Hiro chewed his lip nervously as he watched Tadashi, sitting on his bed between his crutches, slip on his favorite Ghost Ninja shirt and green jacket. “Are you sure you want to come with?” he asked. “Technically, you already introduced me to the campus, and you’re still healing. Maybe you should stay in bed. The gang’ll be there with me, I’ll be fine!”

Tadashi only shot him a wide, toothy grin. “Of course I’m going with you! This is your first day of college, Hiro, I can’t miss that. Besides, I’m cleared to walk around, not on permanent bedrest anymore.”
This is over 9,000 words long and only covers the first couple minutes of Baymax Returns. God, this is going to be long. Each episode might have to be its own fic at this rate. Well that would really make it a series, huh! (*Dodges tomatoes.*)

So there are a few things I have to clarify before starting this fic. This is not going to be an exact copy and paste of the cartoon script with a living Tadashi throwing dialogue here and there - if I do that, I'll go crazy. A lot of things will be copy and pasted, but I'm more of using the cartoon as a guideline to write this fic. Tadashi being alive is already going to drastically change parts of the story; I'm adding my own headcanons, character arcs, and a few plotlines to this as well. And after writing this first chapter, I'm terrified of the length lol. Does Ao3 have a max word limit on fics? ^_^' But this fic has been so much fun to plan and write out so far, I'm excited to continue!

So yeah, there's going to be changes. I have emotional arcs built for Tadashi and Hiro, Callaghan's going to brought up a lot more, I even have some backstories made up for the lesser villains! All you need to understand for the movie (this is already long, I'm not rewriting the whole movie, too), is that Tadashi survived the fire, but was heavily injured. Luckily, the medical world is more advanced than in the real world, so he's recovering faster than he would in reality. Despite this, he's not in shape to help the team in person, so for now, he operates a drone equipped with stun blasters and communicates with the team via it and their communicators. As for Baymax, even though he helped Hiro cope with Tadashi's death and is his link to his brother in the movie, they are still just as close here as they are in canon. That's not changing. He's still on the team, and loves both his Hamada patients.

Lastly, I'm going to be blunt here: I'm writing this fic for my own personal enjoyment. I'm adding stuff for my own personal enjoyment. I love the cartoon for what it is and can't wait for season two - this fic is for fun, not critique - but good lord, *I can't stand Karmi.* I tried to give her a chance and wanted so bad to like her while season one was airing, but I think Big Problem cemented my dislike of her forever. I have zero desire to write Karmi's character, so I'm reducing her role in this fic. I'll be dealing with the bullying plotline in my own way in the Issue 188 chapter(s), but she's going to be pretty much gone after that. She'll get a mention here and there, but I'm cutting most of her appearances and rewriting Fan Friction and Big Problem to exclude her. I'm sorry if that disappoints Karmi fans, but I just don't have any desire to write her.

Anyway, sorry for this super long author's note! Onto to the story, which I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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should stay in bed. The gang’ll be there with me, I’ll be fine!”

Tadashi only shot him a wide, toothy grin. “Of course I’m going with you! This is your first day of college, Hiro, I can’t miss that. Besides, I’m cleared to walk around, not on permanent bedrest anymore.”

Hiro winced. No, his big brother wasn’t on permanent bedrest orders anymore, but he was still recovering from his injuries.

The fire had left him with deep scar tissue that ran from the back of his neck to his calves, and around his sides. In addition, a beam had fallen on top of him in there, crushing his lower back, and hindering his ability to use his legs. By the time the firefighters had found him, he was hanging on by a thread. Since then, he had been through a spinal and several skin surgeries - all in a matter of weeks. The exposition had been in early August; it was now close to mid-September. He was lucky the medical world was so far advanced these days. Nevertheless, that didn’t mean he was all better.

Tadashi still didn’t have full control over his legs. He had started physical therapy almost immediately after his spinal surgery, and while he was expected to eventually regain full control, that wouldn’t be for a long while. He would be on crutches until November, at the earliest, but that didn’t mean he could run marathons once he got off them. His legs tired out easily. It wasn’t recommended he be on his feet more than two hours at a time right now, excluding his therapy sessions. His scars were also an issue; the constant surgeries hadn’t rid him of them, only patched them up. There were small sections of his right side and mid-left of his back he couldn’t feel at all due to nerve damage. None of the tissue liked significant cold or hot temperatures, and they dried out easily due to large patches being unable to produce sweat. They, along with the muscles beneath them, ached regularly, requiring the use of prescribed medication. Unlike his legs, much of his scar side effects would last forever.

Hiro couldn’t shake the heavy weight over his chest that this was his fault. If he hadn’t built the microbots, Callaghan would never saw an opportunity and started the fire. If he had held tighter onto Tadashi’s arm, he would have never been able to go in there. If he had called Tadashi’s name as he ran up those stairs, begged him to stay, he might have come back down instead of running in there.

Tadashi didn’t see it that way, as his fault. They’d already had this conversation before; he had nothing to feel guilty for over the microbots and there was no stopping him from going in there. Tadashi’s choices had been his own, and while he regretted leaving Hiro there by himself, was mortified at the possibility his little brother could have potentially watched him die, his actions were all on him, not Hiro. It didn’t relieve the weight much, though.

Hiro had spent the remainder of his summer at his brother’s bedside, helping Aunt Cass and Baymax care for him. He even put off registering for school so his classes wouldn’t get in the way of caring for him.

Tadashi had taken it all in stride, it had seemed, wearing his usual, warm smile as Aunt Cass brought him up food, yanked Hiro into bed with him to cuddle and tease him (glad his sense of humor was still in tact), and professed excitement that he could personally test out Baymax as a full time healthcare companion now. His friends (their friends now, Hiro guessed) came by frequently, and it almost felt like life was on its way back to normal.

Still, the guilt hadn’t let up.

And then Callaghan happened.
Hiro found one of his microbots in his jacket pocket. Baymax, who had also taken note of Hiro’s emotional state as well as Tadashi’s physical state, had decided follow his ‘tiny robot’ while Tadashi napped (one of his painkillers caused drowsiness). Hiro chased after him to an abandoned warehouse, and well, everything spiraled from there. He discovered the man in the kabuki mask, he tried to turn Baymax into a crime fighter to take Yokai down, Tadashi woke up and realized he was gone and sent their friends after him (Hiro would never understand how his brother always knew exactly where he was when he was in trouble; big brother senses must be killer), and Yokai tried to kill them all. They found out Fred was rich, Tadashi blew up everybody’s phones and demanded to know why Hiro had been in the ocean after speeding through downtown (seriously, killer senses, how!?), and Hiro convinced all of them they had to become superheroes.

Well, almost all of them. Tadashi, then still on bedrest orders outside his PT sessions, had been a beast to convince. He only relented letting Hiro go as long as he had his own eye in the sky able to help (read: able to protect his brother at all times). So while Hiro and the gang developed their suits and weapons, Hiro and Tadashi also built a small, rectangular drone that contained a high powered camera, audio devices, and two rotating stun blasters. Tadashi controlled it from home on his computer.

Their trip to Akuma Island had been...less than spectacular at the start, but it all went to hell when Yokai’s mask came off.

Tadashi had gone radio silent. He stayed that way as Hiro expressed disbelief, told Callaghan everything Tadashi had been through, how he could have died trying to save him, and saw red when informed his injuries - and death, had he died - would have been solely Tadashi’s mistake. The drone only moved after Hiro removed Baymax’s healthcare chip to stop his creation, and to follow Hiro and Baymax off the island.

Tadashi had been waiting in the garage, sitting on the couch by the indoor door when they got home. Hiro had thrown himself in Tadashi’s arms in tears. He was angry, enraged, bitter, and seeing Tadashi there made him realize he had gone too far with Baymax, a robot he designed to heal, never kill. How could he have done that, when it went against everything Tadashi stood for? He apologized to them both, begged forgiveness. Tadashi held him tight, told him it was going to be okay, that he wasn’t mad. Baymax hugged him, assured him it as all right. Soon the gang showed up, Gogo joined in on the hug, and they all agreed they’d apprehend Callaghan the right way.

So they did. And they saved his daughter’s life.

And lost Baymax in the process.

Hiro’s heart felt like a tangled mess. Baymax was Tadashi’s project, meant to make a huge difference in the world, and now he was gone. All of his hard work was gone. On top of that, he had been Hiro’s friend. In the weeks they had cared for Tadashi, he’d gotten attached to Baymax, kind of like he was a second brother. They even did their own version of his fist bump with Tadashi. Losing him had hurt in so many ways.

In typical Tadashi fashion, he didn’t blame Hiro. He claimed to have had a heart attack when he watched them go into that portal. He was so proud of Hiro’s selflessness (selflessness he had learned from him, Hiro had added silently), but he had been terrified he’d lost him forever. He could rebuild Baymax, he had said. Not the same Baymax, not his friend that he was so sorry Hiro had lost - he made it clear he knew how much Hiro loved him and didn’t deserve this - but his project nonetheless. Tadashi couldn’t rebuild Hiro. If he could only get one of them back, Tadashi would always choose his little brother. (Funny how he and Baymax had that in common.) He was
so incredibly happy and grateful Hiro was safe.

But the weight on Hiro’s chest was not relieved.

He was tired of hurting his older brother. He was tired of hurting the people he loved (Tadashi, the gang, Baymax…). He just wanted everyone to be all right.

Hence why he was nervous to bring Tadashi with him to campus. Tadashi might have been cleared to walk, but he wasn’t cleared to go back to class full time.

SFIT had offered him the semester off for his recovery, but unlike Hiro, Tadashi hadn’t wanted to miss class. So instead, he was doing what he could online, and would make up what he couldn’t via extensions when he returned to class in November. Crutches or not, his doctors and physical therapist agreed he should be well enough to attend classes in person by then.

It was not November yet.

“Hey,” Tadashi knocked his shoulder lightly. “Quit making that face. I’m fine. Wasabi’s gonna bring me home in his rental after you get to your first class. I promise not to overdo it.”

Hiro gave him a tiny smile, though none of his nerves had disappeared. “Sorry. It’s, uh, just a big campus, right? You’re going to walk all around it.”

Tadashi ruffled his hair. “It’s not that big. Come here!”

Hiro had to laugh as Tadashi yanked him by the SFIT hoodie into a one armed hug, putting his weight on his other crutch and squeezing him tight. He laughed harder as the first crutch fell over against the bed, then crashed on the floor. Tadashi chuckled, too.

“So this is what it’s like to have your own personal worrywart,” he joked, loosening his arm. “Mind helping me, wart?”

“No, you can pick it up yourself,” Hiro joked back, already bending over to get the crutch.

When he stood up to full height and adjusted the crutch under his older brother’s arm, he found Tadashi beaming at him.

“I’m so proud of you,” he said, voice lowered. “For a little while there, I was afraid the fire and Callaghan had scared you away from college forever. Not just SFIT. Now it’s your big today. Is it bad that I wish I could sit in all your classes with you like I did in high school?”

Hiro flushed at the praise. “Heh. Well, uh…” he thought about joking how weird that would be, as if they were joined at the hip. He decided otherwise. “No. I kind of wish you could be there with me all day, too.”

“Aunt Cass and I are gonna be there to pick you after your last class. You don’t mind, do you?” he asked. “We wanna hear all about your day as soon as possible.”

Hiro huffed good naturedly. “Like you two aren’t going to be blowing up my phone between all my classes. You made a copy of my schedule for that exact purpose, didn’t you, or that was just my imagination?”

“Stop it, you’re making me feel like a mother hen,” Tadashi gave Hiro’s head a playful shove. “Come on, let’s get downstairs. At this rate, we’re gonna have to skip the tour and drop you off at your first class instead.”
“Heh, yeah,” Hiro agreed.

He made a move to turn around, only to stop short. He lunged for the top of Tadashi’s dresser. “Wait, we can’t forget this!”

Tadashi made an amused noise in his throat as Hiro reached up to place his favorite San Fransokyo Ninjas hat on his head. “You’re absolutely right, we can’t forget that. Now come on, don’t wanna be late!”

Hiro smiled to himself. Regardless of the weight on his chest, his older brother could always brighten his mood.

The breakfast rush was always a mess in the café, but Tuesdays, oddly enough, contained the quietest of breakfast rush messes. In fact, despite it being seven-fourteen in the morning, Cass would say business was only steady. Steady meant it was manageable enough that she could get away for a few minutes to pack Hiro’s lunch, a task she had set herself to last night only to completely forget about by bed time. She hated doing that.

Luckily, she wasn’t too late; it looked like her boys had found their friends’ table in the middle of the room by the time Cass returned to the counter. She watched with a smile as they gleefully greeted her boys, exclamations of “Hiro!” “Tadashi!” and “Hey, man!” chorusing over the noise of the other customers.

Cass nearly jumped for joy as they rose from their seats. It was Hiro’s first day of college! It felt like yesterday had been Tadashi’s first day. Now both of her nephews were attending San Fransokyo Institute of Technology, one of the best scientific universities in the country. Oh, if only her sister and brother-in-law were here to see them. They would be so, so proud. She knew it in her heart.

Of course Tadashi wasn’t heading off to classes today; his were online until mid-November, when his doctors and physical therapist anticipated he would have healed enough to resume most every day physical activities. He was going along with the gang to see Hiro off and give him a personal tour of the entire campus, something she couldn’t do because, unfortunately, it wasn’t enough to justify closing the café during the breakfast rush (even if Tuesdays were always quieter); The Lucky Cat kept them reasonably afloat, but they weren’t that well off. She was glad he could go, though. Ever since the fire, Tadashi had been all but confined to his bed. Cass knew he was getting restless, that his body was itching to move despite the scars and damaged spine, and if he hadn’t been granted the margin of freedom he had been last week, he’d likely be on his way to losing his mind. He needed this outing more than she did.

Tearing her gaze from Hiro and their friends to her oldest nephew, Cass’ smile slipped from her face. His body, hunched over his crutches, was turned away from the group, staring at the TV by the window. On the screen was the latest news report of the Krei Tech incident, displaying footage of the mystery heroes fighting against Hiro’s microbots.

"Reports are still flooding in about a group of unidentified individuals who prevented what could have been a major catastrophe,” the news announcer said. “The whole city of San Fransokyo is asking: Who are these heroes and where are they now?"

At the bottom of the screen read the words, “RENOVED ROBOTICIST DR. CALLAGHAN IN CUSTODY” repeating over and over below the images.

Cass’ stance softened. Her poor baby. When Callaghan had set that fire, stolen Hiro’s microbots,
and became responsible for Tadashi’s injuries and near death, he had done more than committed arson and theft; he had broken her oldest baby’s heart. Cass was the first person to admit she wasn’t mother material, and while she had done everything she could for her sister’s children, she knew she couldn’t do everything in the world for them. Tadashi might have been just another student to that monster, but to him, Callaghan had been a decade long role model and idol integral to making Tadashi the young man he was today. When his role in the fire had come to light - oh, her baby had been crushed all night. He had been hiding it since, putting on a normal, I’m-happy-to-finally-get-outside front, but she knew he was still hurting inside.

As the others began to head for the door, Hiro turned, and noticed Tadashi’s gaze glued to the TV. Cass immediately leaped into action.

“Oh, I just wanna squeeze you both!” she cried as she pulled the two of them into a bone crushing hug. “I can’t believe my little men are off to college at the same time! Where did the years go!? I swear, yesterday you were in a high chair, Hiro, while you were coloring at the kitchen table, Tadashi. When did you get so big and smart!? What did I feed you!?”

“Hey, we’ve always been smart,” Hiro laughed, squirming out of her grip.

Cass lowered her arms, taking a step back. She settled her attention on him first, holding out his lunch bag.

“I made you a lunch, sweetie,” she told him. Then a thought struck her, and she yanked it back. “Wait, do you pack lunch for college? Tadashi started packing his own lunches in seventh grade, do people still that after graduating high school? Or do you only eat what’s in the cafeteria? I don’t know, is this not cool?” She held the brown bag up to her collarbones. You know what, who cared. “Oooh, I’m so proud of you! Come’re! Last hug!”

She wrapped her arms around Hiro, nuzzling her face in his hair. Her youngest baby, off to college! She couldn’t believe it. Tomorrow, they’d be moving out, PhD holders forcing her through empty nest syndrome. They were simply growing up too fast!

Cass must have been hugging him too tight, though, because in an instant, fingers were tapping her back and Hiro was croaking out, “Aunt - Cass - I !”

She released him with an apologetic grin and handed him his lunch. “Sorry, sorry. Okay, you guys better go. You don’t want to be late on your first day!”

“Yeah, we don’t,” he agreed, and spun around on his heel towards the others, who were watching as they filed one by one out the door. Hiro turned around again, however, and raced back into her arms.

“Last hug,” he repeated her words.

Cass cooed, hugging him gentler this time. “I wish your mom and dad were here to see this. They’d be so happy to see how far you’ve come.”

“Heh, yeah, I guess,” Hiro replied as they let each other go. “You and Tadashi are picking me up after my last class, right?”

“Six-thirty,” she nodded. While Tuesday mornings couldn’t be justified, Tuesday evenings were so dead Cass often closed up shop early to spend the night with her nephews. That was why movie nights were often Tuesday nights. “Take your time coming out. No need to rush from all the amazing stuff you’re going to do.”
“Gotcha,” he laughed. “Okay, I’ll see you later, Aunt Cass. Love you!”

“I love you, too!” she called out as he raced for the door, now not bothering to look back at her.

Tadashi chuckled. “He’s really growing up, isn’t he? Where did the years go?”

Cass placed a hand on his upper arm. “You two are growing like weeds all the time.”

“I’m twenty-one, Aunt Cass.”

She patted his sleeve. “Don’t remind me. I look at you and still see a puffy alien baby in diapers. Sometimes I’m shocked to remember you’re taller than me now. When did that growth spurt happen again?”

Tadashi scoffed playfully. “Uh huh. Well, we do gotta go. Wasabi’ll have me home by nine. Want me to help you down here while we wait to pick Hiro up?”

“Sounds like a plan!” She slid her hand up to squeeze his shoulder. In a smaller voice, she stood up on her toes to whisper, “And you know you can talk to me any time about anything, my sweet boy?”

Tadashi’s face melted a fraction. His eyes darted to the TV, then to her. “I do. I’m fine, Aunt Cass.”

She gave his shoulder another squeeze. “I’m always here for you boys.”

“I know,” Tadashi leaned down to kiss her cheek. “Thank you. I love you, Aunt Cass. I’ll tell you about the tour later! Bye!”

With that, he quickly hobbled off to catch up with the group.

Cass sighed to herself.

Yes, he did know. Although she felt the need to remind him, because he seemed to be closing off when it came to that monster and what he did, they had always been close. Cass loved her nephews equally, loved them both to ends of the universe, but she would lying if she said she was equally close to them.

Tadashi had been her sister’s first pregnancy. While they hadn’t known Cass would one day take up guardianship of him and his future little brother, she remembered being so excited to be a cool aunt. Then Tadashi was born, and it was love at first sight. She might as well have been an honorary third parent (albeit, a bumbling third parent who instantly handed the baby away the moment things got rough or icky). She had loved babysitting him, taking care of him, and playing with him each chance she got. By the time Hiro was born, Tadashi was already thoroughly attached to her side.

When their parents died in that awful car accident, it had been her Tadashi leaned on the most. She remembered with a pang in her heart how often and hard he’d cried, how he spent several nights in her bed because it hurt too much to be alone by himself, how just thoroughly devastated he had been emotionally. They talked so much in those first few months, and it ended up cementing a new facet of their bond.

It was a facet she didn’t share with Hiro; he hadn’t been old enough to understand death at three years old. His reaction to moving in with her had been to scream, cry, kick and punch his way out of her arms, and sob cheek against the floor, wailing for his Mommy and Daddy to come take him
home. It wasn’t so easy to talk to him, to make him understand the horrible, undeserved reality their family had been forced to live in. And as he grew up, his memories of them faded to the point talking about them made him uncomfortable at worst and roll his eyes at best (or maybe it was the other way around). She didn’t know how to fix that.

The point was, from that time on, Tadashi always came to her when he needed to sort his feelings out. Hiro didn’t. Hiro was the average teen who hid in the corner of his room until the tough got too tough. Tadashi, however, saw her as his rock.

Maybe that was why it was so frightening to finally watch him close off instead of talk to her. Callaghan had broken his heart to pieces, she was certain. She couldn’t begin to imagine the pain, anger, and guilt he felt inside. Oh, if she could have a solid minute alone with that monster in her kitchen, just one solid minute, her and the stove top…

Cass shook her head. No, she shouldn’t think like that. Even if he deserved to feel an ounce of the pain he had inflicted on her baby, it was neither here nor there. He was in jail, would likely be sentenced to life in prison due to his assault of a billionaire, much less all the other damage he had done. What she needed to focus on was her boys.

Her boys, who were going off to college together.

Cass felt the tears prick her eyes. No, no, she couldn’t have this either. Tuesdays might be slow, but she had work to do.

She would see Tadashi in an hour and forty minutes, Hiro this evening.

It was time to get back to work. She would see them later.

If there was one regret Tadashi had, it was that he didn’t have his phone out to snap a picture of Hiro’s face the second his eyes caught SFIT’s gates. He had been so afraid the fire and Callaghan had tainted his view of the university, that the association alone would push him away from further education forever. That he might eventually return to bot fighting to fill his time instead. Luckily, Tadashi had been wrong. Hiro had enrolled not two days after the portal incident, and he now looked at the gates with genuine eagerness in his eyes - not the false kind he put on to fool well meaning adults. So far, so great.

He realized too late, however, his friends were mistaking Hiro’s awed silence for hesitation.

Honey Lemon brushed her fingers against Hiro’s shoulders. “Are you nervous, Hiro?”

“No way!” Hiro clutched the straps of his backpack happily. “I want this. Why would I be nervous?”

“You’re fourteen and going to college,” Gogo reminded him, sagging her shoulders.

Tadashi flinched. That...that was true.

Hiro had also been nine when he started high school. Tadashi recalled all the bullying his little brother had had to suffer for being younger than everyone else - for being smarter than everyone else. He didn’t think that would happen at SFIT. People were more mature in that regard; and even if they weren’t, Tadashi promised himself he’d nip all bullying in the bud faster than he had in high school. No one was going to harass his brother on his watch.

“You’re brother is like a legend here,” Fred added, ever so helpfully.
At that, Tadashi frowned. He kind of was a big name on campus, he supposed. He was known for being an outgoing guy, one of the first people to go for a tutoring session, and his impressive tech. A lot his teachers absolutely adored him due to his manners and work ethic. Nearly all traits Hiro either lacked or didn’t indulge in.

His chest tightened.

Oh no…

Wasabi lifted a hand over the side of his face, as if to block the conversation to just between them. “I hear the new dean is a hard case,” he mumbled.

Tadashi wrinkled his nose. Professor Granville, Callaghan’s (that monster’s) replacement. He had read her emails and been sent classwork from her, since she was also filling in for a thermodynamics I, II, and III professor that was out on maternity leave. Yeah, the hard case rumors seemed true in his book. And while Hiro was turning a new leaf, he WAS still fourteen and therefore prone to mischief.

Oh no…

His fear transformed into a fierce glare, however, as Hiro suddenly appeared unsure of himself. “I - hadn’t thought of any of those things.”

Honey Lemon jumped up. “Keep not thinking of them!” she suggested merrily as she shoved him towards the campus gates.

Tadashi relaxed a bit. Good ol’ Honey Lemon. She may have started it, but at least she had some sense.

Tadashi rounded his glare on his remaining friends. “Seriously. You had to bring that stuff up?”

Fred and Wasabi averted their eyes, sheepish.

Gogo popped her gum, nonchalant. “Sorry. Wasn’t trying to scare him.”

Tadashi closed his eyes, fighting the urge to groan. ‘Please don’t let this be a bad omen.’ The last thing he wanted was Hiro getting cold feet on his first day.

The four of them moved to catch up with Honey Lemon and Hiro. They made a stop at the administration building, where Hiro had his photo taken and was given his student ID.

Wasabi was quick to put it in a lanyard and slip it over Hiro’s neck.

“Don’t ever lose this,” he warned sternly. “Seriously, it’s like twenty dollars to replace.”

“I have to get mine replaced,” Honey Lemon moaned. “Everyone got new IDs this year. Somehow, they printed my nickname instead of my real name on mine. I still haven’t gotten my fixed one yet.”

“Yeah,” Tadashi added. “They switched out the old kind for these updated ones. This ID is going to be your key to locked doors from now on.”

“Good thing your old ID wasn’t your key,” Fred slapped Tadashi on the arm. “Can’t believe you lost of all people lost it. Hey, did you ever find it over the summer?”

Tadashi shook his head. “Nope. Don't be like me; hang onto yours, Hiro.”
Hiro opened his mouth to say something, then abruptly closed it.

Gogo raised a skeptical eyebrow. “What?”

Hiro laughed nervously. “Um, I may of, uh, ‘found’ it?”

Tadashi stood straight. “Found it where?”

Hiro hesitated. “Um, you know, in a place you would have normally left it...in your wallet.”

Tadashi gawked at him. “You STOLE my school ID!? Hiro! I had to pay a ten dollar fee for losing it to get it replaced! The week after, they announced they were replacing all student IDs in the fall! You cost me ten bucks for nothing!”

He scratched the back of his head. “I’ll pay you back. I mean, turning over a new leaf, no more petty crime for me!”

Tadashi scowled. On one hand, part of him was glad Hiro had admitted it. He was maturing, which was wonderful. On the other hand - “Give me back my ID,” he ordered.

“But it’s useless now!”

“Don’t care. Where is it?”

Hiro’s shoulders slumped. “I’ll give it back when I get home, okay.” He held up his phone. “Hey, look at that! It’s seven-forty-three. I have thermodynamics I in less than hour. How about that tour?”

“We’re not done with this,” Tadashi told him.

“I agree with Hiro, it’s tour time!” Fred rushed forward to spin Hiro around, and off they went.

Tadashi rolled his eyes. He still wanted his ID back. It was a matter of principal (and getting the twerp back later).

Nevertheless, the tour began. Since he was so enthusiastic about it, they allowed Fred to lead the group.

The first place he decided to show Hiro, he introduced as, “This is the room where people wear goggles and do stuff!”

“Virtual reality,” Hiro corrected, eyes lighting up as he looked around at the students in their VR sets. “Ha, nice!”

“Yeah, that,” Fred said. He yanked Hiro away. “Come on, next stop, less than hour left!”

“Hey!” Hiro yiped.

Tadashi had to chuckle at that. Fred loved the campus and wanted to show off as much of it as possible; Hiro likely wouldn’t get a good look at anything until he was settled in.

“This is the quad!” Fred announced as they left through another exit, entering a small field between the buildings. “Named after someone with the last name Quad, one would presume.”

Gogo suddenly threw an arm out in front of Hiro, pushing him back. An orange frisbee flew hurtling by, except it wasn’t an ordinary frisbee. A robotic face and limbs extended from its sides
mid-air, and it tossed a real frisbee on his stomach back to it’s creator, a brunette in a pink shirt. Tadashi knew her from one of his classes last year, but couldn’t remember her name. She had had some awesome ideas, and this was one of them.

“Awesome, you got it working!” he shouted over to her.

The girl paused before she could throw again. She waved across the quad. “Thanks, Tadashi! Glad you’re back!”

“I’m just visiting!” he yelled. “It’s my brother’s first day! Wanna meet him?”

Hiro elbowed his crutch. “Bro, no!”

Tadashi jolted. “What?”

“You can show off your amazing baby brother after the tour, dude,” Fred started to lead Hiro away. “Next stop!”

Wasabi nudged Tadashi’s shoulder. “I think he’s nervous about meeting people,” he offered when Hiro was out of earshot. “Let’s take it one step at a time. He’s gonna meet a lot of new people in his classes anyway.”

Now it was Tadashi’s turn to be sheepish. “You probably have a point.”

Regardless of everything else, Gogo was right; Hiro was a fourteen year old college student. In a way, despite his excitement, this had to be worse than high school. Scarier. He really doubted any adult on SFIT’s campus would pick or look down on him, but Hiro was fourteen years old. He didn’t know that, nor did he have pleasant past experiences with older classmates to make him anticipate any other treatment. He had only given the nerd gang a chance because they were Tadashi’s friends and had been nice to him their first meeting.

Well, great. Now Tadashi really wished they could sit side by side in class together again, like they had before he graduated high school. He wanted to protect him, even if it was from nothing.

“You guys gotta watch out for him while I’m not here,” Tadashi told Wasabi, Gogo, and Honey Lemon, and made a mental note to tell Fred when he got the chance. “It’s not just that he’s fourteen. Hiro started high school when he was nine. A lot of people hated him. It killed me to watch him try to make friends, offer to help with assignments, ask if he could PLAY with people, and get called names, laughed at, told to get lost. Some kids got angry because they knew he was smarter than them; they happily took that anger out on him. High school left its mark. It’s why he doesn’t really have friends his age now that he is a teenager. He doesn’t know how to talk to people, and they kind of...not scare him, but make him think there’s something wrong with him.” He sighed at the memories. “The faculty only took the bullying seriously after I, their favorite goody-two-shoes who could do no wrong, beat up a kid for picking Hiro up by the collar. And even then, kids still picked on him when there were no teachers around and they thought I wasn’t looking. You can imagine how rough he had it after I graduated, and there was no one there to frighten all the bullies away anymore.”

The three exchanged worried glances.

“You never told us about this,” Honey Lemon said quietly.

“You actually beat someone up?” Gogo asked, startled.

Tadashi shrugged. “He’s my little brother. You guys are his first real friends outside the family
since - well, since forever. He never got along that great with kids his age in elementary school either. You can guess why.”

“You want us to keep him safe,” Wasabi reiterated. He put a hand on Tadashi’s shoulder, smiling gently. “Don’t worry, we got your back, man.”

“We won’t let anyone mess with him,” Gogo assured him.

“You can count on us,” Honey Lemon clapped her hands together. “We’ll fill Freddie in, too.”

Tadashi smiled. “Thanks, guys.”

“Hey!”

Tadashi lifted his head. Hiro was racing back their way, Fred following with a pout.

Hiro came to a halt at Tadashi’s side. “Are you okay? We noticed you guys weren’t coming, so I thought - do you need a break, big brother? Do your legs hurt? Is it your scars?”

“Oh, how sweet!” Honey Lemon cried in delight. She threw her arms around Hiro’s neck, bending down to his height. “You’ve gotta be the sweetest brothers I’ve ever met, always looking out for each other! It’s giving me cavities!”

“Uhhh,” Hiro froze in her embrace, “w-what?”

“Nothing,” Gogo replied in a tone that read, drop it. “We’re fine, just talking.”

Tadashi nodded. No need to reveal what they were discussing - Hiro would go nuts in embarrassment.

Fred threw his arms up. “UGH, talking! The number one source of procrastination. Guys,” he gestured to an imaginary watch on his wrist, “we have approximately thirty-seven minutes before Hiro has to be seated in thermus dynamite 101, let’s get a move on! The tour has barely begun!”

Wasabi huffed in annoyance. “We’re coming, Fred. Geeze. Calm down.”

“I’m all right, Hiro,” Tadashi ruffled his little brother’s hair. He was sweet. “Let’s go so Fred doesn’t have an aneurysm.”

“Thank you,” Fred slung an arm around Tadashi’s shoulder. “Glad someone understands! Now, to my FAVORITE place on campus!”

Which turned out to be the cafeteria.

“Welcome to the fooding zone!” Fred exclaimed, tossing his arms out in ta-da fashion. “As a non-student, this is undoubtedly my fa- Oh!” In his excitement, Fred stepped backwards as he spoke, and knocked into a student behind him, making the guy lose his drink on the floor. Fred scratched his cheek. “Sorry, bro. I shoulda been watching where I was going.”

“It’s okay,” the guy waved him off as he picked up his cup. “It was an accident. Not a big deal.”

Wasabi wrapped an arm around Hiro’s shoulder, sipping his own drink he had grabbed on the way in. “Watch this. There’s sensors in the floor that detect spills just like this.”

“Whoa,” Hiro face lit up in amazement as four cleaners the size of dog bowls came zooming from their stations to soak up the dumped liquid. “I need to get that design for the café. Aunt Cass would
“love it!”

“She would,” Tadashi agreed. "Maybe we can ask maintenance some other time."

Hiro nodded rapidly.

Fred scratched the back of his head nervously. “Great, great plan. Anywho, half an hour left. Moving on, people!”

They did a quick run of the nearby buildings, visiting the astrophysics department, biology and chemistry labs, and the student lounge. Time flew by, unfortunately, and before they knew it, it was twenty after eight. Hiro’s thermodynamics I class was in ten minutes, which brought them to the Ito Ishioka Robotics Lab.

“I never realized this place was so big,” he said as they walked down the hall near the nerd lab. “And you said it wasn’t that big, Tadashi.”

“Eh, I’ve been here three years. I’m used to it, so it’s not so big to me anymore,” Tadashi replied, playfully flicking Hiro's temple.

“Don’t be intimidated,” Wasabi advised him. “Just take it one class at a time.”

Gogo, who had pulled out her tablet to double check her own schedule, gagged. “Ugh. Applied particle physics first. Nine AM. Fantastic. So glad I switched out of astronomy I for this.”

Honey Lemon’s eyes sparkled. She leaned down to Gogo’s level, squeeing. “Ooo, me, too! Yay! You have Asakawa, don’t you?”

“Sadly,” Gogo grumbled. “I heard she gives out the worst homework.”

“I actually enjoyed her class when I had her last year,” Wasabi mentioned. “The homework is awful, though, that’s true.”

“You looking forward to your first class, Hiro?” Fred casually asked.

When no answer came, the group stopped, and craned their necks behind them.

Hiro was standing outside Tadashi’s lab, staring up at the nameplate.

Tadashi winced, a pang of empathy shooting through him. Baymax. They had left what remained of his armor in his lab after the battle with Callaghan (monster, Yokai). They had figured it was the best place to hide it.

It was hard to accept that he was actually gone, lost in another dimension thanks to that portal. All of his hard work, years of sleepless nights and countless malfunctions, over ten thousand medical procedures worth of programs and more gone, lost in a matter of minutes. That knowledge alone was devastating. Add on all the astounding help Baymax could have done for the world as a healthcare companion, and it hurt more. Then add on what this Baymax had meant to him and Hiro, who had become Baymax’s primary and co-primary patient since the fire - a choice Tadashi had chosen to see the bright side in since Hiro accidentally activated him, one of the few positives after the fire, he could personally test his project’s capabilities on himself. Losing him had almost felt like the end of the world.

Hiro felt responsible for his loss. Baymax had become a close companion of his while they (and Aunt Cass) took care of Tadashi between and after his surgeries. And he was well aware how high
Tadashi’s hopes for Baymax’s future were. The guilt was crippling. Tadashi wished there was a way he could make it better. So far, Hiro didn’t take much stock in his reassurances. That hurt more than losing his project.

Unfortunately, while he could build another body, another model - which he planned to as soon as able, because the world needed Baymaxes - the healthcare chip had been one of a kind. Tadashi could create another one. He had the files backed up to do so. But it would be a brand new Baymax without the additional memories and downloaded information of the first. It wasn’t the same.

Walking over to him with the rest of the gang, Wasabi placed a hand on Hiro’s shoulder. “You okay? We miss Baymax, too.”

Hiro lowered his eyes. “Uh… I’m fine. Can I, uh, be alone with Tadashi? I’ll catch up with you guys later, when thermodynamics is over.”

The group looked to Tadashi for confirmation. He gave them a nod. “I’ll meet up with you in a bit.”

The gang was reluctant to leave, but smiled all the same as they went.

Wordlessly, Hiro turned the handle and entered the lab.

Tadashi hobbled in after him, shutting the door. No one passing by needed to overhear them.

He watched Hiro take the wrist armor out of its container, heaving it onto the desk.

Hiro kept his head down, face out of view. “Do you hate me for leaving him behind?”

Tadashi furrowed his brow. “No. No, never. Hiro, you had no choice. Besides, he wanted you to, and it saved Abigail’s life. If you tried to bring him back with you, all three of you would have been trapped forever. Who knows if another portal could have been made in time to get you back alive?”

Hiro hadn’t been in hyper sleep like she had been, and even with the incredible technology within the pod, hypersleep couldn’t keep the body going forever. Tadashi would have worked night and day to reassemble another portal had it closed on them, but he couldn’t deny he probably would have went mad at the results he’d have likely found on the other side by then. At the very least, Hiro could have died in there.

“He was your project. He was gonna help so many people.”

“I can build more Baymaxes,” Tadashi reminded him. “I can’t build more of you.”

Hiro flinched.

