibly come out of this day.

Inside her pocket, her phone vibrated. She sighed, took it out, shocked to find a message from MightyMidoriya715. Wait. More than one.

She quickly turned the corner into the nearest bathroom, locked herself in one of the stalls to look. It was only a matter of time before the principal called her to the office. She had a limited window to see this. The first message was indeed explaining Kamui Woods.

*Kamui Woods has an amazing Quirk, but his downfall is fire. He would have to stay away from dry areas or anything involving fire otherwise he could risk burning up. He's got great flexibility and he's very fast, making him excellent for rescue missions. I wouldn't recommend him for battle, though. At least not concerning fire...I'm sorry. I think I'm talking too much!*

The next message was sent an hour later, shortly before she met up with Miss Akizuki.
I'm sitting in class. And I know I should be paying attention. But I'm thinking about you. Hope your day is going great.

The next one was right after.

Was that weird? I didn't mean to make you feel weird! I'm sorry if I made you feel weird!

She quickly typed out a reply, the smile on her lips before she even knew it. It wasn't weird. I've been thinking about you too. Today sucks. Wish you were here.

The reply was instant. But it wasn't just text. It was a photo. Kyoko frowned before opening the file.

Her heart stopped at the sight of the photo: a green haired, green eyed, freckled boy, shyly smiling at the camera and holding up an awkward peace sign. Kyoko realized it was him. Underneath were his words,

Have no fear! For I am here! ...lame, right? I can't be there for you literally. But hopefully my face doesn't weird you out.

It dawned on her then that they had just crossed a line. Kyoko thought about sending a photo of herself, only to change her mind. Like a cute boy like him would want to see someone plain like her. She simply wrote back,

You're cuter than I imagined! How could you think that face is weird??? Thanks for being here. You made my day. <3

“Miss Kawabara!”

Kyoko immediately put her phone away, stuffing it in her pocket just as the bathroom stall door was thrown open and Principal Yuri glared at her through bespectacled eyes.

“Hi.” Kyoko gave a cheeky grin, “So happy to meet again.”
Principal Yuri didn't look amused. She pointed to Kyoko, “My office. Now.”

So much for art class.
Principal Yuri's office was clean, pristine, and quiet. Everything on her desk was placed to a tee. The slightest pencil out of place would be immediately moved back into its proper place, perfectly aligned by size next to photos of Principal Yuri's husband and children. Kyoko sat quietly in front of her, one hand picking at the skin on her arm.

Yuri sat with a stoic glare that would make All Might himself cower, or so Kyoko thought. She bit the inside of her cheek as Yuri spoke quietly,

“You punched one of your fellow students in the face.”

Kyoko opted not to reply.

“You broke his nose. Chipped one of his teeth. I had to call his parents and urge them not to press charges.”

Silence.

“He has been crying in the nurse's office ever since.”

Kyoko couldn't resist a snort there, the chortle coming out before she could reign it in.

The vein popped on Yuri's neck. “Miss Kawabara, I fail to see what is so funny about you assaulting a student!”

“Sorry, ma’am…” Kyoko covered her mouth, tried to fix the smile tugging at her lips. She cleared her throat, straightened her face, sat up as she replied, “With all due respect, ma’am, he talked about my mother.”

Yuri hesitated, let out a frustrated sigh, “That still doesn't justify assault, Kawabara. I've also been
told you cut your session short with Miss Akizuki today.”

Crap. Kyoko grew quiet again, averted her gaze to the perfectly aligned pencils.

Yuri raised an expectant eyebrow, “Care to explain why?”

Nothing.

Yuri huffed, softened her voice, “Kyoko. I can't help you if you won't help me.”

And there it was. The pity. The sadness. The bullshit Kyoko didn't care for. Everyone gave it to her after her mother died. She didn't need anyone's pity. Everything was fine! The world kept moving. Why stop now?

Yuri waited before sighing once again, “I won't call your father. I've also cleared your detentions for this week, so you can go home immediately after school. I've explained to the teachers your...situation, and they understand. But I don't want you making this a habit.”

Kyoko looked up at her, “No! I don't need anyone feeling sorry for--!”

“--only this week.” Yuri interrupted. “But if this happens again, your father will be notified. And you could potentially be suspended from school. Do you want that?”

Kyoko deflated, clenched her fists.

“Kyoko?”

“....no, ma'am.”

“Then you won't be doing this again?”
“No, ma’am.”

“And I want you to stay the full period with Miss Akizuki from now on. Are we clear?”

“....Yes, ma’am.”

“And I strongly urge you to find a creative outlet for your aggression.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

Yuri regarded her for a long moment before saying,”You're a good girl, Kyoko. And your mother was very good to me and my family. I only want to help you. I just wish you'd open up more.”

Kyoko didn't reply.

“You can go. But I'll be keeping an eye on you.”

“Yes, ma'am.”

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Ayu Sakura was the top student in many of her classes, and even a star athlete. Unfortunately, there was only one thing she wasn't particularly good at: art. She huffed in frustration at the bowl of fake fruit their art teacher put in front of the students for them to draw. She could barely draw a circle resembling an orange, let alone a straight line. This wasn't like physics or math, where her Quirk could help break down formulas in seconds. No, this was art. Her worst subject.

The door opened, and Mr. Hirota turned to find his star artist, Kyoko Kawabara, walk in with a signed slip from Principal Yuri. “Miss Kawabara! Excellent timing! Please, have a seat!”

Kyoko handed him the slip, but he waved dismissively. Hirota was always a bit free-spirited and lax with his students. “Come now, no need for that! Feel free to draw!”
Kyoko sighed as she plopped down at her usual seat next to Ayu. Thrilled to have her favorite artist friend back, Ayu grinned, “Kyo!”

Kyoko gathered her supplies as she groaned, “I told you not to call me that, Sakura.”

“Oh, boo! You still won't call me Ayu like I asked!”

“Fine. Sorry. Ayu.”

“I'm soooo happy you're here,” Ayu whispered as Kyoko fished out a red apple, took a hefty bite of it before pressing her right index finger to the paper, where red paint began to line the paper. “I have so much juicy gossip for you!”

Kyoko tried not to look bored as Ayu began talking about the latest scandal in her tennis team: two of her teammates wore the same outfit. As she prattled on, Kyoko took the bowl of candy Hirota offered her in order to help her Quirk take effect. She picked up an orange gummy to paint orange from her left index finger, ate more colored gummies to get the colors she wanted to complete the drawing.

“Ooh, Kyo! Can I have blue for the bowl, please? I didn't grab that paint when I did my supply run…” Ayu pouted at her lackluster drawing.

Kyoko rummaged through the candy bowl, found a sour blue gummy, shoved it into her mouth and pressed her left pinky to Ayu's drawing. When she moved her finger, blue emerged from her finger tip, earning an awed gasp from Ayu.

“Thanks! Your Quirk is soooo cool, Kyo!” Ayu gushed, “You should come to my house for a sleepover and you can teach me how to draw! I'll teach you makeup tricks in return!”

Kyoko sighed, “I'll have to check my schedule,” she lied.

Ayu wasn't a particularly bad person. In fact, she was the closest thing Kyoko had to any sort of friend at school. They had been sitting together in art class since the beginning. Ayu was popular, smart, and not particularly malicious whatsoever. She was just so cheerful and hyper it was often too
much sometimes. But Kyoko didn't really have the heart to snap at her, so she would merely tolerate her presence.

Besides, Ayu only really started talking to Kyoko shortly before her mother died. And then, when it happened, Ayu insisted on always talking during art and even exchanging phone numbers. Despite many offers to hang out, Kyoko never took her up on them. It was obvious Ayu was just feeling sorry for her. While she wasn't as obnoxious about it as everyone else at school, she didn't really want to indulge Ayu. Eventually. Ayu would get bored anyway.

The bell rang shortly after, leaving a pouty Ayu as she appraised her barely finished drawing. “Crap. It's so bad!” She wailed. “I'm never gonna pass this stupid class!”

Kyoko sighed, chugged a bottle of water to reset her Quirk. “It's okay. It's minimalist.” She offered. “You can tell Hirota that when he checks it out.”

Ayu looked at her as if she had blessed her. “You are a genius, Kyo!” She cheered. “Thanks!”

Kyoko shrugged, moved to leave, but grunted when Ayu unexpectedly pulled her in for a hug. Ayu was beaming when she pulled away, “You've got math next, right?”

“Yeah…”

“Ooh, let me know how you do on the quiz! If you failed, I can tutor youuuuu.”

Kyoko sincerely hoped she had passed that quiz. “....Um….sure.” she said gamely for Ayu's benefit.

And then, Kyoko's phone vibrated in her pocket. “Erm, gotta go. See you tomorrow.” Kyoko said quickly before heading off to class. Just as she turned the corner, she fished out her phone, grinned at the message waiting for her.

*You think I'm cute?! No one's ever thought that before...thanks...I'm sure you're cute too!*

Kyoko felt her cheeks heat up. She wanted to send him a selfie, but as she tried, she looked at her face on the front-facing camera of her phone. Slim, pale face. Plain, blah brown eyes, dark circles
underneath them, making her high cheeks look even slimmer, like a dead person. And of course, her black hair, limp and straight, bangs covering her wildly large forehead.

*Cute. Yeah, maybe in another dimension. An alien one.* She turned off her camera, simply sent a winky face emoji before hurrying off to math class.

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“Did I weird her out? I definitely weirded her out...geez, why did I have to send her a stupid selfie, geez. Maybe she showed it to all her friends and they're laughing at me. Maybe she's so horrified by how I look she wants to throw her phone out a window...maybe she..”

No one was immune to Izuku Midoriya's endless mumbling rampage as he sat in the back of the class, reading and rereading the messages from the girl he only knew by her online alias, BananaFanaBoNana, or he preferred, Nana for short. Was it a reference to what he thought it was? He would have to ask her.

If he hadn’t already weirded her out.

“I'm such an idiot...why did I tell her I was thinking about her? Way to go, Izuku...you only possibly blew it with the one girl you've been talking to for just a few months and you don't even know what she looks like and you just weirded her out by being stupid and sending a selfie of yourself. Crap, what kind of idiot am i to--?”

“Midoriya!”

Izuku started, glanced up to find the entire class staring at him. He shrunk further into his seat as the teacher glared.

“Would you care to share with us what you're thinking?” Said teacher raised an eyebrow, followed by snickering from classmates and a burning glare from Katsuki Bakugo.

“Um…” Izuku was careful to hide his phone in his pocket. “N--no...I'm sorry…”
“Then I suggest you pay attention.”

“Yes, sir…”

More snickering, plus a “damn nerd,” from one Katsuki. Izuku tried to focus on the lesson, but he couldn't stop his thoughts traveling to the amazing, talented artist across town.

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Another tedious day, finally over. The last bell rang and Kyoko was more than relieved to just go home, watch some All Might videos online, probably message Mighty Midoriya until he fell asleep, and stay in her room painting all night. She already had her bag on, spotted Haru with a bandage running up to his parents’ car. She couldn't stop a tiny smile at how he ran sniveling. However, she didn't feel like being screamed at by someone else's parents, so she left the front of campus, already on her way to the bus home.

“Kyoooooo! Hey, Kyo! Wait uppppp!”

Kyoko turned, found Ayu hurrying up, bag in tow as she waved. “Kyo! I'm so happy I caught you! Let's walk together!”

“I'm….I have to take the bus…” Kyoko tried to weakly protest, but Ayu's grinning face was hard to resist. She waved, “No worries! They cancelled practice today, so I figured I'd just walk, but I'm glad I found you!”

She linked arms with Kyoko, who was surprised at the gesture. They walked to the bus stop arm-in-arm, with Ayu gabbing away about anything and everything and Kyoko listening here and there. When the bus came Ayu still didn't leave, sat beside Kyoko while still talking. Kyoko listened, occasionally nodded or gasped at the appropriate times. It was during a lull in conversation that Ayu briefly scrolled through her phone, texting perhaps a friend. Kyoko took advantage, fished out her phone to shoot a message to the boy,

_Out of school. What a day I had. I've got to tell you about it once I get home. How was your day?

“Who's MightyMidoriya715?” Kyoko almost jumped out of her skin. She immediately hid her phone in her pocket, found Ayu innocently blinking, having already put away her own phone.
“Uh, er, it's just--nobody,” Kyoko quickly muttered, gave a thin-lipped smile for Ayu's benefit.

Ayu studied her a long moment, then her whole face lit up, her amber-colored eyes bright as she squeaked, “Ohmigoodness! Is it a boy?!"

“No!” Kyoko snapped.

“Ooh! It isssss!” Ayu sang. She poked Kyoko's cheek. “Lookit how you're blushing! It's soooooo cute!”

“H--he's just someone who likes my artwork online!” Kyoko protested.

“That means you've got a fan! See? I told you that you were amazing! That All Might you drew those months ago...Mr. Hirota still won't stop gushing about it!” Ayu sighed dreamily. “Soon, you will be a world-renowned artist. Maybe your art will make the museums, ooh! Maybe even the Louvre! Imagine your art in France! Merci beaucoup!” she giggled after her rather bad attempt at French.