“Hiro, you have to understand,” he tried to explain for what felt like the hundredth time, “when you disappeared into that portal, I was at home. I was watching you through my drone’s camera. There was no way I could physically get to you. I love Baymax, I do, and I’m equally as upset he’s gone, but please understand: I will always choose you over him. You’re my only little brother, my only Hiro Hamada. I’d rather have just you here than neither of you. I’ll say it a million times if that’s as many as it takes to get you to believe me. I don’t blame you. I don’t hate you. Not for leaving him, not for going in there.”

Hiro’s form seemed to shrink into itself.
Tadashi hobbled across the room. He layed his crutches against the window, and drew Hiro into a close hug from behind. “I love you. I can’t lose you, too.”

Hiro shuddered, not responding.

“I will never blame you. I’m glad you’re safe. I’m proud of you for saving Abigail’s life. Honestly, the part I’m most upset about is that he was your friend. You lost him as much as I did - more than I did. You don’t deserve this.”

Hiro straightened in his arms. “I’m sorry.”

Tadashi nuzzled his cheek against his hair. “There’s nothing to be sorry for. I’m the one that’s sorry. You didn’t deserve to go through that. You don’t deserve this at all. I’ll keep saying it until you believe me.”

Hiro half-heartedly wormed his way out of his grasp, sighing. He handed him his crutches. “You know what? It’s all right. I’ve kind of already been through this before, haven’t I?”

Tadashi cocked his head. “Huh?”

“When Mom and Dad died. I’ve lost people before,” Hiro explained.

Tadashi’s heart shattered, partially from his own memories of their deaths, but mostly from the fact Hiro felt that much pain from losing Baymax. “I thought you didn’t remember them.”

Hiro shrugged. “I’ve heard the stories. I know I was a terror for you and Aunt Cass.”

“You were a grieving three year old,” he argued.

“My point is,” Hiro ran a hand over the armor, “I got through it. I can get through it again. I’ll be fine. As long as you don’t hate me,” he ended with a meager laugh.

If possible, Tadashi’s heart shattered into tinier pieces. “I could never hate you, Hiro. Please.”

A fake smile on his lips, Hiro shifted his attention to the armor. The smile transformed into a sad one. He gave it a light fistbump. “Ba la la la la.”

Tadashi wondered if this was his way of saying goodbye. His heart ached.

(Monster. This was his fault. This was all HIS fault. Yokai.)

Hiro took a step away from the armor. ”S’pose I better get to thermodynamics ‘fore - “

He stopped mid-word, neck snapping around.

Tadashi lurched forward. “No way!”

The fist was loosening open. Between the fingers and the palm revealed a sliver of green, and a sliver of sharpie marked tape.

Hiro hurried to force the fingers entirely open. “Oh my god. Your chip. Baymax!”

The brothers looked at each other in astonishment - Tadashi shocked and Hiro grinning.

“I have to figure out how he did that,” Tadashi murmured. “How - ?”
“We can rebuild Baymax! The real Baymax!” Hiro exclaimed. “Tadashi, do you see this?!”

“Unbelievable,” he breathed.

All the original data, including the new data, was in there. Hiro was right; they could rebuild the their Baymax. Not just a second model.

Hiro bounced up to his older brother, chip clasped in his small hand. “We can do this! We gotta do this! We can make him from scratch, only we’re definitely updating him with super capacitors - ”

“A- hem!”

Hiro jumped. Tadashi’s neck shot up.

Standing in front of the door was a woman in a black sweater and grey skirt, adorned with an intricate golden necklace. Her expression was stern.

Tadashi recognized her from her teacher page on the SFIT student website. “Professor Granville!”

“Mr. Hamada,” she returned, voice bordering on a growl, “and Mr. Hamada. Neither of you are supposed to be in here.”

Hiro regarded her coolly. “Uh, this is Tadashi’s lab. Who are you?”

Tadashi whapped his shoulder. “Callaghan’s replacement, genius, and our thermodynamics professor.”

“Oh.” Hiro didn’t sound enthused.

“‘Oh’?” Professor Granville raised an eyebrow. “Is that all you have to say? After you’ve been caught skipping your first class? It’s five past eight-thirty, in case you’ve forgotten.”

“I’m not skipping!” Hiro argued. “Wow, five minutes! It’s the first d- OW!”

Tadashi rapped the side of his head. “YOUR first day. Not everyone else’s. I am so sorry, professor, he was supposed to get to class on time, but we, um, were having a moment.”

“I see,” she replied slowly. “So what, pray tell, are you doing here, Mr. Hamada? The last I was informed, you were not returning to SFIT full time until mid-November.”

Tadashi grabbed the back of his head, flushing. “J-Just giving Hiro a quick tour so he doesn’t get lost. I’m really sorry he’s late. We’re heading out now.”

Granville took a step to the side, blocking the door. “You have quite the reputation, Mr. Hamada.”

“Which one of us are you talking to?” Hiro questioned, tone mockingly cheerful.

Tadashi almost him him again.

“Tadashi,” she narrowed her eyes at Hiro.

He did hit him again.

“Ow! Knock it off!”

“Be quiet, Hiro.”
“As I was saying,” Professor Granville continued, “you have quite the reputation. Excellent grades, a dedicated work ethic, phenomenal project end-results. I trust you will set the type of example for your brother that we expect here at the university.”

“Absolutely,” Tadashi said. His heart sunk as he spoke.

Now was not the time to make comparisons, but this was his first true meeting with Callaghan’s replacement. It wasn’t fair to put her on the same pedestal he had him, nor did he want to. Yet for the past three years, it had been so easy to talk to and get along with Callaghan. This felt like he was walking on needles.

Not to mention, with Callaghan...while it was no less true he was a hard worker and had kept their relationship professional, Tadashi had hero worshipped the man. More so than Hiro ever had. After their parents died, after their dad died, there hadn’t been any close male role model in their lives. Tadashi had accepted from the age of ten he would have to be Hiro’s male role model at home, but he himself was left with none. Instead, he had a figure on a screen that he looked up to, that helped build his dream of going into robotics to improve the world. And when he got to SFIT, where he could study under that figure? It had been a dream come to life. With Callaghan, however professional their relationship had been, Tadashi could drop the role model role for a little while and let himself relish in having his own.

It wasn’t like he expected Granville to fill those shoes. He didn’t. Yet to hear her tell him to do exactly as he done for the past decade...somehow, it reminded him of how empty those shoes were.

(Monster. He could rot in hell.)

“If you’re going to set such an example,” Professor Granville raised her chin, “I suggest starting with being where we should be at the appropriate times. Hiro in class learning, you at home recovering.”

Tadashi let the admonishment roll off his back. It wasn’t the worst thing he had ever heard, and she had a point about Hiro.

But Hiro looked at him, uncertain.

Tadashi stood up straight. “Again, I’m so sorry he was late. It won’t happen again. You have my word.”

Professor Granville paused, as if waiting for more.

“I’m going home anyway.”

She didn’t look impressed. Nevertheless, she nodded. “Good. We want you in the best shape when you return, Mr. Hamada. I can already gauge from your online assignments that you have a bright future ahead of you. Get all the rest you need.”

If Tadashi got any more rest in bed - even if he did still need to lie down, yes - he was going to explode. He wanted to walk, he wanted to work, he wanted to get on with his life. That was neither here nor there, though.

Hiro stared up him. “We’re still going to rebuild Bay- your healthcare companion project, aren’t we?”

Tadashi smiled down at him. “Duh. You gotta get to class, though. We can talk about Baymax when we’re home.”
Hiro suppressed a sigh, then turned to Professor Granville, wearing an adoring smile. “You’re right, I should be in class. Sorry. Won’t happen again, like he said.”

“Then I suggest you get moving, Mr. Hamada,” she warned, stepping aside.

“Okay. Bye, Tadashi,” Hiro spun around on his heel on his way toward the door. “Love you!”

Six months ago, Hiro never would have added ‘love you’ in front of a non-family member. Since the fire, however, he said it nearly every time he left Tadashi’s side.

Tadashi smiled. “Love you, too, little brother.”

Granville’s eyes followed Hiro out the door, then refocused on Tadashi. If his vision was correct, they appeared to soften a bit.

“Rebuild Baymax?” she inquired.

Tadashi scratched his cheek. “Heh. Yeah. He had an accident of sorts at home. Hiro’s only helping me repair the damages, not do anything new. It’s still my project, not his.”

“Hm-mm.” Granville folded her hands behind her back. “Mr. Hamada, may I be frank with you for a moment?”

He blinked. “Sure?”

“My predecessor,” she began, and Tadashi instantly regretted giving her permission, “committed atrocities and deceit no one expected him to. I was already hired before it was revealed he was alive. Of course, by then, it was clear he would never be welcomed back on school grounds if he were ever to be released from prison. But the staff here knew him. Twenty years ago, in a different teaching position, I had the opportunity to get to know him as a colleague. I can assure you, we are all horrified to learn what kind of man he really is.”

Tadashi stayed silent. He didn’t know why she was telling him this. All he knew was that his jaw locked as she spoke.

“From what I’ve gathered,” she continued, “you two were close.”

He didn’t mean to snap, though that was what he did, “No closer than any other student was to him.”

‘He tried to kill his students. He tried to kill them on the road, he threw them in the ocean. He sent my brother and friends to the bottom of the ocean.’

“Yes, but he took particular interest in you, your abilities, and your projects,” she stated. “On top of that, you were the one who ran inside a burning building to save his life - a life that did not need saving.”

“Are you trying to paint our relationship as something it wasn’t?” Tadashi bit, unable to hold back. “He was my teacher. That’s it. I didn’t know what he was up to, and I didn’t - “

She held up a hand to stop him. “Quite the opposite, actually. I don’t mean to imply what you’re thinking. Only that you were surely hurt in more ways than one by that man.”

That man.

(Monster. Yokai.)
“I hope,” Professor Granville said, “we can one day establish a trust between us similar to what you had with him. I am strict and expect nothing short of the best from my students, Mr. Hamada, but I am fair. I understand if you have mistrust for me due to my position. I don’t expect to replace him in your eyes. I do want you to know, however, that you may come to me with any concerns, and if there’s anything I can do for you - within reason, of course - to help you, let me know.”

Tadashi swallowed. “Thanks,” he said, tongue feeling like sand. “Thank you. For the record, I don’t hold anything against you. Taking his job doesn’t make you him.”

Professor Granville nodded slowly. “I have high expectations for you and your brother. You’re both gifted young men. I hope you’ll meet them. So far, you, at least, seem to be.” She turned to face the door. “Have a safe trip home.”

Tadashi swallowed again. “Have a...have a safe trip back your classroom.”

Without another glance, Professor Granville took her leave.

Tadashi levied himself down in his chair. He had to take a breather.

The news. Aunt Cass. Now Professor Granville. No one could let him forget, could they? Not even for two hours. He hated that so much. He just wanted to forget. What that monster, Yokai, had done to him - not his injuries, what he’d really done - Tadashi was never going to forgive him for. God, he wanted to forget so badly.

...He couldn’t wait to get started on Baymax.

Chapter End Notes

Some notes:

- BH6 the Series retconned the part of the movie where classes had already begun by the time Hiro activated Baymax and met Yokai in the abandoned warehouse. I'm retconning that retcon to match up with the movie.

- The ID situation is a reference to Hiro's Journal. Tadashi "lost" his school ID and Hiro "found" it - and conveniently taped it in his journal! I also needed a reason Honey Lemon's nickname is on her school ID in the cartoon instead of a real name.

- Notice how Granville's morning announcements didn't flick on? My explanation for that is that Tadashi has been to his lab at least once since the fire, probably to get Baymax to work on him in his down time, and flicked the monitor off that day since he wasn't attending class, but I wasn't sure how to write that in.

- Speaking of Granville, she does care about Tadashi. She admires him the same way she does in the cartoon, and feels sorry for what happened to him. Hiro's a little snobby to her because Tadashi is there in *his* lab, as opposed to Hiro being in his late brother's lab, but their relationship will go down the same route as in the cartoon.

- I'm going to reference Hiro's schedule from the journal for this fic. Thermodynamics taught by Granville, obviously, isn't on it, so I placed it on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 8:30AM to 10:00AM. Granville is the dean of the school but also seems to be
teaching multiple classes (I swear, she's in a new classroom every time we see her teach), so I'm going with the headcanon she fills in for professors who can't make it that day if she can. As for TD, I decided she's filling in for a teacher that will be gone for at least the first semester. She's also the head of the Robotics department because, you know, Callaghan's job.

- I need Cass and Tadashi fluff. I like putting tiny parallels in their POVs. I do headcanon they're closer to each other (emotionally speaking) than Cass and Hiro are due to Tadashi's age. That doesn't mean she's not close to Hiro, though.

- Hiro's past in high school comes from early drafts of the movie. You can actually find storyboards with voice over on YouTube where little Hiro went to high school with Tadashi and got bullied by their classmates. Tadashi didn't beat anyone up there, but one glare to the bullies got them away from Hiro, so I took some creative liberties. Of course this didn't make it into the final cut, but I wanted to keep it.

- There's nothing in any canon material I've been able to find that confirms Tadashi saw Callaghan as a dad, father figure, or even a special mentor. It's just a really fun headcanon I love.

I think I've written more for this fic in one week than I have all year so far lol. Chapter two is already ten pages underway (oi; and for reference, this chapter was 23). I'm hoping to update every 1-2 weeks, but chapter two shouldn't be that long away. I'd probably say Monday at the latest.
“Oh,” Wasabi crossed his arms. “I didn’t realize we were still doing the whole superhero thing.”

“Oh, YEAH!” Fred, clawed feet perched on the table in his bedroom, yanked off the head of his Kaiju suit in disbelief. Of course they were; that’s why he was dressed up and doing a cool heroic pose on his table. “Wait, where’s Hiro and Tadashi?”

“At home, gushing with their aunt about Hiro’s first day, remember?” Wasabi said as he and Honey Lemon took a seat on the couch. A miniature roar sounded behind him, and pulled a mini Kentucky Kaiju out from behind him.

Gogo pressed her elbow on the back of the couch. “Seriously, Fred? Are you five? I thought you knew how to put your toys away.”

Fred ignored her jab. “Dang it!” he slapped his forehead. “I forgot! Man, they’re gonna miss our first night patrol!”

Gogo popped her gum. “Night patrol?”

“Yes!” Fred leaped off the table, darted across the room where their suits lay, snatched up her helmet, and before Gogo knew it, Fred slammed it on her head. “Where we suit up and patrol the streets!” He quickly snatched up one of Wasabi’s laser hands and tried to put it on his arm. Wasabi scowled, twisting is arm away, but Fred got it on the second try. “We’ll foil evil-doers,” he wrapped the strap of Honey Lemon’s purse around her neck, and jumped back up on the table in a superhercio pose, “and dispense justice and be awesome and etc. etc. etc.!”

The three of them shed their gear immediately.

“I’m not doing it,” Gogo was blunt.

“I - I don’t think so,” Honey Lemon smiled apologetically.

“No, thank you,” Wasabi shook his head.

Fred threw his claws out. “Why not? You guys have clearly forgotten how sweet it was being superheroes! We caught a revenge crazed villain,” he reminded them, pacing around the table, counting off on his claws, “saved the city, we had victory pancakes this morning!” he threw his
arms down in front of him. “What’s the problem?”

Gogo jabbed a finger in his direction. “The problem is you have clearly forgotten that we are NOT superheroes. What happened last week is over!”

“And it was really scary!” Wasabi curled in on himself.

Fred jerked his neck back. “What? You didn’t seem scared.”

“Because I was pumped full of adrenaline! Now I’m back to being afraid of things! Heights, speed, cholesterol, loud noises!” He pulled a face. “I’ve got issues! You do NOT want to be Wasabi, man!”

“Sorry, Freddie,” Honey Lemon said firmly. “We already lost Baymax and we almost lost Hiro. Tadashi nearly went out of his mind with worry when they went in that portal. I don’t want to lose anyone else.”

“Yeah, you think Tadashi’s gonna be okay with Hiro putting on his suit again?” Gogo challenged. “You heard the way he screamed when Hiro went in there and you saw what a disaster he was when we got back to their garage. If you bring this up to him, I bet he’ll kill you.”

Fred froze. After meeting up with them outside the robotics lab entrance, Hiro in class, Tadashi caught the entire gang up on the rather interesting and surprisingly graphic time he beat the shit out of one of Hiro’s old high school bullies. Fred still couldn’t get the image of spewing blood flying from the kid’s nose and upper gums out of his head - well, he had been the one to ask for such details, but still. After that, no one bugged Hiro in front of Tadashi, and that kid would shriek and run away each time he saw Tadashi. They couldn’t even be in the same classroom or the guy would bolt.

From what Fred gathered, Tadashi had put the fear of God in that guy that day, and only got away with it because of his otherwise charming personality and spotless record. No, he did not want to be on the wrong end of Tadashi’s fists. But it only proved he’d make a fantastic combatant when he got on the field someday!

“But there could be a supervillain out there right now,” he protested to the group, “about to - ”

Gogo shot forward. “Face it, Fred!” she spat, shoving her helmet in his claws. “We aren’t in one of your comic books! This is the real world, and in the real world, there are no supervillains.”

Fred looked down at her helmet, yellow between the blue of his suit.

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Fred looked down at her helmet, yellow between the blue of his suit.

“Anyway, I gotta head out, Freddie,” Honey Lemon told him, standing up. “My roommate threatened to throw away my new instant ice formula supplies if she came home to a room of fumes again, so I have to get everything cleaned up before her seven-thirty class ends.”

Wasabi stood up behind her. “I have six AM classes on Wednesdays; I have homework to get done before I hit the hay for the night.”

Gogo popped her gum. “I’m flat out going home.”

Fred sulked as they disappeared through the door. They just didn’t get this awesome opportunity that had fallen into their laps. If they thought he was letting this go, oh, they were sorely mistaken. Big Hero 7 wasn’t dead yet.
Yama listened to the useless hack, a so called thief named Dibs, scream as he was hung over the edge of the building by the ankles, close to a thousand feet above the busy, night street below. The threat was clear, Yama was certain, even to an idiot like him. It would only take one curt nod, and Dibs be splattered on the sidewalk in seconds.

“I’ll ask one more time,” he growled. “Where’s. My. Money?”

Dibs squealed in terror. “I lost it!”

That was all the hack had to say for himself. That was all he had to say himself all night.

Yama sneered. He should have known better than to loan money to someone who looked as incompetent as him. He should have trusted his gut and had him thrown out the moment he laid eyes on him.

Thank goodness he hadn’t wasted even a small fortune on the hack, not if he couldn’t pay back the hundreds he owed, let alone the thousands in interest.

Dibs was worthless to him.

He had less than a minute to change his tune, say something that would convince Yama to spare the innocents below the sight of his smashed, empty skull.

Behind him, one of his men stepped forward, holding up a cell phone. “Yama,” he said, “it’s him.”

Yama started.

Him.

As much as he hated to admit it, Dibs wasn’t the only one who had his head on the line thanks to rotten luck.

Without a glance at the hack, Yama moved to head inside.

“Go ahead and take the call!” Dibs yelled, out of breath.

Yama took the phone as he entered one of his private offices, his man closing the door behind him so he could be alone.

Yama paused. Whatever this call was about, he already knew he wasn’t going to like it.

“Obake,” he greeted, keeping his voice humble.

No response.

Yama grunted. “Whatever you need, just sa-”

The monitor on his wall buzzed to life. Yama turned around, startled, as it flipped from channel to channel, until it came to one where the background was pure blood red.

This was why he didn’t like doing jobs for him.

An object appeared in front of the red, a strange, misshapen object that was grey in color. Yama couldn’t identify what it was for the life of him, or why someone like Obake would want it, but it wasn’t his place to question it. And frankly, he didn’t want to know in the first place. Whatever got the madman off his tail as quick as possible.
He stood up straight. “And where is it?”

The monitor buzzed.

A picture of San Fransokyo Institute of Technology overtook the screen.

Yama nodded. It would take some planning and organizing ahead of time in order to bypass security, but they could get in. “Done.”

He ended the call. Obake clearly had no other instructions for him, and if he did, he would let him know.

The bastard always did.

“We are so switching to super capacitors.”

“Hiro, no.”

“You were fine with it when you introduced me to Baymax! They charge faster!”

“No, I said, ‘Huh,’ which is Big Brother for, ‘My baby brother said something but I’m not listening.’”

“Tadashi!”

“They’re **expensive**,** Hiro. Lithium ion charges at a close enough speed; there’s no justification to change them, especially when super capacitors cost twice as much to manufacture! If something happens where I can’t get Baymax out there for free, then I want him to be available for as cheap a price as possible.”

“Like Baymax won’t cost a ton anyway!” Hiro argued.

Tadashi glowered. “He’s my project. I’m getting graded on him. When it comes to his design and healthcare protocol, leave it alone, Hiro.”

Hiro groaned, tossing his head back. “Fine. We’ll let Baymax charge at ninety-one percent of the speed he could when super capacitors are sooo much better.”

“Keep talking, bonehead,” Tadashi warned as they approached his lab. “Your skull isn’t that thick.”

Hiro laid a hand flat on the door, looking up at Tadashi with his tossed back head. He puffed his lower lip out. “I’m so scared, Dashi. P’etty p’ease don’t huhrt me!” He laughed loud as he ducked away from Tadashi’s hand, darting into the lab.

Tadashi shook his head, following him inside.

They didn’t have a whole lot of time. It was a little after one and Hiro had aerial robotics at two-thirty. Wasabi, Tadashi’s ride home, had class at three. The plan was to test out Baymax’ healthcare chip to make sure it was functioning properly, get the materials together to start building, and load them into Wasabi’s rental to take home so Tadashi could get a headstart while Hiro was in class.

Hiro tossed his backpack on the ground. He dug in his jacket pocket. “I got the chip right here.”
“Good,” Tadashi hobbled over to sit in his chair. He sat down, leaning his crutches against the desk. “Can you give it here?”

Hiro held the chip out.

Tadashi reached for it.

Only Hiro jerked his arm back before he could take it, hesitation written all over his face.

“Uh,” he gulped. “Tadashi? What - What do we do if this doesn’t work? What if the chip is broken?”

Tadashi didn’t have an answer to that. Or, at least, not a good answer.

He remembered how distraught his brother had been yesterday. He actually asked if Tadashi hated him for leaving Baymax in the other dimension, and compared the loss to the loss of their parents. The events of the past month and a half had left their own scars on Hiro. Tadashi hated that. He hated that nothing he said seemed to get through to him, relieve the burden he felt on his shoulders. He hated that he didn’t know how to fix it.

Except now he had a chance to fix it. If the chip was functioning properly, then what made Baymax Baymax was here. Maybe Hiro would let go of some of the guilt in his heart if this worked. Baymax wouldn’t really be gone, after all.

“Then I’ll find a way to repair it,” Tadashi promised. “Coding is one of the things I do best. I’ll figure out a way to fix it and we’ll bring the real Baymax back.”

Hiro smiled shyly. “Thanks.”

Tadashi extended his palm. “No problem. But we won’t know until we try.”

Hiro glanced down at the chip. He handed it over.

Tadashi slid it into the computer’s access port. He swiveled the chair closer to the desk and tapped at his keyboard. “Okay, let’s open this thing up.”

Soon enough, a familiar face engulfed his screen.

“Hello, Tadashi and Hiro.”

“Baymax!” Hiro launched himself at the computer in an attempt to hug him. He pulled himself off with a sheepish chuckle. “Heh, yeah, hug’s not really going to work, is it? We’ll have to stick with this for now, buddy.”

Tadashi watched in amusement as Hiro picked his mouse to fistbump it.

“Ba la la la la,” Baymax said.

“You had us worried, pal,” Tadashi said. “You should have told Hiro you were giving him your chip in the other dimension. Would have saved us a lot of heartache.”

“I am sorry if I caused you distress,” he apologized. “Tadashi, without my body, I cannot scan you to update my files on your physical condition.”

Tadashi smiled at that. He’d missed Baymax’s caring personality. To be perfectly honest, Baymax had shown he was beyond all of his creator’s hopes and expectations - he was both an astonishing
healthcare companion and a wonderful companion on his own. He was happy the chip wasn’t busted after all.

“We know,” Hiro perched his arms on the desk. “We’re rebuilding your body. You’ll be back to your old self in no time!”

“I am glad to hear it.”

“And guess what? I started college yesterday! I’ve had thermodynamics I, calculus for engineers, humanoid construction, open lab, and I just got out of laser photonics. It’s amazing! I have so much work to catch up on, and that’s not counting my aerial robotics course in an hour and a half, or world history I, which, ugh, why do I have to be ‘well-rounded’ at a science university? I can’t believe there’s a general education department here, what idiot decided that? Everything else, though, I LOVE - ” Hiro babbled on.

Tadashi was glad. This was the perkiest he’d seen Hiro in a long while, probably since he gave his presentation at the expo. He hadn’t even been this chatty last night as he told him and Aunt Cass about his day.

“ - Froeb and Sato have to be my favorites so far. Professor Froeb reminds me of Honey Lemon, super nice and weirdly fascinated with her work. She talked about how failure is part of learning, and that she sometimes likes to make purposely broken inventions just to see how much destruction they can cause. Nothing massive, just, like, a gardening bot that actually destroys the garden instead of tending it! And Professor Sato is so laid back, it’s more like he’s a supervisor than a professor. He and I got to talking about - ”

Tadashi used the desk to propel himself away from the screen to the other side of the room where the carbon fiber ligaments were, giving Hiro more space to chat with Baymax.

They had definitely dodged a bullet here.

Time to get to work.

“Asakawa only gave me the weekend to get this stupid essay done. I hate her already,” Gogo complained to the open laptop at her station, eyes glued to her latest set of electromagnetic wheels.

“Ah, don’t be so harsh, Gogo,” Honey Lemon admonished as she rolled a ball of titanium across the lab floor, past Gogo’s station. “The rest of us have to hand it by tonight at midnight. You’re so lucky you have until Monday!”

“Yeah, to catch up on three weeks’ worth of information,” she snapped. “I should have stayed in astronomy I. Now I can’t even transfer back ‘cause the deadline’s passed.”

“You complained about astronomy I and Kowalski just as much as you are about applied particle physics and Asakawa,” Wasabi called from his station.

“You could always drop the class entirely,” Tadashi suggested on the other side of the laptop screen.

He was in his family’s garage, tinkering on his tablet. In the background off camera, Gogo could hear Hiro welding something together. Tadashi had told them the other day they had found Baymax’s healthcare chip and were building him a brand new body together. The gang had barely seen the two of them over the last couple days, between all of their classes, Tadashi’s absence from campus, and the brothers’ project. But that was all right; the gang was used to squeezing moments
like these in their busy schedules.

“If I drop the class, I’ll be demoted to part time student,” Gogo told him. “That’ll destroy my financial aid. No.”

“Guess you’re stuck with your essay, then,” Tadashi shrugged, giving her a sympathetic smile. “If it makes you feel better, I have an five page essay for one class due next Thursday and a seven page essay for another class the day after. All of my free time outside of Baymax is being devoted to those.”

She snorted. “Barely. At least you know what you’re doing for those classes. How does that woman expect me to catch up on three weeks’ worth of material after two classes with her? Especially for an essay due in three days. Everyone else had two weeks to write it!”

“You’ll get through it,” he encouraged. “You’re too smart to let something like this keep you down.”

Gogo dropped her tools and glared straight at the laptop. “Wanna bet, Hamada?”

His smile turned catlike. “Sure. If you get an eighty-five or above on your essay, you can have whatever you want out the café for free for a month; I’ll pay for everything so Aunt Cass doesn’t rip my ears off. But if you get less than an eighty-five…” he meandered off, face lighting up with possibilities. “Oh, there’s so many embarrassing things you could do. How ’bout you take Fred’s place as the school mascot for a day? You know he doesn’t wash his costume unless the school forces him, too, right? And the last time he washed it was the night before freshman orientation.”

She huffed, crossing her arms, but smiled. “Dream on, Hamada. But I will take you up on that free food offer.”

He chuckled. “My wallet is crying already.”

Gogo shook her head in amusement. She very much doubted she was going to get a grade higher than thirty at best, but it was just like Tadashi to kick on ‘I believe in you’ mode. And honestly? She had kind of missed it in the last few weeks. She had to admit, it wasn’t quite the same without him in the labs.

Wasabi wandered over to her station. “You’re not overdoing it on Baymax, are you, Tadashi? You’re not exactly supposed to be working on massive, hands-on projects.”

Tadashi cocked his head, brow raised in a guys, please sort of way. “No, I’m not overdoing it. Hiro’s handling most of the physical labor.” He craned his neck away from the camera. “Hey, Hiro, come say hi to everybody!”

Hiro did not come over. Rather, he yelled, “Hiya! Kinda busy!”

Tadashi shot him a cool expression. “You’re such a charmer, little brother.”

“I learned everything I know from you!”

“Ha ha,” Tadashi returned his gaze to the camera. “Sorry. He’s impatient to get this done. I haven’t figured out how to tell him about my diagnostics protocol yet.”

“He’s gonna hate it,” Wasabi nodded.

Tadashi rubbed the back of his neck. “Yeeaahh…”
BOOM!

Gogo felt the ground shake beneath her - she and Wasabi jumped.

They heard Honey Lemon’s cackle before she peeked her silver dusted face into Gogo’s area.

“I LOVE chemical embrittlement!” she cheered. “It never gets old! EEEE!”

Tadashi covered his eyes with a laugh. “Honey, you’re really something else! I thought you were done with this stuff.”

She wiped the dust from her goggles and took them off, coming over to stand with the group.

“That’s what my parents said the third time they found me playing with the chemicals under the sink as a kid! And I am; the school received an extra ton of titanium they weren’t going to use, so I decided to re-enact last year’s project. Embrittlement is so much fun!”

“Just don’t forget to clean up your station,” Wasabi took a step away from her. “Or the trail of dust you’re tracking on the floor.”

“I will!”

Gogo popped her gum. “The chemicals under the sink, huh? Can’t imagine your parents were too happy.”

Honey Lemon giggled. “Nope.”

Tadashi coughed to grab her attention. “The school knows you took the extra titanium, right?”

“Of course! Professor Froeb was the one who offered it to me!”

Gogo was about to remark that of course it was Froeb, when a wave of blue launched itself onto her work desk.

“NEVER FEAR, FREDZILLA IS HERE!”

She closed her eyes. “Oh god. Fred, get off my bike wheels!”

“He’s in his super suit, isn’t he?” Tadashi deadpanned.

“See for yourself,” Wasabi readjusted the laptop.

“Yup,” he confirmed.

Fred struck one of his idiotic poses. “I heard the call of danger! A supervillain is attacking the labs! Only the defenders of the city can hope to put a stop to whoever set off that earthquake!”

Gogo rolled her eyes. “Here we go again.”

Wasabi put his face in his hands, groaning.

Honey Lemon wilted. “Freddie,” she grew quiet, “I was embrittling titanium. There’s no supervillain here.”

Fred flipped his suit’s head off. “Aw, man! Are you kidding me? I was waiting under the table all day for a call of danger!”
Gogo raised her shoulders in disgust. “You were under my desk all day!? Are you insane!?”

“Well, my neck is pretty stiff now,” he said, massaging the offending area.

“Wow,” Tadashi snarked, eyes lidded. “I can’t tell if this is the craziest thing you’ve ever done or somewhere else in the top ten.”

Fred snatched the laptop up. “Tadashi! How’s your drone doing? You know, you and Hiro should seriously set to work on making you a proper suit so you’ll be prepared for the field when you’re all healed up.”

Gogo climbed onto the table beside him. “Give me back my laptop, Fred! You’re gonna drop it, and then you’re gonna buy me a better one.”

Fred, to her frustration, did not hand it over; he raised it over his head instead.

Gogo clenched her fists. Why the hell did she have to be five foot four and surrounded by six foot plus giants? The only one shorter than her was Hiro, but he wasn’t the one stealing her laptop.

On the screen, Tadashi was giving Fred a dull face. “My drone is packed away. I’m with the others, Fred. We’re not superheroes anymore.”

“Come on, dude!” he begged. “I get your overprotectiveness over your baby bro, but I thought out of everybody, you’d be on my side!”

Tadashi sat up straight. “If this was six months ago, sure, Fred; I’d totally be on your side. Being a superhero is awesome! Except we’ve had too many close calls. Being a hero is also too dangerous.”

Fred narrowed his eyes. “Who are you and what have you done with Tadashi? Are you a supervillain wearing his skin!?”

Gogo made a grab for her laptop.

Fred pulled it out of her way. “Tadashi would love nothing more than to be a hero! Who are you really!”

Tadashi narrowed his eyes as well. “Fred. I am not putting my brother in danger. And I am not going to let him sit there and watch me die for real this time. Assuming there are supervillains out there, it’s too risky. The police can deal with them.”

“Dude, no one’s gonna die! We’d never le- WASABI!”

Wasabi’s expression was flat as he gave the laptop to Gogo, who climbed down. “Fred. Knock it off. He said no.”

Gogo put her laptop on the nearby counter. “You need to cool down. We’re not doing this, end of story.”

Fred hunched forward. “Guuuuuys! What if the city needs saving? The police proved last time they don’t believe every call to danger. Remember how Hiro said they didn’t believe him about Yokai?”

Tadashi twitched. “I get what you’re trying to say. You can’t honestly think, though, that there’s that many supervillains, do you? San Fransokyo has never exactly been crawling with them.”
Fred jumped to the floor. “I mean, I guess? But there are other crooks in the city! We can take them down with the power of seven!”

Gogo rounded on him. “You need help!”

Fred glared down at her. “Uh, duh! I’ve been asking you to help me save the city! Yet none of you are listening!”

Gogo hissed, standing on her toes to reach his height.

Fred curled his lips, putting his claws on his hips and leaning down to hers.

Honey Lemon hopped between them. “Okay, okay! Why don’t we settle down and grab something to eat in the cafeteria? I’m getting hungry. Aren’t you, Wasabi?”

Wasabi wrinkled his nose. “Sure,” he replied, “I’m up for food, as long as those two don’t tear each other’s faces off.”

“Or kiss,” Tadashi joked.

Gogo blanched, reeling away. “Fuck you, Hamada!”

Fred scrambled to back away, only to hit the table, lose his footing, and fall face first into the floor. “Ow! My flame thrower is stabbing my spleen!”

“Oops,” Tadashi smiled innocently. “Your faces were just so close to each other.”

“I know where you live and I know where you sleep,” she threatened.

Wasabi helped Fred up, snickering. “You were pretty close.”

“NO,” Fred objected. “Don’t you guys know your tropes? If Gogo and I were to become a couple, she’d get kidnapped and held hostage so the team, particularly her love interest, which in this case, would be m-”

Gogo glowered. “Stop talking, or you’re going to be the one that gets kidnapped!”

Honey Lemon clapped her hands together. “Who wants to go to Noodle Burger?” she asked louder. “It’ll be my treat!”

Fred immediately perked up. “Free food? Sweet, I’m in!”

Tadashi sniggered.

Gogo’s eyes flashed. “Got something to say, Hamada?”

“No, no,” he covered his mouth. His eyes were clearly laughing. “Nothing at all. It’s not like you don’t know where I live. I’m staying quiet. I will certainly not hum Here Comes the Bride.”

Gogo sneered. “Piss off.”

But not for long. She suddenly realized it had been a while since Tadashi had teased anyone in the gang - not since before the fire. While the faculty knew him as an eternally polite student, Gogo had recently learned the whole Hamada family were teasing snarkers at heart. Maybe he had with his family, but Tadashi hadn’t snarked at or teased them in months. She wasn’t sure what to think of that realization. It was good, she guessed. Things were getting back to normal. Including the
things she hadn’t realized were gone.

“We should clean up Honey’s station before we leave,” Wasabi reminded everyone. “Tadashi, you and Hiro coming to Noodle Burger?”

He shook his head. “Sorry guys. We’ve got class- and homework to finish up. Why don’t we go to Yaki Taco tomorrow?”

“Noode Burger and Yaki Taco?” Fred pumped his fist. “YES!”

Honey Lemon reached out to touch Gogo’s shoulder. “You coming, Gogo?”

She glanced at the laptop, then at Fred. They were both annoying, but they were both her friends. She loved them. And at the end of the day, she had to admit she wouldn’t trade their annoying traits away - it was part of what made them them.

Gogo shrugged. She wasn’t going to say that aloud, though. “Eh, fine. As long as I’m getting free food, I can put with Captain Fanboy’s nonsense.”

The next week flew by in a rush of classes, lab visits, working in the garage, and falling asleep in the middle of the café for Hiro. There was much to do, much to put together, and so much homework inbetween. He was glad to have Tadashi there. Two people sped the process along faster than one.

He had to say, this was the best week of his life. Not only were they rebuilding Baymax - *he was here!* - Hiro was actually enjoying his classes as well. He couldn’t believe that all this time, he’d thought college would be boring and teach him stuff he already knew. Although there was some stuff he did already know, most of it was brand new information. Heck, his humanoid construction class was surprisingly useful in putting Baymax’s body together!