Kyoko raised an eyebrow, “I dunno about the Loo, or...whatever....I just like to draw...*"

“People always go far when they chase their passions!” Ayu proclaimed, “And you have a passion, Kyo! Maybe you should go to a high school for the arts! Hey, where d'you wanna go, anyway? Our applications are due soon!”

“Um...I dunno. I just applied...anywhere…”

Ayu frowned. “Boo! That means we won't see each other after the end of the year!” She immediately lit up, “Oh! But we have each other's numbers! And you can come visit me over the summer! I have a pool, so we can swim together, tan together and find hot, exotic summer loves!”

Kyoko wasn't sure she wanted that. “Um...yeah, I'll see…”
The bus was at her stop. Kyoko got up, waved, “I guess I'll see you tomorrow…”

“Yeah, I live further away...bye, Kyo! Text me!” Ayu waved happily, was still waving even after Kyoko got off the bus. As the bus drove off, Kyoko sighed, appraised the apartment complex. Despite it being full of people, she still felt alone as she began climbing stairs up to her apartment.

She felt more than knew her father wasn't home. Probably another late night. Sighing, Kyoko inserted her key into the lock, opened the door to find the television still on from earlier in the morning, and a cold plate of eggs and bacon left behind.

“Way to go, Dad,” Kyoko bitterly bit out before snatching the remote and shutting off the television. She sighed, felt the anger stinging the back of her throat as she approached the table, snatched the plate up and chucked the cold food in the trash bin. And then, she practically flung the plate into the sink, her heart falling as she heard a sickening crack.

“No…” she breathed, looked at the plate. Sure enough, she had thrown it so hard it split into three splintered pieces. It was her father's favorite plate, one crafted by her mother in her old hobby of making pottery. She picked up the pieces, somehow hoping they'd magically stitch themselves back together. But they didn't.

The tears came fast, flooded her vision. And Kyoko viciously wiped them away, hating the feel of them, the sting of them. But they didn't stop coming as she held the pieces, sunk to the floor as she held onto them like a baby, pressed against her chest.

She cried into the broken pieces, mentally apologizing over and over again to her mother. She sniffed, wiped her eyes as she looked at the pieces, thought back to her dad dismissing breakfast, the way Haru shamelessly ruined her lunch (her stomach growled in response), insulted her mother's memory, and how everyone seemed to just tiptoe around the truth: her mother was dead. Megumi Kawabara wasn't coming back.

Kyoko let out a shuddering breath, tried to remember the techniques Miss Akizuki had taught her. Deep breaths. Calm thoughts. Then the sadness will dissipate.

Deep breaths.

Calm thoughts.
Sadness dissipates...

Her phone vibrated. Kyoko let out one last breath, wiped her eyes as she slowly stood, gathered the pieces, wrapped them in a plastic bag before placing them beside the trash bin, hesitant to throw it away.

Another vibration. Kyoko closed her eyes, mentally counted to three before taking out her phone, leaning against the counter. Two messages. One was from Ayu.

Kyoooo~! Just got home. U get home ok?

Kyoko bit her lip, typed a quick reply, yeah. I'm home now.

The second message was from the mighty boy himself.

My day was okay... kinda boring honestly. I just got in. My mom's already starting on dinner... but tell me about your day!

She couldn't resist, cracked as she typed through tears, Today was horrible. I hate my school. I hate my dad. I hate everything.

He immediately wrote back, what's wrong? What happened?

I made breakfast for my dad, but he didn't even eat it and I served it on a plate my mom made for him and I just broke it like an idiot. There's this kid at my school that always talks crap and I just had enough and I punched him and then I got in trouble. I mean, I was but the principal cleared it all up. I hate everyone feeling sorry for me. I hate that my dad doesn't even care. I wish I could just reset today.

By the time Kyoko clicked 'send' she instantly regretted it. Great. He was probably gonna think she was a whiny baby. Maybe this was the message that was finally going to scare him off. She wiped her eyes, didn't want to wait for a message that was probably never going to come. She placed her phone on the counter, brought her attention back to the broken pieces.
Kyoko grabbed the bag, tried tossing it into the garbage. But she couldn't. It felt as if she was tossing her mother in the trash.

She sighed, decided to leave the pieces in her room, in the back of her closet. By the time she returned to kitchen to prepare dinner, her phone vibrated.

She swallowed, slowly approached as she unlocked her phone, willed herself to read the message from the boy.

*I'm sorry you're having a bad day. I don't think it's that your dad doesn't care...maybe he was just busy. You did say he's a doctor, right? I'm sure that he cares about you. I... can't help in terms of bullies. I have them, too...but I try to smile, and go on for another day. Just like All Might. I know it's probably lame, but I don't want to see you sad. Things will get better. I promise you.*

She wasn't aware she was a sobbing, blubbery mess until one fat tear drop hit the screen of her phone. She reread the words that made her heart flutter.

*I don't want to see you sad. Things will get better. I promise you.*

She smiled through her tears, wiped her screen and finally typed out. *You're always so nice to me. If you don't mind my asking, what's your name? Like your real-life name. If you don't wanna tell me, that's okay...we've been talking for like, months and we don't even know each other's names...*

It was a while before he wrote back.

*You kind of already know half of it. Midoriya. Izuku Midoriya. :)*

Izuku Midoriya. She smiled, sent, *Kyoko Kawabara. That's my name. But you can call me Kyo.*

*Nice to meet you, Kyo! :) I mean, name basis, anyway.*

Giggle. *Nice to meet you too, Mighty Midoriya!*
She received a blushy-faced emoji at that. She let out a full laugh then, pulled out ingredients from the freezer for dinner.

And for a brief moment, just one brief moment, Kyoko Kawabara did not feel so alone.

Chapter End Notes

For those unsure, Kyoko's Quirk will be elaborated on as the story progresses. Also, more of precious bean Izuku in the next chapter.
The Compass Points North

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Her father was working overtime on a Sunday, the television was blaring a cooking show, and Kyoko had just opened the fridge to find it empty save for a pitcher of water, half a can of tuna, and pickles in a pickle jar. She sighed, ran a hand through her messy black hair, ignored the draft on her legs as she tugged at the hem of her oversized tee that she wore to sleep in. She didn't particularly feel like going out, but she didn't have much of a choice.

Rolling her eyes, she slammed the fridge shut, half-listened to the cooking show as she barged into her father's room, opened his drawer, found the credit card he seldom used, then crossed the hall to her room, slammed the card on the nightstand before going into her bathroom, ripping off her pajamas and getting the shower ready. After the briefest of showers, Kyoko stepped out, pulled out anything black to wear, tugged it on. She tied her damp hair up in a bun before grabbing the credit card, her wallet, her keys, and her phone. She left the television on as she left her apartment, on her way to the supermarket.

On her trek to said market, her phone vibrated once again. Kyoko smiled, already knowing who it was.

Got my applications for high school ready! I have to say, I'm really nervous. I hope I get into U.A. I really do. What about you, Kyo? Have you submitted your applications yet?

I wish I had the time...I'm off to the supermarket. Dad forgot to buy groceries. Again. So I guess it's up to me! I know U.A. will accept you. You've been studying so hard! You said you aced the practice exams, right?

I mean. Yeah...but...wait, you haven't submitted your applications yet? There's not much time left...you've got any first choices? (Secretly hoping you're going to U.A...)

Sadly, no U.A. for me. My grades are great. But my Quirk is absolutely useless in Hero work. Besides, it's way too far from where I live...maybe I'll just go to the high school near my apartment. It's got a nice general education system.

Don't sell yourself short, Kyo! There's gotta be amazing schools that can help nurture your future! What do you wanna do?
Kyoko hesitated as she walked into the supermarket, grabbing a cart as she took in Izuku’s question.

It was by the frozen foods aisle that she texted honestly,

*I don't know.*

---

His back hurt from staying hunched over so he could lean in really close to his computer. He had only left his bedroom to go the bathroom or eat breakfast with his mom. Apart from that, Izuku remained locked in his room, messaging the girl he now knew as Kyoko. He frowned at her last response, quickly wrote back,

*You don't know? Well, what about your Quirk? Maybe that'll help you figure it out…*

*Whatever I eat or drink, I can produce the color of it from my fingertips. I highly doubt something like that is gonna get me into any sort of well-paying job.*

*Maybe you can sell your art? You're really talented...hey, didn't you say your parents wanted you to be a doctor? Maybe you could join a support course.*

*I don't wanna be a doctor. I wanna actually have a life. Lol.*

*Doctors have lives…*

*Tell that to my dad.*

Izuku’s heart went out to her. From what she had told him, it didn't seem her dad was around all that much ever since her mom passed away. He seemed to take a lot of late calls, overtime, he was barely home. Kyo seemed to be by herself a lot, and he'd be lying if he said it didn't worry him.
Maybe you could be a nurse or something like that. He wrote.

You haven't seen me wake up my dad every morning. I don't have amazing bedside manner. I'll just apply to my neighborhood school and Seiji High. My mom went there when she was young. So maybe I'll go there.

That's a great idea, Kyo! And then maybe you can find out what you want to do then!

I hope so. Lol. What about you? U.A., huh? Gonna join the Hero Course with your awesome Quirk? What is your Quirk, anyway? You never told me...

Izuku blanched, swallowed nervously. He never quite got into his Quirklessness. Besides, what if he told her and she laughed at him? Or called him a loser? He sighed. No...Kyo wasn't like that. Was she? His trembling fingers hovered over the keyboard, unsure of what to say. Finally, he wrote,

Yeah, Hero Course...I wanna be a hero, too. As for my Quirk, I

“Izuku?”

He almost shot up to the ceiling as he whirled around, found his mother innocently peeking into his room, door wide open. Inko Midoriya wore her usual pink cardigan with a navy skirt, but she had her yellow apron on, signifying she was cooking. She blinked, “You've been in here all day, sweetie...I'm just getting started on dinner. I didn't know exactly what you wanted, so I figured I'd ask...”

His computer pinged, signifying a new message. Izuku tried his best to hide his screen. If Inko saw him talking to a girl, she'd embarrass him. “Uh, surprise me, Mom! I'll be right out!”

“Izuku.” Inko frowned, stood her ground as she narrowed her eyes. When she spoke again, it was a deadly whisper,

“Are you looking at inappropriate pictures of ladies on the internet?”

Izuku could've died right then and there, letting out a horrified yell, “MOM! Of course not! I'm just
working on a project for school! Yeah!”

Inko eyed him suspiciously. “You'd better not be lying to me.”

“I'm not! I swear! It's just a project!”

She regarded him even longer before replying, “Well, I'll call you when dinner's ready.”

Izuku nodded fervently. “Mm-hmm! Sure!”

Inko slowly closed the door, and as soon as the door clicked shut, Izuku whirled around, back to his screen, where Kyoko sent another message.

*Izuku? Are you there? Is everything okay?*

He breathed out a sigh of relief as he backspaced his drafted message, wrote instead,

*Sorry. My mom walked in. Are you still in the supermarket?*

*Yeah. I'm waiting in line at the cashier. I have a full cart of groceries for the week! Dad won't have to worry about a thing! Is your mom okay?*

*Yeah, she was just asking what I wanted for dinner.*

*Oh. Well, what are you having? I'm probably gonna surprise Dad with his favorite.*

*I don't know. I told Mom to surprise me.*

*Ooh, like living dangerously, huh? ;3*
Izuku blushed. *Uh...I guess. I mean, gotta be brave like All Might, right?*

*That's right! You're gonna be applying to the same school he graduated from! Oohhhh, I hope you get in! I'll be keeping my fingers crossed just for you!*

*Thanks, Kyo. That means a lot. I wanna help you get into your dream school, too. And maybe if we're lucky, we can work together in the same hero agency!*

*I told you, my Quirk is useless...*

*I'll put in a good word if I'm lucky. I could tell them you'll paint amazing billboards. Then we wouldn't have to message each other across town. We'd see each other every day.*

*“WHO ARE YOU TALKING TO?!”*

Izuku yelped as he fell out of his seat, found Inko behind him, spatula in hand and eyes wide as she glared at the computer screen.

*“MOOOOM! I DIDN’T EVEN HEAR YOU COME IN!”*

*“WHO. ARE. YOU. TALKING TO?! DO YOU KNOW THERE ARE PEDOPHILES ON THE INTERNET?!”*

*“SHE'S NOT A PEDOPHILE, MOM!”*

*SHE ?!??!?!!”*

Izuku groaned, crawled back onto his chair as he pointed to the username. “Yes. She.” He sighed in resignation. “Her name is Kyo. She's just a friend I met on the All Might chatroom, Mom. We're just friends. That's all.”

Inko leaned forward, having to squint as she looked at their messages. She paused. Finally, she sternly spoke,
“Okay. Fine. Don't tell her any personal information.”

“...Um...okay, Mom.”

“If you're really friends, then don't hide it from me. I want to know who your friends are.”

“Sure, Mom… I'm sorry…”

“And if you meet, make sure it's in a public place and I know about it.”

Izuku felt the heat on his cheeks. “....okay…”

“I'm serious, Izuku, you have to be super careful. Do you understand?”

“Yes.”

“And don't send this girl any photos of your willy.”

“MOM !”