Tadashi seemed happier, too. While he couldn’t bend and twist around the carbon fiber skeleton like Hiro could, he practically lived in the garage now, tweaking limbs at the work bench and coding on the computer and his tablet. Aunt Cass had even made up a little bed on the couch and brought his meds down if he forgot them inside.

Hiro guessed that shouldn’t have been a surprise; Tadashi hadn’t been able to work on anything for two whole months. His online school work was limited to what he could do on a computer, no actual building involved. And this was *Baymax*. His future wasn’t down the drain thanks to Hiro after all.

Hiro still felt guilty for leaving him behind. It had been tough enough to lose his friend. It was tougher to face Tadashi, who couldn’t just stop with the ‘It’s okay, I love you, Hiro Hamada is irreplaceable’ spiel. To get him to stop the other day, Hiro had tried reminding him he’d gotten over loss before, but maybe mentioning their parents hadn’t been the best idea. Hiro, as awful as it was to admit (they were their parents), often forgot what a sore spot Mom and Dad were for Tadashi. Good thing they found the chip not long after. Nonetheless, the guilt he felt towards his older brother lingered.

Rebuilding his body was about more than getting his friend back, even more than doing Baymax justice. Hiro meant it when he said he was tired of hurting his loved ones. Baymax was important to Tadashi, too.

Hence why they were in his lab for the last pieces of the puzzle. (Or so he thought.)
“I can’t believe it’s finally ready,” Hiro rubbed his hands together as Tadashi checked the box of deflated vinyl on one of his work tables. “You know, big brother, I can’t believe this took you three years.”

Tadashi snorted, turning to face him and the naked endoskeleton. “It’s because of those three years we were able to get him done in a week, you brat.”

Baymax, from his place in the computer, blinked. “My endoskeleton is almost complete.”

“You got it, buddy,” Hiro picked up Tadashi’s tablet, fingers sliding over the screen, transferring the necessary codes to the skull’s database. “Let’s get this going.”

Tadashi lowered himself into his chair. “You excited, Baymax?”

“I am a robot. I cannot feel excitement.”

Hiro grinned at the screen as the transfer finished.

Baymax blinked again. “My endoskeleton is now complete.”

“Finally,” Hiro cheered, moving to dislodge the cables from his body.

“Now you can move onto the test phase,” Baymax reported.

Hiro laughed. “Test phase? Heh! Are you kidding? Just have to get you dressed and boom!”

Tadashi frowned. “Think again, genius.”

Hiro stared at him. “What?”

“The diagnostics protocol,” Baymax said, “will take seven to ten days.”

Hiro dropped the cables. “Diagnostics protocol. Seven to ten days,” he repeated, incredulous.

“Tadashi always ran an extensive diagnostics protocol.”

Hiro walked around to the endoskeleton’s front, lips curled in annoyance. “Yeah, sounds like you,” he told Tadashi. “We don’t have to do that, though. We followed your blueprints to a T. He’s not going to freak out like you had Baymax show me in your video journals before.”

Tadashi raised his hand, forming a circle between his thumb and index finger. “All it would take is the tiniest glitch, one character mistake we made in a sleepless moment, for the body to freak out. And even then, he could still freak out if a glitch slips through the testing phase. We’re doing the tests.”

“You want me to wait almost two more weeks to put Baymax in his body,” Hiro paraphrased.

“It’s not two weeks,” Tadashi corrected. He wrinkled his nose. “If he doesn’t work, though, it would actually be longer.”

Longer. That was incomprehensible to Hiro. They’d waited long enough. His friend, Tadashi’s future - why should they wait when they could have him ready now?

It would be okay. They had thought he was gone for good, only for the chip to show up. Hiro had thought the chip might be broken, only for it to be in perfect condition. Tadashi and Baymax thought the endoskeleton would freak out, so surely it wouldn’t.
“It’ll be fine,” he said, reaching to press the access port in.

Tadashi jolted behind him. Hiro glanced at him, catching his older brother trying to stand without his crutches, only to fall back in his chair.

He rolled his eyes. Typical over-reacting Tadashi, trying to stop him. *It would be fine.*

The endoskeleton whirled to life. Hiro shifted his attention back to it. Its head tilted to look down at him. Its eyes blinked.

“*Yes!*” Hiro spun around. “*See? I told you! It’s perfect.*”

Tadashi’s jaw fell open. “*H-Hiro!*”

His face dropped. He heard the arm spinning before he saw it. Hiro turned, saw the purple electric sparks fly as the bot twisted and jerked. Uh oh.

“*Get over here!*” Tadashi grabbed him by the hood, yanking into his lap and folding overtop him.

Hiro watched in horror. The bot ran across the room, knocking shelves over, throwing tables, smacking against the walls. He looked at Tadashi. His head was bowed over Hiro’s, eyes squeezed tight. A pit formed in Hiro’s stomach. This was not how he had imagined this night ending.

“Aghuh!” Hiro cried, both at the sound of glass shattering in his ears and at Tadashi nearly breaking his fourteen year old spine as he bent further overtop him. “*Tadashi!*”

He unscrewed his eyes. Panting, Tadashi sat up. Hiro sat up with him. He breathed deeply, locking his eyes at the way Tadashi’s arms were still bolted around his waist.

“Oh no,” Baymax said. “*My body is running away.*”

The matter-of-fact note of his monotone was not appreciated.

“This,” Tadashi gasped, “is why I run diagnostic tests! *HIRO!*”

Hiro winced. “*Sorry? Look, I’ll make this right, I’ll go catch it!*”

If anything, Tadashi’s grip tightened. “*Are you crazy?*” he barked. “*That thing will kill you!*”

Hiro faltered.

‘That thing.’ Not Baymax, or Baymax’s body.

He’d messed up. Bad.

Tadashi tossed his head back with a groan. “We have to call campus security. They’ll catch it.”

“No!” Hiro fought against his arms until Tadashi released him, and jumped to his feet. “I’ll get him! This is my fault. I probably messed up the design and I’m the one who didn’t want to run the diagnostics. I’ll handle it.”

Tadashi lurched. “*Hiro, no - HIRO!*”

Hiro was already at shoving the door open. “*Stay here, you can’t run! I’ll be back!*”

Stupid, stupid, stupid him! He probably ruined Tadashi’s whole night by not doing those
diagnostics. Stupid!

He had to make this right.

Sprinting through the halls of the robotics lab, Hiro raced to the entrance. He flew out the doors, coming to a halt at the top of the steps.

“Where are you?” he muttered to himself, scanning the area.

Over there! The bot was running through the grass at breakneck speed. Hiro watched as it smacked face first into a decorative boulder, falling flat on its back. It quickly rose, though, and continued running around the side of the building.

‘Tadashi’s going to hate me forever,’ he thought.

“Mr. Hamada!”

He winced. Oh, great. Just what he needed on top of this.

Hiro twisted his torso around. There at the doors stood none other than Professor Granville.

Out of all his professors, she was without a doubt his strictest. Oh, and the dean of the whole university, which made this situation infinitely worse. He could only imagine what would happen if she saw Baymax’s endoskeleton destroying school property.

“What are you doing here at this hour?” she demanded.

“I was - ” Hiro wracked his brain for an excuse. She couldn’t know about Baymax’s endoskeleton. But none of his classes had assigned him any work yet that require pulling an all nighter at the labs.

“Studying! Yeah, just came out for some fresh air. Whew, that air is sure fresh!”

Normally, Hiro was a good liar. Under these circumstances, however, the lying part of his brain seemed to have run off with the endoskeleton.

“Whelp, better go!” He made to go down the steps.

Granville, evidently, was not having it. “Follow me, Mr. Hamada.”

“Actually, I - ”

Granville shot him a daring look.

Hiro bit his tongue.

“...have nowhere I need to be, so I will follow you.”

Hiro reluctantly tailed behind her. He paused to glance over his shoulder to see if he could spot the endoskeleton. It appeared to be gone. Stomach sinking further, Hiro returned inside.

Granville took him to her office.

“When we first met,” she began, standing tall behind her desk as Hiro sat down, “I was worried you would become distracted by your own agenda.”

She flipped an open file down on her desk, sitting.
Hiro bit his lip. The police report from the night he and Tadashi got arrested.

“Or worse,” she continued.

“Uh-huh,” he mumbled. “You know about the bot-fighting.”

Her expression was not angry, though. “I have to admit, you’ve shown discipline. You’re doing exceptionally well - ”

Hiro’s stiffened.

Whatever she said next was drowned out by the fact the endoskeleton was climbing the outside of her second floor window. Hiro sucked in a breath.

The bot stared at him. Hiro stared back. Then purple bolts of electricity flew, and it fell backwards.

“No, stop!” Hiro shrieked, leaping up and slamming a hand on the desk.

Granville jerked her neck back.

Hiro froze.

“No, stop…” his brain raced for an explanation, “…giving me compliments! Haha, I - I don’t want to get a big head.”

Granville eyed him wearily, as if he were a wild animal. “Then I’ll just say this.” She relaxed, smiling softly. “Keep up the good work.”

“Oh, I will. Thanks!” Hiro pretended to stretch, yawning. “Sooo tired! Better get home!” he backed away until he hit the door, and slipped out as quickly as he could.

He had a bot to find.

...after unrelenting badgering, the team -

“Caved,” Gogo interrupted Fred’s alleyway monologue.

Fred ignored her. He shut the top of his suit. “ - came together! Now unified, they embark on their first night patrol, knowing they are the city’s last bastion of hope.”

Wasabi rubbed his temple. “Would you please stop narrating, Fred?” he begged, aggravated.

This was ridiculous. Fred was lucky it was Friday night, and therefore they had all weekend to study and complete their assignments. Like Honey Lemon and Gogo, he had only agreed to this to shut him up about night patrol. They all loved Fred, they did, but when he got into one of his obsessive moods, there was no stopping him until he lost interest himself. And considering how long he had been in this particular mood, it would probably be a long while before he lost interest in being a superhero. They had no choice other than to run with it for now.

“Yeah,” Honey Lemon agreed. “Nothing’s happening, Freddie. I think it might be time to go home.”

Before Fred could argue - Wasabi knew he wasn’t going to back down - a car came zooming around the corner, crashing onto the sidewalk as it turned, nearly slamming into the closest buildings, and wildly zipped down the road.
Wasabi groaned inwardly. Oh, great.

Fred pointed after it, delighted. “Did you see that!? That, my friends, is obviously a car thief! It’s last bastion time!”

He leaped to follow the racing car.

Wasabi exchanged glances with the girls. They were all thinking the same thing: Fred was in one of his obsessive moods; they had no choice other than to run with it for now. Best to get it over with.

They chased after Fred, speeding to cut off the racing car and form a defensive line in the middle of the road.

“Halt!” Fred commanded. He turned his suit’s eyes to the others. “Yeah, he’s not halting.”

The car screeched as it approached, the wheels veering out of control. For a split second, Wasabi thought the driver was going to stop. Except then the others jumped away, and Wasabi found himself clinging to the roof of the car, which still zoomed down the road.

“He didn’t stop!” he cried, terrified out of his mind.

The car wildly rounded another corner.

Wasabi screamed.

When he had chosen, through no choice of his own, to indulge Fred, this is not what he had had in mind!

In the distance, he saw the others running towards them. Gogo sped ahead, tailing the car’s end.

“Pull over, now!” she yelled to the driver.

The car made yet another turn, jerking left hard. The force sent Wasabi’s body flying; the tight grip he had on the edges of the roof was the only thing that saved him from falling off. He spun around, facing the front of the car, back facing his friends.

He shrieked in terror. “DID YOU NOT HEAR HER!”

A fourth turn was made, no less traumatizing than the others.

A green floam grew out of the pavement ahead of them. It took a moment for Wasabi to realize it was from a couple of Honey Lemon’s chem balls. The car ran straight into the mess, catching on the foam. It did not stop, however; it slowed, jerked, and to his regret, broke free in less than three seconds.

“Still not stopping!” he screamed.

Fred, with Honey Lemon on his back, leaped ahead on the road. Fred threw out his arm, palm out. “Oh, yes he is!”

The car veered to the side, finally, FINALLY, coming to a halt.

Wasabi’s fingers let go while the car was still in motion. He flew into Fred’s arms bridal style.

“They fear the lizard,” Fred assured him confidently.
Wasabi was too frazzled to care.

Fred set him down on his feet.

Gogo skated to their side.

The team hovered in front of the car door, ready to attack.

Fred reached for the handle.

The door swung open.

“Justice is - ” Fred stopped short. “Oooh, wait a minute!”

“Are you people crazy!?" the driver howled. “My wife is about to have our baby!”

The woman in the passenger seat paid them no mind - she was too busy being in labor.

“Oh my gosh, I’m so sorry,” Honey Lemon gasped. She put on a tense smile for the woman. “You’re doing great!”

Wasabi’s brain felt like it was on fire. (He was going to kill Fred later.) Quickly following Honey Lemon’s lead, he babbled, “Boy or girl!? Wait, don’t tell me, I wanna be surprised!”

The driver flung the door shut. The car zipped up a ramp, a ramp Wasabi saw too late was the entrance to the San Fransokyo Hospital parking garage.

“Congratulations on your bundle of joy!” Fred shouted after them. He turned his attention to the rest of the gang. “So,” he admitted, “not a car thief. We still showed some real hustle out there, guys.”

Gogo snapped. “Fred, there’s clearly nothing going on! We’re leaving!”

Wasabi and Honey Lemon had nothing to add, following her off.

For his part, Wasabi just wanted to get back to the labs, grab his stuff, and head home for the night. A warm bath sounded nice and relaxing before he jumped into studying.

“But guys, night patrol,” Fred whimpered.

They ignored him. Tonight had been a disaster.

Wasabi pulled his phone out from under his armor. He wanted to double check his planner to see which classes he had quizzes in again the coming week. He turned it on from sleep mode.

It immediately started ringing. The caller ID read ‘Tadashi.’

Wasabi didn’t know why, but a wave of dread washed over him.

He answered the call.

He didn’t even get a chance to say hello.

Tadashi was shrill. “FUCKING FINALLY! WHERE ARE YOU GUYS!?”

Wasabi almost dropped his phone.
That was *not* how Tadashi spoke. Hell, he had never even known the guy to swear.

Gogo and Honey Lemon froze, bewildered. Fred leaped to Wasabi’s side.

“Is that Tadashi?” Gogo asked.

Wasabi nodded. He handed her his phone. His brain could not deal with this right this second.

Gogo took it, and put the call on speaker.

“Tadashi?” Honey Lemon tried.

“*WHERE ARE YOU GUYS!? I HAVE BEEN TRYING TO GET A HOLD OF YOU FOUR FOR A HALF HOUR!*”

The four of them looked at each other, puzzled.

This could not be good. Not in the slightest.

“What’s going on?” Honey Lemon demanded.

“**HIRO! HIRO IS WHAT’S GOING ON!**”


“I CA-” Wasabi heard him take a deep breath. He remained shrill, but no longer yelled. “Hiro skipped my diagnostics protocol. The endoskeleton went ballistic! It annihilated my lab and broke out through the window! This has to be my fault, I coded several commands while on my drowsy meds, I’m a fucking idiot! Hiro ran after it. They left campus ages ago. You guys, if it doesn’t kill him, it’ll GET him killed one way or another! You have to catch them!”

“It’s no one’s fault,” Honey Lemon said firmly, leaving no room for argument. “Have you tried getting a hold of Hiro?”

“He’s not picking up!” Tadashi answered. “I’ve been hacking my lab computer to get control of my drone. If I can stun the endoskeleton - if I can stun the endoskeleton - if I can - I’m not gonna make it to his location anytime soon! You guys have to catch them! It could - It could run into the street, cause a car to skid off the road, and the car’ll hit Hiro -!”

“Shut up, Tadashi!” Gogo told him. “Don’t send yourself into a panic attack, it’s not gonna help him. You have his location, don’t you?”

“Y-Yeah.” Tadashi whined low in his throat. “I have the tracker open. He’s on - he’s - Eastwood Street!”

“Eastwood. That’s not far from here,” Gogo said.

Fred bounced up. “You picked the best time to call, my friend! We were in the middle of night patrol, and this is exactly why I wanted -”

“FRED,” Tadashi growled, “I am NOT IN THE MOOD. FIND MY LITTLE BROTHER BEFORE THAT THING GETS HIM KILLED!”

Fred withered. “Sorry.”

Wasabi jerked his head back. “We’re - We’re on it, Tadashi. We’ll call you back as soon as we
“Thank you, thank you, thank you! I owe you guys! Please go!”

The line went dead.

“Is he okay?” Wasabi questioned. “That didn’t sound like Tadashi at all.”

“He’s worried for Hiro’s safety,” Honey Lemon argued. “It sounds like the endoskeleton is lethally dangerous. We need to get to Eastwood Street, pronto.”

“Did I come off as not caring?” Fred’s voice cracked. “I didn’t mean to come off as not caring about Hiro. I don’t want the bot to kill him either!”

Gogo shoved his phone in Wasabi’s hand. “We know, Fred. Look, we’ll deal with Tadashi when we get Hiro and the endoskeleton. Let’s go.”

The same wave of dread washed over Wasabi again. He was not liking tonight’s events.

Hiro had not meant to chase the bot across the city of San Fransokyo.

He had not meant for a couple of Good Luck Alley goons to catch the bot first, electrocuting it into submission.

And he had certainly not meant to run into Yama, who recognized him from the night they got arrested, and was still royally pissed about it.

“I-In case I wasn’t clear before, I’m really sorry about the whole jail thing!” he yelled, trying his best not to look down at busy, busy Eastwood Street one hundred stories below his dangling body.

Yama smirked. Hiro did not like his smirk. It wasn’t a good ‘You’ve learned your lesson so I’ll let you go’ kind of smirk.

He nodded at the goons holding Hiro’s ankles.

They mirrored his smirk, lowering him further off the roof.

Hiro cried out.

He didn’t want to die, he didn’t want to die, he didn’t want to die! This wasn’t happening, this wasn’t happening! This couldn’t be real!

(In the back of his mind, he quietly apologized to Tadashi for utterly destroying his night with the grand finale of dying on him. He was sorry.)

Yama leaned over the rail. “Wait!”

The goons stopped.

Hiro thanked his lucky angels.

“You go to that nerd school?” Yama demanded.

Hiro sucked in a sharp breath. His school ID was hanging off his body, the lanyard stuck in his coat. He grabbed it and stuck it in his belt. “Uh, yeah, but it’s not - ”
“Pull him back!”

The goons whipped Hiro over the rail, not releasing his ankles. They held him so high, his upsidedown head was face to face with Yama’s.

Heh. And he thought Tadashi and their friends were tall. He saw just what giants Yama and his goons were now.

Yama leaned in dangerously close to his face. “You and I, we’re gonna make a deal.”

“Oh, we are? Okay, I love deals!” Hiro was in no position to argue. He smiled toothily. “Do you want an SFIT application?”

Yama narrowed his eyes. He snapped his fingers at the goon not holding one of Hiro’s ankles.

The goon handed him a cell phone.

Yama showed it to Hiro. There was a picture of some kind of gray, misshapen object on it.

“This is in the dean’s office,” Yama spat.

“It is?” Hiro wasn’t sure he recalled it on Granville’s desk. Maybe it had been, maybe it hadn’t; all the blood was rushing from his racing heart to his head. “Neat.”

“You wanna stay alive and get your bot back, Zero?”

Hiro nodded enthusiastically. “Yes!”

“Get it for me,” Yama ordered. “Bring it to my place in Good Luck Alley. You know where I’m talking about.”

“Sounds like a plan! I will do that! You can count on me!”

Yama growled low in his throat. “Play any games like you did the night of our fight, and you’ll regret it.”

“No games,” Hiro swore.

“I’ll personally drop you from this building myself.”

“Fair, fair. Totally fair.”

“Then I’ll go after your pathetic, knight in shining armor brother,” Yama promised. He grinned. “I hear he’s a cripple these days. Can’t speed away on his little moped with broken legs, can he? Perhaps he can clean your guts up off the sidewalk before I drop him over the edge.”

Hiro’s blood ran ice cold. He didn’t have a response to that.

Yama stepped away. “Throw him out. I better see you before the end of the night, Zero.”

Hiro stumbled along Eastwood, unsure of what to do.

If he went back to school, Tadashi would be on his case in a flash, and they’d get never the thingamajig Yama wanted, or Baymax’s body. If he didn’t, though, he’d never get it, and Yama would kill them both.
Maybe he could text Tadashi, sorrowfully report he’d lost the bot, and could they meet up at home? Hiro didn’t think Tadashi would buy it for long; when Hiro never showed up at home, he’d get paranoid and surely do something to find him. But it might give him enough time to steal the item, get it to Yama, and get Baymax back. He could deal with Tadashi’s wrath happily once they were in the clear.

How to get it off Granville’s desk, though? He’d need to break into her office without her noticing. She should still be there - according to his phone, it was barely nine-thirty. A good number of the faculty stayed late into the night to get work done, supervise lab students, and more. Granville was one of them.

Hiro would have to do it quietly. The best idea he could think of was adding her access code to his ID, which would allow him to slip in and out of her office while she was away. He’d have to get uncomfortably close to her to get his ID near hers, and he might have to create a diversion to get her out of her office if she had no intention of leaving it when he got there, but it was doable.

It had to be doable. Tadashi’s life was on the line, too.

He would need help getting the code, however; someone would have to be on Tadashi’s lab computer to press the button, activating the data transfer.

Tadashi was a no go. If Hiro could put this night behind him with Tadashi knowing as little of what happened as possible, then he would.

Gogo wasn’t going to work either. She wasn’t that kind of rebel. She’d likely tell on him to Tadashi and advise him to go to the police for this.

Honey Lemon and Wasabi were out of the question. If Gogo would tell on him and advise police intervention, they were without a doubt going to as well, and would probably be pushier about it.

That left Fred. Hiro supposed if he framed the plan as some sort of superhero bid, he’d go along with it without question or protest. And all he had to do was press a button. It was easy. Okay, Fred could work.

Hiro took a deep breath. Okay. Okay, he had a plan -

“HIRO!”

His eyes shot open wide. He spun around.

“No, no, no!” he panicked. “Tadashi, you overprotective jerk! Why do you keep siccing them on me!?”

The gang, decked out in their super gear of all things, closed in on him.

Honey Lemon and Gogo launched themselves at him, grabbing a shoulder each.

“Are you all right, Hiro?” Honey Lemon asked gently.

“Where’s the bot?” Gogo asked firmly.

Fred leaped in front of him. “We’re ready to take it down! Oh yeah! Also, glad you're safe, pal.”

Wasabi wiped his forehead, the calmest of the group. “We’ve been up and down Eastwood searching for you, little man. You’ve given your brother a heart attack, you know that?”
Hiro’s eyes darted between them, brain flailing for words. “I - You see - Yama - ”

Gogo honed in. “Yama? Bot-fighting, money shark, head of a crime syndicate Yama? Is the bot after him or does he have the bot?”

Why did Tadashi have to have smart friends? Why did he have to introduce smart people to Hiro and consequently make them his friends?

Hiro wrung his hands. “Um, have?”

Wasabi did a doubletake. “Yama has Baymax’s endoskeleton?”

“Yama has what!?”

Dread filled every inch of Hiro’s stomach. He gulped at the sight of Tadashi’s drone hurtling for them, small, sleek, shiny white, it’s stun blasters poised to shoot. Hiro couldn't see the camera or speakers on it’s front, but he was well aware they were there.

“Yama has what!?” Tadashi’s voice repeated.

Hiro wondered how he was going to talk himself out of this one.

Chapter End Notes

Notes:

- I read somewhere (I think it was on the official BH6 Tumblr?) Honey Lemon got into chemistry as a kid by playing with the chemicals under the sink, to her parents' dismay. I thought it was funny, so I brought it up!

- The official heights for the gang are: 6ft 4 for Wasabi, 6ft 2 in heels and 5ft 10 without for Honey Lemon, 6ft for Tadashi and Fred, 5ft 4 for Gogo, and 5ft for Hiro. :) I love it. Also, I want to be Gogo, who is my height, and surrounded by so many (hot) tall people.

- I should mention that the vast majority of season 1’s episodes take place before Halloween, so even with the movie retcon, that means most of the season is squished into two months and then we're suddenly at the end of the semester (which would normally be mid-December in real life, not early to mid November). I'm not necessarily going along with this timeline, but I'm not going to try to fix it either. I'm just following the show for the most part.
Baymax Returns III: Taste of Fear

Chapter Notes

So, yeah, I apologize for how late this is, and I apologize in advance if it reads weird. This was surprisingly difficult to write. There were several things I wanted to accomplish with this chapter, but it feels like I only touched on them while hammering home stuff I’d already talked about. Just - I’m sorry. I hope you enjoy anyway! It’s a little longer than previous chapters were, so, I hope that makes up for it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Rain hadn’t been in the weather forecast for the night, yet it began to pour as Hiro, clearly shaken, stared at the group like cornered prey terrified of surrounding predators. Honey Lemon’s heart went out to him; if Yama had the bot, then he had to have been through quite the experience. She squeezed his shoulder.

“Are you okay, Hiro?” Tadashi asked through his drone. “He didn’t see or attack you, did he?”

Hiro opened his mouth, searching for words that didn’t come out.

“Hiro?” Honey Lemon squeezed his shoulder again to ground him. “You’re not hurt, are you?”

Fred tossed his suit’s head off. “Come on, little man, you can tell us. We’re here to help!”

“Hiro, please. Tell us what happened,” Tadashi begged.

He shrank at the desperation in his brother’s voice. “I…”

The gang exchanged worried looks.

Wasabi raised his hands out in front of him, questioning, “Where’s Yama right now?”

“We’ll handle getting the bot back,” Gogo assured him, “but you need to tell us what’s going on so we don’t go in blind.”

Hiro bit his lip. His eyes darted to each member of the team, Wasabi, Tadashi, Gogo, Fred, and Honey Lemon. He sighed.

“I was chasing Baymax’s endoskeleton,” he began. “It was too fast. It went into an alley and these thugs electrocuted it. It short-circuited and went down. Turns out those thugs were Yama’s goons. He was…not happy to see me. For someone who only met us once, he has very vivid memories of Tadashi and I, I guess.”

“Hiro,” Tadashi breathed, exasperated, but quickly changed his tune to concerned. “What did Yama do next?”

Hiro squirmed. “Mm, he might have taken me to the roof of that building over there,” he pointed to one of the high towers a few blocks down Eastwood, “and hung me over the railing by my feet. He was gonna drop me.”
Honey Lemon gasped. Her grip tightened on Hiro’s shoulder, this time to ground herself - as if he weren’t planted on the sidewalk this moment, perfectly all right and intact, and she could keep him from falling one hundred stories into the pavement. It was a horrible image she had in her head.

She was also positive they could all feel the heart attack Tadashi was having in his lab.

“*He what!? Hiro, this is exactly why I told you to stay out of bot-fighting! Ah, we gotta go to the police, or something! O-Okay, can one of you guys stick with him on his back to SFIT while the others take care of Ya—*”

“No!” Hiro cried, clenching his fists. “No, Tadashi, you don’t understand! The only reason he didn’t drop me was because he saw my school ID! Yama wants me to steal something from Granville’s desk in exchange for Baymax. He said if I played any games or tricks, he’d personally drop me off the building and come after you next! He knows you can’t run, he must have heard about the fire! We have to do what he says.”

Honey Lemon’s heart leapt to her throat. Not him, too.

Tadashi’s drone was silent a moment. “*No, we don’t. Hiro, giving in is not going to work. We can’t trust Yama to keep his word. Besides, how do you know he won’t take whatever you give him and try to kill us anyway?*”

Gogo reeled her hand away from Hiro’s other shoulder, standing tall. “*No one’s getting killed. Tadashi’s right, Hiro, if it’s this bad, we have to go to the police.*”

“Because they’re going to believe me!? Or do anything about a criminal they let go over and over again!” he protested, failing his arms.

Fred jumped up, throwing his suit top back down. “*Hiro’s right! This isn’t a job for the police, it’s a job for us! We’ll beat Yama so bad, he won’t even remember his own name when we’re finished with him!*”

“Yeah, and then a second in command goon will order hits on Tadashi and me!” Hiro ran his fingers through his hair erratically. “*Uuugh! I was already thinking of a plan until you guys showed up!*”

“So you were just going to handle it yourself!?“ Tadashi spat. “*Hiro, this is too big to do alone!*”

“I wasn’t going to be alone! I was going to ask - ugh, forget it!” he slapped his palm against his forehead. “*Okay, how about we compromise? We all pitch in to stop Yama, but we do it my way.*”

“What’s ‘your way’?” Wasabi asked, face hard.

“We’re going to need to get the - whatever it is, sculpture, paperweight, this metal thing - off Granville’s desk. I don’t know why Yama wants it, but he’s willing to threaten our lives over it, so yeah. We’ll have to steal her access code, which I can do with a little help, and take the thing to Yama. With you guys, we can probably stage an ambush - or, back up ambush if Yama doesn’t want to keep his end of the deal. Either way, we get Baymax back. Then we could steal the paperweight sculpture thing back and replace it in Granville’s office before anyone knows!” Hiro smiled anxiously. “*Sound good?*”

Fred pumped his fist. “Like a plan! The second theft basically cancels out the first, so Lady Justice should be appeased.”

“There are so many things that could go wrong with that,” Tadashi said. “The biggest being that
I’m not letting you get within fifty feet of him ever again!”

Hiro threw his hands up. “We don’t have a choice! Yama expects me to give it to him. If someone goes in my place, he’ll see it as a trap! I have to go! The others, and your drone, can protect me!”

“And when someone ends up hurt, going to the hospital, or, god forbid, winds up dead!?”

“THAT’S ENOUGH!” Gogo shouted, skating between Hiro and the drone’s vision. “You two can squabble about it later. For the time being, both of your butts are in trouble if Yama’s willing to kill you over bot-fights and paperweights. Hiro, how long do you have to report back to him?”

Hiro twiddled his fingers. “The end of the night.”

She spun around to face the drone. “Then we don’t have a ton of time to go to the police and make them believe us. If we just tell them Yama threatened you and Hiro, all they’re going to do is contact Yama for his side, maybe put him in custody for a day since Hiro’s a minor, and let him go. We’d have to give them reason to keep him locked up, and I doubt there’s footage out there of him hanging Hiro off a ledge.”

“Not to mention, Hiro’s probably got a point about a second in command putting hits on you guys under Yama’s orders,” Wasabi added, grimacing. “I mean, seriously, threatening your lives over a paperweight? That’s extreme.”

Honey Lemon shuddered. She hated that they were most likely correct. They had no proof Yama had hung Hiro over the edge of a one hundred story building, or even that he threatened the brothers. It was their word against Yama’s, and even if the police took him in for a little while based on his history, it wouldn’t be forever, and it wouldn’t prevent the chain of command under him from taking action in his place.

They had to protect Hiro and Tadashi. She’d nearly lost them too many times in the past two months alone. She wasn’t going to let anyone hurt them again. Ever.

“What do you suggest we do?” Tadashi was curt. “Say we go with his plan and, I don’t know, film his meet up with Yama. Hiro will be implemented in theft, Aunt Cass will find out, and SFIT could take disciplinary action against him.”

“He’s fourteen and being blackmailed by a guy the police have record of him being associated with,” Gogo argued. “A guy they’ve arrested who knows how many times!”

“And instead of going to the police immediately, he steals from a prestigious university for a crime boss. It still goes on his record and SFIT still takes disciplinary actions because theft of school property is explicitly warned to result in expulsion! Even if it’s a stupid paperweight instead of something truly dangerous!” Tadashi burst out. “Besides, you keep bringing up the possibility of a minion coming after us in Yama’s stead. I doubt we’re going to get every minion arrested tonight!”

Wasabi groaned. “This is going to give me a migraine. So what do we do?”

Fred put his claws on his hips. “Uh, hello? Hi, Fredzilla, here, remember how incredible we were beating Yokai? Sure, it’s the only item on our superhero resume, but it’s a huge, recent, and awesome one! If we can fight off someone like him and the microbots, we can surely strike enough fear into the hearts of Yama’s gang to keep them away from all Hamadas. And since we’re superheroes, we can just say our vigilance caught sight of what was going on, not like Hiro contacted us or anything. Wink, wink - I’m winking in here, guys.”

Honey Lemon squared her shoulders. It seemed like they didn’t have much of a choice. “Freddie
might be onto something. We’re famous for what happened at Krei Tech. If Yama heard about the SFIT fire, he and his men have definitely heard about us. If we pull this off, they might be too afraid to go after Hiro and Tadashi in the future.”

“THANK YOU, Honey Lemon! Glad someone appreciates my heroic plans.”

“We don’t have a lot of time to fight over this,” she went on. “Let’s say Yama is willing to wait until dawn. The sun rises this time of year around six-thirty. We have less than nine hours to act. We need to get moving.”

Tadashi made a frustrated noise. “I can’t believe I’m agreeing to this. This has to be a nightmare.”

“Woman up, Tadashi,” Gogo ordered. “We’ll keep Hiro safe. All of us, including you. We’re on our way back to campus.”

They would keep them both safe, Honey Lemon corrected in her head, placing her other hand on Hiro’s other shoulder. Both of them.

Hiro entered the ruins of Tadashi’s lab to find his brother already working on a device to transfer Granville’s access code to his ID. He was still in his chair, screwdriver and wired metal the size of a chip in his fingers. Baymax had been replaced on his monitor with his drone’s camera, which viewed the south end of the campus from atop the robotics lab. His healthcare chip was nowhere in sight, so Hiro assumed he remained in the computer.

Tadashi’s lifted his head from his work, expression dark.

Hiro froze. This wasn’t good. He’d destroyed what should have been a happy night with his actions, and his old brother was finally furious. This was walking directly into the lion’s den. His legs were very tempted to run away before Tadashi’s wrath could annihilate him.

Unfortunately, the others filed in after him, blocking his escape.

Tadashi beckoned him with his chin. “Come here.”

Hiro chuckled nervously, clasping his fingers behind his back. “Why?”

“Hiro.”

His shoulders sagged. Reluctantly, he stepped forward towards his older brother.

Tadashi met him half way, grabbing his arm and pulling him half into his lap for a hug. “Why,” he whined, “are you such a magnet for trouble? You almost got thrown off a building!”

“Sorry,” Hiro winced. “Didn’t mean to run into Yama.”

“And now you’re going to run back to him,” he sighed. “I swear, one of these days, Hiro, I’m going to invent something that permanently locks our wrists together and keep you out of trouble that way.”

His heart sunk. Somehow, this was worse than his brother’s wrath.

He put his arms around Tadashi’s neck. “I’m sorry. I should have listened to you and Baymax about the diagnostics tests. Or calling campus security. I shouldn’t have run off.”

Tadashi let him go, clapping a hand on his shoulder. “Hey,” he gave a small smile. “It’s gonna be
all right. I’m scared for your safety, Hiro, not mad. You didn’t know the endoskeleton was going to react like that.”

Hiro pushed his lips to one side. Scared. Of course he was scared. His creation that Hiro had helped with and was probably to blame for the malfunctions had destroyed his lab while they were in it and caused a nearly deadly run in with Yama that could still turn completely deadly. Why shouldn’t be he scared?

He wished Tadashi was angry, though, and that he’d royally roast Hiro instead of hug and reassure him. He deserved it, much as the thought made him want to bolt. Anger would be easier to deal with, less guilt-inducing. If he was skipping anger in favor of reassurance, that meant things were really bad.

Hiro hated he had gotten them here in the first place. He had to make up for it.

“Here, finish this,” Tadashi handed him the device and screw driver he was holding, then turned to the others. “We need to figure out how to approach Yama. He and his goons aren’t just going to let all five of you walk in, especially if you’re suited up.”

Hiro tinkered with the device. At least it gave his hands something to do, which helped him move his thoughts away to the change in subject. “He wants me to bring the paperweight to his place in Good Luck Alley. You remember the last fight you saved me from? The front door’s around back.”

Wasabi raised his brow. “Is it his house or his business?”

“Eh, he could live there for all I know.”

“So business,” Gogo reiterated. “How much do you know about the layout?”

Hiro sheepishly smiled at the device. “Next to nothing. I’ve never been inside. Yama used to hold all his bot-fights in the open alley behind it. It’s not small, though. Pretty tall building.”

Fred hopped from foot to foot excitedly. “Tadashi! Your drone could do recon while we get the paperweight! You could find us the perfect place to sneak in to cover Hiro!”

Tadashi pursed his lips, thoughtful. “I don’t know. I’d have to get my drone in the building to do that. Unless someone blind and deaf leaves a window or door open, my drone isn’t going to get in easily. And that’s assuming no one will spot it once it’s inside. It’s not tiny, Fred.”

“No games or tricks, Yama said,” Hiro muttered, pace quickening on the device. He cleared his throat. “I might be able to bring someone inside with me. I mean, the endoskeleton is shut off, too dangerous to turn back on to walk on its own, and I don’t exactly have the muscle to drag it out by myself. Yama never explicitly said I couldn’t bring anyone with me to help. He’s certainly not going to send one his men to escort me and it all the way back to campus.”

“You sure, Hiro?” Gogo shifted her weight to one side. “You don’t think he’s gonna find that suspicious?”

“Not if I bring along someone unassuming. Someone not in super gear, who’s not at all intimidating on the outside, but could clearly help me carry the endoskeleton.”

Honey Lemon frowned. “Whoever goes with you would be unarmed and it would might take time for the rest of us to catch up, depending on where we are. If something goes wrong in a split second, we might not make it in time.”
Tadashi put a hand over his eyes. “Great. This is perfect.”

Wasabi held up his hands in placation. “Hold up. Maybe we’re overthinking it. Fred’s plan is that the team was night patrolling and caught wind of Yama being up to no good, yeah? We can scout the building from the outside ahead of time. Meanwhile, I like Hiro’s idea that someone go in with him, that way he’s not by himself with Yama, armed or not. We could put a mic or miniature camera on them so if something goes wrong, they can subtly give us their location and we can bust in. If nothing goes wrong, we have a map of sorts to get in later and steal the paperweight back.”

“And bust Yama and his goons’ chops so hard they don’t mess with Hiro or Tadashi in the future!” Fred exclaimed. “I can make up this awesome line about not using kids for dirty work or threatening said kids’ brothers.”

Tadashi’s shoulders slumped and he covered his face. “I hate this and every possibility I can see of it going wrong. But I do think this is probably our best bet.”

Hiro tried not to flinch at his tone. “So, is the camera or mic gonna be sent to the police afterwards, or…?”

His older brother ran his hand down his face. “We’ll cross that bridge when we get there. Honestly, if Fred and Honey Lemon are right about the team’s reputation and we kick his butt, he might leave us alone. No police convincing necessary. On the other hand, I don’t know what, if anything, we can record that will be substantial evidence to keep him behind bars and not incriminate you. Besides, like I said earlier, we’re not going to get all his lackeys arrested tonight either. Let’s just play it by ear for now.”

Hiro made a mental note of that and tucked it aside for later. He couldn’t stop thinking about Yama’s line about his ‘crippled brother’ and how he couldn’t run. He didn’t know what he was going to do yet, or when, or how, and much less how to handle his entire gang of goons, but Yama was going to get arrested. Hiro would make sure of it.

Tadashi took a deep, reluctant breath and sat up straight. “I can’t go with Hiro. Who wants to volunteer?”

Honey Lemon stepped forward. “I’ll do it. I don’t look threatening and I just remembered I have another purse in the main lab; I can hide my chem purse in it! That way, if something does go wrong in a split second and you guys are too far away, we won’t be unarmed.”

“No,” Hiro put the screw driver down on the desk, finished with the device. “If you have to use a chem ball, it won’t matter if your chem purse is hidden in your real purse; the chem balls’ll be proof you’re a member of the team. We can’t take the chance Yama - or anyone stronger outside of jail he gives this information to - will try to whittle us down when they know you’re off duty and alone.”

Fred nodded sagely. “That is one reason secret identities are important. Also to protect your family, friends, and love interest. Wait, do you have a love interest, Honey Lemon? Because if not, then that’s one less risk - ”

“Moving on,” Hiro interrupted him, side-eyeing him, “it really doesn’t matter who comes with. I’m done with the chip. We need Granville’s access code and the paperweight, then we have to get going. We’re on a time limit, guys.”

Tadashi wrinkled his nose. “Well, it kind of matters, from a strategic standpoint. Whoever goes with you is going to be weaponless. That means if trouble does occur, we’re down one fighter
against a literal mountain and his gang. Honestly, if worse comes to worst, your chem purse’s abilities are incredibly versatile, Honey Lemon. I’d rather have it on the field than not, but not at the risk of your identity.”

Hiro scowled. They were wasting time. “You know what, I can go in by myself. You won’t lose any manpow-”

“No,” Tadashi spat. “I’d rather have someone unarmed with you than no one at all. It’s the best idea I’ve heard tonight.”

Sighing, Fred flipped the top off his suit and began climbing out. “Guess, it’s up to me, then. I’m the only one who can go.”

Gogo raised a judgmental eyebrow. “Excuse you?”

“Says who?” Wasabi’s tone was equally as judgmental.

“Uh, duh?” Fred leaped to the floor, allowing his suit to collapse on the tile with a thud. “One, if you’re going to scope Yama’s place ahead of time, you have to get there fast. Gogo’s the fastest out of all us, hence her nickname, and you’re very detailed and precise. Together, you can get a good scope of the building. Second, you’re built like a truck and Gogo has a resting - Gogo has a face that makes people want to pee themselves at first sight of her. I’m a sticky geek who, as somebody noted once, looks like I live under a bridge. To a stranger, what’s intimidating about me? And thirdly-wirdly, I breathe fire. Breathing fire in an enclosed space that might be super flammable sounds like a disaster waiting to happen. Your weapons work better in this setting, both for long and short range attacks. Better than fire, at least.”

Gogo blinked in surprise. “Wow. You’re capable of intelligent thought.”

Wasabi smiled, impressed. “Didn’t know you had it in you, Fred.”

He laughed off the jibes. “Hey, I’m a superhero enthusiast and an English major. Sucking in every fight scene imaginable in the comic book world AND being forced to analyze text and context for three years can have its perks.”

“All good points, Fred,” Tadashi quirked his lips up. “Just please don’t do something stupid that will get you hurt. I know I keep pressing how much I don’t want Hiro to get hurt, but I’m worried about you guys just as much. I can’t guess how many men Yama’s got at his place; if worse does come to worst, I hate that I’ll be the only one at a safe distance.”

Fred tossed his arms out wide. “No problemo, bro! Safety is my second middle name after Lee.”

“Now that that’s settled,” Gogo took charge, “Wasabi and I will head out while you guys get the paperweight. What’s the address, Hiro?”

He gave it to her. “Remember, it’s in the middle of Good Luck Alley. Be careful.”

“Got it. Don’t worry about us,” she said. “Come on, Wasabi.”

“You wanna send your drone with us?” he asked. “If we’re only scoping the outside, there’s no issue with getting caught inside.”

Before Tadashi could answer, Baymax took over the computer screen, replacing the view of the campus with his face.
“Tadashi’s drone camera,” he said, “requires full use of the monitor and many necessary computer functions. It would be impossible to transfer Professor Granville’s access code and operate the drone camera at the same time.”

“Heh,” Tadashi scratched the back of his head. “I did have to hack and rig this thing so I could use my drone through it, and keep the activity hidden from the school. I’ll catch up with you guys when we’ve got the thing.”

The two nodded. They headed for the door.

Honey Lemon followed them. “I’ll go, too. Sorry, Tadashi, I don’t like standing around doing nothing, and three pair of eyes might be better than two.”

“Gotcha, Honey,” he smiled at her on her way out, then shifted to is attention to Hiro. “We’re going to use my ID, okay?”

Hiro jerked his head back. “What? Why not mine? No offense, but I’m going to have get uncomfortably close to her to get the code. Pretty sure she’d be more willing to get close to a scrawny kid than a six foot tall, adult man, bro.”

Tadashi gave him a flat look. “Yeah, I was raised by Aunt Cass as well, genius. I know what I would look like. But you’re using my ID to get it. I’m not supposed to be on campus so no one will suspect I copied her code, and there’s no way I’m trusting an impulsive fourteen year old to delete the university dean’s code from his ID once this is all over.”

That stung.

He couldn’t help scowling (though it was more at himself than Tadashi). “Wow, you do trust that I’ve turned over a new leaf, huh?”

His older brother chuckled humorlessly. “Oh, I do; except you’re still an impulsive fourteen year old who seriously doesn’t need twenty-four/seven access to all the campus facilities Granville has permission to visit.” He pulled his wallet out and took his brand new ID from it, handing it to Hiro. “Here.”

He pressed the idea and device together. The latter activated.

Baymax was replaced on screen with the message “CODE DETECTED - SCAN.”

Tadashi held his palm out. “Device.”

Hiro groaned, but handed it over. Fine. It was fine. After everything tonight, Tadashi was probably right to be a bit wary with him. He’d have to earn his trust back.

Fred lifted himself to sit on the nearby work table, putting a hand on his stomach. “Man, I’m starving. Can we stop at Noodle Burger for some noodle soup before we go to Yama’s?”

Tadashi craned his neck, expression flat. “Fred.”

“Is that a no?”

He rolled his eyes and frowned. The frown soon transformed into a fake smile. “When Hiro gives the signal, do you wanna press the button to transfer the code, Fred?”

His eyes lit up. “Uh, YES! I get to be a hacker! Thanks, dude!”
Tadashi stared at him with the same flat look as a moment ago, but then cracked a small, real smile. He returned his gaze to Hiro. “Be careful with Granville. Doesn’t matter what our reason is - if she finds out what we’re doing, we’ll get expelled on the spot.”

Hiro nodded. “I’ll be careful.”

Tadashi picked up an ear piece from his desk and put it in Hiro’s ear. He cupped the nape of his neck. “And PLEASE be careful with Yama. If you can get out of there without trouble, do it. Don’t provoke him.”

“I know, I know. I don’t wanna be hung over the edge of a building again,” Hiro brushed his hand off. “I’ll be okay. I promise.”

Tadashi pulled a face, but nodded. “Check her lab office first. I went out in the main lab while you guys were on your way and talked to some students who are here almost every night. Granville takes a break from supervising and goes back to her lab office around nine-thirty and comes back at ten. She’s probably on her way out now.”

“Got it.” Hiro quickly hugged him. “Last hug. Love you!”

“Love you, too,” he heard Tadashi reply as he raced for the door.

Fred hopped off the work table. “Hey, ever notice you and Hiro are a lot more touchy-feely than you were over the summer?”

Tadashi’s eyes hardened slightly. He spun his chair around to fasten them to the monitor. “We both almost died. It puts things in perspective.”

Fred walked over to lean on his computer desk. “Is that why you were so freaked out on the phone earlier?”

He watched Tadashi’s brow furrow. “Yes. Also because I couldn’t get to him and none of you were picking up your phones. I was this close to calling our aunt so she could chase him down in her truck.”

Fred hummed, unsure where to take it from there. Now that they were alone, he wanted to say he was sorry if he sounded like he cared more about superhero-ing than Hiro earlier. He didn’t; hell, the entire point of being a superhero was to save people before they got hurt. Now that they were alone, though, he found the words weren’t easily reaching his mouth.

Something had changed in Tadashi lately. Fred knew he wasn’t the brightest tool in the crayon box, but something was up with one of his best friends and it worried him.

It wasn’t necessarily that Tadashi had yelled at him on the phone - having had his own near death experience with Callaghan, he had an inkling of what Tadashi meant by ‘perspective’ - and Hiro was his little brother at that, his little brother that he had been rescuing and protecting for ages. Fred understood. Especially considering either of their deaths wouldn’t have been the first their family experienced. He got it.

It was more than that.

Although he had smiled and acted like his usual self from day one after the fire, Fred had noticed Tadashi sink into himself - just a little. Maybe more when they weren’t around to notice. The light in his eyes faded some, he seemed to only tease and snark Hiro anymore, and during quite a few
visits he appeared thoroughly exhausted.

But okay, all of that could be chalked up to his injuries, to the flurry of surgeries, to the rest he sorely needed to recover. Dude only had so much energy in his body. It could just as well be chalked up to the realization he had almost died, almost died in front of Hiro at that. Fred could imagine the horror of nearly having everything torn away from him, and he knew without a doubt, thanks to the countless apologies he had given everyone, Tadashi felt horribly guilty for the pain he had caused. Fred got that, too.

Only that was all normal, in his view. It would have been strange if he hadn’t been affected by the incident. And in some ways, Tadashi was definitely getting better; the light was back to full brightness in his eyes, he had started teasing and snarking the gang again, and the exhaustion was replaced by a restlessness excited to move around. Introducing Hiro to the wider campus and rebuilding Baymax had been good for him.

In other ways, he...was ‘regressed’ the right word? Fred wasn’t sure. All he knew was that he didn’t remember Tadashi being this irritable before. Forget the current situation with Yama - Fred hadn’t been missing the flat looks, sarcastic retorts, and gritty silence where there used to be crinkled smiles, playful jibes, and laughter. It was like on a scale of Honey Lemon to Gogo, Tadashi had slid from close to Honey Lemon to closer to Gogo.

Except Gogo was perfectly fine and normal, because this was her personality. Tadashi wasn’t like Gogo. He was like Honey, cheerful and able to see the fun in the silliest and stupidest things.

When he didn’t like something, he either rolled his eyes with a tiny smile because it was ultimately harmless, or he dealt with the situation with a level head. Of course he could get angry; he and Hiro lightly beat on each other every so often, there was the story of Hiro’s old bully, and there were certainly times in the present when one did not want to be in his way...but irritability wasn’t part of his general personality. It simply wasn’t.

Fred couldn’t shoo away the nagging in the back of his head that this had only started after Yokai’s mask came off. It hadn’t been too long since the reveal, but Tadashi didn’t stay in bad moods for weeks at a time either. It didn’t help that his mouth was sealed tight on the matter. So far, the gang had agreed to let him be, because Tadashi always came out and talked eventually, but Fred seriously did not like this. It was going on too long.

Or perhaps it wasn’t? He guessed it was possible he was making a mountain out of a molehill. After all, it hadn’t been that long, and Tadashi had been through trauma after trauma in less than two months.

As for the Callaghan being Yokai thing...Fred supposed he had a right to clamp up. Out of the whole gang, Tadashi had been the closest to him. Callaghan had been the head of the robotics department, the head of Tadashi’s major. Honey Lemon was a chemistry major, Wasabi physics, Gogo doubled in mechanical engineering and industrial design, and Fred was into English at SF State; none of them had spent as nearly as much time with the man as Tadashi had. The others might have had him for a class or two outside their major, and he used to be a common sight in the labs, but Tadashi was the only one who spent regular time, up close and personal, with Callaghan. Not to mention he had totally fanboyed him when he thought no one was paying attention. No duh he’d clamp up after finding out his idol was a supervillain.

This could absolutely be a molehill he was making into a mountain. Who was to say Fred wouldn’t be the same if he were in his best pal’s shoes? What if Captain Fancy, or better yet his own hero of a dad, were actually villains? Sealing his mouth shut and being irritable for a long while could be expected, couldn’t it?
Nevertheless, Fred found himself struggling to apologize for his callousness. If Tadashi’s expression was anything to go by, he wasn’t in the mood for anything other than the task at hand. Fred could hear himself being snapped at, regardless of whether the snap forgave him or not.

Which was too unnerving for comfort, no matter how expected it should have been.

‘*Just let him be,*’ he thought, inwardly sullen. ‘*Laugh, goof around, don’t bug him too much. He has to come around, and positivity is the best medicine for emotional junk. I know he doesn’t hate me. He wouldn’t have changed his fake smile into a real one when I mention being a hacker if he did. He needs our support, however quiet he is.*’

His worries didn’t evaporate, though. He doubted they would until Tadashi was back to his full self.

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Hiro hid behind a corner, watching Granville lock her lab office with her card. She had her bag over her arm; he wondered if she was going home instead of the lab. If that were the case, he only had one shot at this, no second tries.

“Target spotted,” he told his ear piece. “I’m going in.”

“*Be careful,*” Tadashi’s voice reminded him.

“*Roger that!*” Fred’s voice exclaimed. “*Man, I love saying that! I’ll do it again. Roger that. No no, wait, British voice, ROGA’ THAHT!*”

Hiro narrowed his eyes. Oh, he couldn’t wait to bring Fred to Good Luck Alley. It was going to be so much fun, if this was anything to judge on.

“*Who is Roger?*” Baymax’s voice pinged in.

“*You know, that’s a good - *”

“*Fred!*” Tadashi hushed. “*I won’t let you push the button if you distract Hiro! Baymax, don’t worry about it.*”

Hiro relaxed. He was about to snap himself. He breathed in deep, and walked around the corner.

“*Excuse me, Professor Granville,*” he called out.

Granville lifted her gaze. If she wondered why he was still here after claiming he was going home to bed, she didn’t note it out loud. “*Yes, Mr. Hamada?*”

Hiro smiled pleasantly. “*Well, I was thinking about what you said, and it’s nice having someone here who believes in me.*” He extended his arms out wide. “*So thank you.*”

Granville stumbled backwards, dodging his attempt to hug her.

“*Yes, well, uh,*” she stammered, stepping to the side.

Hiro bit his lip. Weird; normally people loved to hug his adorable, cute as a button, sweet as an angel self (at least when they assumed that was what he was like - but he was cute, all the café regulars said so!). He wasn’t used to people stumbling away.

He laughed nervously, and made another grab for her.
Granville avoided him.

Again. And again. And again!

“Knock it off, she doesn’t want to hug you!” Tadashi hissed in his ear.

Thankfully, Granville didn’t appear creeped out by his attempts, even as she leaned away from him. If anything, she was a little amused. “Is that all?” she asked lightly.

Hiro froze. “Uh, well - ”

“Turn on the waterworks!” Fred tossed out. “Trust me, it’s the only way you’re gonna get that hug.”

“You sure, Fred?” Tadashi didn’t sounded convinced.

Hiro was already turning around to rub his eyes. It was worth a shot.

“Totally sure! Whenever my mom was busy at upper society social events when I was little, it always got me her attention.”

“Mr. Hamada?” Granville inquired. “Are you all right?”

Hiro turned back around. One of her eyebrows was raised. His eyes watered.

Her voice cracked. “Is there something in your eye?”

“Tears,” Hiro whined. “There’s just so much going on!”

He jumped up, locking his arms around her neck.

Granville bent under his weight and stiffened. She awkwardly patted his jacket.


“Go, Fred.”

“Wait, which button is it? I forgot.”

“Fred!”

“I kid, I kid! Aaaaand there! Got it, little man!”

Hiro exhaled in relief.

“We’re at one hundred percent, Hiro,” Tadashi confirmed.

He detached himself from Granville’s neck. “Thanks! I feel better now.”

She stood up straight. Her eyes rolled to the ceiling. “Thank goodness,” she muttered.

“Go on, do whatever you were doing,” Hiro urged her, “don’t want to keep my professor waiting. She’s intermittently fair and a good hugger!”

Without waiting for a response, he ran back to the corner where he had previously hid. He waited until he was positive she was gone to reenter the hall.
“What a relief,” he murmured to himself.

Hiro peaked around another corner upstairs on the faculty floor. Granville’s normal office was less than twenty feet from where he was standing.

“I hope she doesn’t have cameras in there,” Tadashi worried. “Callaghan never did.”

Hiro glanced in the direction of his ear piece. Callaghan - Granville’s office would have been his at once point, wouldn’t it? He shuddered. That added a sense of sliminess to the room it hadn’t had before.

“She doesn’t,” Hiro informed him. “I was in there earlier. There’s no cameras.”

“Why were you there?” Tadashi’s tone was suspicious.

“She congratulated me on my wonderful work ethic. Where do you think I got the ‘someone here who believes in me’ shtick?”

His tone brightened. “Ah, I got ya.”

Hiro smiled to himself at the pride (and lack of doubt) in his older brother’s voice.

He made his way for the door. He quickly scanned both directions of the hall, then swiped Tadashi’s ID across the card reader. The door unlocked. He pushed his way inside the darkened room. The outline of the paperweight on the desk instantly caught his eyes. Hiro closed the door behind him and walked towards the desk.

He picked up the paperweight curiously. He brought it close to face, closed an eye, rolled it over in his palms. Why would Yama want this? It was only a weirdly shaped hunk of rocky metal. There was no secret button, locked panel, or hidden message Hiro could see. It definitely wasn’t a key or component of some sort. Perhaps it was worth a fortune? That was the only logical explanation he could think of. Yet something in his gut told him money wasn’t the reason.

“What happening!?” Fred exclaimed.

Hiro jolted. The paperweight flew in the air. He rushed the catch it. He pulled as face as the paperweight weighed down his arms - yes, it was heavy all right! He readjusted himself and put a finger to his ear, annoyed.

“Did you get it?” Fred continued.

“Yeah,” Hiro responded, “It’s heavier than it looks. Why would Yama want this?”

“I haven’t the slightest idea,” Tadashi replied. “You good to carry it in your coat pocket on the way to Good Luck Alley?”

“Yeah, I’ve got it.”

“Good. Fred’s going to meet you at the front doors. I think the earpiece will do instead of a mic or camera. I’ve got Fred’s suit to communicate with the others, so keep me updated. Please be safe, little brother.”

Hiro folded his fingers over the metal. “I will,” he promised. ‘When I’m hurt, he’s hurt. I can’t keep doing this. It’s been way too many times. From the microbots to now...I have to prove I can protect him.’
“On the bright side,” Tadashi said as Hiro and Fred strode through the thin, red lighted roads of Good Luck Alley, “the others reported in. They overheard one of Yama’s men mention his office is on the top floor. There’s no open windows, so they’re going to wait on the roof, along with my drone. Honey Lemon will deteriorate the concrete and Wasabi will cut the rest of the way in. Give me a signal you’re in trouble or safely out, and we’ll jump in.”

Hiro nodded. “Thanks for the heads up, big brother. Fred, these are dangerous people. Let me do the talking, okay?”

In his ear, Tadashi groaned, but didn’t say anything.

Fred eyed the lingering inhabitants of the Alley with suspicion. “You bet, Hiro. I’ll keep my eyes peeled and my lips sealed.”

Hiro scanned the area as they approached the garage door that served as the front of Yama’s base. From what he had in his almost one year of bot-fighting, the building had been abandoned ages ago, until Yama’s gang took it over and spruced it up quite nicely. Legally, no one owned the building, so the true entrance had been bordered up. When Yama took it over, he guessed they preferred the use of the garage over taking the boards down.

A goon stood watch. He glowered at Hiro and Fred as the approached him. “What do you want?” he growled.

Hiro scratched the back the his neck, trying his best not to look intimidated. After all, this could be a life or death situation. “We’re, uh - ”

Fred, to his horror, saw his hesitation burst into action. “Frederick Frederickson IV!” he cried, comically returning the man’s glower. “This is Hiro. We’re very busy, dangerous types, and we don’t like to be kept waiting!”

The goon crossed his arms, silent.

Hiro could only watch in a panic as Fred made the most ridiculous faces in an attempt to look like a ‘dangerous type.’

The goon’s brow hardened.

Fred continued to make his ridiculous faces.

Hiro face palmed. He wished Tadashi had let him bring Honey Lemon instead.

To his surprise, though, the goon opened the garage door. He said nothing to them, only watched as he and Fred made their way inside. The door slid shut behind them.

Hiro held his palms up at Fred as they walked down the hall. “What happened to letting me do the talking?”

Fred cracked a half smug smile. “Now you and I both know that was never going to work.”

Hiro scowled.

“Regret not letting Honey Lemon come with me, big brother?” he hissed quietly.

“Actually, no,” was Tadashi’s honest reply.
Hiro’s scowl deepened.

Another goon appeared at the end of the hall. Hiro recognized him as the one who’d shown him the picture of the paperweight on a phone earlier. He sent Fred a hard look, then focused his gaze on Hiro.

“Yama’s on the top floor,” he gruffed. “Follow me.”

The goon lead them to an elevator around the corner.

Hiro reached a finger towards his ear. “This is it. No turning back now.”

“The others are on the roof,” Tadashi reminded. “Get in and out as quick as you can, no trouble. If that’s not possible, say so. We’ll be in in no time. Stay with Fred.”

Hiro nodded. He followed the goon and Fred in the elevator, sticking close to his friend’s side. To his relief, Fred said nothing more that could possibly antagonize the goon.

The elevator rose them to the top floor, where the goon lead them through a series of corridors to a room.

Hiro gulped, remembering Yama’s threats. If things went south, he hoped the others were somehow positioned above this room.

The goon opened the door for them, revealing Yama’s imposing figure sitting at the other end of the room.

“Zero,” Yama greeted, not an ounce of pleasantry in his voice. “You have the item?”

Hiro took a deep breath. “I do.”

He and Fred entered the room. The goon let the door fall shut on its own, striding ahead of them to take his place beside a third goon behind Yama.

Hiro pulled the paperweight out of jacket pocket when they reached the low table in front of him. Neither he nor Fred sat on the pillows on their side of it.

“I have it,” he repeated. “Where’s my robot?”

Yama snapped his fingers.

A portion of the paneled wall retracted itself, revealing Baymax’s skeleton hanging in what appeared to be a metal chamber.

“Give it here,” Yama demanded, holding his palm out.

Reluctantly, Hiro obeyed.

Yama brought the paperweight close to his face, examining it.

Hiro went straight for Baymax’s body, stepping into the chamber beside it.

Fred put his fists on his sides. “That’s Baymax’s skeleton? It’s so naked.” He reached an arm out. “It’s naked Baymax.”

Hiro didn’t respond. He walked around the body, inspecting it for damage. From what he could
tell, nothing was ruined or in need of repair. That was good news. God, he was glad to see it. Now all he had to do was get it SFIT. Baymax would be in his body in no time.

“And you,” Hiro glanced up to see Fred extending a hand to Yama, “must be Yama!”

Yama looked up from the paperweight to stare at the hand.

Chills ran up Hiro’s spine. He stepped out of the chamber.

Yama snapped his fingers once more. The wall snapped shut in front of him.

Hiro gasped, and gasped again when the others walls retracted. Combined together, over a dozen goons stood prepared for Yama’s directions. This was bad; if he counted Tadashi’s drone, Yama had three times the back up he and Fred did. If he didn’t, Yama had four times.

“Hiro, what's going on?” Tadashi asked.

Hiro forced himself to remain quiet, to think.

This wasn’t fair. He and Yama had a deal! Tadashi had been right, they couldn’t trust Yama to keep his end of the bargain. Now if the team came barreling in, they would get crushed. He couldn’t let that happen.

“Hiro! Are you okay!?”

His brain whirled in his skull, frantic to question Yama and keep Tadashi in the dark. “Are - Are they here for the paperweight? Let me guess, you’re gonna sell it, aren’t you? It’s worth a fortune, isn’t it!”

“What I do with it is none of your concern.” Yama smiled cruelly. “You don’t really think I’m going to give you your robot, do you?”

Fred’s neck shot from side to side, goon to goon. “That was my understanding! Did nobody else think that!?”

“Lock ‘em up!”

The goons launched themselves at the two. Hiro bit his tongue to avoid yelling out, allowing himself to be manhandled. Fred yiped.

‘Don’t provoke them. Don’t get in trouble. Don’t let Tadashi tell the others to come busting in. We’re too outnumbered!’ he thought.

Just as Hiro was prepared to let him be dragged away, however, Fred twisted his torso and craned his neck so his mouth would be directly in front of the ear piece and yelled, “BOY, do I wish someone would SAVE US!”

Hiro was too horrified to chide him.

The goon got them as far as the three quarters across the room when Wasabi’s plasma blades struck through the ceiling. They cut a rough circle and just like that, the ceiling caved in, Wasabi, Honey Lemon, and Gogo standing in defense on the cement. Tadashi’s drone zipped in after them.

“No, no, no, nono!” Hiro screeched. “There’s too many!”

Gogo glanced from goon to goon. She jerked to one side, using the momentum to dash to the other
end of the room. Using the distance to her advantage, she hurled one of her disks at the goons by the cement. It struck two in the chest, knocking them flat on their backs. The disk boomeranged back to her hand magnet.

Closer by, three more goons lunged at her in response. Gogo clenched her fist, decking one in the face with her disk, another in the ribs. They quickly keeled over in pain. The third repositioned himself, making a grab for for her from behind. Gogo attempted to dash out of the way, but the keeling goons’ forms blocked her path.

“Gogo!” Tadashi shouted.

His drone zipped closer, one of the guns spinning to aim at the third goon. A blast of yellow green shot out, striking the goon’s entire body. Gogo managed to jerk inbetween the keeled goons before the third could fall on top of her. He collapsed on the floor with his pals.

Meanwhile, a goon launched himself at Wasabi. Wasabi grabbed him by the sides and flung him over his head.

Gogo slid to his side. A fourth goon lunged for her, only to be engulfed in gooey mess of one of Honey Lemon’s chem balls.

Honey Lemon ran around Wasabi and past Gogo, throwing another chem ball at the feet of two more goons that advanced on them. Their feet, up to their ankles, were stuck. They hissed, pulling at their legs to get out of the gunk.

“Yeah!” Wasabi cheered.

Gogo turned her head. She saw the two unstunned goons she’d decked pick themselves up, and make a running jump for Wasabi. She threw one of her disks, but they dodged it this time.

“Wasabi, move!”

Wasabi started, not moving in time. He yelped as they leaped on his back, struggling to balance the extra weight and avoid sinking to the floor.

Gogo skated behind him, fingers digging into the coat of one of the goons, howling as she forced him off and tossed him to the side. He landed on the floor with a grunt, and squealed with Tadashi blasted him. He lay prone not far from his previously blasted friend laid, still frozen.

The goons holding Fred and Hiro released their grasps on them, darting to help their pals.

Gogo yanked the other goon from Wasabi’s back, tossing him head first into the two. They tumbled together into a tangled heap.

Tadashi’s drone poised to stun all of them, when Honey Lemon cried out. His drone dove in her direction instead.

A goon had her by the hair, body contorted half backwards, leaning on her right.

She grit her teeth, eyes steel, and quickly punched a combination into her purse. The purple ball that came out was slammed into the goon’s face. He screamed as sticky foam covered his eyes, hands flying from her hair to the foam. Honey Lemon righted herself, and threw another chem ball at his legs.

Another goon creeped up behind her, though, arms shooting for her purse. Honey Lemon noticed too late, and gasped.
Tadashi fired. The goon collapsed on top of her.

“Sorry, Honey!” Tadashi apologized.

Wasabi leaped to shove the guy off of her. He quickly pulled her to her feet.

“Thanks!” she said to Wasabi. “Don’t worry about it, Tadashi!”

Hiro cringed to hear her use his brother’s name aloud. He hoped no one noticed.

Three goons were stunned on the floor, he counted. Three or four were stuck in chem ball messes. The rest remained standing, getting back up every time they were knocked down. Hope threatened to surge in Hiro’s chest, though; that was more than half, and the team was still going strong.

“This is INCREDIBLY AWESOME AND AMAZING!” Fred shouted at the top of his lungs, pumping his fist in the air.

Two goons picked up a turned over stool, breaking it in half with smug smirks. Broken wooden legs in hand, they rounded on Wasabi.

Honey Lemon began punching a combination in her purse. Another goon threw a fist at her from the side, however, prompting her to duck before she could finish her combination.

Tadashi poised both of his blasters to shoot.

From behind, however, a baseball bat came swinging into the drone side. It wasn’t enough to damage the body, but it did sent it hurtling through the air.

Wasabi, meanwhile, grimaced in fear. He looked at his gauntlets, closed his eyes, and released his plasma blades. They zinged to life. Eyes still closed, he slashed wildly at the wood.

He opened them. The goon reeled back, dropping the useless, small chunks in their hands.

Wasabi smiled widely. “Adrenaline’s back!” he exclaimed, retracting a blade to smash a fist into one of the goons, then the other. They went flying.

A goon caught up to his ankles in goo caught Tadashi’s drone mid-air. He smirked, and plunged the drone blasters first into the goo.

“FUCK!” Hiro was unnerved to hear Tadashi swear in his ear piece. “I’m down!”

“Got it covered!” Wasabi happily replied, round housing a goon in front of him.

Gogo threw both her disks out, knocking more goons in the heads, including the one with the bat that knocked out Tadashi’s drone. They were slower to get up than the first couple times. “We’re wearing them out!”

Three goons surrounded Honey Lemon. She took a chem ball in each hand. A goon jumped at her, receiving a blob of goo in his face. The second quickly followed, foam slathering in his. The third dived before her hand could leave the second’s face, snatching her purse in one large hand and her upper arm in the other.

“The periodic table,” he noted with relish. “I remember that. Let me give it a try.”

“Honey Lemon!” Gogo yelled.
She threw her disks.

The goons she had knocked out, however, slid out of nowhere in front of Honey Lemon and their pal. One managed to catch her one of her disks while the other was knocked down again.

The goon holding Honey Lemon’s purse produced two orange chem balls. He tossed one at the broken stool pieces on the floor - they disintegrated into the carpeting instantly.

“I loved chemistry in high school,” he grinned, showing off rotting teeth. “Where should I aim the next one? How about your face?” he leered down at Honey Lemon.

She inhaled sharply.

“Stand down!” Tadashi ordered, panicked. “No one move! Not until you can get the chem ball out of his hand and the purse.”

“Not awesome, not awesome!” Fred hopped from foot to foot, worried.

Gogo’s free disk boomeranged back into her hand. She looked down at it, then at Wasabi.

Wasabi returned her look.

They seemed to have a silent conversation. He nodded, and she held her disk up.

“You throw that thing at me and I throw mine at her,” the goon warned.

Honey Lemon’s face hardened. “I am not a damsel!”

Hiro caught himself laughing as she - who was only being held back by one of her arms - swung her free hand’s nails across the goon’s face, from temple to jaw, leaving bright red streak marks in their place.

“You little - !” The goon’s grip on her loosened.

Honey Lemon took advantage of that, breaking free. Gogo’s disk came flying for his nse, knocking him on his butt. Honey Lemon quickly produced another chem ball and aimed it for the one in his hand. Hiro could faintly see the orange ball disintegrating within the pink goo.

“It’s neutralized!” she cried, then aimed another for his chest to keep him on the ground.

“Don’t forget about me!” the goon holding Gogo’s other disk shouted.

Hiro watched him fling it at Wasabi. ‘Idiot,’ he thought.

Gogo intervened, using her magnet to lure the disk back to her. She skated forward, decking the goon in the face and stomach.

Wasabi activated his plasma blades again, turning to Yama. “Now we finish this.”

Yama chuckled. “That’s what you think.”

“Huh?” Hiro’s spine went ramrod straight - someone snatched his hood, yanking him back. He cried out as he was lifted backwards and hurled over a large, muscled shoulder.

Fred soon joined him on the other shoulder.
“No, no, no, no!” Hiro’s mouth fell open as - five? Ten? Fifteen!? - flooded the room through the
door behind them.

They circled around the group, shielding Yama and the goon carrying Hiro and Fred.

“Can you make it through a round two?” Yama laughed. “How about a round three? Maybe if you
had come a little later in the night, you would have caught me when most of my men were out;
instead, here we are. Not exactly the same numbers you faced against the rogue professor, is it?
Finish them.”

Hiro couldn’t see anything from his position. He could only listen to the grunts and howls of the
team, the blasts of chem balls, the direct hits of Gogo’s disks and soft hum of Wasabi’s plasma
blades.

“No, no, no, no!” He heard Tadashi moan. “This isn’t happening. This isn’t happening!”

Hiro tried to kick and punch at the goon’s torso. He barely moved.

“Fred!” he begged for help.

Fred’s eye drifted to the back of the goon’s neck. “Squirm,” he hissed under his breath.

Hiro did, kicking his legs, clawing at the goon’s back, and wiggling his hips.

Fred darted a hand for the back of the goon’s back.

Before he could reach it, though, the goon plucked them both off his shoulders by their scruff,
swung them in front of them, and bashed their foreheads together.

Hiro’s eyes rolled up to his browline. He felt himself being dropped to the floor, Fred beside him.
He watched, dizzy and groaning, as the circle of goons became tighter and tighter on the team.

“Hiro!?” Tadashi exclaimed. “Are you okay!? HIRO! Answer me!”

Hiro closed his eyes, trying to make sense of his head through the pain and dizziness. He must
have blacked out briefly, because when he opened his eyes, he was being carried through one of
the halls on the goon’s shoulder again, Fred beside him.

He groaned in pain and frustration. ‘The others…’

The goon brought them to a large, metal door, beside which was a high tech lock panel. The goon
hit the pad, opening the door, and tossed Hiro and Fred inside. The door slid shut.

“Hey,” Hiro protested weakly.

Fred hoisted himself up by the arms, then helped Hiro to his feet. “My head feels like a wrecking
ball hit it. Are thick skulls part of the Hamada genes? ‘Cause I think once Tadashi and I ran into
each other while we were drinking, and my head felt like it was gonna explode then.”

Hiro put a palm on his forehead, shaking his head lightly. “I don’t know. Where are we?”

He scanned the room. The walls, ceiling, and floor were pure steel. There were no windows or air
ducts. Aside from a string of lights above them, there was literally nothing within this room.

“Great,” he muttered.
Fred scratched his head. "You think the others are okay? I didn’t realize Yama had that many minions in one place."

Hiro sighed. "He is a crime boss. And he did say if we had come later, most of them would have been sent out." He shook his head wildly. "Alright! That doesn’t matter now. We have to get out of here."