---

Kyoko frowned as she kicked the door to her apartment closed, hauling several bags inside. Her phone hadn't vibrated in a while. She hoped Izuku was okay. Maybe his mom called him for dinner. Yes, maybe that was it.

Kyoko grunted with effort as she stumbled into the kitchen, putting down all the bags and beginning to unpack the groceries. Just before doing so, however, she took out her phone, reread his last message with a fond smile across her lips.
I'll put in a good word if I'm lucky. I could tell them you'll paint amazing billboards. Then we wouldn't have to message each other across town. We'd see each other every day.

That idea didn't sound too bad. Despite only speaking for a few months, Kyoko felt as if she had known him much longer. She knew she was being stupid. Her mom often warned her of strangers on the internet, especially when her parents caved and got her her own laptop two years ago. They had a full discussion with a slideshow presentation. Kyoko shuddered. That was an awkward time.

After unpacking the groceries and preparing dinner, Kyoko finally took a minute to write her reply, her mind lost in a daydream.

That would be awesome. You'd be a pro Hero and I'd be the billboard girl. At least I wouldn't be by myself all the time. I'm pretty sure you're having dinner with your mom. I'm getting dinner ready myself. So you can text me later, when you're free. 😊

Her phone pinged then, a message from her father. Kyoko frowned, read his message.

Don't worry about dinner tonight. Will be working late. Don't wait up sweetheart. See you tomorrow morning.

Kyoko glanced over at the stew cooking on the stove. Sighing, she got up, turned off the stove, went into her room and slammed the door shut.

---

Kyoko fell asleep at 5 in the morning and woke up an hour later. She was groggy, sluggish, but above all, she was numb inside. She turned off her alarm before it could even go off, was already getting ready for school before realizing she hadn't checked her phone since the night before. After dinner was a bust, she ended up painting and painting and eating cold stew around midnight. Her phone died at eleven, she hadn’t bothered charging it. But now, as it charged while she brushed her teeth, her phone pinged with multiple messages. Toothbrush in mouth, Kyoko tiredly read the stream of messages, only for her eyes to go wide at the words she read.

Sorry! My mom was being weird! I told her about you. She said to be careful but it's okay. Then I had dinner. I wanted to bring it to my room but Mom wouldn't let me. :( 
Are you mad?

Please don't be mad. :( 

I'm sorry. :( I didn't mean to leave you hanging. Did you and your dad get to eat dinner together?

Are you okay?

Oh, geez, I'm being annoying. I'm sorry! But I'm worried about you, you know...cuz you haven't messaged back yet...unless you're mad at me, in that case I'm super sorry! Really, I didn't mean to leave you hanging!

Kyoko chuckled despite her sour mood, finally wrote,

Relax, Izuku. Lol. My phone died and I forgot to charge it and I fell asleep. I'm up now. I'm not mad...I didn't get to eat with Dad. He had to work late again. :( I worked on some new fanart though...I'll post it today after school! Hope your day started off awesome.

She pressed send, to alleviate the poor boy's worries, resumed her mundane task of brushing her teeth. By the time she finished washing her face and ripping the pore strip off her nose, she got a reply.

I'm glad you're okay! And that you're not mad...I'm sorry you didn't get to eat with your dad. :( I would've eaten with you. Can't wait to see your new fanart!

Kyoko smiled, in a slightly better mood as she began getting dressed for school.

---

“What time did you go to bed last night?”

Kyoko sighed, played with the hem of her school uniform's skirt. She kept her phone on silent so as not to annoy Miss Akizuki during their session, despite itching to message Izuku. She finally
shrugged, lied, “Midnight.*

“That's still pretty late, Kyoko. Did you take a pill for your insomnia?”

Pause. “Yeah. It just took a while to kick in.”

“The dosage we gave you is just enough to work within twenty minutes.”

“I have a fast metabolism.”

“It should've worked quicker then.”

Silence.

“....How was your day yesterday? Tell me how you felt when you woke up yesterday morning.”

Kyoko shrugged. “I dunno. I guess... okay?”

Miss Akizuki nodded, wrote it down in her notepad. “Did that feeling remain the same or fluctuate throughout the day?*

Kyoko shrugged. “Annoyed. Because I had to do grocery shopping. Um...mad because Dad worked late again...and then…” she thought back to Izuku's sweet message, tried to hold back but still smiled, “…happy. Hopeful. Like I mattered.”

“Anything contribute to that feeling?”

Kyoko hesitated before replying. “Just um...I was drawing a little.”

“And what were you drawing?”
“All Might.”

“All Might seems to symbolize a lot for you. You draw him a lot.”

“He symbolizes peace. He's the Symbol of Peace.” Kyoko deadpanned. “Also... I like his color scheme.” That part wasn't a lie. All Might was a vibrant Hero, with many bold, bright colors, and Kyoko enjoyed painting them.

It also involved eating lots of strawberries, blueberries, vanilla ice cream, and bananas for her Quirk to muster All Might colors. It was always a good day to draw when those foods were involved (she also ate black licorice for line and muscle definition).

“I know he's the Symbol of Peace. But I'm asking what he symbolizes to you. Who is All Might in your life, Kyoko?”

Kyoko remained silent, despite her mother coming to mind full force. She remembered the video that her and her mother used to watch all the time, particularly shortly before her passing.

It was a clip of an after school special many years ago, where All Might wore a ridiculous mustard yellow suit and smiled his way into the hearts and minds of everyone around the world. He talked quite seriously that day, as it was a special that involved death: Little Timmy had come home from school one day and his mommy told him his pet hamster Astro had died. It was heavier than the usual cheery morals and life lessons All Might would give on other days, but this one stayed with Kyoko and her mother.

“Sometimes, the family and friends we bring into our lives don't necessarily stay forever,” All Might had said, his smile dropping just a bit. “Sometimes they move away. Sometimes they drift apart. Or, in this case, they leave this world. Remember that they will always be a part of you. The world keeps on turning, citizens! They will always be here!” He then pressed his hand over his chest, “In your heart!”

_The world keeps on turning._

“Kyoko?”
“He’s the reason I got over my mom’s death so quickly.” Kyoko admitted. “He made me strong.”

Miss Akizuki smiled slowly, “All Might made you strong?”

“Yes. The world keeps on turning when people die. If All Might can keep going, then so can I. He handles his hero business head on. Just like I have to deal with everything else head on.”

“That’s very admirable, Kyoko.”

“I guess.”

The bell rang, signifying the end of their session. Kyoko eagerly got up, bag in hand. Miss Akizuki wrote one last thing on her notepad, smiled up at her, “Same time tomorrow?”

“Sure.”

“Great! Then I’ll see you tomorrow!”

Kyoko left the office, began her trek to art class. On her walk, she put her phone back on vibrate, found a message from Izuku.

*You’re not gonna believe what happened this morning! A new hero’s on the scene! Her name is Mount Lady! I’m still working on the ins and outs of her Quirk.*

New hero? Kyoko opened her news app, found it flooded with new articles about the hot new Hero. What she didn’t like, however, was how she had stopped a robbery not too far from where Izuku was. She immediately wrote back,

*Are you okay? Were you hurt? I saw where the robbery was and I’m hoping you’re okay. Please be okay.*

His response was immediate, *I’m fine. I didn’t get caught in any crossfires. But you had to see it, Kyo! I saw Kamui Woods, Backdraft, AND Death Arms! It was amazing!*
You saw all of them! Ugh! You're so lucky! This means you got to see their Quirks in action, right?

Yeah! I've got plenty of material to write in my notes! I can't wait to tell you about it once I have it! I dunno, Kyo...I feel like today is gonna be a great day!

I hope so, Izuku...but please be safe? I'm gonna be worried all day until I know you're home. :(  

Don't worry about me, Kyo. I'll be fine. :)  

Somehow, Kyoko wasn't convinced.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry it was so long. I'm hoping to update soon.
A double update. Because this one couldn't wait to be written.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Five hours, sixteen minutes and twenty-seven seconds since Izuku's last message to her, and Kyoko was a nervous wreck, her phone in her hands the entire time. It had been the longest window they'd had without hearing from each other. She'd kept the news on since she practically ran into her apartment, hearing about a sludge villain apprehending someone near Izuku's neighborhood. She had sent a barrage of texts, each ranging from are you okay to I'm so worried please text me back.

Kyoko burned her wrist and fingers several times making dinner, far too focused on her phone than her well-being. She managed to soak all burned areas in cold water, wrapping them in blue paint tape (they ran out of Band-Aids, of all things). She finished cooking, kept her plate and homework on the table. She could barely concentrate as she kept her eyes trained on live news reports of the sludge villain. Apparently All Might was around. Despite some relief calming her at the mention of the Symbol of Peace, her heart still quivered. She would not rest until she knew her friend Izuku was safe.

Her phone vibrated and she practically slammed her thumb on the fingerprint scanner, almost cracking her screen as she looked at the new message from--

She deflated upon seeing it was merely her classmate, Ayu.

OMG! R u watching the news?! It's bonkers about that sludge villain!

Irritation stung Kyoko briefly. It wasn't who she wanted it to be. However, she didn't want to leave Ayu on read. She typed back,

Yeah. It's insane...I'm happy All Might is around. But my friend lives nearby and I think he's in danger.

OMG! Is it that fan of yours who likes your art???
Yes. I'm worried about him. I'm scared he might be hurt.

Kyoko felt the tears sting her vision as she pressed send. She didn't realize just how scared she was until she typed it out. She sniffed, tried to keep calm as she kept watching the news. Apparently they were looking to save the hostage the sludge guy had taken captive. She bit her lip to keep it from trembling, checked her phone to find a new message from Ayu.

I'm sure he's fine, Kyo….maybe he's just evacuating the area and he can't text yet! You know phones aren't really allowed until after the villain is apprehended. Don't worry, Kyo. <3 I know he's fine. He will message you in no time.

Kyoko wanted to be annoyed, but oddly found Ayu's words comforting. It was nice of her to be so reassuring. She sent a fingers crossed emoji before looking up at the latest news.

“...authorities are claiming a boy is running in! We're not sure what he's doing, but it seems he wants to try and help…!”

The footage they showed was fuzzy, but Kyoko squinted, tried to study the footage.

Her blood ran cold as she caught a glimpse of a mess of green hair. She had seen that before.

She stood up, ran to the television, her eyes wide and teary as she pressed a hand to the screen, whispering frantically,

“What're you doing, Izuku? Please just run! Run away! Please…”

She took out her phone, quickly texted Ayu,

He's not okay. OMG. He's the one running out there. I recognize him. He sent me a selfie once. He's running out there.

OMG! Is he crazy?! Look. Don't worry... maybe the police will grab him before he gets too close!
Kyoko kept her eyes trained to the television, knowing it wasn't good for her already poor vision. Her father would have to schedule another appointment for stronger contact lenses. Chancing it, she quickly typed out a message to him,

_I see you on TV. Please run. Please just run. I'm begging you to just run._

She kept watching, didn't blink until she absolutely had to.

“...just in! Sources claim All Might is on the scene…!”

“Save him!” She cried out, barely thinking. “Please save him, All Might!”

She watched, caught a glimpse of the Hero stepping in, fists clenched and ready to fight. Her mother always had a bit of a thing for All Might. Maybe it was the muscles. But as Kyoko watched she kept her fingers crossed, prayed for everything to be okay.

There was wind, strong winds. The cameras briefly cut off, and Kyoko's eyes were wide as she waited.

And then, the clear skies were gray with rain. People were recovering, barely there.

“Good grief!! According to our field reporters, All Might has subdued the sludge villain and rescued the hostage! No injuries or casualties reported! Amazing! His move was so powerful it changed the weather! Our weather team's gonna have a field day with this…!”

Kyoko sunk to the floor, relief washing over her like a tidal wave. No one was hurt. That meant Izuku was okay. She sighed, her back on the carpeted floor as she stared up at the ceiling as logic finally caught up with her.

Her right hand was hurting from all the burns, the tape wrapped too tightly. She kept her hands sprawled out, mentally practiced Akizuki's method.
When had she fallen asleep on the living room floor? Kyoko wasn't sure, but when her eyes opened again, she was still looking up at the ceiling and it was eleven o'clock at night. She quickly sat up, still found an empty apartment, her homework on the table, and her dinner plate half empty. She got up, found a late night drama playing on television. She turned it off, went to wash her dinner plate, put it away, and realized she had left her phone on the carpet in the living room.

She completely disregarded her homework then, lunging over the couch to her phone, on forty-seven percent battery and unread messages.

The first message was from her father at around six. Another late night. What else was new?

The second was from Ayu, sending reports of no casualties and a happy emoji as she wrote he's okay, Kyo <3. Kyoko appreciated that.

The third was from Izuku. Kyoko opened that message quickly, reading the essay he left behind.
Kyo! You're not gonna believe what happened today! I mean, you probably do, considering you probably watched the news. I'm so, so, so, so, SO sorry for not replying sooner. A lot has happened and I really wanna tell you about it. But don't worry. I'm fine. I'm sorry I made you worry. Please respond when you can. Guess who I finally met!!!!

She smiled fondly, read and reread his message. She walked into her room, closed the door and plopped onto her bed, read his message one more time before pressing the reply button--

“Shit!” Kyoko's blood ran cold as she realized she hadn't pressed the reply button, but the 'make voice call' button. “No!” She whispered, “Nononononononono, hang up! Hang up! Hang upanguphangupangup--!”

“Uh...hello?”

She froze at the sound of the voice on the other line, held her phone away from her like a demon.

“Hello?”

The voice was so far away, and it sounded like a boy's voice. So at least it wasn't a creepy forty-year-old man living in a basement. Kyoko remained frozen, unsure of whether to hang up or speak.

“....Kyo?”

She jumped at the way her name came out on the speaker. She bit her lip, swallowed the nervous lump in her throat, pressed the phone to her ear.

“Um...er...hi...Izuku...” she choked out, hated how her voice was huskier and not nearly as girly as she wanted it to be. Her cheeks were blazing as she bit out, “Sorry...I...um...I...p--pressed call by accident. I meant to reply via text....but...I'mso sorryifyouwantmetohangupI'llhangupIjustwassoshakyIpressedthewrongbuttonand--!”

“No!” His voice came out so pitchy, bless him. Kyoko blinked, stopped.
“Please don't hang up...I...er...well...I didn't expect you to call...but it's okay...”

Pause. Then, a panicked, “You didn't hang up, did you?!”

“No...no I didn't. I'm still here.” Kyoko cleared her throat, realized *this was Izuku*. She was *actually talking* to Izuku. Like, on the phone. Her heart was a racing mess but she swallowed and croaked out, “Um...so...hi...”

“Uh...hi,” his voice softened. Another pause.

“Um...is this a bad time?” Kyoko asked quietly.

“No...no...it's fine...my mom's asleep...I couldn't sleep though. Not before messaging you...I mean...now we're talking...so...”

Another pause.

“I'm so glad you're okay.” Kyoko admitted, curling up into a ball as she kept the phone pressed to her ear.

“I mean...a lot happened today...but I saved Kacchan, so...”

“Who's that?” Kyoko frowned.

“Oh...the hostage they took was my old friend since kindergarten. His name is Kacchan.”

Kyoko saddened, “Oh. Geez. I--is your friend okay?”

“I think so.”

“Wait...how did you save him?” Kyoko's voice was tinted with concern. “Izuku, what did you do?
What happened today?"

“Um...well...I...I met All Might?” Izuku choked out.

Kyoko's eyes went wide, “No. Way.”

He chuckled. “It's true! You're not gonna believe it! He signed my notebook!”

Kyoko's scream on the other line almost made Izuku deaf. “YOU'RE KIDDING, RIGHT?”

“I'm not! I'll send a picture of his autograph for proof!”

Kyoko let out a squeal, rolled onto her back and kicked her legs up in the air in happiness. The nerves were dissipating as she gushed, “You have to tell me everything now, Izuku! First things first---what happened at school today? And how. Did. You. Meet. All Might?!”

---

Three hours later, Kyoko pouted into the phone, “I still can't believe you ran head-on into that stupid sludge villain! You were lucky All Might was there! I still think your friend Kacchan should be more grateful, though...do you need me to punch him for you?”

Izuku let out a cry. “N--no! Please don't! I don't think Kacchan is a bad person...he's just not good at talking things over...really. But...I think I have a shot at U.A. I just have to train really hard for the next couple of months.”

“Oh...well, you were lucky to meet All Might! So how are you gonna train for the exam, anyway? What about your Quirk? You still haven't told me about that...” Kyoko laid on her stomach, feet kicked up as she waited for Izuku to reply. She just plugged in her phone to charge, but she didn't want to hang up. They'd been talking for so long...

Izuku hesitated. Should he tell her the truth? That All Might picked him as his successor? That he was Quirkless? He coughed, “Um...I was just studying a lot and I have to exercise a lot...so...yeah...I've got ten months to prepare!”
Kyoko blanched. “Oh, no.”

“What is it?”

She eyed her school bag, which held an application for Seiji High…unsubmitted.

“N--nothing! I just realized I have to do laundry soon! Yeah! But I'm sure you'll get in, Izuku! If you want, I'll send you flash cards!”

“...Thanks, Kyo. It means a lot. We...we've been talking for hours now. And we have school in the morning…”

“Yeah…” Kyoko remembered, eyed her clock. She bit her lip, paused.

“...You hang up.” She blurted out.

“Huh?! W--why me?!”

“Because I can't! I'd feel rude just hanging up!”

“Well, I feel rude hanging up on a girl! I--I don't know!”

“We both need to get up in the morning!”

“But...I don't wanna stop talking to you!”

Both of them paused, Kyoko's cheeks heating up at his confession. “Oh...um...well...I dunno…”

She started, heard the front door. Her dad was finally home. If he found out she was awake, he
would be furious. She lowered her voice to a whisper, “My dad's home...I have to go anyway...if he finds out I'm still up, he'll lose it…”

“It's okay. I think I hear my mom getting water in the kitchen...what if we both hang up at the same time?” He whispered back.

“Works for me. I'll talk to you soon. Okay?”

“Okay...so...on three?”

“On three.” She heard her father's footsteps.

“One…” he began.

She closed her eyes tightly.

“Two…” she whispered.

They both hesitated.

“Kyo?”

“Yeah?”

“I like the sound of your voice.” he admitted shyly.

She swore her heart stopped. “...I…” she swallowed her nerves, risked replying. “I like the sound of your voice, too.”

They both remained quiet before he finally said. “...three.”
And just like that, they both pressed end call, Kyoko tossing the covers over her just as her father opened her door to check in. She held her breath, remained perfectly still.

As soon as the door closed, and darkness flooded her room once more, she bit her lip, curled into a ball, trembled with excitement.

He liked the sound of her voice.

It took everything in her not to let out a happy squee into her pillow.

Chapter End Notes

May do a time skip. Or one more chapter before a time skip to the exams. Either way, hope you guys don't mind the update.
Chapter Notes

Warning: this chapter contains lots of angst. But hopefully I make up for it with the disgustingly cotton candy sweet fluff I put in towards the end.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Principal Yuri raised an eyebrow as she appraised the sloppily filled out application for Seiji High. She then looked up at the sheepish, clearly anxious Kyoko, who waited with baited breath.

“You know the deadline for applications was yesterday.” Yuri stated.

Kyoko bit her lip, “It was? I--uh--had no idea…” she chuckled nervously.

Yuri's eyes then found the signature of both the anticipated student and the parent or guardian...both signatures looked suspiciously similar to Kyoko's telltale scrawl. She looked up, pursed her lips. Kyoko smiled sweetly, a rarity. Yuri sighed in resignation, “Kyoko, you know I can't submit this.”

Her smile immediately fell, and Kyoko plopped down on the seat across from Yuri, “What?! B--but why not?!”

“Do I need to go over this?” Yuri sighed, “First, there's a matter of it being too late. Second...I know your father didn't sign this.”

“Yes, he did,” Kyoko said quickly. “I take after Mom in every way except handwriting! That's...totally my dad…”

Yuri hated seeing the hope slowly leave Kyoko's eyes. “Look. I'm sorry. But even if I did submit this as a clerical error on my part, they would notice the way it's filled out. I know you wanted to go to your mother's alma mater. But it's too late. And I know your dad's handwriting. He used to fill out my prescriptions, remember?”

Kyoko deflated. “Your treatments...I remember…”
“Exactly. What I don't understand is why your father hasn't signed. He's usually always active in your paperwork…”

Kyoko averted her gaze to the floor, her heart growing cold as she realized she'd ruined her shot. *Way to go. I can't do anything right…*

Yuri frowned, “How has he been, anyway? I've been meaning to check in.” She asked carefully.

“He's fine.” Kyoko got up, set her jaw. She grabbed her bag, “I'll just go to my zoned school. Thanks for your help.”

“Kyoko--!”

She left the office without another word.

---

“Kyo-kyo!” Ayu sang as Kyoko walked into art class, plopped down next to her and threw her bag down. “My favorite artist! Hirota is making us do free drawing today! I'm so excited! I can draw stick figures and circles without getting a bad grade for lack of trying!” She cheerfully proclaimed. “What're you gonna draw, Kyo-kyo?”

Kyoko huffed. Her sour mood really didn't complement Ayu today. However, she still couldn't bring herself to be rude. “...Kyo-kyo?” she raised an eyebrow.

“Yes!” Ayu grinned. “ Doesn't it sound cute? Like a sweet kitty meowing? Ooh! It's because you're adorable! So I'm calling you Kyo-kyo!” She giggled.

“Joy.” Kyoko dryly said before staring blankly at her canvas. What could she possibly draw? She didn't have the means to draw All Might—not vividly, anyway. The gummies Hirota offered her didn't offer colors vibrant enough for him. Also, her mind was far too busy going over the options. She'd blown her chances. If only she hadn't been so lax. This was her future. And she threw it away.
Mom would be so ashamed.

The thought stung, and it made her take a mouthful of black and red gummies, along with a dark, morbid green. She slammed the small bowl of gummies down, her mind dictating her hands as she ran them over her canvas, not caring what came out of her colors. Her fingers draw harsh, sharp lines, made ugly shapes as she drew. Her eyes stung and her heart was pounding in her ears.

“Kyo?” Ayu frowned, distracted from her silly drawing of stick figures by her classmate beside her, aggressively drawing with tears forming in her eyes. Kyoko didn't seem to hear her, too into her task at hand. “Kyo-kyo? Are you okay?” she tried to reach out to her.

“Miss Sakura!” Mr. Hirota appeared behind her, appraising her drawing. Ayu sat at attention, sheepishly smiled as she gestured to her two stick figures. He smiled, but it looked more like a grimace, “Er...interesting interpretation of…” he hesitated.

Ayu grinned.

“...life?” Hirota chuckled nervously before appraising Kyoko's art. Kyo sat quietly, her gaze downcast. Ayu looked now, spotted the black thorns, branches, red and moldy green leaves pointing about in many directions. It looked like a tree straight out of nightmares. It mildly unsettled Ayu.

“Miss Kawabara...interesting…” Hirota nodded. “....I sense something from this piece. Anguish. Grief. Despair.”

Kyoko didn't reply.

The bell rang, signifying the end of class. Kyoko snatched up her bag and hurried out, leaving a confused and worried Ayu behind. She didn't respond when Ayu called out to her.

---

She couldn't feel her fingers. Kyoko held up her taped-up right hand, found her fingers turning blue. She could barely move them and they looked swollen. As she sat on the bus home from school, she opted to stay on instead of getting off at her usual stop, instead taking it further into town, to the hospital her father worked in. She didn't want to go anywhere near that place again, but she needed help.
She wasted no time getting past the front desk, up to the main triage ward, where her father worked.

“Hi, Kyoko!” The cheery nurse at the front desk greeted. “Wow, look at you! You've gotten so tall!”

“Hi, Nina,” Kyoko gave a gamely smile for Nina's benefit, tried to will away the horrible pit forming in her stomach, causing nausea. The last time Kyoko stepped foot in this hospital, it was full of tearful goodbyes and holding hands and hearing a heart monitor go from steady beeping to one long, drawn-out, finalized--

“Is--is my dad busy?” Kyoko held up her right hand, “I think I may need some help. It's been like this since--!”

“Whoaaaaa, holy crap!” Nina got up, studied her blue fingertips. “Sweetie!” She wailed, meeting her eyes, “What happened? Is...is this paint tape?”

Kyoko pulled her hand away, “Um...don't worry. Can you just see if my dad can help me? If he's busy, I can just see someone else…”

Nina frowned, her perfectly glossed pink lips curling. “Your dad's busy with another patient, sweetie...but if you want, I can have you be seen by one of our--!”

“--Kyoko?” A new voice, an all too familiar voice, sounded behind her. Kyoko internally groaned, turned to the newcomer: a woman the same age as her mother. She wore her usual white lab coat, a stethoscope around her neck as well as glasses. Her mousy brown hair was pinned up with a clip, and her name badge read Sakamoto, Sayori - Department of Oncology.

This was the last person Kyoko wanted to see. The pit made her stomach lurch, made her want to puke up the gummies she ate earlier in art class. Sayori moved, smiled brightly, but there was that dimness in her green eyes. “Kyoko...sweetheart, how are you? I've been asking your dad about you--!”

“I'm fine.” Kyoko bit out, tried to hide her hand.

Sayori grabbed her wrist gently, frowning at the tape. She looked to Nina, “I'll handle this,” she said,
“Kyoko, come with me.”

She was guiding Kyoko down the hall, to her office. Kyoko tried fighting, protested, “You can't help me! You're a cancer doc--!”

“I am still a doctor nevertheless. And that hand of yours could get infected if it's not taken care of right away. I'm between shifts so I can help you.”

Sayori tugged her into her office, sat her down before searching her drawers for a first aid kit. Kyoko sat quietly, kept her eyes trained on the burgundy carpet instead of the white walls. The white desk. But her curiosity tugged, made her look up at the photo sitting on Sayori's desk. It was a fairly old one, from before Kyoko was even born.

Sayori had just graduated medical school in the photo, holding up her license proudly beside a black-haired, brown-eyed woman, the woman Kyoko so strongly resembled. The two medical licenses proudly read their names: Sayori Sakamoto and Megumi Kawabara. Kyoko felt the sadness in her throat at the smile on her mother's face. It never changed, even then.