Fred nodded vigorously. "Looks like we need to break out of a super secure, high tech, safe room! Awesome! How do we do that?"

Hiro turned to the door. The lock panel was on this side, too. He smiled deviously. "I’ve got it."

Fred didn’t seem to hear him, or acknowledge Hiro as he went to pull open the panel and mess with the wires. "Oh, I’ve got it! We can so what Dirk Dindley did when he was trapped in the dungeon of Dr. Solviq. Get this! He fastened a key out of a stale cracker and a single strand of his own hair!"

The door slid open. Hiro peered out to check for guards. There were none.

"Or," Fred caught sight of the open door, "We - Yeah, that’ll work, too, just, you know, unlock - "

"Come on," Hiro told him. "We have to help the others!"

"Ask Tadashi how they’re doing," Fred suggested.

Hiro blinked; he’d momentarily forgotten about his ear piece. "Tadashi? Are you still there? TADASHI!!"

A beat passed.

"Oh my god!" Tadashi breathed a sigh of relief. "Sorry, I’m trying to put together a smaller drone as fast as I can. I couldn’t see you behind all the thugs and you weren’t answering. Look, the others are holding their ground. I don’t think Yama has enough men in the building for a round four. But they’re the ones getting worn out now and Yama’s shouting at his men to kill them! GET OUT OF THERE! The others will follow you as soon as they can!"

Ice ran down Hiro’s spine. This was not what he’d planned. This was not what he’d wanted. ‘I’m getting Yama arrested as soon as I can,’ he thought to himself.

“What’s he saying?” Fred asked.

Hiro bunched his shoulders together. He couldn’t leave the others defenseless when Yama was ordering kills, especially when the team was so outnumbered. He’d never forgive himself if anything happened to them. Never.

But what could he do? He and Fred had no weapons, no suits, not even a layout of the building to set a trap. They couldn’t leave, though; they had to help.

“We have to do something,” he told Fred. "Yama’s ordering his goons to kill. The team’s not going to hold out forever. We have to do something, Fred."

“You two have to get out!” Tadashi corrected.

Hiro chewed on his lip. He knew what his brother was thinking; the odds weren’t good, they were defenseless, the team was at a better advantage to fight their way out than he and Fred were. It was safer to just run; but Hiro’s brain began sparking ideas.
He shot back to the panel.

Fred put a hand on his chin. “Alrightie, not good if Yama’s on the permanent ‘get rid of them’
track. Let’s see, when Aria Spellboundia’s best friend and sister were in mortal danger from
Sergeant Militario missile launcher, what did she do? Besides the alien powers? NO! Better yet,
when she faced Mistress Darkray, who stole her alien powers away, making her powerless as her
human companions! And her love interest, Byron Danger, was almost vivisected by Mistress
Darkray! He would have died! Okay, so Spellboundia, now just Aria, hacked her way out of her
prison cell because Mistress Darkray was using Sergeant Militario’s old, abandoned base -”

“That sounds neat and all,” Hiro interrupted, holding an organized mess of exposed wires and
metal casing in his hand. “Look, this is the equivalent of a stun gun right now. If I jam it in a
goon’s side, it should shock them and keep them down long enough for us to get out. I - I know it’s
not much, and there aren’t enough parts in here to build two, but the more we can help the team,
the better!”

“Better than nothing!” Fred agreed. He pumped his fists. “And I got my trusty fists! I’ll be like my
hero, Phalanges!”

Hiro didn’t ask what that meant. “Come on!”

“Hiro, please!” Tadashi begged. “You and Fred can’t!”

Hiro squeezed his eyes shut. “We’ll be all right. I’m not deserting the team again. We’ll all be back
at the lab soon, big brother!”

Hiro ignored Tadashi’s protests. He and Fred ran from the room, through the halls.

“Okay, we go around this corner here!” Fred directed. “Then a right up ahead, followed by a left.
Yama’s office isn’t far away!”

Hiro nodded. “Good!”

Just like that, two goons jumped out from around the corner. One’s face was swollen and the other
had the blue, sticky remains of foam on his face.

“Hey, you two aren’t supposed to be out here!”

“Grab them!”

Hiro was agile. He ducked beneath their reach, and shoved the exposed wires into the first goon’s
hip. He screamed and fell to the floor. Hiro jabbed the other’s closest thigh next. He did the same
as his comrade. Hiro stepped over the bodies, eyeing their chests - okay, wonderful, they were still
breathing. He hadn’t overcharged the device. Good.

Fred pouted. “Aw, I didn’t get to use my fists!”

“Next time, Fred!”

They ran and ran, turned the second corner, and spotted Yama’s office. Five or six goons piled
outside the door, three unconscious, the rest partially frozen to the floor.

“TAKE THIS!” Hiro heard Wasabi yell.

One, two, three more goons came hurtling out the door, crashing into the wall.
Hiro barely thunk when he one twitch and move to stand. He leaped forward, slamming his device into the goon’s side. The goon howled and collapsed on his pals.

“Hiro!?” came Honey Lemon’s shocked voice. “Wasabi, wait!”

Before Hiro could move, another goon’s body slammed on top of him. The device flew out his hand.

“Hiro!” Wasabi yelled.

Underneath the goon’s weight, Hiro heard Yama roar. “TAKE CARE OF THEM ALL! THE BRAT, HIS FRIEND, THE WANNABE HEROES! END THEM! END THEM!”

Hiro flinched. Then he saw Fred leap over them, snatch up the device, and bolt for the door.

Hiro listened to scream after scream, heard the chink of ice crackling, bodies slamming, and disks striking. He tried to squirm free, but the goon on top of him was too big and heavy.

‘I’m sorry. This isn’t what I meant to happen,’ he apologized in his head.

Finally, all the noise halted. No more throws, no more screams. Hiro didn’t realize his eyes had been closed until he opened them.

Gogo shoved the goon on top of him off and helped him up.

Hiro could see the sweat on her face under her visor and how heavy she was breathing.

“You guys okay?” he asked quietly.

“We’re okay,” Gogo confirmed. “How are you guys? They didn’t hurt you two while you were gone?”

“They locked us up is all,” Fred told her. He handed Hiro his device back. “I was gonna use my fists, but a dude came barreling for the door and I panicked. Sorry.”

Hiro’s throat felt raw. He couldn’t tell him he didn’t care.

Gogo lead him inside Yama’s office.

Goons out cold, encased in ice, trapped in goo and foam covered the place. Hiro couldn’t avoid stepping on limbs and coat tails here or there. He didn’t want to begin counting the enemies in here.

In the back of the room, Yama stood encased completely in ice. His face was enraged, captured mid-howl, arms raised like he was about to rain every ounce of fury in his body down upon them. Hiro winced.

Honey Lemon picked up the paperweight. “I’m so glad this is over.”

“All this for a dumb hunk of metal,” Wasabi sighed. “My adrenaline’s wearing off. Tadashi, you hear us? Your new drone isn’t needed.”

“...Get out of there,” Tadashi said. “Please. Just get out of there.”

Hiro had never felt so powerless in his life. Tears threatened to prick his eyes, but he held them back. He wandered over to where the original drone lay trapped in Honey Lemon’s concoction.
The goons that had been trapped up to their ankles were gone, presumably free and either trapped again or unconscious. Hiro used all his strength to yank it out.

Above them, helicopter noise sounded. A rope ladder fell through the hole in the ceiling.

Fred ran up to the ladder, lifting his head up. “Hey, Heathcliff! My man!”

“Did you call Heathcliff, Tadashi?” Wasabi asked.

Tadashi didn’t respond right away. “...What? Oh, yeah. If we needed a quick get away through the ceiling instead of the front door. I thought of it while you were fighting the second batch. Sorry.”

“No need to apologize, this works,” Gogo shifted her weight, and headed for the door where Baymax was.

Fred latched onto the rope, excited. “It’s like a spy movie!”

Honey Lemon came over to Hiro’s side, planting her hand on his shoulder. “You okay, Hiro? You look down.”

Hiro shrugged her off. “I’m fine. I’m sorry I got you all into this. I - I should have - I’m sorry.”

She lightly touched his face. “It’s not your fault. You didn’t know. And see, nothing that bad happened! We’re okay, you’re okay, everybody’s okay. We have the paperweight, and Wasabi and Gogo are getting the endoskeleton. We can put this behind us now.” She hugged him tight. “We were never going to let anything happen to you or us. I promise you that.”

Hiro let her gently pull him to the helicopter ladder.

He had so much apologizing to do.

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Tadashi was pacing around on his crutches in the mess that was his still lab when the others finally returned. Tonight was nuts. He was so happy it was over. (Assuming Yama didn’t seek revenge, but he didn’t let himself think of that. The man was ice right now.)

When his lab door opened and the gang entered, Tadashi threw himself at them - he let go of his crutches, pulled Hiro against his chest, and wrapped his arms around Fred, Gogo, Wasabi, and Honey Lemon in a big group hug.

“Thank god!” he breathed. “That was terrifying!”

Gogo awkwardly patted his shoulder. “We’re fine, Tadashi. It was nothing we couldn’t handle.”

“And totally awesome!” Fred added. “I bet each and every one of them will be scared to death of us after tonight’s battle! And it was only four members of the team. Now that I’m processing everything, it was totally exhilarating!”

Tadashi didn’t have the energy to scold Fred. “The only thing I care about is the fact you guys are safe. He was going to kill you!”

Honey Lemon used one arm to return his hug. “He didn’t. We protected each other. I just hate they were able to nab Hiro and Fred when the first batch of reinforcements arrived. I can’t believe that happened!”

Hiro squirmed free. “This is my fault. It is. I’m so sorry, guys.”
Tadashi gently released the gang. Fred bent to pick up his crutches so he could stand on them.

Wasabi frowned. “We agreed as a team to go down there the way we did. How could it possibly be your fault?”

Tadashi saw the way his eyes averted and his lower lip quivered. His chest already stung.

“I should have run the diagnostics,” Hiro explained. “I should have let the police handle Yama like you said. I shouldn’t have tried to work it out with him. I’m sorry I put you guys in danger. I’m sorry I’m scared you, Tadashi. I’m sorry for everything. It wasn’t worth it.”

Gogo put a reassuring hand on his head. “Woman up,” she told him lightly. “Yeah, there was a lot of guys, but we made it through. This is hardly the end of the world.”

“Yeah, Hiro,” Fred said. “Don’t think of it as getting us in trouble. Think of it as a win! Yama’s never going to mess with you or Tadashi after this!”

“And if he does, we’ll be right here to stop him over and over,” Honey Lemon promised.

“The last thing you should do is beat yourself up for circumstances out of your control,” Wasabi told him. “You had no idea where this all would lead.”

“They’re right, Hiro,” Tadashi continued. “This isn’t your fault. The endoskeleton running away was a huge accident. The rest is on Yama for attacking you. You’re not to blame. Please, Hiro, don’t add this to the list.”

Baymax activated on the screen. “Without my body, I cannot scan Hiro’s emotional state; however, based on previous scan data and circumstantial data collected recently, I suspect his feelings are associated with the trauma of nearly losing his and loved ones’ lives. Recommended treatment is relaxation, assurances from loved ones, and avoidance of triggering stimuli.”

Tadashi flinched. “Thanks, Baymax. We’ll get you in your body as soon as possible. That’ll help Hiro as well.”

Hiro curled his lips in dismay. “Why can’t you just be mad at me? I got everybody into this. If something had gone wrong, it would have been because of -”

Tadashi put a firm hand on his shoulder. “NO. It wouldn’t been because of you. God, what can I say to make you believe that? Please tell me so I can say it.”

Unfortunately, Hiro only shook his head and stepped away. “I’m sorry. I won’t do it again.”

Tadashi raised his gaze to the gang, crushed. He hated so much that he couldn’t fix this.

The gang exchanged glances.

“Work on Baymax tomorrow,” Gogo eventually said. “We should go home, get some rest. That includes you geniuses.”

“You’ll feel better in the morning,” Wasabi added. “I’ll drive you home.”

“Call us if you need anything,” Honey Lemon stressed. “We’re here.”

“I’m gonna be up all night thanks to the exhilaration,” Fred said. “If you need a midnight snack at Yaki Taco or Aya’s Pizzeria, feel free to hit me up! It’ll be on me!”
“Thank you. You guys go ahead,” Tadashi insisted. “We’ll catch up in a minute.”

They nodded. Gogo and Wasabi left the endoskeleton on the floor by the door, and the gang made their retreat.

“All right,” Tadashi started, “why do you want me to be mad at you? Believe it or not, I wouldn’t even put this in the top ten worst things you’ve done.”

Hiro didn’t answer him. He turned to Baymax on the monitor. “I’m sorry I almost lost another one of your bodies, Baymax. You and Tadashi were right all along.”

Baymax blinked. “Apology accepted, Hiro. The others are correct. You need sleep. Sleep is beneficial to one’s mental -”

“I gotcha, buddy. You don’t have to say it. I’m fine.”

Tadashi closed his eyes. Tonight had been a living nightmare in so many ways. He didn’t want Hiro to feel like this, though, much less if he was going to put all the responsibility for it on himself. He was at his wit’s end with this. How on earth could he make it better? This was his job, he had to.

Tomorrow, he decided. They’d deal with this tomorrow. The others were right, they needed sleep. Goodness knew how emotionally exhausting this night had been. Sleep would be a respite.

“Let’s go home,” he told Hiro. “We’ll talk about this tomorrow.”

They did not talk about it the next day, to Tadashi’s frustration. Or the next, or the next. Every time he tried to broach Friday night, Hiro either made an excuse to run off or diligently fought to change the subject. Tadashi was about ready to rip his own hair out.

He wished he could ask Aunt Cass for advice. She might know what to do. Except he couldn’t, because she didn’t know about their superhero-ing, and the last thing they needed was her tearing their ears off and putting them under lockdown for the rest of their lives (never mind that Tadashi was an adult who could decide his own future at this point, nosiree). He could frame it as just being about the fire, but that...that could lead to a conversation where he had to talk her about himself, and he didn’t want that either. Nevertheless, it hard not to ask her about Hiro.

By the final day of the diagnostic tests, when the scan was at eighty-seven percent, Tadashi decided to give up for now. Hiro would talk when only when he wanted to; that much was clear. Perhaps after Baymax was back up and running, and things got back to normal again, Hiro would be ready to talk. He couldn’t keep it all inside forever. Besides, Tadashi wouldn’t let him.

“So,” Tadashi sighed in his lab chair, “this should only be a few more minutes. You excited?”

Hiro, who was pacing and tapping his fingers on his thighs, glanced up. “Yeah, I am. At this rate, nothing could glitch out to make it go wrong, could it?”

He flipping his palms up. “There’s always a chance, I mean. Doesn’t mean it will, though. We went through the code and fixed the major bugs.”

“So it’s only the minor bugs we have to worry about since we would have missed them,” Hiro ran his fingers through his hair. “We’ll patch them up ASAP if something goes wrong. And do another two weeks of diagnostics.”
“It’s more like a week and a half.”

“Same thing.”

Tadashi rolled his eyes. “Please stop pacing. You’re making me dizzy.”

Hiro halted. “Sorry.”

“Don’t apologize, I know you’re anxious.” He held out Baymax’s healthcare chip. “Here. You can be the one to put in, all right?”

Hiro stared at it, befuddled. “You don’t want to do it? He’s your project.”

Tadashi grinned. “You’re not going to wreck my grade by putting his chip back in, bonehead. You can have the honor.”

He reached for the back of his neck. “You sure, big brother? It’s not your grade, it’s...he’s yours.”

Tadashi knew what he meant. “Hiro, he means as much to you as he does to me. I want you to put it, okay? After all that you’ve been through, you deserve it. Backtalk me and I’ll go mother hen on you.”

To his delight, Hiro laugh. It was a sparse laugh, yet a laugh nonetheless. He accepted the chip. “Thanks.”

“No problem.”

“You should be the first one he scans,” Hiro said. “You’re his primary patient, after all.”

Tadashi shook his head dramatically. “When did I get a such a caring, thoughtful, baby brother? Is it too late to return him and get the other one back? I miss my selfish snarker that gives me one too many headaches. No, bonehead, have your reunion first. I’m not about to fall over and break my coccyx.”

Hiro smiled.

It was better than having him run away.

Tadashi focused his attention on the screen.

Ninety-seven, ninety-eight, ninety-nine, one hundred percent.

“We’re good to go, little brother!”

Hiro pumped his fists in the air. “YES!”

He ran over to Baymax’s body, opening the access port. He place the chip inside and looked back at Tadashi. His face was a mix of panic and excitement.

“Here goes nothing,” he said.

Tadashi nodded.

Hiro turned fully to Baymax. He splayed his arms out. “Ow.”

Hiro threw himself around Baymax’s vinyl belly. Baymax bent over to return the hug.

Tadashi folded his hands in his lap, a pleased smile stretching across his face. Now *this* was a sight for sore eyes.

“I missed you, buddy,” Hiro sounded on the edge of tears. “I’m so happy you’re here.”

Baymax patted his head. “There, there. It is all right.”

Hiro gently pulled away, and grabbed Baymax by the hand. “Tadashi next!”

With a chuckle, Tadashi took his crutches and stood up.

“I detect,” Baymax said, “no further signs of injury, inflammation, or breakages. On a scale of one to ten, how would you rate your pain?”

“Zero, pal,” Tadashi put a hand on Baymax’s upper arm. “Man, is it good to see you in the flesh.”

“I have no flesh; I am made of vinyl.”

“Oh? Could have fooled me,” he joked.

Baymax blinked. “You are my creator. How do you - ? Oh, this is a...joke.”

“Yup.” Tadashi did a double take as Baymax hugged him. He chuckled again and hugged him back. Melted into the hug might have been a better way to put it. This was nice; so glad he had gone with the huggable approach in his design. He truly had missed this. “You missed me, too, huh? That’s good to hear.”

Hiro bounced on his feet. “We have to show the gang and Aunt Cass! They’re gonna flip! Especially Aunt Cass!”

Baymax lifted himself off Tadashi.

Tadashi ruffled Hiro’s hair. “The gang’s in the lab. Go get them. We’ll head home to show Aunt Cass afterwards, how’s that?”

Hiro bounced for the door. “Yes, yes, yes! GUYS! GUYS, COME QUICK!”

“Oh man,” Tadashi laughed. “This is great for him. He needed this.”

Baymax peered down at him silently.

Tadashi felt his face fall. “...What?”

“While your post-fire physical symptoms are to a minimum,” he explained, “I detect high signs of: fatigue, stress, anger, and guilt. They outweigh your signs of: relief and happiness. You and Hiro are both experiencing them, but you levels are greater.”

Someone might as well have dumped a bucket of cold water over Tadashi’s head. He sighed and wiped the side of his face. “I’m aware, Baymax. Thanks. I’ll take care of it. Please don’t mention it to the others. It’ll bring Hiro’s mood down.”

“I advise: rest, comfort, and talking to loved ones about what is upsetting you.”

“Thank you, Baymax,” Tadashi was curt.
He stared down at him. “You are experiencing: irritability.”

Tadashi smiled tightly. “Baymax, please. Thank you for your concern. You know what will help? Celebrating your new body. It’ll help me and it’ll help Hiro. I swear I will talk to him soon, okay?”

Baymax didn’t get to answer. Hiro busted in with the others.

“See!” he tossed an arm out in Baymax’s direction. “We did it!”

Baymax said nothing of Hiro and Tadashi’s emotional states as the others hugged him. Tadashi was glad for that.

He would talk to Hiro, he told himself. He just needed him to stop running away first. If there was ever a day his brother wasn’t his top priority, that day hadn’t come yet.

As for himself, well...he didn’t need the help. He really didn’t. There was nothing anyone could do for him anyway. Time would simply have to heal the wound itself, and then he’d have to live with it as much as he will his scars. He’d be fine.

Yama was livid. Those wannabes had thrashed his men and destroyed his office. The long, blonde haired one had frozen him solid for an entire night. She was lucky the cold hadn’t killed him. Not only that, Zero and his friend got away with the object and robot.

No matter, he reminded himself to cool his head. Zero was right; the only worth that rock could possibly have was in monetary value. Some dead sculptor popular with the rich probably made it or something. Why Obake would be interested in that, he didn’t have the slightest clue, but he had something better.

His men had analyzed and examined the robot down to its circuitry before Zero arrived. As he sat there, dozens of replicas were already completed and dozens more were on their way.

Obake wasn’t the type of man to collect ugly rocks. He was the type to take interest in maniacal robots, however.

Now it was only a matter of presenting them to him.

And hopefully get his debt written off.

Chapter End Notes

- Ever notice like 8-12 dudes show up in Yama's office when it's just Hiro and Fred, but less than half that when the team shows up later? I had to take advantage of that when I realized it!

- According Fred's secret files on the official Tumblr (which are written by Fred), he's high in emotional intelligence. I'm taking advantage of that. He'll be extremely goofy and not too smart, but he's not an idiot.

- I have smaller emotional arcs built for the team as well that I touched a little on here. Honey Lemon's going to get determinedly protective and Fred's gonna get concerned for emotional well beings. Gogo and Wasabi's will get revealed as the story goes on.
They'll all get fleshed out.

- Honey Lemon fixes the window the same way as in the show, just off screen. I couldn't find a way to work it in the new context with it standing out and breaking the moment. They also return the paperweight to Granville's desk before they leave, same as before.

- Because of the amount of men the team had to face, Tadashi's drone getting struck down (so one man down, three to go), and Hiro getting separated from the team during the fight, he's more high strung than he was in the cartoon. Yama wanted to kill Hiro and Fred after they broke out of the security room, but never said anything of the sort about the team. High string Hiro hearing him ordering their deaths? Yeah, not the best for his mental health.

- Fun fact: I found something interesting while looking at Fred's files...something called a dean of athletics at SFIT. So, uh, I think Granville is only supposed to be the robotics department dean in the show? Oops. Ah, well, most interpreted her as the dean of the whole school and I already established her job in this fic. Not a big deal!

I promise the next chapter won't take over a month to get up. I don't think it'll be as hard as this one was. Again, I apologize if this chapter...didn't meet expectations. I don't know why I had so much trouble here.
This took forever, didn't it? I'm sorry. I didn't expect this chapter to bug me worse than chapter 3 did, and yet it did. Sorry. But I think the break benefited me more than it hurt.

I went back through the last three chapters to fix some errors I made. I'm sure I still missed a lot, so if you guys point them out, I'll go back and fix them. Same for this chapter. I also changed thermal dynamics to thermodynamics because even though I hear "thermal dynamics" when I watch the show, I looked it up and realized the subject is probably actually "thermodynamics."

I'm referencing Hiro's schedule for the journal a lot here. They're not going to play a massive role in the story, but while I was going over my plans and thinking about other WIPs I have, I decided I wanted to incorporate Hiro's other classes and professors more. It sounded fun, so why not? (Besides, I now have plans for them in later episodes; nothing massive or overarching, but plans! As I said before, I am writing this for fun, and for some reason, I find writing the other professors fun). I'll copy the journal schedule below for reference. We'll start meeting them for real next chapter. Also, to be clear: all the journal says about the professors are their surnames. Their genders, appearances, and personalities are completely made up by me.

Hiro's Schedule:

MWF: Humanoid Construction, 9-10:30AM, Froeb; Laser Photontics, 11-1PM, Yoshida; Aerial Robotics, 2:30-4PM, Roe.
TTH: Calculus for Engineers, 10:30-12PM*, Sullivan; World History I, 2-3:30PM, Squires; 4-6:30PM, Open Lab, Sato.
*There's an error in the journal that lists CfE as 10:30-10:00PM, so I changed it to noon.

As I said in chapter one, Granville's class isn't on there because the journal was made for the movie, not the cartoon, so I'm I placing it on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 8:30AM to 10:00AM.

Anyway, I hope you enjoy this chapter and that it makes up for the wait!
Cass preferred it that way, though. The café had been her dream since she was a little girl, and nowhere in those dreams had she pictured herself sitting in an office all day while employees did the real work. Besides, not only did she like the constant hustle and bustle that kept her moving on her feet, it sort of felt like a challenge, trying to keep up with it all. And there were few things Cass adored more than challenges.

Nevertheless, she had been struggling to pick up a basin towering with dirty dishes when something suddenly lifted it up for her. That ‘something’ had turned out to be Baymax, accompanied by a cheerful Hiro and grinning Tadashi. As soon as she got over her initial shock, she hugged Baymax, who affectionately returned the gesture, and she pulled both her boys into the hug by the sleeves. Then she promised them an impromptu, celebratory movie night after the café closed for the night.

Because Baymax being back was well worth a celebratory movie night. The boys were scant on the details (Hiro was probably embarrassed by whatever happened), but apparently, the robot had gotten into an accident while out with Hiro the day that monstrous professor attacked Krei Tech, and Cass had seen first hand how horrible and guilty he had felt about it. While Tadashi had been crushed over Callaghan, Hiro had been devastated over Baymax. Her heart ached remembering the pain she saw her boys live with.

Yet now here they were, everyone all smiles and cheery again. It warmed her heart back up. She had known they were rebuilding Baymax together in the garage, but she hadn’t realized how far into the process they were. She hadn’t expected to see Baymax again so soon. Cass guessed this was what happened when two great minds worked together, as opposed to one (and the fact Tadashi already had three years worth of kinks worked out beforehand). Hiro had been buzzing with excitement since she let him out of the group hug, proclaiming that he was never going to let what happened last time happen again. Tadashi was no less enthusiastic.

She loved seeing her boys so upbeat and happy. They deserved it.

“Popcorn’s done!” she announced, tossing the bag in the trash and carrying the bowl into the living room.

“...basically miniature helicopters!” Hiro finished explaining, his arms flung high above his head, and looked at Cass. “Oh, hey! Aunt Cass, did you hear what we said we’re doing in aerial robotics? Professor Roe is - well, we’re making what are essentially miniature helicopters that can transport small but seriously heavy materials and we’re gonna race them across the quad at school! Whoever gets theirs across the quad to the ‘delivery area’ the fastest without dropping their materials is gonna get a bonus point they can use on any upcoming quiz or test they want. Not the best prize in the world, but I didn’t know I’d get to compete in class like this! And it’s only our first hands on project on the semester! I can’t wait to see what other stuff we’re gonna do that tops this!”

“That’s amazing, Hiro,” she laughed, shooting forward to ruffle his hair with both hands. “You better win. If you do, I’ll cook you some yakisoba-pan as a real prize.”

Hiro’s eyes lit up. “You mean that?”

_Yakisoba-pan_ was one of Cass’ popular specials in the café and one of Hiro’s favorite foods, topped only by her hot wings. She had spent years rapping at his sneaky hands with a wooden spoon to keep him out of the café kitchen so he wouldn’t pilfer her pre-made reserves. He loved the stuff.

“Yup,” she nodded, internally noting that she’d make it anyway even if he lost. “You work hard, mister.”
“Professor Roe’s classes are fun,” Tadashi smiled from his place on the couch. “I had her my second semester of freshman year. I came third in that race.”

“You came third?” Hiro raised his eyebrows, incredulous. “How?”

“My materials almost fell out, so I panicked and kinda jerked around to get them even on the platform again. It cost me a few precious seconds.”

Cass pulled the TV out of the corner in front of the fireplace and began hooking up the old DVD player as the boys talked.

“I’m definitely beating your score,” Hiro told him confidently. “Baymax, you know I’ll win, don’tcha?”

“I do not have the statistical data required to determine your chances of winning,” Baymax informed.

“Oh man,” she saw Hiro shake his head out of the corner of her eye, “that’s not at all what I wanted to hear, but you have no idea how good it is to hear your weird, technical talk from your normal face again, buddy.”

Cass formed a silent ‘Ohh,’ with her lips. Her little baby.

“So you like Professor Roe, huh?” Tadashi asked.

“Oh yeah,” Hiro answered. “I like all of my professors. Well, Professor Granville’s sort of intimidating and Dr. Squires is pretty annoying, but I don’t hate any of them. Froeb’s a little crazy, which is great because it’s twice as interesting to listen to her explain skeletal construction because she shows us exactly how wrong putting dangerous parts together can go; Yoshida’s big on vocab homework but honestly, I kinda wanna pester Wasabi more about his lasers now because she makes it sound cooler than I already thought it was - ”

“You should,” Tadashi encouraged, voice lowering a bit. “Trust me, he’ll get a kick out of you asking about his lasers. He loves showing them off and talking about them. You don’t believe he kept that apple, food, in the lab that one time because he was hungry, do you?”

Hiro perked up. “Okay, I will! Anyway, uh - Sato’s awesome all round because it’s like he knows everything about the labs and is super chill. I can ask him anything and he’ll tell me all about it without being condescending or acting like I’m an idiot; Roe’s classes are never boring because she goes over all the applications of aerial robotics and how we can build off what we learn in her class, and, duh, she said we’ll be doing lots of competitions to test our projects, which is fun; and Sullivan’s super, super nice! You remember how in high school a lot of kids hated math? Well, she makes calculus for engineers as simple as she can and does a lot of examples to make sure everyone gets it right. I mean, I’ve caught on pretty quick, but I’ve seen a lot of my classmates ask her for help and she doesn’t mind slowing down. And she does it with a - a - I don’t know, mom attitude? I don’t know how to explain it, but yeah!”

Cass stood up. “That’s great, sweetheart! So good you’re enjoying your classes. What do Granville and Squires teach?”

“Thermodynamics I and world history I,” Hiro answered. “I like thermodynamics better. Granville’s the no-nonsense type, but she’s not, uh, sadistic? She doesn’t get a kick out of seeing us fail and stresses the use of her office hours a bunch so she can help out students who don’t get it. And Squires is...uptight and into history. Not in a bad way, I guess, but he hates it when students
get bored in his class. He yells at me so much because I’m the boredest of us all. Why do we even need history at a science university? It’s not even the history of science; I have an essay due next week comparing ancient Japan, Greece, and Central America. Why am I comparing ancient Japan, Greece, and Central America when I’m there for robotics!?”

“That essay.” Tadashi whistled. “I do not want to be in your shoes, little brother.”

“I detect signs of: stress,” Baymax said, turning his body to face Hiro. “Hiro, your cortisol levels are rising. Recommended treatment: relaxation. If symptoms worsen, the use of herbal teas, rest, and medication are known to be helpful in reducing stress.”

“Thanks, Baymax,” Hiro rubbed the back of his head. “So what movie are we watching? Kentucky Kaiju? Frankenstein? Giant Robot Monsters IV: Battle on Mars?”

Cass squeezed between Tadashi and the end of the couch. “You boys pick; this is your night for finishing Baymax.”

“I’m good with anything,” Tadashi shrugged.

Hiro turned to Baymax. “What do you think, buddy? What movie do you want to watch?”

Baymax peered down at him curiously. “I do not know the difference between: Kentucky Kaiju, Frankenstein, and Giant Robot Monsters IV: Battle on Mars. Would you like me to download data on each in order to make an appropriate suggestion?”

“Spoilers?” Hiro scoffed. “No way! We’ve already seen all these movies before, you’re the one who’ll be watching for the first time! I want your honest reaction to - Ooo, we should definitely go with Frankenstein! Or Zombie Samurais in Tokyo! What do you think of corpses coming to life and attacking people?”

“That is a medical impossibility,” Baymax instantly responded.

Tadashi snorted back a laugh and covered his mouth. “We know, Baymax. They’re just movies; you know, fiction - for fun. Actually, it might be fun to listen to you comment on all the medical inaccuracies, like how long it actually takes for a corpse to rot.”

Hiro’s smile widened. “And all the gross facts about the decomposition?”

Tadashi nodded eagerly. “Like when your body bloats up and when your skin starts to sink in. Hey, did you know bacteria from your intestines is what starts the decomposition process?”

“Really!?” Hiro exclaimed.

Baymax’s chest lit up with an outline of the human body. “Actually, the first stage of decomposition is autolysis, the self-digestion of cells. What you are describing is part of the putrefaction stage, when the intestines - ”

Cass blanched. She held up a hand to stop them. “Okay, ew, no! I do not need to know any of that. If you keep talking about this, I’m not going to be able to stomach horror for a while. Just pick a movie, please!”

Tadashi was sheepish. “Sorry, Aunt Cass.”

Hiro patted Baymax’s stomach. “Guess you’ll have to keep your medical mumbo jumbo to yourself, Baymax. Okay, so how does Giant Robot Monsters IV sound? The main character is
basically the opposite of you.”

“With this help alleviate Aunt Cass’ nausea levels?” Baymax asked.

“Yes,” she said immediately. “Killer robots sound better than zombies right about now.”

Baymax held up a helpful finger. “Then I suggest Giant Robot Monsters IV: Battle on Mars.”

“I’ll put it in!” Hiro jumped to grab the movie off the shelf. “Go ahead and sit down, buddy!”

Baymax obedient, waddling over to the couch and carefully seating his large body next to Tadashi. He blinked. “If the main character is ‘the opposite’ of me, what is it? What is the opposite of a healthcare companion?”

Tadashi cocked his head. “Uhhh, ya see...it’s fiction, so no one’s actually getting hurt, but the franchise is about a killer robot bent on wiping out humanity. In this one, they’ve lured it to a Mars colony to keep it away from Earth, but now they’ve gotta protect the scientists on Mars, or else it’ll kill them all and get back to Earth.”

Baymax blinked. “Oh. I do not understand the function of such a robot. Why was it built?”

Hiro plopped the DVD in and grabbed the remote, throwing himself at the couch, squishing himself tightly between Tadashi’s side and Baymax’s vinyl. “To be awesome - that’s the short explanation. Then things got out of hand and now it wants to kill everyone. It doesn’t really matter, what matters is the fight scenes! So sshh!”

Hiro pressed play on the title screen and the movie began.

Cass settled more comfortably in her seat. Although it was a tight fit on the couch with the four of them, she didn’t mind the close contact.

And glancing down the couch at her younger nephew, he didn’t either. Hiro, thoroughly squished, leaned his upper body against Tadashi and kept a hand splayed across Baymax’s side. She didn’t comment on it aloud, though, just thanked her lucky stars her family hadn’t been left as broken and traumatized as it could have been recently. Plenty of issues remained, the fall out of recent events, but it seemed her boys were starting to get better and that was all that mattered to her.

Wrapping an arm on the flat top of the couch, Cass soon lost herself in the images on the screen.

Yama was heading home for the night. His house, a traditionally Japanese type, sat atop a luxurious hotel not far from the edges of Good Luck Alley. It was almost like a penthouse of sorts; he’d had it built after acquiring the property from the original owner after he’d failed to pay back his debt.

Debt. Yama groaned under his breath as his limo came to a stop outside the hotel. He had to contact Obake soon. By now, he would expect Yama to have done his recon, gotten into the university, and retrieved the useless rock. It wasn’t good to keep Obake waiting. Especially when the bastard seemed to have eyes everywhere.

Stepping out of the limo and approaching the hotel doors, Yama silently hoped to himself the robots would be enough to make up his debt to Obake. This was what he got for not checking the clientele of top notch illegal storefronts in the Alley. If he had known he was sending his men to pillage one of the joints Obake got his rarer supplies from, regardless of the fact the owner had refused to pay Yama back, he wouldn’t have sent them. Not that Yama had known who Obake was
at the time, but he had gotten to know enough of him when the son of a bitch hacked into his home security, pulling shit straight from a psycho horror movie out on him, and ended the encounter with quite a bit of blackmail.

“It will be difficult to obtain the materials I ordered from that shop anywhere else,” Obake had told him, sending chills down Yama’s spine. “Your men destroyed everything and ran my supplier out of the city. I’ll have to reach out far and wide to find another contact, which is going to cost me time better spent elsewhere. You’re going to make up for this.”

There was no finding Obake. Yama had tried. He’d gone through as many contacts as he could, had his men trace the hacking signatures, sent out search parties for god’s sake, and found nothing. Except another night ripped out of a horror movie as Obake’s voice tutted at him.

“I can go away,” Obake had taunted, “if you obey.”

So Yama obeyed. He got shipped out the materials Obake wanted to remote locations for pick up, he gave him copious amounts of money not required to be paid back, and did his dirty work when demanded. He’d humbled himself before the man’s voice, and still - still he was in his debt. Yama wanted out. He hated being the mouse to someone else’s cat. He did not like being the terrified one. The robots had to work.

Inside the hotel, Yama entered one of the elevators and pressed the button to his floor.

Tomorrow, he decided as a commercial encouraging San Fransokyo tourism surrounding the metro played. Tonight, he needed sleep.

Then the lights went out, replaced by an emergency red as the elevator shook and stalled. Yama yelled, grabbing at the walls for support and panting. He looked at the screen where the commercial had been playing in terror. He was at the eighty-eighth floor and a one eyed, tongued demon stared at him against a green series of flickering code.

“Well, did you obtain the item?” Obake asked harshly.

Yama continued to pant. His mind raced a mile a minute, unable to gather itself in a conclusive thought. “The - item?”

“Ah, I see,” Obake noted. “You failed.”

The demon insignia disappeared. Yama screamed for his life as the elevator dove downwards, the eighties zipping into the seventies, sixties, fifties -

“Wait, wait, wait!” he shouted, body rising in the air as gravity yanked the floor down faster than it did him, banging on the screen. “I made you something better!”

Twenties, teens, ten, five -

The elevator came to a halt and the normal lights returns. Yama crashed on the floor chin first and gasped for air. His heart was accelerating. He felt like he was going to die.

He almost did die.

This was why he despised Obake and wanted out.

“Show me,” Obake’s voice ordered.
The elevator picked back up, and Yama keened in fear. It rose slower this time, faster than normal but not at breakneck speed. He didn’t trust himself to stand, partially out of fear of falling and partially out of fear the elevator would dive again, until it came to a stop at his floor. Yama rushed out of the death trap and sped for the seven robots he had stored at home to keep for himself (maniacal robots could be useful for raids, after all).

Without a single word, he activated them one by one and presented them to the hacked-in television screen in his living room. As he did, he did his best to calm down and get a hold of himself.

If this worked, he might get out of his debt.

He ordered the robots to break the wood he set up before them, and, unified, they crushed them to splintered pieces.

“I see…” Obake trailed off a moment, “potential.”

Yama allowed a tiny, relieved smile to cross his face. “Much better than that piece of scrap.”

“No,” Obake barked, causing Yama to recoil. The data on his robots appeared on the screen as Obake hacked his files to get their information. “But useful to obtain it.”

Yama tried to keep a straight face. All right. Fine. As long as all went well -

Obake wasn’t finished, though. In a soft, hissing voice, he warned, “Do not. Fail. This time.”

Yama swallowed. The message was received.

God, he hoped this worked.

Hiro slurped at the smoothie he’d sneaked out of the café, tapping away at the garage computer. His eyes scanned the designs on the screen from top to bottom, debating where to make changes. His idea was so simple, yet the tiniest error could bite him hard later if he wasn’t careful (he’d learned from the diagnostics mistake).

“Hey, Hiro.”

Hiro raised his head. “Hi, Tadashi. Hi, Baymax.”

His older brother and robot stood by the inner garage door. He hadn’t heard them come in.

“Hello, Hiro,” Baymax waved.

“What are you doing?” Tadashi asked.

Hiro spun his chair around. “Uh, a prototype for my project for aerial robotics. Professor Roe is having us race at the end of the week. I need a good design if I’m going to win and get Aunt Cass’ yakisoba-pan. It’s gotta be epic!”

The edged of Tadashi lips curled up in amusement. “You sound more excited than you ever did about bot-fighting. I should have introduced you to Professor Roe last year.”

“What? No,” Hiro laughed. “I’m done with bot-fighting for good, but no way. It’s just that school’s not as boring as I thought it would be and yakisoba-pan is on the line! Besides, I have to win; winning is in my blood and I can’t lose something as simple as this. I’d be the lamest ex-bot-fighter
around.”

Tadashi scoffed playfully. “All right, if you say so. Anyway, much as I don’t want to pry you away from your homework, it is good for geniuses to take a break now and then. Fred invited the whole gang over to hang out, so come on.”

Hiro fought his facial muscles to not fall. “Yeah? Um, actually, after this I was going to work that awful world history I essay. I wanna get it out of the way as soon as possible. Then I have a thermodynamics project to get started on that might or might not have been assigned last week and might or might not be due next class…”

Tadashi frowned. “Seriously, Hiro? You haven’t started a project you were assigned last week yet?”

“Which is why I really need to dedicate today to my homework!” Hiro stressed. “You can go ahead without me. Maybe we can all do something together another day?”

Tadashi shot him a look and sighed. “Sure. I’ll tell the others you’re swamped with homework. You need to work on your time management skills, little brother. College is ten times worse than high school and this could come back to haunt you.”

Hiro tapped himself above the ear. “I’ll keep that mind. Tell the guys I’m sorry.”

Tadashi turned to Baymax. “You stay here and keep him company, pal.”

Hiro did a doubletake. “What? He’s supposed to be taking care of you, not me!”

Tadashi smirked. “Now, now, Nurse Hamada, you have to let me learn to be self-sufficient sometime. I’m not made of glass. Besides, I don’t want to leave you lonely doing your homework while the rest of us have fun. Baymax’ll give you someone to bounce ideas off of.”

Hiro leaned back in his chair. Well, he did miss spending time with Baymax. They’d practically been inseparable since last night when they got him back in his body. Hiro didn’t want to steal him from Tadashi, though; while Baymax was one of his best friends, he was Tadashi’s healthcare companion - both as his primary patient and as his creator. He’d already inadvertently taken him away once, in the portal.

“You sure?” he asked hesitantly.

“Yup,” Tadashi spun around for the door, leaving no room for argument. “I’ll catch you guys later. If you change your mind, you know where Fred lives. Love you!”

“Love you, too,” Hiro replied, almost mumbling.

Baymax waddled up to Hiro’s side. “Are you all right, Hiro? Your tone indicates: reluctance. Do you wish for me to follow Tadashi instead?”

“No,” Hiro rubbed his knees. “It’s fine, Baymax. I’m just a little nervous because - I guess being a mother hen is genetic in this family.”

Baymax tilted his head. “I have not detected fowl DNA in you, Tadashi, or Aunt Cass.”

Hiro snorted and patted him on the stomach. “You’re funny, Baymax. Okay, I have to get back to work.”
Baymax peered over his head at the screen. “Your aerial robotics project requires the use of cameras and microphones? I fail to see how these increase your speed or help carry heavy materials.”

Hiro slurped at his smoothie. “That’s because I’m not working on aerial robotics. I’ll do that later with the rest of my homework. I’m gonna get Yama arrested.”

Baymax blinked. “That is not what you told Tadashi.”

“Because I’m not stupid,” Hiro retorted. “Look, I’m not going to put us all in danger like I did last time. My aerial robotics class and Tadashi’s drone inspired this plan. I’m going to make a little fly on the wall that’ll attach itself to Yama and record all his crimes in Good Luck Alley. When I have enough to keep him locked up, I’ll anonymously send the footage to the police. It’s perfectly safe and sound. I just have to make sure the bot’s tiny enough to go unseen, durable enough not to get damaged if something hits it, and that nothing compromises the camera, mic, or signal.”

Baymax looked down at him. “I thought Fred’s plan to use the team to keep Yama from attacking you and Tadashi was effective. Has Yama confronted you since the night my endoskeleton ran away?”

“This isn’t about keeping Yama away from us,” Hiro tapped rapidly at the keyboard. “Okay, it is. Not entirely, though. Yama’s a bad guy who hurts people, and even if he does stay away because he’s scared of the team, well - the team’s disbanded, right? I know the others aren’t exactly keen on staying superheroes. If he realizes they’re not going to show up again…”

Hiro wasn’t going to let him threaten his so-called ‘cripple’ brother ever again.

“I see,” Baymax replied. “However, do you not think it would be good to tell Tadashi and the others? If not for assistance, then as a precaution? What if your fly is discovered and traced to you?”

“If I tell them, they’ll think I haven’t learned anything and I wasn’t actually sorry that night,” Hiro grunted. “They don’t need to know. I told you, this is safer than before. As for tracing, I’ll just have to put more effort into keeping the signal anonymous. If I play my cards right, I can have this done by the end of the week. I can go Yama hunting while eating delicious yakisoba-pan.”

Baymax was silent.

Hiro paused. “You’re not going to tell them are you?”

Baymax didn’t answer for a moment. “Patient confidentiality prevents me from discussing your plans with others without your permission; however, I do advise you tell them.”

“Neat,” Hiro returned his full attention to the computer. “Hey, when I’m done with this and my homework, let’s watch Zombie Samurais in Tokyo. I wanna hear all those gross decomposition facts you and Tadashi brought up.”

“If that is what you wish.”

Hiro paused. “You okay, buddy?”

Baymax peered at him. “I have been scanning your brain waves recently. You exhibit mild to high levels of: guilt, sadness, anger, and stress. I have concerns.”

“Oh.” Hiro laid his hands flat on the table. “I’ve been pretty happy today. Are you sure?”
“I have also detected signs of: happiness. They do not negate your other levels.”

He inhaled deeply. “Oookay… I mean, I have been down lately. I was worried your endoskeleton wouldn’t function and it would have been my fault again. Before that, I was worried your chip was broken. And before that, I missed you so much because you were gone. I guess that’s what you’re detecting. I swear, now that you’re back, it’s all gonna change,” he punctuated the statement with a sweep of his hand.

Baymax wasn’t satisfied. “According to my scans, these levels have persisted longer than you have known about my healthcare chip. Older scans also indicate mild to high levels of: guilt, sadness, anger, and stress. These are the scans that influenced me to follow your microbot in an attempt to mitigate them. I rationalized these feelings to be due to Tadashi’s injuries and our encounters with Callaghan. They should have decreased by now. Are these occurrences continuing to bother you?”

Hiro felt a cold cloud wash over him. He should have expected this. He knew Baymax was designed to care for physical and mental health. He should have known he would pick up on his current state.

Hiro thought about lying. He had no desire to talk about these things, to hear the same old spiels and speeches Tadashi gave. They didn’t work. Hiro had a bad habit of dragging his loved ones into trouble and hurting them, whether directly or indirectly, and nothing anyone said could change that.

No. He decided against it. Even if he lied, Baymax would be able to detect his brain signatures. He’d know Hiro was still feeling guilty, angry, and upset. Although Hiro had no interest in listening to another ‘not your fault!’ spiel, there was no point in trying to hide it from Baymax. Besides, the robot was his best friend. And he was a robot, which somehow made him feel the tiniest bit more secure in admitting it (if Baymax started spieling, Hiro could tell him he was satisfied with his care; Tadashi certainly wouldn’t respond to that the way Baymax would).

“…They are,” he confirmed. “Plus the stunt with Yama. I hate how I’ve been letting everyone down. As soon as things seem like they’re going right, I mess it up. People wind up in danger. They get hurt. I can’t stand it.”

Baymax half yanked him out of his seat to hug him. “It is all right to feel responsible for others’ safety. Your feelings are not abnormal.”

Hiro blinked. That was different. “You mean that?”

“Yes.” Baymax readjusted him in his chair. “It is natural to blame oneself for what one perceives as their mistakes and the consequences of those mistakes.”

Hiro was stunned. “Wow. I didn’t think you’d agree with me that’s it’s my fault.”

“I do not,” Baymax corrected. “I only mean that your feelings are understandable. Hiro, you should speak with Tadashi, Honey Lemon, Gogo, Wasabi, and Fred. Reassurance from loved ones can be beneficial in reducing negative feelings and false perceptions.”

“I have talked to them. They don’t listen,” he insisted.

‘You’re not listening,’ a quiet corner of mind pouted.

That wasn’t fair, though. Baymax, without a doubt, only wanted what was best for him.

The others did as well, Hiro supposed.
Yet that didn’t make their speeches any easier to bear.

“What would you like them to do, Hiro?” Baymax asked. “How would you prefer them to help you?”

“How about by leaving me alone?” he snapped. “Or getting mad at me? You’re supposed to get mad when people hurt you. They don’t. You’re a robot so I don’t expect you to get mad, but them? They should hate me.”

His heart panged. He didn’t want the others to hate him, not truly. If Tadashi alone hated him, Hiro didn’t believe he could bear that in slightest. If they were to enter the garage this moment, the five of them, and start chewing Hiro out, he’d be torn between terror and intense shame. It wasn’t an experience he craved for.

It was that that was what happened when one’s actions got others in trouble and almost ruined their lives. Almost killed them. Multiple times. They should be mad at him. They should hate him.

The fact they didn’t confused and irritated him. Their spiels confused and irritated him more. If they weren’t going to hate him, the least they could do was not bring it up. He could live with that.

“Hatred between friends and family members is not healthy,” Baymax reported. “Their hypothetical hatred towards you will not treat your emotional state. It will worsen it.”

“Fine, then they don’t hate me,” he spat. “Let’s leave it at that.”

“No,” Baymax said, surprising Hiro. “Tadashi has updated my patient confidentiality programs, so I will not contact them for you; however, I urge you reach out, even if it is only to me. Bottling up your feelings does more harm than good in the long run. It is against my programming to allow my patients to harm themselves.”

Once again, Hiro was stunned.

A fresh patch of guilt grew in his chest. Baymax was only caring for him.

‘I’m making him worry when he shouldn’t. I’m not his primary patient; Tadashi is. Does this also count as taking him away?’

Hiro sighed. “I’m sorry, Baymax, I just don’t see how talking is going to help. I feel terrible and...and whenever someone comforts me, I don’t feel better. It’s as if there’s -” he gestured to the air above his shoulders, “a weight on top of me I can’t rid of, and it keeps getting heavier with each stupid thing I do.”

“Could you explain further?” he requested.

Hiro hesitated.

Baymax didn’t press.

Hiro finally shook his head. He could feel his resolve crumbling, but... “I’m not even sure I can put it in words you’d understand.”

“Understand your feelings or understand why you are to blame?”

“Same thing.”

“Hiro - ”
“Hey,” he quietly cut him off, “I’m sorry, okay? I don’t want to talk about it. Maybe - Maybe I will with someone, probably you, sometime. I don’t know when. But I also don’t know what to say, and I’d rather work on my fly and homework since I do know what I’m doing there. Can we please not today?”

Baymax stared at him. If Hiro didn’t know better, he’d think there was sympathy in those camera eyes. “I understand. Saying this much counts as progress, Hiro. It will get easier when you are ready to open up again.”

“You don’t say,” Hiro muttered dismissively, diverting his attention back to his work.

The fresh guilt continued to grow in his chest. Baymax was one of the last people he wanted to worry with his stupid feelings.

“First semester is the hardest,” Gogo said when Tadashi informed the gang of why Hiro hadn’t come with him to Fred’s house.

“Remember our freshman year?” Wasabi brought up, laying his arms out on the back of Fred’s couch. “I practically lived in the library. I was so nervous I’d flunk out by Christmas.”

“I blew up a lot of old furniture my tía and tío were getting rid of to cope with the stress,” Honey Lemon nodded, face twisting at the memory. “I don’t blame Hiro at all.”

“Speaking of Hiro,” Gogo said, “is he feeling better from that night with Yama? He seemed okay in the labs, but I want to make sure.”

Tadashi shrugged helplessly. He wished he had better news to report. “He refuses to talk about it. I know it’s bugging him deep down, yet he won’t talk to me. I’m trying to give him some space before I approach the topic again. Maybe some time’ll help.”

“I hope it does,” Wasabi said. “The little man’s too young to have that kind of guilt on his shoulders.”

Honey Lemon clasped her hands together. “Do you want us to be there when you talk to him? We can all help convince him it’s not his fault and we’re all right.”

Tadashi took his hat off and ran a hand through his hair. “I don’t know. I don’t mean to scare him with some sort of intervention. He might clam up worse if we do that. It’s not only that night, though. Hiro feels guilty for the exposition fire as well, and leaving Baymax in the portal. Every time I start to think he’s getting over it, he gives me another reason to worry. No matter what I say to convince him otherwise, he’s so sure he’s responsible for everything that goes wrong. I don’t understand it. I don’t know how to make him listen to me.”

“An intervention might be exactly what he needs,” Gogo suggested.

Tadashi shrugged again. “Either way, I don’t believe ganging up on him is going to help. Hiro’s not exactly a talker when it comes to feelings.”

Wasabi shifted his weight. “And what about you? How are you holding up lately?”

Tadashi started. “Me?”

Dread pooled in his chest. No, no. He was not talking about his own issues. Not Callaghan (monster, Yokai), not anything to do with him. He wasn’t -
“You were pretty frantic that night,” Wasabi continued. “Screaming at us on the phone and petrified when Yama’s guys got the upper hand on us. You feeling okay?”

The dread diminished. Tadashi swallowed awkwardly. “Oh. Oh, yeah, I am. Sorry about that, by the way. I was terrified you guys and Hiro were going to get injured, or worse, killed. I don’t know what I’d do if anything happened to you. He’s my brother and you’re my best friends. I can’t lose you.”

“We’re not upset at you,” Honey Lemon put a hand on his T-shirt sleeve. “We get it. We’ve been worried is all. It’s been a hectic end of summer, hasn’t it?”

“That’s one way of putting it,” Gogo commented dryly. “We care about you, too, Tadashi. You don’t have to apologize.”

Fred’s head popped up behind Wasabi. “Apologize for who now?”

Wasabi shrieked and jumped to the side. He ground his teeth, and Fred had to leap to his feet to avoid being swatted at.

“There you are,” Gogo glared at him. “Where have you been? You’re the one who invited us over and you didn’t bother to show your face when we got here. I thought we were hanging out.”

“You’ll see, you’ll see!” Fred flailed one wrist in her direction. “What are you guys talking about? Where’s Hiro?”

“Hiro’s at home drowning in homework,” Tadashi answered him. He felt his face flush a tad bit. “We’re talking about how I acted when we were dealing with Yama. Hey, I was kind of a jerk to you that night. I’m really sorry, Fred. I was stressed and shouldn’t have snapped at you the way I did. I also should have apologized earlier.”

If Fred held any hard feelings over that, he didn’t show it. He only beamed at the group and leaned forward to squeeze Tadashi’s shoulder. “No probelmo, dude! Water under the bridge. I knew how stressed you were, so no offense was taken!”

Tadashi breathed a sigh of relief. He did feel embarrassed for snapping at Fred, both on the phone and after the others left the two of them alone in his lab. It wasn’t like him, and he was fully aware Fred always meant well at heart. He was glad Fred wasn’t mad at him.

Anyway!” Fred stood straight and tall, shooting a finger high in the air. “I have something to show you guys! Heathcliff!”

The doors to Fred’s room opened. Heathcliff, ever stoic, wheeled in a large, covered up cylinder. Tadashi stared at it curiously as the others stood up to get a closer look.

Fred put a fist behind his back and cleared his throat, as if about to give a presentation to a class or board meeting.

“Ladies and gentleheroes,” he bowed, “since we kicked so much butt at, well, you know, kicking so much butt, I took the liberty of designing our very own - ” he yanked the sheet off the cylinder, revealing a sky light, pointing at it with jittery fingers, “superhero signal!”

Tadashi balked. The sheet fell on top of Fred, and that just about summed up his immediate feelings on the matter.
Fred tossed the sheet off him. “Heathcliff, hit the lights!”

Heathcliff did.

The room went dark, and above Tadashi’s head on the ceiling the sky light brightly displayed the word, ‘HALP.’

“‘HALP’?” Wasabi gave the ceiling a peculiar look.

“Yeeahh, that’s supposed to be ‘HELP,’” Fred noted. “Heathcliff, did we keep the receipt?”

Heathcliff answered, “We did not, Master Frederick.”

“Okay,” Fred pulled Gogo, Honey Lemon, and Wasabi into a group hug. “So we’ll just go with ‘HALP.’ People will know.”

Gogo shoved him away with a growl.

“Freddie,” Honey Lemon began carefully, “I heart your enthusiasm, I really do; but I had to freeze people when we were at Yama’s place. I’m not comfortable with that. I don’t want to be in a situation where I have to use something other than foam or goo on a human being. It’s dangerous.”

“Don’t beat yourself up, Honey Lemon. I’m sure they thawed by now,” Fred waved off.

Heathcliff turned on the lights.

“Guys,” Fred continued, “this is no way for Big Hero 7 to talk.”

“Big Hero 7? Really?” Gogo repeated, criticism evident in her tone.

Fred waggled his fingers on either side of his head. “My brain stormed an epic list of team names, and that one tested best with an audience of me. To the power of seven!”

He threw out his hand for a team cheer.

No one else threw out their hands.

Tadashi couldn’t stay silent any longer. He gawked at Fred, bemused. “Please tell me this is a prank, Fred.”

Fred jolted. “Oh! Sorry, Tadashi. I forgot about your crutches. Don’t get up, we’ll bring the team cheer to you!”

Tadashi glowered, and that halted Fred in his tracks.

Fred blinked at him in surprise. “What?”

Tadashi’s glower transformed into an incredulous expression. “My god, you’re serious. Why are you serious?”

Fred cocked his head. “Uhhh, is that a trick question? Because I don’t get it.”

“Look, Fred,” Gogo stole his attention. “It was a one time thing, saving you knuckleheads from Yama. We didn’t agree to keep being a team.”

Fred scowled. “I could have sworn I heard from someone - I don’t wanna name names, but it might
rhyme with Bobo - that it was a one time thing when we stopped Callaghan!"

Tadashi flinched.

(Monster. Yokai.)

“It was,” he glared at Fred. “We got mixed up with Yama because of bad circumstances. It was a coincidence you guys were suited up and while I’m grateful your plan worked at the end of the day, you guys could have gotten severely injured. You’ve could have died. Hell, you could have gotten hurt or killed by Callaghan! Why anyone want to purposely put themselves in that kind of danger again?”

Fred put his hands on his hips, returning the glare. “Uh, lemme see...in order to help people, maybe?”

Tadashi recoiled. While he doubted Fred knew it, that was direct stab in the gut. A white anger simmered below his chest, though he tried to ignore it. Fred didn’t know, couldn’t possibly know. And he would never use it against Tadashi if he did. (Would he? Fred was one of the nicest guys a person could be friends with, but if he knew, would he?)

“Help people do what?” Wasabi demanded, folding his arms. “San Fransokyo’s not crawling with supervillains, Fred. We told you this. Callaghan was a special case and the police normally handle the crooks in Good Luck Alley. The city doesn’t need us.”

“And we have SFIT and SF State piled high on our plates,” Gogo reminded.

“It’s not that necessary, Freddie,” Honey Lemon agreed. “We have bigger problems to worry about at school than the city does with crooks.”

“You don’t know that!” Fred cried. “What if the city does end up in danger? What if a bunch of villains put people’s lives at risk!? We could be the only ones standing between them and - ”

“Fred!” Tadashi interrupted. His stomach was twisting painfully. He was beginning to feel nauseous. “It’s over! Big Hero 7, or whatever we were, is done! We didn’t sign up to be heroes to save the city from imaginary villains! Let it go! Callaghan stole Hiro’s microbots and tried to kill you guys. Yama threatened Hiro and I’s lives. That’s it! Those are the only reasons we went after them - they were real threats. I’m not being on any superhero team for the sake of your overactive imagination and obsessive love for comics. Grow the hell up already!”

The entire group stared at him, astonished.

A flash of hurt crossed Fred’s face.

Tadashi instantly returned to Earth. He shrank into himself. “I’m sorry. That was - That was too far. I know you don’t mean any harm, Fred, you want to do good. There aren’t any villains, though. And if there are, I don’t think it’s worth it for you guys to be in danger. I can’t take that risk. You guys and Hiro mean way too much to me to take it.”

The others looked at Fred.

“You need to let this go, Fred,” Gogo repeated sternly. “It’s not going to happen. Ever. We're telling you for the last time: NO.”

“You can’t have a team when only one person wants to be on it,” Wasabi added.
“Sorry, Freddie,” Honey Lemon apologized.

Tadashi grabbed his crutches and rose to his feet. He still felt nauseous. “I’ve gotta go to the bathroom. When I get back, can we please hang out for real instead of doing this?”

Fred gave a small, silent nod.

Tadashi’s shoulders sagged. “Thank you.”

If there was one thing Fred prided himself on, it was his determination.

The gang’s reaction to HALP had stung. Being accused of having an overactive imagination and only wanting to be a hero because of his love for comics had stung. But all right. He wasn’t a moron. Not only was being a superhero awesome, cool, and amazing, an epic dream come true, they did a lot of good in the world. The gang just needed proof San Fransokyo needed them, and Tadashi in particular needed reassurance no one was going to get hurt. Fred could figure these issues out, and Big Hero 7 would come back to life.

There was, however, one person whose opinion he hadn’t gotten yet, and might be his best ally in persuading the others.

Fred found Hiro, accompanied by Baymax, leaving the robotics lab the next day, what looked like a helicopter the size of an apple in his hands.

“Hey, Hiro! Baymax!” he called out.

“Hello, Fred,” Baymax waved.

“What do ya got there?” Fred pointed to the helicopter thing.

“A prototype for my aerial robotics class,” Hiro answered, shrugging off his backpack and putting the thing inside. “We’re racing them on Friday. How’s it going, Fred?”

“Going great, my fine, furry friend,” Fred ruffled his wild, unbrushed hair. “You’re not heading to class, are you?”

“No,” Hiro moved to fix his mussed up hair. “I’m done with class for the day. I’m heading to Tadashi’s lab. I’ve got homework to do.”

Yeah?” Fred followed Hiro and Baymax as they headed in the direction of Tadashi’s lab. “Your brother said you missed our hang out yesterday to do homework. Don’t you feel like taking a break?”

Hiro shrugged. “I’ll take a break when I’m done. I’ve got important stuff to do.”

He held open the door for Baymax and Fred to follow him in.

“Time management is an important skill to learn,” Baymax commented.

“You sound like Tadashi,” Fred told him, plopping down in the spare wheely chair.

Baymax blinked. “Thank you.”

Hiro threw himself into the chair in front of Tadashi’s computer. “I’ll make yesterday up to you guys. How about on Saturday we go see a movie? Or go to an arcade, or something.”
“Totally,” Fred replied. “I’m up for anything. Hey, by the way, how do you feel about the team name ‘Big hero 7’?”

Hiro glanced at him over his shoulder as a graph of a helicopter that sort of did and sort of didn’t look like his prototype appeared on the monitor. “Big Hero 7? What’s that?”

“The name of our superhero team of course!” Fred propelled the chair across the room, jabbing his thumb at himself. “I came up with it. Cool, isn’t it?”

Hiro looked back at the monitor and started typing. “I didn’t know the team was still a thing. I thought the others were against it.”

Fred perked up, noticing how he said the others were against it. Not him. “I mean, that’s what they keep saying. You’re not against still being a hero, are ya, Hiro?”

Hiro paused. He opened his mouth and closed it.

Baymax tilted his head. “My scans indicate there is nothing wrong with your vocal chords, Hiro. Are you developing a sore throat? Autumn is typically cold and flu season, and academic environments tends to be breeding grounds for germs and viruses.”

“I’m fine, Baymax,” Hiro assured the robot, spinning around to face him. He looked at Fred. “I...I wouldn’t say I’m against it. Being a hero was incredible. It was fun. And if you’d asked me a couple weeks ago, I think I would have said yes to being one. It’s just...I put you guys in danger with Yama. His goons could have crushed Wasabi, Honey Lemon, and Gogo, and who knows what they would have done with you and me. I don’t want to put you guys in that position again.”

Fred frowned. He propped his arms across the back of the chair. What Hiro was saying wasn’t all that different from what Tadashi had said. They were both worried about the gang’s safety.

To a point, Fred could see where they were coming from. It reminded him of the perspective chit chat he’d had with Tadashi before. They’d all been through a lot lately, with the Hamada brothers squat in the center of all the conflict. He could see how it’d weigh on them. He would be lying, however, if he claimed to understand the danger argument completely.

He sat up straight. “Okay, I’m gonna say sorry in advance if this sounds insensitive because I don’t mean to sound like a jerk who doesn’t care - I really don’t - but where is this coming from? Especially from you?”

Hiro flinched. “Huh? What are you talking about?”

Fred scratched his head. He hoped this wouldn’t sound offensive. He wasn’t trying to shame Hiro over to his side. He genuinely didn’t understand. “No offense, but Callaghan was a hell - sorry, heck - of a lot scarier than Yama and his minions were. He chased us through the city, threw cars at us in the hopes of killing us, and was willing to let us drown in the bay. It was right after that you came up with the idea of being superheroes. What makes what Yama did scarier than that? More dangerous than that? In my opinion, Callaghan and his Yokai persona makes Yama and his minions look pretty boring.”

Hiro’s eyes widened at him.

Baymax shifted his gaze silently between the two of them.
Finally, Hiro spoke. “I - You can say hell in front of me, Fred, I know what swearing is. I don’t care if you guys swear around me.”

Fred curled one side of his lips. “Dude. Not the part I was asking about. What’s the matter? I’m not going to judge you, you know.”

Hiro hesitated, a flash of fear striking his face.

Baymax stepped closer and wrapped his pillowy arms around him. “There, there. You are safe. It is healthy to talk about one’s feelings with close friends. You are not required to speak if you don’t want to, but it would help your emotional state to open up.”

“Yeah, little man,” Fred agreed. “If you really don’t wanna be a hero again, fine - ” Big Hero 6 didn’t sound like a bad team name either (or Big Hero 5 if Tadashi ultimately couldn’t be convinced either, he guessed) “but you can always talk to me if you’re feeling down. I’m a better listener than most people think.”

Hiro glanced up at Baymax, who pulled away. “I...I don’t know.”

Fred planted his chin on his arms. All right. He was hoping Hiro would be an ally in convincing the others, but he wasn’t going to force him if emotional stuff was bothering him. Although two heads were better than one, he could figure the rest of the gang out on his own.

Then Hiro took a deep breath and looked Fred in the eyes. “The thing is, uh, I suppose it’s because I have a bad habit of dragging you guys into danger. With Callagan, I - I wanted to catch the guy who hurt Tadashi. You guys showed up because Tadashi told you go find me at the docks, and if I hadn’t been there, he never would have chased us. I still wanted to catch him, though. Then I wanted to kill Callaghan for what he said about Tadashi, and it - I ended up abandoning you guys. And violating Baymax. You guys had every right to be mad at me, and, uh, you weren’t for that long. Then I was so stupid in skipping the diagnostics tests and got you guys involved in the junk with Yama. It’s a pattern. Even when Callaghan tried to kill us at Krei Tech, you were only there because of me. You guys are only ever there because of me and my stupidity. It’s too much. I don’t want to be the reason you guys get hurt. I don’t want you guys hurt at all.”

Fred gave himself a moment for that to sink in before he responded. Whoah. That was heavy.

“Hiro, we have already forgiven you for what happened on Akuma Island,” Baymax said, “and accepted your apologies for skipping the diagnostics protocol. You do not need to carry such guilt.”

Hiro sneered. “Because it’s not my fault, right? Jeez, you do sound like Tadashi. Figures, he made you. Am I the only that can see I’m at the start of everything? That my actions cause them? Hell, I made the microbots Callaghan loved so much! I used to bot-fight, freaking Tadashi out and making him trick me into visiting SFIT so I’d want to go here! It all comes back to me and my stupid decisions and that’s what keeps getting us in trouble! No matter what way you slice it, everything is my fault, and I hate that none of you will acknowledge that! Why can’t you understand that!?”

Hiro snarled. “You want to know what else is my fault? Leaving you in that other dimension where you could have been lost forever instead of trying to bring everyone back. Letting Tadashi run into the fire when I should have held onto him, called out his name, done something to keep him from going in there and almost DYING - !”

Fred leapt to his feet and gripped at Hiro’s shoulders. “Okay, okay, quit it! Don’t - Don’t keep talking.”

Hiro seethed. Fred could see the first signs of tears watering his eyes, making them glisten. He had
had no idea he was this bad. He wondered if Tadashi knew.

“Okay,” Fred squeezed his shoulders. “First of all, lemme tell you something about Tadashi: He
does have a thick skull. He’s stubborn as a goat when he wants to be. Short of someone three times
your size tackling him to the ground, nothing would have stopped him from going into the fire
once he set his mind to it. That’s something you can take off your ‘list’ right now.”

“He’s already told me that,” Hiro spat. “I don’t care. It’s still true.”

“No, it isn’t,” Fred was firm. “You can tell yourself up and down that the sky is green and the
grass is blue, but that doesn’t make it true. Tadashi would have never listened to you and he would
have shoved you away if you tried to hold on. He’s got a heart the size of this building, and as
much as he loves you to pieces, he would have tried to save Callaghan in every timeline. It’s got
nothing to do with you. It’s the kind of person he is.”

Hiro glowered up at him.

“Tadashi is a determined young man,” Baymax added. “Tadashi is also one hundred fifty-five
pounds and four ounces. You, Hiro, are one hundred seven pounds and seven ounces. His muscles
mass is larger than yours as well. By my estimation, you have slim chances of holding Tadashi
down.”

Hiro only continued to glower.

“Second,” Fred went on, “the bot-fighting and mircobots? Toss them out, too. Callaghan would
have stolen anything from anyone that would have helped him kill Krei. You were unlucky to be
the victim he stole from. Everything that happened at the expo is on him. So is him chasing us, and
so is him trying to kill us on Akuma Island and at Krei Tech, so get rid of those next. As for Yama,
you didn’t go looking for him, and he’s the one who decided to threaten you and go back on your
deal. You did nothing wrong. That includes the endoskeleton; you got excited and pushed a button,
I do that all the time! Then you thought you could fix it by going after it. You couldn’t have
known. And like Baymax said, we forgave you for what went down on Akuma Island. It’s water
under the bridge. We’re not going to be mad when we already forgave you.”

“What transpired on the other side of the portal was also necessary,” Baymax continued. “You
would not have escaped with my previous body. I am programmed to honor my patients’ wishes;
however, I am also bound to do what is necessary to protect my patients and care for their healths.
If you had not agreed to leave me behind, I would have ultimately chosen to send you away
anyway. Remaining on that side of the portal would have benefited neither your nor Abigail’s
healths.”

Hiro paled. “You - You would have?”

“Yes,” Baymax was absolute.

“See? Almost nothing’s your fault and what was is in the past,” Fred explained. “You can’t bog
yourself down in so much guilt, Hiro. It’ll eat you alive. Think invisible mutant maggots devouring
your brain. That’s basically what this level of guilt is. You gotta let this junk go. We don’t want to
see you hurting yourself any more than you want to get us hurt, Hiro.”

“I’m not hurting myself,” he argued.

“Not physically,” Fred told him. “Mentally? Yeah, you are. I get you feel bad, but don’t turn
yourself into the villain in your mind. If anything, you’re unlucky, dude. Sadly unlucky. That
doesn’t mean you’re to blame.”

“Fred is correct,” Baymax agreed. “Holding onto these matters will not help anyone, Hiro, least of all yourself. It is good to acknowledge pain; it is not good to wallow in it. You must find solutions instead.”

Hiro cast his eyes down. Muttering, he inquired, “And what solutions would those be?”

“How about listening to us when we say it’s okay?” Fred said. “Come on, buddy. We’re not going to get mad at you no matter how much you think we should. You haven’t done anything to earn it. And to be honest? There’s probably almost nothing you could do that we wouldn’t forgive in the end.”

Hiro didn’t reply for a moment. His gaze stayed down. “You guys really sound like Tadashi. It’s weird.”

“Maybe that’s a clue that we’re right?” Fred offered. He shook Hiro’s shoulders a bit. “Come on, look at me.”

Hiro sighed. His expression relaxed into one that was unreadable, and he lifted his eyes. “I don’t feel better. It didn’t make me feel better when Tadashi said it, and it doesn’t make me feel better when you guys say it.”

Fred licked his lips, quickly searching for the right words. “Okay. Okay. How about this: Me, Tadashi, Honey Lemon, Wasabi, and Gogo are adults. I know, I’m a man-child and all, and I wear that title with pride; still. We’re adults. We’ve never gotten involved with anything because you dragged us into it. We made our choices. Tadashi running into the fire? His choice because he’s stubborn and has a massive heart of gold. Us agreeing to be superheroes? Because we wanted to catch Callaghan as much as you did and because superheroes is amazing, who wouldn’t want to be one? Confronting Yama? We made that plan together as a group. We could have gone to the police. We could have told you that you were dumb for wanting to cooperate with him and completely ignored you. We could have done that when it came to Callaghan, too, however well that would have worked or not. Yet we didn’t. We chose not to. We’ve had so many opportunities to tell you no, tie you to a chair to keep you from running off, and handle matters in a different way. We didn’t.”

Hiro’s lips twitched.

Fred took a deep breath. “I know emotional junk doesn’t always let up when people tell you what’s what. It’s like logic and feelings are mortal enemies sometimes. Nevertheless, at the least, Hiro, believe it when I say you don’t drag us into danger. We choose to be there. The last thing a bunch of adults have to do is listen to a sticky fourteen year old kid, no matter how smart or wild he is. We knew every time we’d be putting ourselves in danger, and we chose to anyway. Why? Because we believed in the cause. We wanted to protect people. We wanted justice. We wanted to teach the bad guys a lesson. You didn’t force us to be anywhere.”

He could see the wheels turning in Hiro’s head. A few of those wheels didn’t believe him, he knew. A few of them - Hiro swallowed, a half hopeful expression flitting across his features.

“I...I guess so,” he admitted quietly.