Mommy…

“Ah! Found it!” Kyoko was jolted out of the moment, turned to find Sayori taking her hand, cutting away at the paint tape on her fingers.

“You wrapped them too tightly, honey,” Sayori shook her head. “You were cutting off your circulation…we're going to have to wait before I can put Band-Aids on…”

She frowned then, planted a hand on Kyoko's head, ruffled her hair.

“Oof! Hey!” Kyoko protested.

“You!” Sayori reprimanded, her voice hard and disciplinary, “You can't just wrap all your injuries in paint tape! You could've risked a serious infection!”

“I--I ran out of bandages at home!” Kyoko whined.
“Still! You should’ve come straight to the hospital! You know your dad or I could’ve bought you some! You can always ask for help!” Sayori sighed, exasperated, the annoyed expression animating her usually serious face. Her hand left Kyoko's head as she plopped down on the chair across from her. “Honestly, you're just like your mother! You and Megumi were always so damn hard-headed! Always wanna be tough and ride solo, but nooooooo, you both have to be self-reliant! Honestly!”

Kyoko hated how she felt like a child sitting across from Sayori, how she shrunk into her seat instead of sitting tall like she usually did. She rolled her eyes by default.

“Don't roll your eyes, young lady!” Sayori exclaimed. “You know it's okay to ask for help!”

“Whatever.” Kyoko grumbled.

“I sincerely doubt Megumi raised such a rude young lady! What did she teach you?!”

Kyoko sighed, rolled her eyes and mumbled, “Yes, ma'am.”

“What was that?!?”

“Yes, ma'am,” Kyoko uttered, a little louder this time as she huffed, studied her right hand, the numbness fading and dull pain finally setting in. “Ow…” she whimpered at last, holding the sore hand.

“That's what happens when you wrap an injury too tight. Plus, a burn? That needs to be aired out! And aloe vera needs to be applied! You're lucky I have that too! How did all this happen?!”

“I was cooking and I just burned myself. No big deal.” Kyoko shrugged, her heart skipping a beat upon feeling her phone vibrate in her pocket. But she didn't dare take her phone out now. She'd get a lecture from Sayori she'd never forget. Ugh. She could be so annoying sometimes…

“And what were you making?”
“Just...food, okay?”

Sayori narrowed her eyes before sighing again, “Just be more careful next time. Doctor's orders. Got it?”

“Yes, ma'am.”

It was then Sayori gave a gentle smile. “Good girl. I'm sorry I haven't stopped by. Work's been insane. And your dad's been so busy. Sometimes he forgets to eat, that frustrating man. How about you? How have you been?”

Kyoko shrugged.

“You're doing good in school?”

“Yes.”

“You're still gonna show me your final report card, aren't you?”

“I didn't forget.”

“Have you been going to your grief counseling?”

“Yes.”

“Good girl!” Sayori looked pleased. “Your mother would be so happy!” She then saddened. “You know if you miss your mom, you can always come to me, right? You know how to get to my condo, don't you? I know you're used to visiting with Megumi, but--!”

“--sure. I can get there.”
Sayori smiled fondly, “You're getting taller.”

“ Sadly.” Kyoko deflated. She hated being so tall. She was towering over the girls, even most of the boys at school. Why couldn't she be normal height?

“How tall is it now? You grew like a weed since I last saw you!”

“180 centimeters and such…”

“Just like your mom!” She laughed. “Oh! That reminds me! You should've submitted your application for high school by now! Any decisions on where you're going?”

Kyoko's blood ran cold, her mind going to the crumpled application stuffed in the bottom of her bag.

Her phone vibrated again.

“Yeah.” She lied.

“If you need a study partner, call me! I'm the best! Me and your mom used to study all night for exams in med school!” She laughed sheepishly. “Don't worry! If you need studying and training, I could whoop you into shape!”

Kyoko smiled lamely. “I have no doubt about that.” She replied.

Sayori got up, stretched, “Here, let me patch up that hand for you. And I'll let your dad know you're here so you guys can head home together. That man needs to sleep. Stubborn mule…” she grumbled.

Kyoko let Sayori handle her hand, felt a bit better after aloe was applied. She sheepishly took the boxful of Band-Aids from Sayori after that was done (“No more paint tape, dammit!”). By the time Sayori left her alone to retrieve her father, Kyoko was obsessively pulling out her phone, eager to read the messages from a certain mighty boy.
Hey! :) What're you up to?

I got started on my training for U.A.! Can't wait to tell you about it. Can we talk tonight like we did yesterday? If you don't, it's okay…

She quickly wrote back, I'm just on my way home from school. I'd love to talk again tonight! Your voice is simply too cute! :3

She received a bunch of blushing emojis in response. She giggled at that, briefly forgot her sadness as she sat in Sayori's office. She wrote back,

I don't think I'm gonna get into Seiji High. I'm pretty sure my future is doomed to a menial desk job. I dunno, Izuku, sometimes I get so scared when I think about my future. I'm afraid I'm going to fail. I'm afraid I'm going to disappoint my mom.

He wrote back quickly, bless his pure heart, Of course you're gonna get in! I know you will! You said you're studying super hard...so all that hard work is gonna pay off! And you're gonna make your mom really proud. You'll be the billboard artist at the hero agency I'm gonna be at! Remember?

Of course I remember. Do they even have jobs like that?

I dunno, honestly. But we can make sure there IS a job like that when you graduate!

...I can't wait for that day.

What, graduation?

No. Seeing you.

Kyoko started as she heard the door open, and she stuffed her phone back in her pocket just as Sayori came in, looking irritated.
“That stubborn moron! Took another late night shift!” She frowned, “Sorry, Kyoko. I don't want you waiting here for your dad. Do you want me to drive you home? I've got some time before my next--!”

“I'll just take the bus home.” Kyoko shook her head. “Thanks….”

Sayori furrowed her brow, studied Kyoko for a moment before asking, “Are you sure you're okay, hon? You've been eating right? No junk food?”

“No junk food.”

“And you've been sleeping a consistent schedule?”

“Mm-hmm.” Kyoko gave a non-committal nod.

“Those sleeping aids are helping, then?”

“Yes.”

“You know if you ever need to talk--!”

“I've got my counselor at school. I know.” Kyoko sighed.

“...I was going to say I'm here if you want to talk about your mom.” Sayori said quietly.

Kyoko didn't reply, merely stood, stuffed the band-aids in her bag before zipping it closed, thrilled at the feeling of her phone vibrating in her pocket as she gave a small smile, “Thanks for the help, Miss Sayori.” She bowed before brushing past her, heading out. She gave a wave to Nina.

She passed her father in the hallway. She didn't even acknowledge him.
Kyoko had to suppress the laugh that threatened to emerge from her lips at ten o'clock at night in her room, phone pressed to her ear. “So you mean to tell me your mom gave you the talk?” She asked, giggling.

“Yeah! It was so embarrassing...I get that she wants me to be careful, but it was a lot! I mean...she started showing diagrams...” Izuku murmured shyly on the other end, clearly flustered. He was filling her in on what happened after a long day of morning training and school, where his mother cornered him and gave him the talk upon realizing ‘her baby was talking to a girl.’

“Your mom sounds so sweet, though,” Kyoko chuckled. “She’s just looking out for you.”

“I know, but...I didn't need to know about all that...I mean...I know how babies are made, but...gah! It's just weird when my mom talks about it!” Izuku exclaimed.

“I know the feeling,” Kyoko laid on her back, kicked her feet up, regarded her disgustingly twiggy, ridiculously long legs. She reached up, tried to touch her toes, but could only reach her ankles. “So you're training every morning before school now, right? What do you do?”

“Mainly lots of exercise...and...um...mentally prepping for the big test in ten months. I started working out at the beach near me. Well...I'm...actually working to clean it up. It's got years worth of trash...”

“That's a lot! Is it the beach I think you're talking about?”

“Yeah.”

“Geez, Izuku! That's a lot to take on! Are you sure you're gonna be okay? I hope you're getting some help! What about your jerky friend, Kacchan?”

“Uh, heh-heh...no, he's doing his own thing...I have help...sorta...”

“Okay, good! Don't push yourself too hard.”
“I won't. Hey, what about you? How are you preparing for Seiji High?”

Kyoko blanched, her legs dropping on her mattress. She was bitterly reminded once again of the crumpled application in her bag. How Principal Yuri gave those sad, pitiful eyes. How she was doomed to disappoint her mother. She bit her lip.

“Kyo?”

“Um...just lots of studying. I mean, no Hero courses for me...just general education I guess…”

“If you want, I can help you study! W--we can help each other!”

Kyoko nodded, felt the smile, “That sounds good! I'll get some flash cards ready! Wait...what kinda questions are they gonna ask anyway?”

“A bit of everything, I think. Mainly Heroes and hero history and stuff like that...questions about rescue and support versus combat…”

Kyoko blinked upon hearing Izuku beginning to mumble away about possible questions. As she heard him rambling, she giggled.

He abruptly stopped, “I'm sorry! I get carried away sometimes and--!”

“IZUKU, IT'S OKAY! I JUST FIND IT CUTE.” Her smile was so big her cheeks hurt. “YOU'RE...REALLY CUTE.”

There was a pleasant pause before she sat up, admitted, “I still have the selfie you sent me.”

“You do?!”

“SURE! IT HELPS WHEN I WISH YOU WERE HERE. I ALSO HAVE YOUR AUTOGRAPH FROM ALL MIGHT SAVED. UGHhhh. I SWEAR I WANNA MAKE THAT MY PHONE'S WALLPAPER!”
He chuckled, “What about you, Kyo? I still don't really know what you look like…”

Kyoko froze, briefly glanced at the full body mirror hanging from her open closet door. Her hair was a mess, her dark circles under her eyes were disgustingly prominent, and she was a twiggy cadaver.

Plus, she saw pimples forming on her chin. She hesitated, “Ummmm…” she glanced at a magazine that held Mount Lady on the cover, and quickly uttered,

“I'll send you one tomorrow! I've...got a face mask on right now to cleanse my pores...I look pretty horrifying right now…” *More like every day…*

“Okay. I'm sure you look pretty regardless, though.”

She wished she could accept that compliment. Instead, she changed the subject, “Um...so what time do you have to be up? I want you to get your sleep…”

“I've got to be up in…” he cried out, “...I have to be up in six hours to be out on time for my training! Sorry...we're gonna have to cut this short…”

“That's okay,” Kyoko shook her head. “I should be sleeping too...um...I have my studying break in the morning, too…”

“Yeah…”

Both of them hesitated once again.

“We really need to do something about this hanging up thing…” Kyoko chuckled.

“I agree...um...well...goodnight, Kyo!”

“Goodnight, Izuku.”
“Um...sweet dreams!”

“You too.”

“Uh...and remember to go beyond! Plus Ultra!”

“Are you seriously inspiring me with U.A.’s slogan?”

“Did it not work?”

“....It did. Thank you. You do the same.”

“....Okay.”

“Goodnight…”

“Goodnight…”

Again, they both hung up at the same time. Kyoko blinked, and the sadness settled back onto her shoulders.

She sighed, went into her bathroom to down two sleeping pills. No way was she going to drown in these thoughts tonight.

Chapter End Notes

For those wondering Kyoko’s height (aka, why doesn’t the States use the metric system?), she is five feet and eleven inches to Izuku's 5'5".
Decisions, Decisions

Chapter Notes

It's a bit quick, but it's simply because it's time to start getting to the juicy stuff. Lots of feels, plus more Izuku and a long overdue appearance from one All Might in this chapter.

The old truck was practically five times his size, but he needed to move it. All Might was watching, and he didn't want to disappoint him. If Izuku was indeed going to be All Might's successor, he needed to work extremely hard. That's why he groaned with the effort, dug his heels into the sand as he tried pushing that giant old truck. The sweat was dripping down his forehead, and he imagined himself shoving it at least a few inches up the sand. But it wasn't budging.

“Come on, young Midoriya!” All Might pumped his fist into the air, “Put your back into it!”

Izuku pushed himself further, the sweat leaving his head and onto the sand as he dug his feet in deeper and let out a strained cry.

And then he felt it. The vibration in his pocket. He pushed, and the truck…

...only moved an inch.

He finally huffed, collapsed with the effort. The rising sun beat down on him and he tried to regain his breath. All Might hopped down from the massive pile of junk, landing effortlessly on his feet.

“We'll have to focus on training your upper body this week.” He proclaimed, offering a hand to help Izuku up. “You're still struggling with that truck. Let's take a quick break for now.”

Izuku couldn't ignore the sting of defeat as he rose to his feet, took the sandwich All Might offered him for breakfast. As they moved to sit, he fished out his phone, found a message from Kyoko. He smiled a bit, opened the message.

Hiiiiiii! Good morning! I hope you're not overdoing it with your training.
He wrote back, Good morning! I'm okay. I'm mainly working on upper body strength for now. But I'm having some breakfast now. Did you sleep well?

Actually, yeah! By the time my alarm went off I almost didn't want to wake up! How about you?

I slept okay. There are days I just wanna sleep in too…

Same here. I wish I could see the sun rise with you. I think that'd be the start to a perfect day.

“OH MY! ARE YOU WOOING A YOUNG MAIDEN, YOUNG MIDORIYA?!”