“We all choose our own paths, Hiro,” Baymax told him. “For better or for worse. That is all we’ve done. You, myself, Tadashi, and our friends. Each of us have gone forward with the best intentions at heart.”
Hiro shifted his weight in his chair. “You’re probably right,” he said slowly. “I don’t know. I didn’t think of it this way. I - I still know it all ends up coming back to me in some way - ”

“Hiro,” Fred interrupted. “When you were running from Yama, the rest of us were on night patrol. I convinced the others ahead of time to put on their gear and go hunting for evil doers. Guess what happened when you were chasing the endoskeleton? We chased down a run away car, thinking it was a car thief, only to find out it was dude rushing his wife to the hospital to give birth.”

A tiny smile cracked from Hiro. “You’re kidding. You ran after a couple in labor?”

Fred nodded, grinning widely. “It was embarrassing. Not something I’ll happily add to our superhero resume. My point is, we were already suited up and searching for trouble. I want to convince everyone to keep the team going because I want to keep looking for trouble. Think of it this way: Every time we’ve gotten in hot water, we came out of it with something positive. We protected all those people and Krei from Callaghan, you saved Abigail Callaghan’s life, and we got Yama off your and Tadashi’s backs. It all worked out in the end.”

Hiro furrowed his brow, contemplating. “And...that’s why you want to keep being a hero? So you can keep helping people?”

“Duh,” he answered. “That, and how exciting the hero life is. It’s so cool.”

Hiro was silent, internally debating that.

Baymax put a comforting hand on his head.

“Okay,” Hiro eventually began, “I don’t feel completely better, but...I think this did help.”

Fred smiled. “So no more blaming yourself?”

“Ehh,” he scratched the back of his head. “Maybe no more blaming myself for everything. Like I said, I don’t feel completely better.”

“It’s a start, though.”

“Sure.”

Fred smiled. “A start’s ten times better than nothing! So, hey, if you don’t feel comfortable staying the on the team, that’s fine. I’m not going to force you if you’re worried about messing up on the field. I totally get it.”

Hiro put his hands in his lap. “Actually, if the others are willing to keep being heroes...I think I will stay on the team. You’re right, we do help people in the end. And - and if you do land in hot water, maybe I can help get you out of it this time. What do you say, Baymax?”

“If it will help your mental heath, I will do what I can to assist,” Baymax replied.

Fred’s eyes lit up. “Fantastic! Now we just gotta get the others on board. We need to show them that San Fransokyo is rife with crime that requires our heroics to put an end to it all! And that we’ll do it without getting hurt, because your big bro’s worried ‘bout that, too.”

Hiro spun around in his chair to face the computer. ‘Of course he is. Okay, uh, let me work on this for a bit. I...I had a plan to catch Yama and put him in jail so he can’t threaten Tadashi in the future, and I still want to do that.”
Fred’s mouth dropped. “You little - You were going to be a lone wolf hero!”

Hiro rubbed his temple with a finger sheepishly. “Not really. It’s a fly on the wall bug that will record his crimes so I can send it to the police and get him locked up. I’m not fighting him directly. I don’t - I don’t trust myself after last time. Let me handle this alone, please. After I get some progress done on it, I’ll start on a new superhero chip for Baymax. Shouldn’t take more than a few hours to complete.”

That sounded awesome to Fred.

“Great,” he nodded. “And if the fly thing with Yama goes wrong, we’ll totally have your back.”

Hiro flinched. “Thanks. So, what exactly have the others said about staying a team?”

It was getting late. The hallway lights outside the lab had been dimmed to save on energy. Aunt Cass and Tadashi had texted Hiro about missing dinner, which he apologized for and told them he was caught up on homework. Not a complete lie; he had been working on his aerial robotics project before Fred found him. He would do more with it tomorrow to get it ready for Friday. For now, however, he was busy on Baymax’s new superhero chip while Fred babbled on about the team’s future and Baymax curiously examined the room.

In the back of his mind, he thought about what Fred and Baymax said earlier, about the gang deliberately putting themselves in danger because they cared. Part of him felt a little stupid for not realizing that; no duh they didn’t have to listen to him and no duh they cared.

Another part, however, didn’t believe it. After all, Hiro had sneaked out to the docks, had run off instead of listening to Tadashi about contacting campus security, and had been the one to convince the group they should handle Yama instead of going to the police. Had anything truly gone wrong in any of those cases, it would have undoubtedly been Hiro’s fault. And when it came to Tadashi and Baymax? He still believed he could have stopped his brother, and if he had quit begging to think of a new angle, he could have saved Baymax’s original body rather than risk losing him forever (the truth was, they were lucky Baymax had been able to transfer his chip, undamaged). And so much more.

(And he didn’t have any desire to dwell on the fact Baymax would have sent him and Abigail out of the portal anyway. That was...too much.)

What resonated with Hiro most, though, was the part about helping people. Fred was right; they had done good in the end. They had saved and protected people, despite his mistakes. If the world needed them, why shouldn’t they keep doing that? Not only that, but this time, Hiro would go to great lengths to be sure no one on the team got hurt. He would do better from now on.

As he finished up the coding on the superhero chip, he heard Fred fall out of his chair behind him. He didn’t glance up.

He heard Baymax light up. “I was altered to the need for medical attention when you said - ”

“No!” Fred exclaimed. “I’m okay! I’m okay!”

The coding was complete. Hiro saved it to the chip and pulled it out of the cartridge. “Here we go, Fred!”

Fred’s eyes widened at the red chip, which had a drawing of a caped hero on it. “Whoa. It’s beautiful!”
Hiro popped open Baymax’s access port and placed the chip inside, closing it.

Baymax stood tall. “I am now capable of defending the innocent and various other heroic deeds.”

“Awesome!” Fred cheered. He threw out his hand. “To the power of seven!”

Hiro held back a chuckle as Baymax performed their version of the fistbump.

Fred was momentarily confused. “Not what I envisioned, but you put your own spin on it.”

Hiro was about to correct him that it was his and Baymax’s fistbump when the hall lights flicked on to full brightness. He panicked. “Great; we’re not supposed to be in here. We gotta hide!”

As he and Fred began searching for good places to hide, Baymax held up a hand. “I am large and difficult to conceal. I will deflate.”

“Yeah, no time,” Hiro told him as he started to release air, and leaped on top of the robot.

After a quick few seconds, Hiro and Fred were hiding behind Baymax, who was folded to resemble an inflatable chair.

Hiro nervously listened to the door creak open, heeled footsteps following.

“Hmmm.”

Granville, he realized. Great. This was wonderful. Why couldn’t it have been Sato?

The lab lights flicked on.

A pressure sat itself on Baymax’s lap.

“Ahhh, comfortable,” Granville sighed. “Hmmm. I could have sworn I warned Tadashi Hamada to remain at home, rest up and recover. Yet it appears he’s been refurbishing his lab. That won’t do at all.”

Hiro and Fred winced as she pushed around in Baymax’s lap, knocking into them.

“Or,” she mused, “perhaps it wasn’t him. He doesn’t seem like the type to pass robots off as furniture. You can come out, Mr. Hiro Hamada.”

Hiro bit his cheek. Dang it.

“He’s not here!” Fred half-sang.

Hiro scowled, jabbing him with his elbow.

“Now,” Granville growled.

Reluctantly, he and Fred stood up and came around the side.

Granville glared at Hiro. “I don’t believe I made myself clear upon our first encounter: Neither you nor your brother are meant to be in here. He is meant to be at home, which I assume he is, and you do not co-share this lab. First semester freshman are not entitled to private labs, and private labs are not intended to be shared! That is what the main labs are for. Or did I make that clear? Your brother? Because otherwise, I see no reason for you to have hid.”
Hiro forced out an airy laugh. “Well, professor, I am aware of - ”

Baymax’s head popped out of its confinement. “Hello. I am Baymax.”

Granville glanced over her shoulder. “Yes, I assumed.” She rose to her feet. “Follow, please.”

Hiro obeyed, trudging after her to the computer desk. She picked up the magnet lying there.

“Balance, Mr. Hamada.” She picked up a bolt and placed it above the magnet. “Hard to achieve. Harder to maintain.” She bent over with a smug smile. “One tiny, wrong, decision and…”

She blew on the bolt.

Hiro’s breath hitched as the bolt zipped for the ceiling, digging itself the metal container of one of the lights.

The message was clear. If he was going to step out of line, the consequences could be dire for his academic career.

Hiro’s mind didn’t linger solely on his academics, though; he stared up at the bolt and was instantly reminded of all the tiny mistakes he had made that blew up on everyone he loved. His heart sank.

He hung his head.

Granville crossed her arms. “Your brother does not allow himself to become distracted, Mr. Hamada. You have the choice to follow in Tadashi’s shoes, or you could choose a different path - with him.”

“Ooo, she’s talking about me, isn’t she?” he heard Fred murmur.

“The choice is yours, Mr. Hamada,” she informed him sternly, and without further acknowledgement, headed out the door.

Hiro’s stomach lurched.

Maybe Fred and Baymax were wrong. They may not see it his way, but Granville was right; their lives were like the bolt above the magnet, and Hiro saw himself as the breath of air that sent them all spiraling for the ceiling, crashing into danger.

Tadashi didn’t even want to be a hero. He was scared of the danger, of the trouble that would come about. And while he wasn’t right about Hiro, Tadashi tended to be right about a lot of things.

Besides, Hiro was only at SFIT because of his brother. He couldn’t let him down by destroying his academic career with stupid, tiny mistakes like using his lab without authorization. Tadashi wanted him to succeed more than anything.

“Whoo! That was scary,” Fred commented.

“Your heart rate is accelerating,” Baymax told him. “Would you like to take a seat?”

Fred lit up. “Yes, I would!”

He launched himself sideways on Baymax’s lap.

Hiro zoned out on them, ignoring the vibrating massage Baymax was giving Fred.
No, he wouldn’t be a hero after all. Maybe the city needed them, but maybe they didn’t either. Besides, his schooling and Tadashi were too important for him to throw away. He wasn’t going to do that. Especially if he was wrong and wouldn’t actually do better on the field. One tiny, tiny mistake was all it would take, after all, and he’d never be able to reverse the consequences.

The only thing Hiro would continue was his fly. Yama was too much of a threat to remain free and his presence was Hiro’s fault in the first place. He had to fix it. After that, no more.

“...our night patrol on!” Fred shouted.

Hiro started. He hadn’t realized Fred was speaking, but he zoomed in on that last part. “I - I can’t.”

Fred, he saw, settled comfortably on his butt on Baymax. “Okay, fine. Yaki Taco is healthier anyway, according to the Yaki Taco website.”

Baymax’s chest lit up with the website for confirmation.

Hiro furrowed his brow. He had no idea what food had to do with night patrol. “No, look, I - ”

“If this is about the tacos,” Fred ignored him, “I’m open to pizza. I mean, I had it for lunch, but, if it’s for you - ”

“Fred, look, I - “ Hiro paused. Great. He just committed to being a hero after having a stupid talk about his feelings, and now he was about to go back on that. With a heavy chest, he stepped past Fred to open Baymax’s access port. He took the superhero chip out. “I need to focus on going down the right path. Tadashi’s path. I’m not going to stay on the team after all.”

Fred watched in horror as he flicked the chip, caught it, and shoved it in his pocket. “Wait, what? Why!”

“Didn’t you hear Granville?” he asked. “I can’t afford to mess up my education. Tadashi - I have to make him proud.”

Fred leaped up. “Hold on, hold on! You’re backing out because she told you off for using his lab!? Dude, Tadashi lets all of us in here! And that’s to hang out, not use his stuff! Okay, Gogo steals his stuff - hey, yeah, she does! Granville’s just being a hard case!”

“Well, she’s a hard case who has the power to kick me out of school,” Hiro grunted.

“You’re not going to get kicked out of college for this!”

Hiro groaned. Fred was missing the point.

“What I’m saying,” he said, “is that I need to get my priorities in order. Tadashi doesn’t want to be on the team and he wants me to do well in school. I’m choosing to follow his footsteps.”

Baymax stood up and waddled over to Hiro’s side.

Fred fell to his knees. “You’re telling me you’re giving up the hero life for your brocon-ness!?”

Hiro jerked his neck back. “Brocon-ness?”

“Brother complex!” Fred yelled.

Hiro’s face twisted. “I do not have a brother complex.”
“Yes, you do! You both do! Everyone knows it!” Fred accused. “Come on, Hiro! It was one thing when emotional junk was bothering you, but this!? You think I let SF State get in the way of being a superhero!? I have a seven page essay due tomorrow that I only have three pages done on, and I’m still going on night patrol! Come on!”

Hiro shook his head, exasperated. He ignored the guilt piling up. He wasn’t going to tell him this was still emotional junk; he’d sound like a hypocrite, or worse, a liar. “No, Fred.”

“What about your fly on the wall? Yama?” he begged.

“I was going to deal with him before and I’m going to deal with him now,” Hiro replied. “Except that’s it. I’m not going to be part of Big Hero 7.”

Fred sputtered. “W-wha- W- What about Baymax!? Don’t you want to be a superhero, buddy!?”

Baymax stared. “I am a healthcare companion. If being a superhero will help my patients, I will do what I can. If it will not, I have no reason to be one.”

“What about me!?” Fred asked. “Aren’t I your patient!? It would help me!”

“You are not physically injured or mentally unwell.”

Fred whined. “What if I break my arm!?”

Hiro glared. “Fred!”

“Please do not intentionally break your arm,” Baymax answered simply.

“We’re going home, Fred,” Hiro cut to the chase. “We’ll see you later.”

“No, no!” Fred dramatically pounded one fist on the floor. “This isn’t fair! Why has academia mocked my love for heroics once again!?”

Hiro raised an eyebrow, but chose not to ask. “Uh, switch off the lights when you’re done, Fred. See ya. Come on, Baymax.”

“I’m not giving up on us, Hiro!” Fred shouted as they left. “Granville is wrong! I’ll show you!”

“Sure, Fred,” Hiro closed the door behind him and Baymax.

It was time to go home.

Chapter End Notes

- Giant Robot Monsters IV: Battle on Mars is based on a poster with the same name that can be found in the movie art book and journal. I made up the plot.

- This chapter is pretty light on Tadashi. If his outbursts in his POV feels funny, the revelation of what’s going on with him (which we’ll get by the end of Baymax Returns) will hopefully fix that.

- The great thing about Baymax being around is that makes Hiro feel more inclined to open up. If he had been alone with Fred, he might not have opened up to him a nearly
as much. His issues haven't gone away, though, and we'll see them again soon!

- Poor Yama. First he has Obake on his back and now Hiro's fly is going to come after him. We'll see how this works out for him lol. Speaking of Obake, I can't wait to get to the episodes where he plays a heavier role with the team!
Welp, these two chapters took forever, but I wanted to get them out together. Chapter six will be up not long after this (if it's not up already for you).

This chapter introduces Hiro's other teachers in person. Chapter four has his schedule on it; you shouldn't need it to understand this chapter, but if it's helpful for you to know the time of days and order, it's there.

Also something to note since it's been a while: Hiro's more anxious in this fic than he was in the show due to changes I've made and the character arc I had in mind from the beginning. Please keep that in mind.

I wanted to show in this chapter how my Hiro is coping with trying to balance school and get at least a little of the professors' personalities in it (I do had have plans for the professors in later chapters, including Issue 188 coming up, so I want them established). I apologize if this drags some. A lot of these scenes were only supposed to be a couple hundred words, but blew up into a couple thousand. I promise chapter six goes by faster.

The flames blazed high and fast, burning with an intense rage as Tadashi struggled to navigate his way through them. The heat was unbearable; the exposition hall might as well have been an oven. Smoke choked his lungs and his favorite green jacket singed against the flames, but Tadashi kept going. He had to.

"Professor Callaghan!" he shouted, voice straining under the weight of the smoke. "Professor Callaghan!"

They didn't have much time. No human being could possibly survive in an inferno like this. Tadashi didn't want to die in here. He wanted Callaghan to die even less. And he had a little brother outside waiting for him, waiting for them both to make it out of here. They had to escape, before it was too late.

"Where are you!?" he shouted, only to erupt into a coughing fit, which slowed his pace. He tried to contain it with both hands over his mouth - it was useless, though; Tadashi moved them to his throat, and squinted through the harsh blazes. His eyes watered. "Professor!? Please!"

Tadashi’s eyes widened. There. A couple dozen feet away, he could see Professor Callaghan’s back - the back of his grayed head, the back of his infamous sweater vest, the back of his khaki slacks. Tadashi shot forward, not caring if the flames singed more of his green jacket along the way.

“PROFESSOR!” he yelled at the top of his lungs, darting one arm out to reach for him. “WE GOTTA GO - ”

Professor Callaghan turned around, slowly, and Tadashi came to a dead halt face to face with the man. His heart dropped.
For a split second, it was Professor Callaghan standing there - standing there, stone faced and wearing Hiro’s neural transmitter.

But then it was him, it was Tadashi standing there, stone faced and burning. He was burning alive.

The world came to a sudden, agonizing halt.

Horror twinged with a mixture of terror, fear, regret, and the urge to get out, get out NOW! crept steadily up Tadashi’s spine. He watched, frozen, as the flames licked at the other Tadashi’s skin, burning the pale color black and peeling it away to reveal various shades of red; his muscle. That burned away as well, and as he watched, the smell hit him - burning human meat - and he couldn’t get away. He couldn’t run away. He was stuck in place.

“PROFESSOR CALLAGHAN!” he shouted desperately, pleading for help.

The Tadashi in front of him only continued to burn, eyes hard and frown resolute. The whites of his eyes filled with yellow, a sickly, disease-ridden yellow. He didn’t move, not an inch, didn’t even scream in pain as the flames devoured his clothes and ripped away at his body -

That was okay, though, because Tadashi felt the pain rip through him like lightning, and screamed for him.

The neural transmitter was the only thing that didn’t burn.

Tadashi awoke already sitting ramrod straight in bed, the scream dying on his lips as the glow of Baymax’s charging station faintly lit up his side of the bedroom. He was sweating. His heart was racing. It took him a moment to realize the smell and pain were gone, totally gone, as if they had never been there. Because they hadn’t been. It was a dream.

Tadashi breathed in deeply as Baymax inflated and turned on the emergency light in his body to combat the darkness of the room. The light helped reassure him he was awake, in his room and not the exposition hall.

“I was alerted to your need for medical attention when you: screamed,” Baymax stated, and promptly scanned him.

Hiro stumbled up next to the robot from the other side of he divider, night clothes and hair ruffled from sleep. His bagged eyes squinted against the light, peering tiredly at Tadashi. “What’s going on?”

“Tadashi, your heartbeat is accelerated,” Baymax informed, “and your neurotransmitter levels indicate: fear.”

Tadashi put a hand on his sweaty forehead. “S-Sorry. Nightmare.”

“Would you like to talk about the nightmare?” Baymax asked softly.

Tadashi shook his head. “Just the fire. That’s all.”

Hiro nodded in understanding. “Gotcha.”

Tadashi bit back a wince. Yeah, ‘gotcha.’ Nightmares hadn’t been unheard of for either of them recently. They both had terrible dreams of the fire now and then. Hiro’s weren’t so frequent anymore, had been at their worst right after the event, but Tadashi knew damn well what they were
about and where they had come from. Him. He regretted scarring him like that. Hiro shouldn’t be able to empathize with his own nightmares the way he did.

“Would you like a glass of water, or perhaps warm milk, to help you back to sleep?” Baymax inquired.

“No thanks, buddy. Thank you,” Tadashi answered with a deep breath. He smiled at his creation’s generosity. “I’ll be okay.”

Hiro patted Baymax’s arm and dragged himself up on the foot of Tadashi’s bed, crawling his way up to Tadashi’s side and accidentally elbowing him in the ribs as he scooted under the covers.

Tadashi grunted, but his smile didn’t fade. “You staying here for the rest of the night?”

“Duh,” Hiro yawned as he said it.

Hiro had stopped sneaking into Tadashi’s bed ages ago, when he was maybe nine or ten years old, but since the fire, when either of them had a nightmare, Tadashi would either invite Hiro into his bed (he usually didn’t have the energy - or full consciousness required - to get up and go to Hiro’s in the middle of the night) or the boy would climb into it himself. It was one of the ways they comforted each other - reminded the other that they were still here and not going anywhere.

Tadashi couldn’t guess how long this would go on before neither of them needed it anymore, but he wouldn’t complain; some nights he really did need Hiro by his side, to remind him that he was alive and hadn’t left his brother alone for good, and it was his fault Hiro needed him in the same way other nights. Of course he’d let him stay.

Tadashi laid back down on his pillows, smile quirking as Hiro lazily snaked his arms around his torso and snuggled against the pillow. In an instant, he was out.

“Tadashi,” Baymax caught his attention, “is there anything I can do for you to help your current state?”

“Uh, I don’t think so,” he wrapped an arm around Hiro’s shoulders, holding him close to his side. “It’s all right, Baymax, it was only a nightmare. Thank you. I’m satisfied with my care.”

Baymax cocked his head, as if inspecting him - who was Tadashi kidding, of course he was - but in a moment’s time, he stepped back into his charging station and began to deflate.

Tadashi closed his eyes and focused on breathing evenly. It was only a nightmare, he reminded himself. Just a dream.

The scars on his back ached dully. Not enough, thankfully, that he felt the need to wake Hiro or reactivate Baymax to get his meds for him, but they tingled and simmered uncomfortably. He tried to ignore them.

A nightmare. Only a nightmare.

‘A nightmare where Callaghan was me and I was burning alive,’ he couldn’t stop himself from thinking, even as sleep gnawed at the edges of his mind. ‘Callaghan was me and I was burning. Callaghan was me and I was burning. Callaghan was me…’

Hiro stepped out of thermodynamics with a sigh of relief on his lips. He’d been worried Granville would approach him during class to talk about the little chat they’d had the night before, if not give
him a piercing look to remind him she was watching for another misstep, but in their hour and a half together, she hadn’t. He’d just been another student in the class, one she’d paid no more or less attention to than anybody else. Fantastic. He preferred it that way.

As he walked down the hall of the robotics labs, heading for the lobby to exit the building, he pulled out his phone and opened his messages, intending on texting Tadashi.

His older brother had had another nightmare about the fire late last night and had a physical therapy appointment early this morning, which he should have gotten out of a little while ago. Hiro knew he was acting a bit smothering (‘Nurse Hamada,’ ha ha, so funny), but he couldn’t help it. He wanted to make sure Tadashi was doing all right. He’d still been asleep when Hiro left the house at seven-thirty, which had been cutting it close to his eight o’clock PT appointment. (Aunt Cass probably got him out of bed shortly after Hiro left; she was his driver, after all).

What he didn’t expect, however, was to see twelve notifications from Fred, all sent within the last hour and a half of his class.

Hiro raised an disturbed eyebrow at the notifications, opened the chat, then rolled his eyes. All twelve notifications were links. He could read partial titles in the blue highlight, like:

Heropedia-Boss-Aweso…

Boss-Awesome-saves-LA-from-crime-lor…

Theamazingoriginsofamazingma…

Crime-rates-in-san-fransokyos-good-lu…

historyofcaptainfancycomics…

And so forth. Seemed like Fred wasn’t kidding when he said he’d show Hiro how wrong Granville was. Twelve links while he was in her class, huh?

Well, Hiro wasn’t interested. As bad as he felt for backing out of an agreement he’d made, his future was more important than vigilantism. Especially when most of the team wanted to stay disbanded, so it was probably a moot point anyway. As fun as being a hero was and as much as protecting others made Hiro feel good, he couldn’t risk everything he’d worked for in favor of - well, something that might not even be worth it in the first place. Certainly not worth his education and the life Tadashi wanted for him.

Besides, he’d promised he wouldn’t hurt anyone else and that was a promise he intended to keep. At the end of the day, that mattered most to him. And he sincerely didn’t trust himself anymore.

‘Here’s hoping my fly doesn’t backfire on me, too,’ he grouched in his head, closing Fred’s messages and opening his chat with Tadashi.

Me:

How’d PT go? You home yet?

Hiro texted as he exited the robotics labs, stepping out into the sunshine.

As he waited for Tadashi to respond, he adjusted his backpack and made a smooth turn for the new auditorium building where his next class, calculus for engineers, was. With only a half hour between his two Tuesday and Thursday morning classes, Hiro normally headed straight for CfE
when TD I ended, and would wait in a lounge corner for class to start.

It was a little weird attending class in that building, he had to admit, since it stood where the old exposition hall once did; but it didn’t bug Hiro as much as he’d worried when he first got his schedule. The outside and inside were completely different, completely redesigned, and if it weren’t for the familiar location, he’d have no association with it and the old hall at all. So while the association was there, and did bother him a little, he was glad to say he had no problems being there. It kind of felt like proof he was healing, in a way.

Tadashi replied when he got to the front doors and pushed his way inside.

**Tadashi:**

Yeah we got home a few minutes ago. Aunt Cass is reopening the café. It was good, the coach says I’m right on track. How’s school?

Hiro’s lips quirked up. Right on track, huh? Great; that meant Tadashi was healing as well. Hopefully he’d be off the crutches in no time.

**Me:**

Granville assigned a seismic project due in three weeks. I have to make a building that won’t collapse in an earthquake.

**Tadashi:**

I think I know what you’re talking about. I remember when Richmond assigned me something similar. Should be easy peasy for you. :) Don’t slack off this time.

Hiro swallowed back a laugh. He’d almost forgotten his lie about thermodynamics homework he’d supposedly put off for a week. Speaking of which, he should devote today’s open lab time to finishing his fly alongside his aerial robotics project. It was already Thursday, after all.

Settling into a couch in a small alcove, Hiro texted back.

**Me:**

I’ll try, big brother, I’ll try. :p

Did you get enough sleep after last night’s nightmare?

**Tadashi:**

I did. I fell back asleep pretty fast.

**Me:**

Can I ask what it was about? I know the fire and all…

Tadashi took a moment to respond.

**Tadashi:**

Just running inside is all. I think I woke up just before the explosion. I’m all right, don’t
worry about it. :)  

Hiro pursed his lips. Sometimes Tadashi discussed his nightmares with him and sometimes he didn’t. He didn’t blame him; Hiro was the same. Nevertheless, well, he worried.  

God, maybe being a mother hen was genetic. Not only were all Rudolphs/Hamadas snarkers at heart, they were also mother hens. Eugh.  

He decided to change the topic.  

Hiro:  

Is Baymax with you?  

Tadashi:  

Yes, Nurse Hamada. He’s propping my legs up on the couch for me, if you must know. xD  

Baymax says hello.  

Hiro couldn’t resist smiling at that.  

If there was anything weirder than being in the new auditorium building, it was having Baymax back and not following him around everywhere. Before the portal incident, he’d gotten so used to having the huggable marshmallow at his side. It was almost disconcerting without him.  

He wasn’t going to steal Baymax from Tadashi, though. Not only was Baymax his first and foremost, no matter how many times Tadashi joked about ‘Nurse Hamada,’ he was still recovering, and Baymax was needed more at his side than Hiro’s. Besides, Hiro doubted Granville would appreciate seeing the robot follow him around campus all the time.  

It would only take one little mistake…one tiny, wrong, decision, she’d said...  

“EARTH TO HIRO! DID YOU GET MY MESSAGES!?”  

“AAAH!” Hiro leaped off the couch, away from the mouth that just shouted in his ear, and whirled around.  

Fred folded his mascot suit-covered arms across the back of the couch. “Well, did you or not? Are you spacing out, again, tiny bro?”  

“Fred!” Hiro scolded, clenching his fists. “You scared the crud out of me!”  

“Sorry,” Fred apologized, not sounding sorry at all. “Did you read them? Huh? I only sent the BEST articles I could find, I even used SF State’s research database for historical and crime rate articles. There’s no possible way you could read them and not be convinced of how awesome and necessary Big Hero 7 is.”  

Hiro narrowed his eyes. Geeze. “No, I haven’t. I’m texting Tadashi. You know I have calculus for engineers in about twenty minutes, don’t you?”  

Fred pointed a clawed finger out and shook it up and down, nodding his head. “Ahhh, I see. You’re waiting for more time so you can through all of them at once. Gotcha!”  

Hiro shook his head wildly. “No, Fred! I told you last night, I can’t afford to mess my future up. If
I get kicked out of SFIT, I doubt Granville will let me win another exposition and or approve a normal application. I want to be here."

Fred’s face fell. “You’re not going to get kicked out for using a lab! That’s not expulsion-worthy! It would be, like, an abuse of power if Granville kicked you out for that!”

Hiro slapped a hand on his face. “It’s not the lab. It’s anything, Fred! Even if I cut out the heroics, I’m still trying to be on my best behavior and focus on my studies so Granville can’t make a tally marked list against me to justify kicking me out! She’s watching me; she has my old bot-fighting police record and has been monitoring my activity in class. Remember when we stole her access codes? She called me into her office earlier that night to show me my record and tell me how good I’m doing despite how much she didn’t trust me because of the bot-fighting. Last night wasn’t a good look on me. So even if I only do a bunch of - a bunch of little things, it still goes against me, all right? I don’t want that.”

Fred stared at him blankly. “...I can’t tell if this is a sign you’ve got massive anxiety issues developing or Granville’s secretly a government agent assigned to spy on you after the whole deal with Project Silent Sparrow.”

Hiro glowered. “Neither. Look, I’m sorry I said I’d be part of the team and changed my mind. I changed my mind, though. I have my own problems and priorities to work through, Fred. Being a superhero just isn’t going to mesh well with them. I can’t lose this opportunity I have.”

Fred’s shoulders sagged. “Seriously? This is why you have to read my articles on Captain Fancy and Amazing Man, Hiro. The struggle to balance duel lives is a staple of the superhero life! We’ll figure it out!”

“No, we won’t. I’m standing my ground here. You’re not going to convince me, Fred.”

The two glared each other down.

“We’ll see about that,” Fred challenged. “I’m not giving up, Hiro. Frederick Lee Frederickson does not give up once his mind is made up! I’ll make you see, just you wait!”

Hiro rolled his eyes. “Uh-huh. I bet you will. Good luck with that.”

“Are you boys all right?”

Hiro twisted his torso around.

Professor Sullivan stood a few feet away, several binders and a satchel in her arms, likely having stopped on her way to her classroom. She was a plump, freckled woman in her late forties or early fifties with graying, carrot red hair tied up in a bun. She gave Hiro and Fred a peculiar expression.

Hiro stiffened. “Uh, hi, Professor. H-How much did you hear?”

“Everything from ‘standing my ground’ to ‘good luck with that,’” she replied, eyeing them up and down. “What are you two arguing over?”

Hiro folded his hand behind his back, attempting to portray the picture of innocence. “Ah, nothing important. Who’s, um, better at a video game we both like is all. We’re pretty competitive about it. Did I mention we’re friends? Professor Sullivan, meet my friend, Fred!”

Fred waved a clawed hand. Covering the side of his mouth, as if that would prevent her from hearing, he whispered loudly, “Nice save!”
Hiro shot him a glare of the corner of his eye.

Professor Sullivan wasn’t convinced. She stepped forward, bridging the small gap between them. “Mr. Hamada, walk this way with me for a moment. Mr. Frederickson, stay where you are.”

Hiro grit his teeth together behind pressed together lips. He really hoped she was telling the truth about what she heard, and this wasn’t about Big Hero 7. Disbanded or not, they could be screwed if anyone found out. They’d have to be more careful discussing the team in public like this in the future.

Professor Sullivan hovered a reassuring hand over his shoulder as she took him a couple yards away from the alcove. She knelt down close to speak to him eye to eye.

“Is he bothering you over there? Tell me the truth,” she said sternly.

“What? No.” Thank god it wasn’t about Big Hero 7 after all. “Like I said, Fred’s my friend. We’re talking about a video game.”

“I didn’t hear much of your conversation, but that didn’t sound like a friendly argument about a game,” Professor Sullivan replied. “I don’t mean to be intrusive, Hiro, but you’re fourteen years old and attending a university. Freshmen usually feel like the new, small fish in a gigantic pond, but you’re in a place mostly filled with adults and so much younger, and goodness, fourteen on its own is such a difficult age. You want to be liked, you don’t want to be disliked, there’s so much drama, and the horrible sensation of peer pressure - ”

Alarms went firing off in Hiro’s head. “Professor!” he interrupted, hasty. “I’m - I’m sorry, but what are you getting at?”

Her eyes steeled, though he got the feeling it wasn’t aimed at him. “What am I getting is if anyone on this campus is bothering you, friend or not, please do not put up with it or deal with it on your own. Find a faculty member and report it. SFIT has a zero tolerance bullying and harassment policy, and since you’re a minor, it’s twice as imperative we help you as soon as possible. Your well-being is important to us.”

The alarms fired off louder. Hiro smiled tightly. “Th-thank you, Professor. Really, though, Fred and I aren’t fighting about anything serious. Look, he’s a friend of my older brother’s, which is how we became friends before I got into SFIT, and we kind of butt heads once in a while. We’re both stubborn and childish, and you don’t believe a word I’m saying, do you?”

Professor Sullivan straightened to full height, eyes just as steely as before. “Mr. Hamada, is he bothering you?”

Hiro shoulders sagged. “No.”

“What are you arguing about?”

“Video games.”

“Is he really your friend?”

“Yes, he is.”

She scanned him up and down, and blew a long breath out her nose. She knelt down once more. “All right. I’ll let this go for now. If ANYONE tries to intimidate, bully, or pressure you into something you don’t feel comfortable with, Hiro, please let me or someone else know. If you don’t
want to come to your professors, you can go to the counseling office. That part of what they’re there for.”

“Yup, got it,” Hiro nodded rapidly. He needed this conversation to end, this second. “Thank you, Professor. You know, I can’t wait for calculus for engineers to start in, what, ten minutes? I bet you can’t either. I don’t wanna keep you from preparing for class, which could delay today’s lesson and make us miss out on some wonderful learning, so, I promise if anyone *does* bug me, I’ll let the counseling office know.”

Professor Sullivan stood up, giving him a knowing yet sympathetic smile. “Trying to get rid of me because this feels awkward, aren’t you?”

Hiro’s face burned. Uh oh, busted. Could - Could this count as a strike against him? “Nonono, not at all! I - I - ”

Professor Sullivan patted his shoulder. “It’s okay! I remember being fourteen, I’d be mortified and trying to get rid of my teacher as well. Just please keep that promise, and know I’ll always have an open ear. It’s an educator’s job to keep their students safe, physically and mentally, not just make sure they pass the course.”

This was turning to into a nightmare. Hiro had previously thought of Professor Sullivan as mom-like, but this made *how* many people trying to get him to open up about his problems and feelings? Four? Five? Granted, a problem he didn’t currently have, but still!

“Thanks, I will,” he told her, doing his best to keep the terror out of his voice.

She squeezed his shoulder and removed her hand. Walking back towards the alcove, she gave Fred’s mascot suit a scrutinizing once-over. “If I remember correctly, you don’t actually go here, Mr. Frederickson?”

“Nope,” Fred smiled widely. “I’m a science enthusiast, Prof, not a science major.”

“I see,” Professor Sullivan nodded. “Professor Dugan and I chat from time to time; he’s a lovely man. Don’t give me a reason to have an unpleasant conversation with *your employer, the dean of the athletics department.*”

Fred reeled back, smile vanishing.

Taking his wide smile for herself, Professor Sullivan marched off down the hall for her classroom.

Hiro made his way back to the couch, watching her go in astonishment. “Wow. That was a threat.”

“Yeeaah, it waaas…” Fred drew out the words. “I don’t get why she’s threatening me, but that was definitely a threat.”

“She thinks you’re harassing me,” Hiro supplied for him.

Fred did a double take with a horrified expression. “What!? Wait, am I?”

Hiro blinked. “Uh, no? I’d say you’re annoying me, not harassing me.”

“Oh, good,” Fred visibly relaxed. “So, making our glorious return to the glorious topic of superheroes - ”

Hiro’s eyes rolled to the ceiling. No, he was done with this conversation. “Hey, would you look at
the time! I’ve gotta get to class, Fred, I’ll catch you later!”

Without allowing Fred the time to respond, Hiro snatched up his backpack and spun off to follow Professor Sullivan.

As far as he was concerned, this matter was closed.

Unfortunately, however, the matter was not as nearly as closed to Fred as it was to Hiro.

He would not leave. He would not go away. Hiro suspected he was ditching his own classes at SF State to pester him.

He didn’t even give Hiro a break after CfE ended and Hiro headed to the cafeteria for lunch and to get a head start on his homework; one moment Hiro was doing math problems, the next a notebook with a bunch of Big Hero 7 logo designs was being slid his way.

And when that didn’t work, Fred decided to show up at every classes Hiro had afterwards. Every class. Not to mention at home with the skylight.

For the next forty or so hours, this was Hiro’s life.

For his first post-cafeteria attempt, horrifyingly, Fred showed up during Squires’ class. Squires’ class!

If there was one class, other than Granville’s, that Hiro would have paid Fred to stay away from, it was world history I. Unfortunately, he’d already been seated and boredly writing notes as Squires spied on about some admiral’s role in the Imjin War.