Poor Izuku almost jumped five feet in the air, almost dropped his phone in the seemingly neverending abyss of trash, shot to his feet to find All Might grinning widely at him. All Might got up, hands on his hips as he proclaimed into the sky, muscles in full display,

“A woman in your life could be good for you! What's her name? Is she one of your friends? A schoolmate, perhaps? A maiden you encountered by chance in your travels?! Details, Midoriya!”

Izuku merely blinked as he watched his idol practically gushing. “Were you…looking at my messages, All Might?”

“On the contrary, young Midoriya! You had a smile on your face only a lady could give you!” All Might laughed his typical booming laugh before asking, “So, what's the fair lady's name?”

“Um...Kyo?” Izuku felt his cheeks heat up. “She's just a friend…” he wasn't sure if he wanted to tell All Might that they essentially bonded over their joint obsession with the Symbol of Peace. “We, um...talk every day… I think she's really special. She's super talented...she likes to draw and...well…”

“And?”

“...what do you mean?”
All Might nudged him, almost sent him flying into the ocean with his strength. “Young Midoriya! I'm sincerely hoping you haven't gone too far with this girl!!*

“What?!” Izuku almost choked. “N--no! We're just friends online! We haven't even met! I--I don't even know what she looks like…” he deflated, realized he'd sent a selfie without actually seeing her face.

All Might raised an eyebrow, “How do you not know what she looks like?”

“Um...well....she hasn't sent me a selfie yet...I want her to...but I don't wanna force her...I don't wanna make her feel uncomfortable…”

“Tell her you desire to see her lovely, beautiful face!” All Might proclaimed. “That will be a gentle nudge!”

Izuku's cheeks were so hot he swore they were gonna burn off. “W--what?! I--I can't say that!”

“Why not? The best way to her heart is to compliment her, young Midoriya!”

“Really? Just compliments?”

And it was then All Might poofed back into the tall, wiry and gaunt form he took most of the time. It startled Izuku briefly, as he still wasn't quite used to that. The good news was, no one was around to notice. He looked with those sunken in eyes and coughed a bit before speaking in his usual tired baritone,

“Actually, a lot of things need to be done. Love takes work, Midoriya. Wait...if you've never seen her face, how do you know her?”

“Erm...well...we met on a chatroom...she posted a really awesome piece of fanart...of you, actually…”

“Me? Are you sure she hasn't sent me anything directly? What's her name again?”
“Kyoko Kawabara. I call her Kyo...she's really talented. I told her to send you some of her art, but she says she's too scared to...so I doubt she's sent any…”

“Have you told her anything about our arrangement?”

Izuku shook his head no. “I...figured it's best we keep it between us. Besides...she probably wouldn't believe me, anyway...but I like her. I think she's really nice…”

All Might paused. “You should be careful. Online, a lot of people pretend to be something they're not.”

Izuku bit his lip. “I will.”

“I'm not saying your friend isn't who she says she is...it's just a warning.”

“I know.”

“Don't send any naughty photos.”

“WHAT IS IT WITH PEOPLE SAYING THAT?!!?!?”

---

Perhaps the most difficult thing about everyone talking about their dream schools was Kyoko accepting the fact she had blown her chance to go to Seiji High. Beneath the excited murmurs and the thrilled chatter and proposals of studying for entrance exams, Kyoko felt nothing but bitter resentment at her stupidity. She avoided talking about it when Ayu brought it up, simply kept her head down in the months that passed. She still managed to pull up excellent grades (She knew better than to tempt the wrath of Sayori), and she would drown herself in paintings or even makeshift cooking lessons from the television at home (she burnt her hand, wrist, or fingers several times in these lessons).
Her sessions with Miss Akizuki were somewhat helpful, when the days missing her mother became too much to bear. But she hadn't said a word about her high school slump. She simply said she was going where she wanted to go (lie), and that she was happy (lie).

Pretty soon it was February and entrance exams were all everyone was talking about. Even Izuku, bless him. In the months they spoke, Kyoko did whatever she could to be supportive. But now, as the days drew closer, she felt herself retreating into that protective bubble, sometimes choosing not to answer messages for hours at a time, sometimes a full day. If he called, she would sometimes not answer.

It was a Saturday when she picked up after two days of not really answering him. She was painting a vase of flowers for art class, which thankfully involved only one hand of paint. Her free hand held the phone to her ear, not really paying attention to who was calling. She assumed it was either Ayu or Sayori, who insisted on checking on her every now and again as of late.

“Hello?” she mumbled, her eyes on the canvas as her fingers traveled in paths of a blue that came from eating a neon blue Popsicle.

“Kyo! You're okay!”

She froze, her careful line zigzagged uncomfortably to the left. Thankfully, it didn't completely ruin her painting. She coughed, kept her usually monotone voice light, “I--Izuku! Hi...yeah, I'm fine…”

“I tried calling yesterday, but you didn't pick up. You didn't answer any of my messages. So I assumed….” he trailed off.

Kyoko stopped. “What did you assume?”

There was a pause before Izuku muttered, “I thought you were either mad at me or something happened...but...we're talking! So…”

He sounded so guilty it made her feel guilty. “I'm sorry, Izuku. I've just been crazy busy with….finishing junior high and getting ready for high school and stuff. I'm not mad or anything.”

“Oh. I'm glad! That you're not mad, that is...what are you doing now?”
“Painting one last project for art class.”

“Is it All Might?”

“No, it's a bunch of flowers. It's super easy for me but it's a lot of blending. Flower petals in particular can start off white at the bottom only to get pastel blue and then full blown blue at the tip. So I had to buy some non-toxic paint at the art store and use that with my Quirk in an attempt to make everything look realistic because I don't want to fail, I just want to end my junior high career with a bang. The best part about the painting is the stems though. They can go from an olive green to an emerald green--!”

She stopped upon realizing she was vocalizing a lot of her inner thought process at the moment. She bit her lip, “I'm sorry. I...I get carried away sometimes…”

“No, no, it's okay! You deal with me and my muttering...so...I mean, your process seems so cool! I don't mind hearing you talk. I love hearing you talk.”

Kyoko's cheeks were as red as the vase in her painting. “…you do?”

On the other end, Izuku was redder than a tomato. “Uh...yeah! Is it weird? I'm sorry if I made you feel weird…”

“Really? We've been talking all this time and you still think you make me feel weird?” She chuckled. “Of course not. It's...sweet. How's your training going?”

“It's going great! I think I'm almost ready for U.A.! How about you?”

Kyoko opened her mouth, prepared to lie as she got up to stretch her legs, almost tripped over the mess of clothes on the floor. She huffed as she opened her closet door, kicked her piles of clothes inside the small room. “My training is--!”

A piece of canvas fell from her closet, perhaps from everything stuffed in there. It hit her calf, causing her to swear as she irritably kicked it until it was upright against the wall.
Her mother's face stared back at her on the canvas, the paint still as vibrant as when Kyoko first painted it, shortly after her passing. Her lie died in her throat, and it seemed Megumi Kawabara looked at her with those eyes and Kyoko swore she saw the twinge of shame, despite logically knowing that couldn't be possible. The dam she had spent months building, strengthening with bitter resolve, finally burst.

"Kyo? Are you okay?"

She let out an affirmative noise, but the tears overflowed, flooded her eyes, fell down her cheeks as she knelt down, brushed the back of her right hand on her mother's face. If she touched it with her fingers, she would get paint all over. She tried to keep her cool, even tried holding her breath, but alas the urge to breathe overwhelmed the urge to hide her tears. She let out a huge, ugly snort.

"Are...are you crying?" Izuku sounded more worried than baffled, his voice quiet.

"No," Kyoko's voice wavered, betraying her. She wiped her eyes, "Everything is fine."

"Did...did I say something wrong?"

Sniffle. "No. You're fine."

"What's wrong?" Izuku had never heard her cry before. Usually when they spoke, she was often pensive or giggling or fangirling with him about All Might or listening to his insecurities and reassuring him. Never had he heard such a sadder sound than this strong, upbeat girl finally crying.

"I just...f--found something I painted a long time ago..." Kyoko wiped her face, but the tears didn't stop. "It's a painting of my...my mom."

"Oh...I'm... I'm sorry, Kyo...is there anything I can do?"

She stared at her mother's soft smile, a smile Sayori swore Kyoko inherited, but Kyoko herself did not see. She realized she was so tired of lying, so tired of putting up a front.
“...I messed up, Izuku.” She admitted at last. “I messed up so bad and I can't do anything about it.”

“What are you talking about?”

“...I lied. I didn't...I didn't submit my application. It was too late. So...I...I won't get to go to my mom's school.”

“What?” He sounded just as broken as she felt. “Why not? What happened?”

“I couldn't get my dad to sign...he's...never home, so...I tried to do it all myself. But it was too late...Principal Yuri said she couldn't submit it. I just feel so stupid! I've been lying because I didn't want...I didn't want to be a loser. Especially not to you. But...I think about Mommy all the time when I think about where I'm going. Mommy always wanted me to go...and now I won't. And I can't help but...feel like...” she couldn't continue, merely cried staring at her mother's face.

“Please don't cry, Kyo...m--maybe something can be done! Maybe you can talk to your dad!”

“For what? It wouldn't accomplish anything.” She choked out bitterly. “All he cares about is his job. He cares more about his job than about me. I look at him sometimes and I swear that...he wishes I was never born.”

“That's not true, Kyo. That can't be true!”

“I don't even care about the fact that I'm still passing my classes. I don't care that I don't have any friends...all I care about is how ashamed Mommy must be.”

“Your mom isn't ashamed of you! She can't be! You're smart, and you're funny, and you really care about your art! You're amazing, and talented...and beautiful...I know she's proud of you.”

Kyoko wanted to laugh, “How would you know I'm beautiful, Izuku? I only sent you one selfie.” If I could consider a photoshopped early photo of Mount Lady as a selfie, then sure...

“It doesn't matter! I still think you're beautiful. We've been talking all this time and you've always been there for me...I wanna be there for you. I hate hearing you cry. We can figure something out. I
can do some research. Maybe there's a way you can be a late admission or something!"

“You want to help me?”

“Oh course I do! I don’t want you to cry! And I know this means a lot to you, so...we can work together and figure something out!”

Kyoko stared at the canvas, finally gathered enough nerve to hide it in her closet once again. As she closed her closet door, she sniffed, “Thank you, Izuku...I'm sorry for the silly waterworks...I don't really like to cry…”

“I don't like hearing it. I don't want you to be sad...for now, I'm not hanging up until I get you to laugh!”

She smiled despite her damp mood. “That might be difficult today…”

“I doubt it! Hold on...I'll send you something funny…”

“Izuku, I doubt an All Might meme is going to make me f--!”

Her phone pinged with a new message. She briefly looked, found he had sent her a photo. She opened it, found Izuku on the beach, in tears as he tugged--was that a truck?

She snorted, finally let out a laugh. “What is even happening in that picture?” She giggled.

“Um...a passerby took it. Said I looked silly.” All Might sent it as a form of motivation.

“You look adorably silly!” Kyoko laughed.

“I got you to laugh!” Izuku sounded so happy.
Kyoko paused, realized he had indeed done so. “Yeah...you did…”

“So you aren't crying anymore?”

“Hmm, no.”

There was a brief pause as she glanced at her unfinished art project. She got up, sat in front of it once more.

“Izuku?”

“Yeah?”

“....thank you.”

“It's...no problem! If you ever feel sad again, I'll be here.”

“That means a lot. You...cheered me up. Just a little. I'm glad you don't think any less of me.”

“Why would I think any less of you? You're awesome, Kyo! And we'll figure out how to get you into Seiji High!”

“And I want to hear all about your entrance exam! I know you're going to pass. You've studied so hard!”

“I hope I pass...thanks, Kyo.”

“You will! I can feel it! Call it a sixth sense!”
“Kawabara!”

*Crap. What now?*

Kyoko knew better than to avoid Principal Yuri during the final bell. She had tried being quick, but once Yuri spotted you there was no running. She stopped where Yuri waited at her office doorway. Surprisingly, Yuri didn't look stern. Instead, she had a smile as she crossed her arms.

“I've got some good news for you, Kyoko.” Yuri said proudly.

Kyoko kept her bag slung over her shoulder as she blinked, “What?”

Yuri patted her shoulder, her grin widening as she began, “So, I know you were itching to go to Seiji High…”

Kyoko deflated. “Principal Yuri, I--!

“--and I couldn't accept your application--!”

“--really, you don't need to comfort me or--!”

“--so, I decided to call in some favors and personally recommend you as one of their students!”

“You really don’t…”

The words sunk in. Kyoko froze, eyes wide as she slowly looked up at the very proud Principal Yuri. Yuri shrugged, “Principal Matsuda over there owes me a favor. Get your uniform ready. Their first years are rough!”

Kyoko blinked as she watched Principal Yuri. Diagnosed around the same time as her mother, a woman her mother and Sayori fought and succeeded in saving. One full year of remission. Her hair
was just starting to grow back, styled in a cute bob.

“You….recommended me…?”

“Sure! Good grades, they’ve even got an exceptional arts program! Mr. Hirota was generous enough to submit some of your projects!” Yuri’s grin was toothy as she gave a thumbs up, “You can thank me after you've gradu-- oof!”

Yuri was cut off by a rather tall fifteen-year-old girl throwing herself around her, hugging her tightly. She remained frozen, not used to the usually stoic teenager displaying affection. She wanted to crack a joke, but upon hearing the girl sniffle, she decided against it. She softened, patted her on the back.

“You continue to do good in school, okay?”

Sniff. “...yes, ma'am.”

“And do something about that art. Your mom said you'd go places.”

Sniffle, sob. “Yes, ma'am.”

“And keep going to grief counseling. Principal Matsuda has an excellent counselor for you.”

“....yes. Ma'am. Thank you, ma'am. Thank you…!”
When there was a knock at Kyoko's apartment door one blustery Sunday, three days before her entry exam at Seiji High (more of a placement test, thanks to Yuri's favor), Kyoko opened the door to find a very irritated Sayori Sakamoto at the doorstep, grocery bags in tow.

“S--Sayori?! What're you doing here--?”

“--this stubborn moron you call a father hasn't even left you with grocery money, apparently!” Sayori yelled, unceremoniously stomping past Kyoko into their small apartment. Kyoko awkwardly closed the door behind her, found Sayori storming over to the kitchen, shutting off the stove and cutting off Kyoko's attempt at making lunch for herself. “He's lucky it was my day off! If I'd been working today, I would have transferred him from triage to the goddamned morgue! Frustrating man!”

She continued mumbling about Satoru Kawabara as if Kyoko wasn't there. Meanwhile, the television blared on some cooking show Kyoko was watching in an attempt to learn more about cooking. She watched as Sayori unpacked, put everything in its proper place. She scoffed at the empty cabinets and sparcie pantry, mumbling about, “...he knows you hate takeout, just like your mom, you'd both rather cook...frustrating man…”

And then before Kyoko knew it, Sayori was cleaning up, wiping down the countertops, the table, the stove. “I'm going to kick his sorry ass to kingdom come if he does this again...” she grumbled. By the time she finished, she stopped, rested her hands on her hips and grinned. It was odd seeing her out of her usual doctor attire.

“Well, then! What do you want for lunch?”

Kyoko blinked. “Um...what?”

“I can make you a nice bowl of ramen. Would you like that? I've got the noodles, the miso, the broth can be nice and hearty, just how you like it. So?”
Despite Kyoko wanting to protest, her stomach rumbled in response. Sayori whirled around, “That settles it!”

And she was cooking, chopping up vegetables and everything, all in Kyoko's kitchen. She refused to let Kyoko help, so she merely sat in front of the television, blankly watching a recipe for taiyaki. It was when she could smell the ramen mixed with the vegetables and the broth that Kyoko's mouth began to water, and her phone vibrated with a message from Izuku.

*How are you feeling today?*

*I'm okay. My mom's old friend is here. Apparently checking in. How are you?*

*I'm getting ready for my entrance exam. I'm so nervous. I really wanna get in. Wait, your mom's old friend?*

*You will get in. I know it. Yeah. She's known my mom since before I was born. She was also Mommy's doctor during her illness.*

*Oh! You guys must be close!*

*Not really. She's annoying but she means well. I talk to her because she was friends with Mommy. That's all.*

*Maybe you could be closer? You did say she helps when you hurt yourself…*

*I was hoping you didn't hear that part of our last conversation…*

*I did. I wish you would be more careful when cooking. I don't like hearing about you burning your fingertips :(*

*I can still paint! I don't burn my fingertips. Just the sides of my fingers. Sometimes my wrist or arm.*
You burn your wrist and arm?!!

Izuku, relax. I'm a big girl. I'm fine. Cooking just has its ups and downs. Besides, Sayori got me Band-Aids and aloe vera. Those help a lot when I do get burned. Stop worrying. :3

“Lunch is ready!” Kyoko looked up from her phone just as Sayori rounded the corner with a tray holding a huge bowl of miso ramen. She was beaming as she served her, “It's hot, so be careful while eating!”

“Thanks…” Kyoko's stomach let out an appreciative rumble as Sayori briefly left only to come back with a bowl of her own, smaller than Kyoko's. She sat in her father's big chair while she asked,

“So? How's school?”

“Fine.”

“You've been doing your homework?”

“Yes.”

“You've been channeling your aggression into painting?”

“Yes.” Kyoko didn't really want to have this conversation every time Sayori stopped by. It was annoying.

“And you've been attending grief counseling?”

“Yes.”

“You're being particularly monosyllabic today. What's on your mind?”
“Nothing. I just don't have anything to add.” Kyoko muttered.

Sayori sighed, sat back and ate quietly for a while before beginning, “Look. I know it bothers you that your dad isn't home, but—!”

“It's fine. Dad has work while I take care of the house. I do a good job.”

“I just don't think you guys have found an efficient way to work together after Megumi…”

“It's functional.” Kyoko snapped. “There's nothing to worry about. I would've went out anyway with Dad's credit card. I buy groceries. I clean to the best of my ability. Everything is fine.”

“It doesn't seem fine, Kyoko.”

“Don't you have a job to go to?”

Sayori ignored her question. “I know I haven't been around much after Megumi. It hurts...living without her. But I've gotten my head out of my ass and I'm willing to do whatever I have to in order to help.”

“Thanks, but we don't need your help.”

“Megumi asked me to look after you and Satoru. It was all she asked of me before…” Sayori paused, her usually stern face saddening before she coughed, “I told Satoru I would be visiting once a week to check in on you. And I also told him he needs to be home more. When was the last time you two spent time together?”

“Everything is fine. You checked in, now you can go and do...whatever doctors do on their free time.” Kyoko waved dismissively.

Sayori didn't look amused. “So if I go into your bedroom right now, I'm not going to find piles of dirty clothes on the floor?” She asked slyly.
Kyoko blanched.

Sayori finished her bowl quickly before getting up, throwing Kyoko's bedroom door open. By the time Kyoko put her tray of food aside, it was too late.

“WHAT IN THE FRESH HELL IS THIS, KYOKO?!?!”

Kyoko stumbled, sheepishly stood behind Sayori as she appraised the piles and piles of clothes and hangers all over the floor, the open and unkempt drawers, the unmade bed, the virtually empty closet and pastel paints for blending cluttering her tiny bathroom.

“LOOK AT THIS MESS!” Sayori roared. “ARE YOU KIDDING ME RIGHT NOW?!”

Kyoko bit her lip, “I'll get around to it, okay? I've just been busy!”

“BUSY DOING WHAT? I MIGHT AS WELL SET FIRE TO THIS MESS. IT'S THE ONLY WAY I'LL SEE YOUR DAMN FLOORS AGAIN!”

Sayori almost tripped over the bundles of clothes as she stepped in Kyoko's room, scoffing as she picked up dirty pants, shirts, and school uniforms. “You have a laundry basket!” She groaned. “Why aren't you using it?”

“....because it's full.” Kyoko said sheepishly.

Sayori rolled her eyes, grabbed garbage bags. “You. Pack.” She pointed. “We're doing this now.”

Kyoko cringed. “But…what about--?”

“--I will pay for the laundromat, dammit. And we're going through your idiot father's crap, too!”

“But Sayori--!”
“STOP MAKING EXCUSES!”

“....Yes, ma'am…”

So much for a relaxing Sunday.

---

Kyoko was almost hypnotized as she watched the spin cycle of the washing machine, phone in hand while Sayori calmly sat beside her, reading a health magazine. Occasionally, Kyoko would message Izuku, where they went back and forth on heroes, All Might, and the usual things they initially bonded over. As Sayori read an article about whether or not caviar had carcinogens, the subject matter changed in messages between the two teens.

Kyo?

What?

This is gonna be kind of a weird question, but can you send another selfie? I accidentally deleted the old one you sent me.... :( 

Oh, no. Kyoko bit her lip, was suddenly acutely aware of how her long legs and long arms and big head seemed to dwarf the tiny plastic white chair. She was aware of her fingers, wrapped in Band-Aids, and her long hair, two days unwashed. Her bangs felt oily and she had broken out due to puberty and hormones, so there was a face full of ugly pimples and clusters and a very large zit on her forehead thanks to the oily bangs. Kyoko felt like an incredibly ugly, mutated, deformed unicorn. With trembling fingers, she wrote, You deleted my first selfie? Trying to forget me already? ;3

Nooooo nothing like that! My phone had too much data so I had it automatically wipe some stuff to save data. And it deleted your selfie. :( I wanna see your face.

Kyoko let out a puff as she pulled up her phone's Web browser, pulled up Google for any cute, youthful looking, petite blonde girls. Here we go again…
She found a suitable one, opened her photo editor app and started fixing it up. At least by doing this, he can't reverse image search directly…

Kyoko bit her lip, attached it to her drafted message. She hesitated as her bandaged thumb hovered over the send button. She looked up at her ghastly reflection from the washing machine window.

Would Izuku realistically care? He didn't seem to be the shallow type. But she'd already sent a picture of a petite blonde before. And, as Kyoko struggled, tried to find something even remotely good-looking about her face, her hair, she couldn't find it. It made her laugh how her father and a lot of his co-workers, including Sayori, swore she was the spitting image of her late mother. Kyoko certainly didn't see it. Megumi's hair was shorter, for one, and her face was narrower, her eyes brighter, her complexion clearer…

...above all, Megumi's smile lit up an entire room. It wasn't like Kyoko's perpetual resting bitch face or permanent grimace. It wasn't even close to Kyoko's occasional smile which looked more like a devilish smirk at times. Not very pretty. Not very ladylike.

She hit the send button, sighing.

Sayori looked up, “You okay, sweetie?”

“Mm-hmm.”

I just have to hope and pray he never finds out. That he doesn't ask for more. If he knew what I actually looked like...compared to him...

Her phone vibrated. Kyoko cringed, looked at the message.

You're just as pretty as I remember!

“I wish,” Kyoko snorted, sent a mere winky-faced emoji in return.

“Hmm?” Sayori looked up again.
“I wish….these clothes would wash themselves.” Kyoko said quickly. The last thing she needed was Sayori to know about Izuku.

Sayori chuckled, “Don't we all?”

Kyoko looked down at her phone in her hands, bandaged and ugly. Despite the morning being better in terms of sadness, it seemed to rear its ugly head now. Her mother always told her she was a pretty and almost ethereal girl. Of course, that was when Kyoko was nine years old and only barely reaching 151 centimeters. It was also when her face was adorably chubby and her hair was this sweet little bob.

*My little darling dream girl.*

The pet name hit her like a truck, and it hit unexpectedly. It formed a lump in Kyoko's throat as she stared at the hollow, thin, tall tree she had become in the reflection. The thin, tall, lanky body hid in layers of black: be it tights, thick boots, lots of oversized sweatshirts or jackets.

“Sayori?” Her voice came out small, unusual.

“Hmm?”

“Why does everyone say I'm pretty?” Maybe it was the vulnerability of the moment. Maybe it was the bitter sting of her mother's absence. Maybe it was how she sent a lie to a boy she really was starting to care for.

“Because you are?” Sayori chuckled, spoke as if Kyoko asked if the sky was blue. “You’re growing up to be a very pretty young lady.”

“I don't believe that.” Kyoko said seriously. “Look at me.” She gestured to her reflection, where Sayori's eyes met hers. “Sometimes I just want to be invisible.”

“That was before.” Kyoko muttered, looking down at her phone.

“And what changed now?”

Kyoko didn't reply.

Sayori narrowed her eyes, “This wouldn't be about a boy, now would it?”

Kyoko's heart skipped a beat. “N--no…”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes…”

Sayori sighed, not really believing her but ultimately deciding not to pry. “The people who care the most about you…of course their opinions matter to you. But you need to be okay with yourself, and be who you want to be. Not what everyone else wants you to be.”

“That still doesn't fix ugly.”

“Kyoko, you look just like your mom!”

“But Mom was beautiful.”

“And you don't think you are?”

“Look at me. I look like a dead person.”

Sayori pursed her lips in thought. Clearly this had to be approached delicately. She got up, moved
until she was behind Kyoko, who watched from the reflection, confused.

“I see...two brown eyes.” Sayori began, gripping Kyoko's shoulders as she studied her. “Two brown eyes that I had the privilege of seeing when I visited your mom after she gave birth. Big. Expressive. Although they get dark when you're mad. Just like Megumi's did.” She lifted two strands of black hair. “I see...long black hair. It's due for a trim, but it's soft, well taken care of, and that's because you're on top of it.”

Sayori smiled as she pinched her cheeks, earning a squawk from Kyoko. “Ha! You still have a little baby fat, after all! You're pale because you aren't in the sun as much. But it brings out your eyes better, I think. Look at that nose! Long. Elegant. Not like my stubby, crooked nose.” She joked, earning a giggle from Kyoko. “And there's a smile! Your eyes light up when you do that! Lights up your whole face! Looks like you aren't so dead after all!”

For a brief moment, Kyoko could swear she saw what Sayori saw. “...you're saying this because I look like Mommy.”

“No. I'm saying it because you're Kyoko. And Kyoko Kawabara is growing up to be a very beautiful young lady.”

She didn't agree. But it helped, at least for the moment. Kyoko gave a small smile in response.

Sayori patted her shoulders again. “Come on. We have to move these clothes to the dryers.”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the lack of Izuku and All Might in this chapter. I will safely guarantee that at least one of them is making an appearance in the next chapter.
Chapter Notes

An unexpected twist in the plot.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Toshinori Yagi, also known as All Might, was not having a good day. He woke up in the morning sore and feeling like he didn't sleep as well as he should've. He put on the morning news to find out there was a hostage situation in a bank….all the way across town. He managed to make it in time without anyone being killed or injured, only to be swamped by reporters when he wasn't in the best mood. It was great putting on the smiles and the muscles and the brave face. He remained as affable as possible before finally, finally, shaking them off. By the time he poofed back into his regular tired, gaunt self, he realized he was across town and most likely couldn't transform (therefore travel quickly) for another three hours at best.

Plus, he realized he was in vast need of groceries. Again.

“Shit…” Toshinori grumbled as he stood in line at a random grocery store he'd never been to before. He just wanted to be home, possibly do some last minute training with young Midoriya before the entrance exam at U.A. He didn't ask to carry an excessive amount of groceries in one arm where the nerves were shaky at best. He didn't ask for the cashier to be slow as shit in scanning every last item.

Above all, he didn't ask for a paper bag, which was heavy with the jars and canned goods he bought.

Toshinori walked slowly down the street, careful not to shake the bag too much. It already seemed dangerously close to ripping. He held it carefully, methodically, but the weak nerves in his fingers made it difficult. He was tired, and above all, he was hungry and really could use a cup of coffee. He crossed, decided to cut through a park in an attempt to explore the area and hopefully find a bus. It seemed that was the only way he would get home. It wasn't ideal, but it was better than waiting to transform with a bag that was very close to ripping.

He was so lost in his thoughts he accidentally bumped into someone. “Sorry,” he mumbled just as his victim turned, a young boy, perhaps Midoriya's age.

“What the hell, old man?!” The boy snapped as his friends chuckled. “Are you blind?!”
“Forgive me. I was lost in thought.” Toshinori was no stranger to petulant kids, but he really didn't have the energy to deal with it right now.

“You wanna be lost in this park?” The boy hissed, shoving Toshinori. It caught him by surprise, and he stumbled. He caught his balance, but his heart fell when he heard his bag rip unceremoniously, and the contents of his grocery shopping scattered throughout the concrete. One jar of jam smashed open, and he was certain his eggs did not survive. The boy shoved him again, and Toshinori glared, bit out, “Back off.”

“Ooh, old man thinks he's tough?” The boy grinned, and his friends followed as he tried to corner Toshinori. People walked by, clearly uncomfortable with the scene about to unfold. Or perhaps hoping a Hero would step in.

He really wished he could transform right now. He felt his chest tighten, which meant a coughing fit was about to happen. This was not going to end well.

“Haru!” A new voice came then, and Toshinori started at the sight of a tall, thin girl, aggressively stomping over to the boys. The boy's friends seemed to panic and scurried off. But he remained firm. He seemed to recognize the girl.

“Well, if it isn't the frea--!”

He didn't get to finish his sentence, for in one move, the girl shoved the boy into the fountain, earning stares and gasps from passerby, including Toshinori himself. The boy screeched when he fell, completely drenched as he spat out water.

The girl crossed her arms, her eyes blazing as she exclaimed, “You got bored picking on me, so you decided to pick on an innocent man?! You're literally the most pathetic person I have ever met!”

“My new shoes!” The boy named Haru wailed as he scrambled out of the fountain. Toshinori had to admittedly fight the urge to laugh at the pathetic sight. Despite having a clear sense of justice, Toshinori did appreciate some instant karma now and again.

The girl rolled her eyes, “By the way, how is your filling I punched out?” She asked calmly.

“You're sick, Kawabara!” Haru wailed, pointing at her, “You're sick in the head!”
“And you're sick in the face,” the girl known as Kawabara snapped. “Now you get out of here and leave this poor man alone! Or do I have to punch another filling Daddy paid for out of your stupid mouth?”

He didn't wait, hurried off. She glared as he fled, and for a split second, Toshinori swore she looked like Nana. He opted not to go down that route so early in the day, bent down to pick up his sad pile of groceries.

He started to find her already helping, picking up what could be salvaged. She handed him a bottle of low sodium soy sauce. “Here.” She gave a gentle smile, one that lit up her whole face, seemed to brighten her features. She looked quite young despite being so tall. By the school uniform, she was definitely a student. “He goes to my junior high. He's a piece of work.”

Toshinori blinked in surprise, took the bottle. “Thank you, young lady…” he tried to stand, but the tightness unfurled in his chest, and he was coughing, quickly trying to cover his mouth as he dropped the bottle, which (of course) shattered.

“Are you okay?” She looked worried. “Do you need a hospital?”

He couldn't answer, merely heaved, coughed a nasty fit before finally stopping. When Toshinori pulled his fist away from his mouth, he deflated at the sight of blood on his skin.

“...I know a great doctor…” she whispered, clearly disturbed by what she had seen. Not wanting to disturb the girl any further, Toshinori shook his head. “T--that won't be necessary. I'm sorry for taking up your time…”

He turned, moved to leave. Possibly buy the groceries again. What a day.

“Wait! Sir, please!”

Toshinori turned, found the girl hurrying over. She stopped, groceries long abandoned and already being taken care of by park staff.

“Young lady, you don't need to worry about me any longer. I appreciate your help, but I really need
“--did you shop at the store on Misaka Drive? The one that always uses paper bags?”

“....yes.”

“There's a better market two blocks up...they carry paper and plastic. It's called Minako's. I go there all the time. They also have better brands. You look like you're on some health kick, so their brands might be better for you.”

“Thank you. I'll keep that in mind.”

“If you'd like, I can walk you.” She offered. “You...you look like you need some help.”

Toshinori held up a hand, “No, I'm...”

He began coughing again. Shit! Why wasn't his body cooperating today? When he calmed, the girl was still there.

“Please let me help, sir.”

“Don't you have school?”

“Well...yeah...” she said sheepishly.

“You should go, then. It's not good for a student to miss class.”

“My junior high is done with classes. Most of it is just homeroom and final exams...I've done my exams, so...I can miss a day.”

He hesitated. Clearly this girl wasn't going to take no for an answer. He sighed. “I guess I could use
the help. Thank you.”

She bowed, “It's the least I could do! I'm very sorry that my bully decided to bully you!”

Toshinori couldn't resist a small smile, “You're a very nice young lady. That wasn't your fault. I was being careless.”

“Still! It doesn't justify him being a jerk!” She offered an arm. “You're limping a bit. Hold onto me.”

---

“So what kind of diet are you on?”

“Hmm?” Toshinori glanced over to the girl, who was generously helping him pick out produce. Her eyes studied the myriad of produce, from lemons to cabbages. She was quite tall, he didn't have to look down too much, but alas, even in this state, he towered over most people.

“Your diet.” She said plainly. “Is it a keto diet? All greens? Vegan?”

“Er...simple digestion.” He didn't want to give too much away about his condition.

“Okay. So would soups help?”

“Sure.”

“They have a sale this week…” she mumbled, gently guiding him over to the canned goods aisle. “You can get up to eight cans for a really good price.”

“You do shop here often,” Toshinori mused as she appraised different soups.

“Mm-hmm. My dad doesn't have time to shop for food during the week, so I usually do it myself. I
always have the weekly deals on my phone.”

“Why do you want to help me?” Toshinori asked quietly, “I’m just an old man…”

The girl stopped, met his eyes briefly, bright chestnut brown meeting intense blue. She bit her lip, held a can of minestrone soup. He absently noted how her fingers were bandaged, eight out of ten fingers to be exact.

“...I...my counselor...told me a good way to cope with...something bad...is to try to extend help to others in need.” She explained, clearly trying to avoid revealing too much. He certainly understood that and opted not to question her. “S--so I saw you needed help. I have to learn to help other people…plus...no one was helping you and you were being pushed around. That's not right. Not at all!”

He smiled. She sounded like Izuku, “Your counselor is wise. That definitely sounds like Hero work to me. You on a path like that?”

Her cheeks tinted red, dramatically coloring her pale face. “Oh, n--no! Nothing like that! My Quirk is worthless, really! Nothing Hero worthy at all!”

“What career would you prefer, then?”

She regarded him a long moment before admitting, “...I don't know. B--but I'm hoping to figure it out once I start high school.”

“That's when I figured stuff out,” Toshinori chuckled. “But don't rush. You're still young, and you've got your whole life ahead of you to find your own path.”

“You...sound like my dad. He always used to say that to me.” She grew somber suddenly, but before Toshinori could pry, she held up two cans, “Minestrone or mushroom?”

“Er...both?”

She put both soups in the cart, “Now, what else do you need?”
“All that's left are eggs and the soy sauce.”

“Cool! Then we're almost done!” She pushed the cart to the next aisle while he followed, in a bit of a better mood thanks to her. He appraised the shelves for soy sauce, not aware that she was staring until he found his favorite brand and went to put it in the cart.

“Is something wrong?” He inwardly froze. Shit. Did she somehow recognize him?

She blinked, shook her head as she caught himself, “Sorry...you just...” she mumbled.

“What? My face that ugly?” Toshinori joked.

She met his eyes, “N--no! Not at all! With all due respect...I don't think you're ugly at all. You just have very…” her cheeks grew red again. “This is going to sound weird, but...your eyes look like they tell lots of stories. Like you've lived a very eventful life.”

He smiled, but it lacked humor, “You have no idea, young lady.”

“I--I'm an artist, so...your eyes inspired me.” She muttered shyly. “I've only drawn two people in my lifetime...I usually draw scenery or still life.”

“An artist, huh? That's a pretty interesting passion. I can barely draw myself.”

She blinked, her cheeks redder as she clenched her fists, as if debating something in her head. Finally, she blurted out, “If you don't mind...I'd like to draw you!”

Toshinori's eyes widened, “Me? Like...like this?”

“Well...if you aren't comfortable, it's okay...I'm sorry...I'm being weird…” the poor girl looked as if she wanted to melt into the floor, she was so embarrassed.
He hesitated. She didn't seem to recognize him. And she was a nice young girl who seemed perfectly harmless. But what if she figured it out? What would happen then? Should he come clean? Granted, he'd had some strange requests in his time as All Might, but this was as Toshinori. What was he supposed to do here?

He sighed, “What's your name, young lady?”

She took a deep breath before replying, “Kyoko.”

That name. Why did it sound familiar? Toshinori tried to rack his brain, but couldn't come up with the answer. He dismissed his senile, forgetful brain as he sighed, “Well, Kyoko, if you'd like to draw me, then I suppose there's no harm in it.”

“Really?! You don't mind?”

“If anything, it's nice to know my eyes tell stories.” He chuckled. “I'm not from around here, though. I live across town. I'm here because…” he briefly thought before lying, “...I took the wrong bus and fell asleep. Heh. I don't get enough sleep and here I am, an old man.”

“Don't worry! I can come to you!” She offered. “I'm used to traveling, and it wouldn't be fair to ask you to come to my side of town in your...condition…”

Another moment of hesitation on Toshinori's part. Finally, he took out a notepad and a pen, wrote down his home address before ripping off the paper and handing it to her. “I don't usually do this. But that's me.” He said as she appraised the paper, clearly already planning out her travels. “I warn you, I'm not much of a housekeeper. I also ask you not to share that information with anyone else. Except your parents. They have a right to know where you are.”

Kyoko looked up, and it was her turn to smile humorlessly. “My dad won't really mind.”

He didn't miss the lack of mentioning a mother. However, he didn't question it as they stood in line at the cashier (who thankfully moved much faster than the slow one at the other market). Kyoko was busy loading the conveyer while Toshinori readied his wallet. By the time they finished paying and they were outside (Kyoko carrying two plastic bags and Toshinori carrying the other two), she offered to walk him to the bus that would take him back home.
“So, when do you want me to come by?” Kyoko asked as they waited at the bus stop.

“Maybe Sunday? I'll give you my number.”

“Sounds good!” Kyoko glanced over, spotted a bus turning the corner. She grasped his arm, kept the bags close to him as she spoke quietly,

“So, what you're going to do is take this bus to the mall, which is a halfway point. Then you take the bus right around the corner there and that'll take you home. You'll have to walk a little because it's about two blocks from the address you gave me.”

The bus pulled up, and Toshinori took his bags, prepared to pay the fare.

“Are you going to be all right? Do you need me to help you?"

“I'll just be fine. Thank you, Kyoko.” He gave a thumbs up.

“Wait! I never got your name!”

He hesitated before replying, “Just call me Mr. Yagi. It was nice meeting you.”

The bus doors closed, and it began pulling out of the stop. Kyoko watched the bus leave, and despite her somber mood, she felt a bit better helping someone in need.

What a nice man...

Chapter End Notes

I imagine Kyo won't recognize Toshinori in his true form as Izuku didn't really put two and two together until Toshi himself pointed it out in the second episode.

I wasn't intending to give Toshi a particularly large role in this fic, but once again, he snuck up on me and I just love Dad Might too much.
Izuku will be returning next chapter. I miss writing the cinnamon roll.

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