Squires was the only professor other than Granville Hiro was SERIOUSLY worried about ticking off.

He was a strict and firm, middle aged man in his late forties to mid fifties, with thin brown hair and matching mustache, a stout figure, and a perpetual frown on his face. Hiro could count on both hands the amount of times Squires had smiled so far in the school year. He wasn’t a bad teacher, though; he was clearly (a little too clearly, if anyone asked Hiro) devoted to his subject, never seemed to have it out for anyone specifically, and made it plain that he subscribed to the philosophy of no such thing as a stupid question in his courses. On the other hand, however, he didn’t appreciate slackers, disruptions, or the mere concept of being bored in his class, and would absolutely blow his top if pushed too far. Hiro had heard that last year he SCREAMED at a girl who tried to record an anxious student’s fumbling attempt to present their end of the semester project with her phone - fair enough that she got in trouble for that, sure, but he was already on Squires’ watch list for frequent boredom, and the last thing Hiro needed was to give him an excuse to go marching off to Granville’s office. If anyone would for the tiniest thing, he bet all his saved up bot-fighting money it would be Squires.

“Admiral Yi had a unique military career behind him, one that contained quite the number of demotions due to corrupt accusations against him,” Squires babbled at the head of the room, writing a short hand version of his speech on the board. “And when I say corrupt accusations, I should be clear that the accusations were corrupt, not him. In fact, in several instances he was the scapegoat for others’ failures.”

It was not a secret Hiro didn’t find history as nearly as riveting as Squires did. It didn’t matter what part of the world or what time period they were discussing; it simply wasn’t Hiro’s favorite
subject. He passed of course, had passed it four times in high school and was determined to pass it here as well, but...well, he wasn’t the first person find it boring either, he knew that for sure. Nevertheless, he sat up straight and jotted down his notes with everybody else, a contrast to his usual habit of scribbling with his head and arms lying on the desk. The less reason he gave Squires to go to Granville, the better.

He was **going** to do better and this was part of how; by being a more attentive student, no matter how eager history made him to take a nap in class.

Until Fred showed up, anyway.

Squires’ classroom had two doors, one at the head of the room at the right and one in the back of the room on the left. The left door was closest to the student desks, and Hiro, unluckily, was planted in a row with a perfect view of said door’s window. Which Fred’s head popped up against.

Hiro’s eyes widened. Oh no no no.

Fred held up a clawed finger and disappeared for a moment.

“Mr. Hamada!”

Hiro jumped, returning his gaze to the front of the room. “Uh, yes, sir?”

Squires gave him an all too familiar narrowed look. “Daydreaming, are we?”

“No, not at all,” Hiro shook his head, forcing a smile. “So Yi was an underdog, right? It’s good he had that friend in court, Ryu Song Nyong, you said?”

Squires pressed his lips together. “Yes, I did... Try to keep your eyes forward or on your notes, Mr. Hamada.”

“Will do,” he clenched his teeth together.

Picking up his pencil, he did his best to ignore the urge to glance back at the door.

“Now, I believe you engineering students will find this part particularly interesting,” Squires drew a quick picture of an oval ship with spikes and a dragon head on the board. “When Admiral Yi realized a Japanese invasion was almost certainly on the horizon - ”

A knock on wood drew Hiro’s attention away before he could stop himself.

Fred - Fred had a sign in the door window. A sign, made out of cardboard and black sharpie.

*Join us, Hiro!*

*Defend the weak, uphold justice, be AWESOME!*

*You know you want to. It's your calling. You were BORN for this! We all were!*

*Don’t give up on us, Hiro!*

Hiro stared in total disbelief. He wondered if Fred realized how creepy that sign read at all.

“Mr. Hamada!” Squires called out, brows furrowed in contempt. “Are you paying attention?”

“Huh? Oh, yeah, of course!” Hiro chuckled nervously, snapping his attention back to the board.
“Then,” Squires demanded, “what did I just say was the name of the new type of ship Admiral Yi designed to help combat the invading Japanese forces and defend Korea?”

“Uhh…” Hiro wracked his brain. He thought he heard the name. Maybe. “Tuuuurtledove ships…?”

Squires blinked, brow not quite softening yet no longer furrowed. He turned his head toward the door, where Hiro had been staring and Fred’s sign was. He walked to the back of room. Hiro’s ears burned; he didn’t tear his gaze from Squires, afraid he’d see all the other students who’d surely seen the sign and read it for themselves now, gawking at him.

Fred lowered the sign, revealing his face. He jerked back in alarm at Squires’, and ducked under the window, out of view.

Squires passed the door and approached Hiro, bending over the desk close to him. He swallowed, pausing as if searching for the right words.

“Haven’t I,” he began quietly, keeping his voice low so Hiro’s neighbors wouldn’t hear, “seen you and that young man together around campus with a group of people? Do you know him?”

Hiro’s ears burned terribly hot. He debated lying.

‘No, sir, I don’t know him in the slightest! He must be looking for another Hiro!’ Sadly, he doubted that would fix this.

“Yup,” he admitted in a whisper. “My brother introduced me to them. They’re my friends.”

“Including him?”

“Including him.”

“I see,” Squires said, taking this much more calmly than Hiro would have anticipated. “Your brother didn’t introduce you to some seedling cult, did he?”

Hiro jolted. “What? No! Fred’s - Fred’s a bit of a weirdo, that’s all. He - He wants me to join his comic book club, believe it or not.”

Squires stared at him, expression unreadable.

Hiro swallowed. He slid his eyes to his notes in embarrassment.

Yup, this was it. This would be his first post-chat-with-Granville strike. Fred was disrupting class on his behalf, over what Squires would undoubtedly find as stupid as a comic book club, and Hiro was going to pay for it. Nice lie. Thanks, Fred.

Squires stood up. Hiro reluctantly lifted his eyes to watch. He walked to the door, flung it open, and scowled down at the crouching Fred on the floor. Fred smiled nervously, waggling his claws in greeting.

Squires snatched up the cardboard flipping it so the writing faced the wall. “You,” he growled, “are disrupting my class and distracting my students. I don’t appreciate, nor tolerate, such blatant disrespect to the Institute or my teaching.” He sized up Fred’s mascot costume. “I will be having a discussion with Professor Dugan over this. Leave. Now!”

Without a word, Fred scrambled up and scurried down the hall. Squires slammed the door, making Hiro jump, folded up the cardboard, and headed back to the font of the room. He tossed the cardboard under his desk and picked up his chalk, resuming the lesson without so much as a glance.
“As I was saying, the turtle ships were a successful aid in the naval…”

Hiro felt like part of his brain melted in his skull. Wait, so, Squires wasn’t going to go to Granville? He wasn’t going to get blamed for Fred? He was going to Dugan instead?

Woah, he lucked out big time here. He very much doubted that would happen again. That would be like lightning striking the same place twice.

One thing was for sure, however: Fred was starting to get on Hiro’s nerves equally as big time.

Fred didn’t show up again until open lab was well in session - thankfully, not in front of a professor this time. Arguably, though, how he did show up was worse.

Open lab wasn’t technically a class period, Hiro had learned. While the robotics labs were practically open twenty-four seven to accommodate students, EVERYBODY, regardless of major, found themselves in the labs for at least one class project (or another five), and so it could be difficult to fit everyone in at times. SFIT helped rectify this problem by closing off certain labs off during the day and only letting a select number of students work in there for a set amount of time. This had become the open lab course; in other words, it was a tutorial period.

Hiro was taking today as an opportunity to finish his aerial robotics helicopter and his fly. His helicopter was about done, only needing a few adjustments here and there. His fly should be done by tomorrow afternoon, ready to zip off to Yama. Its name certainly suited it, he believed; it was only a centimeter in both width and height, all black except for its red camera lenses, and small, transparent copter wings on its back, above the audio speakers.

He was elbow deep in his work, alternating between the two projects at his desk, when he heard someone approach from behind.

“Working hard, Mr. Hamada?” Professor Sato inquired over Hiro’s shoulder.

“Huh? Oh, yup!” he replied, raising his head. “It’s my aerial robotics homework. We’re having a race tomorrow.”

“Ah, that sounds like Professor Roe’s class, then,” Professor Sato nodded.

“Yep!”

Professor Sato was probably the youngest of Hiro’s professors; he’d peg the guy at early forties. He was tall, had neatly combed black hair, and was always in a lab coat, which he stuffed his hands into the pockets of while he was supervising open lab. A laid back guy, he was a sharp contrast to Squires and Granville, and Hiro could admit he felt the most comfortable around the man. He simply had this relaxed, easy-going aura around him.

“Do you have any questions?” he asked, craning his neck to examine the helicopter and fly. “I teach aerial robotics as well, you know, first thing in the morning on Tuesdays and Thursdays.”

“You do?”

“No one here teaches only one class, Hiro,” Professor Sato chuckled. “This semester, I’m doing aerial robotics, open lab, and introduction to robotics engineering. So what’s this little guy? Did Professor Roe add a new requirement to the helicopter race?”
“Uh, no,” Hiro thought fast, reaching out to push his fly to the side, “that’s actually for another class. I know what I’m doing for it. Hey, is it all right if I test my helicopter in here or do I have to go outside? I don’t want to get in anybody’s way.”

If Professor Sato had meant to press on the fly, the obvious question distracted him from doing so. He didn’t treat the question like it was obvious, though, nor gave Hiro a strange look, as if the boy hadn’t been in this lab nearly every day for weeks now. He answered casually, “Of course. Try to keep from disrupting your peers’ work, but go ahead.”

Hiro nodded. “Thanks!”

Professor Sato nodded in return and took a step in the other direction to check on another student, only to pause and point a finger up. “Oh, but clean up your station before you do, please; it’s getting late, and I’ve been noticing you tend to leave your area a mess at the end of open lab lately, Mr. Hamada. I’d appreciate a little more respect for your surroundings - and your poor, old professor that’s had to clean up after you twice now.”

Although Professor Sato cracked a toothy smile as he said the last bit, Hiro’s eyes bulged. He had? Oh...he did have a nasty habit of being disorganized and leaving stuff lying around when he was done with them at home. He’d been trying to be a little more organized at school, but he guessed he’d slipped up lately and hadn’t realized.

“I’m sorry, professor,” he blurted out. He scratched his cheek and bit his lip, the picture of guilt. “I - I don’t really have an excuse for that. Other than I might have forgot. I do this at home and it gets my aunt riled up, and my brother sometimes, even if he’s mostly used to it by now. I’m really sorry, it won’t happen again!”

Professor Sato did raise his brow at that. “Well...that’s a more mature response than I get from your older peers. Thank you, Mr. Hamada - but don’t get so worked up over it.” He smiled gently and patted Hiro’s shoulder. “The first semester is always the hardest on students, the stress of which makes them forget little things like this all the time, and what fourteen year old isn’t messy? I was. If this becomes a regular thing we’ll have a problem, sure, but I’m just letting you know. You’re not in trouble. Besides, trust me, some of your older peers are far worse.”

Hiro flashed his teeth in an awkward smile. While he wasn’t as tense as he had been in Squires’ class earlier, he honestly didn’t want this to become a regular thing either.

‘I can’t believe I was doing that. Stupid! If this was Granville’s class, this would have been a fast strike against you! Don’t get on Sato’s list, too,’ he warned himself.

Hiro jumped up and started shoving all his borrowed supplies into a box so he could carry them to their respective cabinets and drawers.

Professor Sato lingered a moment longer. “Mr. Hamada?”

Hiro paused. “Yeah?”

“Please get some rest when you go home tonight,” he said, “you look a little pale. I don’t want you getting sick; you’ve otherwise been a delight to work with so far, and I’d hate to see you miss class.”

Hiro’s cheeks warmed at the unexpected compliment. “Uh, I will. Thank...you?”

Professor Sato lowered his chin in acknowledgement and drifted towards another student.
Hiro rushed to gather the rest of his supplies together and hurried across the lab, struggling and spinning around on his sneakers to stay upright. When he got to the closest cabinet, he opened the door and -

Nearly leaped out of skin when Fred held out his hero helmet.

“Fred!” he hissed between grit teeth (his dentist was going to throttle him at this rate). “What are you doing in there!?”

Fred shifted on the shelf he was pretzeled on. “Hiding so I don’t get in trouble with another prof. Dr. Squires chewed me out to Prof. Dugan, who said I’m ‘doing the opposite of my job’ by interrupting class in my suit. So I left it in my gym locker and hid in here! I was wondering when you’d - ”

Hiro decided that was enough. He slammed the cabinet shut without bothering to listen to the rest and moved to the next cabinet.

Hopefully, that would get his message across to Fred.

It did not.

Thursday ended and Friday morning came quickly. Fred miraculously didn't show up during humanoid construction, but that didn't mean he was gone.

Hiro, after all, had stayed an extra few minutes after class to ask Professor Froeb some questions.

She was undoubtedly his oldest teacher, anywhere between her mid fifties to mid sixties, with gray roots showing under her dyed blonde hair and crows feet wrinkling the corners of her eyes; she did not, however, seem her age. She was bright, enthusiastic, and Hiro wasn't kidding when he said she reminded him of Honey Lemon. And in terms of robotics, Hiro was in awe of her tech that didn't purposely go off the rails.

Not to mention, her class also turned out to be more complicated than Hiro had been expecting. While he wasn’t failing yet by any means, he had had a bit of difficulty understanding this week's lessons. Normally, he'd try to figure them out on his own, but he figured asking Professor Froeb would be better; he was trying to stay on track and focus on his education, after all.

"...and that's why you have to make sure the lubricant fluid is properly insulated," she explained to him. "It's one thing if your robot breaks or moves stiffly; it's another if it combusts on you."

"Definitely don't want that," Hiro agreed. "Thank you, professor."

Professor Froeb smiled, arms folded close over her chest. "You're welcome, Hiro. Though it can be fun to watch the combustion in a safe, separate, enclosed area. When I was a grad student, I tried it out to see what exactly would happen and boy, it didn't disappoint. Have you ever seen a robot walk around, asking if you need assistance, while on fire? The metal didn't even scorch!"

The way her smile widened into a cheshire's and a mischievous gleam glossed over her eyes sent a nervous yet weirdly thrilled tingle up Hiro's spine.

"No, but that sounds cool," he said. "Thank you, Professor Froeb, I think I get everything now."

"Wonderful!" she chirped. "You can come to me any time you have questions, Hiro. My office hours are on the syllabus if you find yourself having trouble later. I encourage you to make the
most out of them."
"I will," he promised.

He had yet to use any of his professors' office hours.

If he was going to improve, might as well take advantage of everything at his disposal. It wasn't like college was as easy as he'd thought it would be months ago either. If he had more trouble understanding, he'd definitely pull out her syllabus (from...wherever it currently was; actually, he might have to search SFIT's website instead).

"I'm glad," Professor Froeb continued. "You know, being a fourteen year old genius whose skills allowed him to skip the introduction to robotics course and most of the basic classes freshmen take, I was a tad worried you wouldn't be the type to ask questions or seek out extra help - especially since you haven't up until now. You may not be anywhere close to failing, but uh, this is a tough school, and plenty of students tend to be former gifted children who flew by through kindergarten to twelfth grade, and they can get pretty anxious when they start to slip here, and choose to hide it out of shame rather than approach their professors. I feel so bad for them; they haven't learned to cope with small failures yet, and, well, that can snowball fast. It's part of why I embrace failure in my class and encourage the use of my office hours. But I'm glad you've come to me instead of letting it snowball."

Hiro blinked at the sudden speech, cheeks flushing. "Uh, okay?"

Professor Froeb threw her head back and laughed, flicking her wrist. "I'm sorry, Hiro, this must sound out of nowhere! It's only that - I mean, you're so young and you're at SFIT already. I've comforted adults twice your age during breakdowns because no one ever taught them it was okay not to understand right away and need help. They were the 'smart' ones who'd lose that title if they admitted not getting something, or so their anxiety told them. With your genius, I can imagine it being extra difficult because look how far you've come on your own in such a short time! So I'm happy you have come to me with questions and will keep doing so."

"Oh," Hiro wasn't sure how to respond to that. He ignored the prickling annoyance in the back of his head at having his age brought up again. "I'm...just following in my brother's footsteps, Professor. He's a good student and I want to be like him."

As soon as the words were out of his mouth. Hiro wanted to slap himself for sounding so corny. What was he, seven? He could have phrased the truth in a less embarrassing way.

Professor Froeb cooed. "That's so sweet! Well, you've been doing a remarkable job here at SFIT, I can tell you that!"

Hiro scratched his head, flushing further. "Thanks. I hope I can keep living up to him."

Professor Froeb batted her hand. "Don't compare yourself like that now, you're not his shadow and that's not what I meant. You're both wonderful students and you should be proud of yourselves. You better get going now, I know you're in Professor Yoshida's next class. And tell Tadashi I said hello when you see him; the robotics department misses him!"

"I will, okay. Thanks again, Professor," he said, and high tailed it out there.

‘Geeze,’ he thought grudgingly as he walked down the hall, ‘seems like everybody’s got something to say to me about confidence or failure or blame or harassment or whatever all of a sudden. When did my life become a badly written parable?’
He didn’t so much as stumble when Fred popped out of nowhere, dressed in his hero suit and holding a picture of himself pointing at Hiro, reminiscent of old wartime ‘We Need YOU’ posters he recalled from high school history classes.

“Fred,” he deadpanned, keeping his eyes forward as he walked, “why are you dressed like that here with your head open? Are you trying to give yourself away?”

“NOOO,” Fred retorted. “I’m a kaiju cosplayer, Hiro, and Fredzilla is a kaiju, so I’m COSPLAYING him on school grounds - or so everyone else thinks! See how I deal with my duel identity, Hiro? Easy-peasy.”

Hiro wasn’t going to dignify that with a response; it was what Fred wanted.

When he didn’t respond, Fred ditched the picture and grabbed a red and orange Big Hero 7 sign. When he ignored that as well, Fred pulled out another, larger, piece of cardboard with Big Hero 7 soppily painted on it.

Hiro only flinched when Fred lost his balance trying to hold it up and fell flat on his face.

On the bright side, Yoshida’s class made him forget about Fred for a whole ten minutes.

Laser photonics wasn’t an easy class in the slightest. It was a cool, interesting, and pretty neat class, but not an easy one. Where Hiro had only needed some questions answered in humanoid construction, he spent practically half the allotted time raising his hand to question Professor Yoshida. He would have thought he was bothering her by interrupting the lesson so many times, if it hadn’t been for the fact she answered his questions with relaxed ease and flowed onto the next topic comfortably. Well, until class ended and she asked him to stay behind a moment.

Professor Yoshida was a tall woman who looked like she was in her forties, but had revealed in his first week of class she was of an age with Froeb. She had straight, shoulder length black hair, wore a lab coat at all times like Sato, and was pretty quiet when she wasn’t lecturing - as in, she sometimes startled her students by appearing right behind them without them noticing until she spoke or touched their work. Hiro had come to know her as an encouraging woman who expected nothing short of diligence from her students, but also kind of blunt.

“Hiro,” she said when the rest of the class was gone, “can you come up to my desk?”

“Uh, sure,” he answered, making a detour from the door to the front of the room. “What is it? Did - I do something?”

Maybe he had annoyed her after all, he thought, heart speeding up in his chest.

“Oh.” So this was going to be a repeat of Froeb’s speech, then. As appreciative as he was for her praise, Hiro wasn’t interested in hearing the same speech twice, much less in a row. He decided to nip this in the bud now, before Professor Yoshida could get started. “I’m trying to be a better student,” he explained, “like my brother is. Do you know Tadashi? Well, anyway, I love being here at SFIT and I don’t want to ruin that with - with bad grades or doing stupid things that I’m not supposed to. I’ve already hit a couple of bumps that pi- upset Professor Granville, and she made it clear that it’ll only take ONE tiny, wrong move to - to lose everything I’ve worked for. So I’m tying my best to be better. Laser photonics isn’t easy, and I don’t want to mess everything up
because I was too cocky to ask questions."

Professor Yoshida’s lips twitched; or, they might have; the movement was so subtle, Hiro could believe he’d imagined. Her expression remained calm, and eyes unreadable.

“I see,” she said. “I won’t ask what you did to upset Professor Granville - that’s your private business and I won’t assume; however, I’m going to have to disagree with both of your assessments.”

Hiro frowned, confused. “Huh?”

“Hiro, you already ask questions in class. While not as nearly as many as today, in the short time you’ve been my student, I’ve seen just how much of a hard worker you are and how you approach difficulty head on. You’re right, my class isn’t easy, but you’re passing with a - I believe it was a ninety-four last time I checked - for a reason. And not because you’re a fourteen year old genius.”

“I’m - ” Hiro blinked rapidly at her, bewildered. He didn’t know which part to question first. “It’s...not?”

Professor Yoshida shook her head. “Frankly, I don’t believe in genius. Every person’s brain is wired to collect information differently, hence some things comes easier to some than others. My daughter, for example, is a wonderful mathematician who recently graduated with her masters from the University of California, but she’s always been horrible with English. My son, on the other hand, has had trouble with math since he started learning addition, and nearly failed it every year of middle and high school. Otherwise, he was a straight A student who didn’t need to study to maintain those grades. And I’ve seen similar cases with my students more times than I care to count. You’re advanced or proficient in one, two, or three areas, but just like everyone else in these other fields - maybe worse than everyone else. It’s how your brain is wired. I’ve seen you struggle in my class, Hiro. Many of my students do, especially if they’re not studying my field and don’t find the information relevant. What’s important is that you try, seek out help, and learn to take it one step a time. That’s what you, like many of my students, do. That’s why your grade is presently so high.”

Hiro continued to blink rapidly at her, bewildered. That wasn’t how he viewed genius, but he understood what she meant.

“My point is,” she went on, “you’re a hard worker. That’s what’s important. SFIT isn’t for those who think they’ll fly through everything. It’s for those who, no matter how their brains are wired, are willing to put in the work to push scientific boundaries. And from what I’ve seen, you’re one of those people. You fit right in, and it shows.”

Hiro was baffled. Something about that sounded familiar, though he couldn’t place it. He might have been thinking of Tadashi, and how he saw science’s purpose as helping people. Whatever the case, he didn’t think he’d ever been called a hard worker before. Only a genius. Things did come easy to him, and - well, he guessed he did face problems head on. That was how he learned and succeeded at robotics. (He wondered what Professor Yoshida would think if she knew his old views on college and how useless he’d thought it was. ‘Teaching me stuff I already know - ha!’)

“As for Professor Granville’s assertion that ‘one tiny wrong move,’” she moved on, and he didn’t correct her that Granville had actually said, ‘one tiny, wrong decision,’ “will cost you everything you’ve worked for, she’s wrong. Success is built on failure. Professor Froeb and I are dear friends, so I know you have her, and have undoubtedly heard her spiels on the importance of accepting failure. Science itself is about discovery, learning, and trial and error. You’re not going to get everything immediately; that’s just a fact, no matter how smart you are. As a student, if you start to
slip, it’s your job to come to us and our job to help you. If a professor tells you that just one, just a tiny wrong move will cost you your place here, then perhaps she needs a re-education in SFIT’s - and any other academic institution’s - principals."

Hiro sucked in a sharp breath. “No, no, no! It’s not like that! She caught me sneaking into my brother’s lab when I’m not supposed to be in there! She caught me twice! She didn’t say I’d get kicked out for a ninety-four, I - I didn’t mean it to come off like that! She always says in thermodynamics that we should always come to her for help whenever we need, she only meant - I was being stupid and selfish, and for once someone was right when they said I should be more like my brother. That’s all!”

Professor Yoshida’s eyes narrowed.

“Please don’t talk to her,” Hiro begged. “If she thinks I said what you thought I said, it’ll be another checkmark against me, and she’s the dean. I don’t want a - a whole list of things against me - ”

“Mr. Hamada,” Professor Yoshida interrupted sternly, “I will not go to Professor Granville and say a word of this meeting to her. What you need to understand, however, is that regardless of what you did, ‘tiny’ things like this do not result in expulsion, and she was wrong to make you feel like you have to work twice as hard and trip over yourself to keep from doing ‘one, tiny, wrong’ thing and getting expelled. Of course you shouldn’t have been using your brother’s lab, and repeated rule breakage can have serious consequences, but what you’ve told me she said is still over the top.”

“She - She never technically said she’d expel me!” he tried, head spinning. “Really! I’m exaggerating. I’m making a mountain out of a molehill! The point was for me to focus on my education and not stupid things is all! She’s told before I’m doing great and she’s proud of me even though she didn’t trust me for bot-fighting in the past!”

The last part slipped out without him meaning to.

Hiro slapped his forehead in shame.

Professor Yoshida’s stance relaxed.

Great, she probably didn’t care anymore since he’d admitted to being a bot-fighter. He bet she understood Granville’s feelings now.

“I see,” she repeated slowly. “Nevertheless, regardless of her intentions, that was the wrong choice of words. You’re a bundle of nerves.”

Hiro had no response. He was afraid if he opened his mouth, he’d backtalk her, and that certainly wouldn’t end well.

He hadn’t meant to paint Granville as a villain. He didn’t see her as one, or anything wrong with what she’d said. She was right. He definitely didn’t need this on her list next to bot-fighting and breaking into his brother’s lab. It was worse than Squires’ deal with Fred and Sato’s comment on his messiness; it would instantly make Granville his enemy, and Hiro didn’t need that. He didn’t want any of his professors to be his enemies.

“Hiro, look at me,” Professor Yoshida ordered.

Reluctantly, he lowered his hand and lifted his face.

Her frown was resolute. “I will not go to Granville, say a word of this meeting, or tell anyone else
about this. Do you understand me? I won’t. But you need to calm yourself down. Worrying so much isn’t going to help you. In fact, it can negatively affect your grades in the long run, because you’ll be too frazzled to grasp the material or hand in work or, god forbid, come to class at all. I’ve seen it more times than I care to admit. You haven’t broken any rules worthy of expulsion, and I doubt you will in the future. You’re a good young man and a good student, whatever your history is: you’ve proven that. You deserve to be here. If Granville does get it into her head to expel you for minor offenses or less than perfect grades, I promise you, I’ll be the first to contest her decision.”

“Thanks,” Hiro mumbled, wishing he could pull his hood over his face and hide.

Professor Yoshida regarded him carefully. “Listen to me. You are a good young man. You keep up with your studies. You ask questions in class. You participate. You have yet to break any major rules, and I’m positive you’ve learned your lesson against breaking minor ones. You belong here, and everybody can see that. I enjoy your presence in class and I know Professor Froeb adores you. I don’t believe I’ve ever heard anything negative about you from the other faculty. Forget living up to your brother. You’re both excellent students in your own rights. Aside from behaving yourself a tad more, which I’m sure you have done and plan to continue to do, you have no reason to change. You’re both excellent students in your own rights. Aside from behaving yourself a tad more, which I’m sure you have done and plan to continue to do, you have no reason to change. I’m not saying this to stroke your ego, or as a lie to make you feel better, or because I thought you were annoying today. It’s the truth. Don’t take Professor Granville’s words as deeply to heart as you have. She didn’t phrase her reprimands appropriately. They should have left you warned, not a constant bundle of nerves.”

Hiro nodded, sullen. “I got it.”

Her face softened. “I’m only telling you this because I care. We do our best here at SFIT, but some students crack under the pressure and drop out, believing they were wrong about themselves, that they weren’t good enough to be here. Do you know how many students I’ve comforted because they got a ninety-eight on a test, despite studying so much and so hard? Because they got a forty-eight, despite studying so much and so hard? SFIT is difficult enough on its own; you don’t need additional pressure wearing you down. What concerns me most isn’t how frequently you raised your hand today, but rather the frantic explanations you’ve given me. This is weighing on you more than you think it is, and that’s not healthy. Professor Granville may not have been wrong - you shouldn’t have been in a lab that wasn’t yours - but she wasn’t right either. I’m willing to bet nearly all of your other professors, if not all of them, would agree with me. We’re not going to let you get expelled for such a minor offense, Hiro. Disciplined, yes, expelled, no.”

Hiro flushed. He didn’t quite believe her (god, what a mess he’d made) but her bluntness and acknowledgement of his say - Granville wasn’t a villain and he did mess up - didn’t irritate him in the way Fred’s arguments had. And the fact she would go to bat for him, not because she loved him or wanted him on a team, but because she genuinely thought he didn’t deserve expulsion, made him feel funny inside. A good kind of funny, sort of. Also an embarrassed one.

He smiled sheepishly. “Thank you, professor. C-Can I go?”

Professor Yoshida looked him up and down with her eyes, then gave a curt nod. “You may. If you’d like to talk more, you can come to me or arrange a visit with the counseling office. The doors are always open. Don’t let this place get to you so much, Hiro.”

“I wo- I’ll try,” he scratched the back of his head. “Thanks for, uh, listening? I guess.”

She gave him a small smile. “Any time.”

Hiro mirrored it and took off out the door.
As he ran through the halls, he gradually slowed to a walk and let a smile spread across his face. Okay, not what he’d wanted, but at least that hadn’t gone as badly as all the other times.

He headed for the lockers against the right wall, which students were allowed to use throughout the day to avoid dropping their stuff in a lab where that wouldn’t be a good idea. He needed his aerial robotics textbook and project for later, and his fly for now - it was ready to hunt Yama, and he finally had the time between two classes to set it off.

This was going to be good.

The smile slipped off his face when he opened his locker to find a Big Hero 7 promotional drawing on the door. In a fit of irritation, he ripped it off and shoved in his pocket to throw away on his way out. Grabbing his stuff and slamming the door - Hiro once again jumped to see Fred there, holding another drawing.

At this point, Hiro was ready to scream.

“Hey, Hiro,” Fred greeted happily. “I - ”

Nope, nope. He wasn’t. Going. To respond.

Hiro turned on his heel and stalked away before Fred could finish.

“How DO I GET FRED TO LEAVE ME ALONE!?” Hiro just about shouted as he stalked into the main robotics lab.

A few other students looked up from their work curiously, but Hiro was in no mood to be embarrassed. He focused all of his attention on Wasabi, Gogo, and Honey Lemon, marching towards them in a fury.

“I’m sick of him!” he raged. “He won’t stop pestering me to - you know! How do you get him to stop!?”

Gogo popped her gum, leaning on one hand on her work desk. “Oh boy. Here’s a lesson you have to learn about Fred: When he gets going on something, he doesn’t stop until he loses interest.”

“Yeah. Sorry, Hiro,” Honey Lemon smiled apologetically, holding up a beaker in sympathy.

Wasabi, tinkering with his laser field, chuckled. “How about you get Tadashi involved? We heard the story about how you were bullied in high school and Tadashi beat a kid for touching you, and ever since, Fred’s been in, like, 75% awe and 25% fear of your brother. He also went off on him a few days ago for the heroics and got Fred to knock it off for the rest of the day.”

Hiro started. “W-What!? He told that story!? Why!?”

Honey Lemon poked her head up from her experiment, suddenly serious. “He wants us to look out for you while he isn’t here. We promised we’d help protect you if anyone decided to make a target out of you. Which we will.”

Hiro gaped. He hadn’t the slightest idea what to say to that. He was torn between wanting to strangle Tadashi and strangle Tadashi while awkwardly appreciating how much their friends cared.

Never mind. He’d contemplate it later. Tossing his backpack next to a chair near Gogo’s work desk, he fished out his fly and laptop. “Well, I’m not getting Tadashi involved. I don’t want him to
punch Fred...yet,” he muttered the last bit. “I need him to quit bugging me during and between my classes. He already embarrassed me in front of two professors. One thought he was harassing and trying to peer pressure me because of my age, and the other thought he was trying to get me to join a cult!”

Gogo’s eyebrows flew to her hairline while Gogo and Wasabi poked their heads out of their work stations.

“Whoah,” Wasabi said. “That’s new. He’s really obsessed this time.”

“Of course he is, after the ordeal with Yokai and ‘fun’ with Yama,” Gogo spat. She gave Hiro a guilty expression. “There’s not much we can do. He’s always like this. When he loses interest, he’ll stop. Until then, all you can do is beat it into his skull that you’re not going to play along. Helps him lose interest faster.”

“Great,” Hiro muttered, syncing up his fly with an untraceable recording program.

“Should we talk to him for you, Hiro?” Honey Lemon asked. “Freddie means well, he just has...problems getting out of his head and the world he built up in there sometimes. He’ll probably feel bad when he realizes how annoying he’s been.”

Hiro sighed. “Do you think that’ll help?”

She shrugged. “It could. Like Wasabi said, it seems like he’s really obsessed this time.”

He groaned. So that was basically a no.

Tapping at his keyboard, the fly picked up off his lap and buzzed for the open lab door.

Wasabi eyed the little robot. “What’s that?”

“Extra credit homework for aerial robotics,” he lied. “I built a tiny fly to go take overhead pictures of the city. It’s a new thing Professor Roe’s assigning, I guess.”

“Ooo!” Honey Lemon squealed. “That sounds fun! You’ll have to show me the pictures when you’re done!”

“Sure,” he also lied. That was never going to happen. He’d conveniently ‘forget’ if she pressed later, and say he already deleted them. “I’ll figure Fred out on my own. Worse comes to worst, I’ll get Tadashi involved to scare him off.”

“If you say so,” Gogo turned back to her latest bike project.

Honey Lemon and Wasabi’s heads disappeared.

Hiro navigated his fly off campus, increasing its speed until it zipped passed the border to Good Luck Alley. There was no guarantee Yama was at his place at the moment, but that was fine; his fly could lie in wait until he was.

Soon enough, the fly found Yama’s building. Hiro searched for an open window or door, only to find none. There was a goon he recognized as one of Yama’s coming this way, though, and Hiro had no doubt he was going inside.

Sure enough, the goon opened the garage entrance, and his fly zipped in. He navigated through the halls and up the backstairs, which goons filtered through. Eventually, he reached Yama’s office,
where the literal mountain indeed was sitting, speaking with a few of his goons in lab coats.

Hiro frowned. Since he was in the lab with his friends, he had his laptop muted, and he hadn’t thought to bring headphones with him to school today (dumb on his part). Nevertheless, whatever they were saying could be useful, so he hit record and carefully maneuvered the fly to sit on the inside of Yama’s collar, only its eyes popping out over the edge.

He would let the video record for a few days, checking in here and there to make sure his fly wasn’t caught or damaged. Afterwards, when he was sure he’d caught Yama up to something criminal, he’d edit the footage and send it to the police.

No more gang leaders to threaten Tadashi’s safety. *Ever.* If they let Yama out of jail again, he’d just record more to get him back in there longer. No one threatened his big brother.

Satisfied with it, Hiro closed his laptop and got out his helicopter to make his last minute adjustments. He was so going to win Roe’s race today and go home to some nice *yakisoba-pan.*

Oh, did he say he was going to win the race? Evidently, he’d forgotten how annoying Fred had been lately. Or maybe he’d been hopeful since Fred seemed to want to stay out of the professors’ views now. Either way, oh no.

Professor Roe had taken them out to the quad for their race. She was a curvy woman of medium height with medium brown hair tied in a high, thick ponytail and in her late forties. She excitedly walked across the quad in front of the students, her clipboard in hand as she inspected everyone’s shiny, various colored helicopters, which floated alongside their creators and held several pounds of tungsten on flat, wooden platforms chained beneath them.

“I’m glad everybody has their project ready and no one’s is falling apart from carrying the material alone,” she chuckled. “We have a lot to cover in class today, both in review and new topics, so let’s get started quickly. Remember, the winner gets a free bonus point on whatever upcoming test or quiz you like.”

Hiro nodded along with his classmates, some of whom murmured in acknowledgement.

“All right, then,” Professor Roe stepped off to the side, holding up a stop watch. “Remember, where the grass ends and the concrete starts is the finish line. First one over it with their tungsten on board wins. If you try to cheat by sabotaging your classmates, you get a zero for failing to understand the purpose of the assignment. This race is a fun way to show you’ve mastered keeping your projects steady in the air without breaking or being weighed to the ground by their materials; it’s not actually about winning, and I can easily cancel all the future ‘fun’ parts of my course if enough you let it go to your heads. With that out of the way, get your copters ready!”

Hiro gripped his controller tightly, like he was just getting serious at a bot-fight. He was determined to win. He’d definitely beat Tadashi’s score of third place, plain and easy. The *yakisoba-pan* was his.

“Okay!” Professor Roe chirped brightly. “On your marks! Three, two...ONE, go!”

The helicopters darted forward, pushing across the quad. Hiro thumbed at the controls, increasing his speed and taking the lead by a foot ahead of the rest.

Yes!

The others tried to catch up. One came dangerously close to Hiro. Another barely surpassed him.
Hiro cranked the speed up another notch. His tungsten didn’t so much as move on his platform as he shot even farther ahead, reaching the halfway point on the quad.

Aaand that was when Fred showed.

He leaped out of nowhere on the other side of the quad, under the archway past the finish line, holding up a new cardboard sign that had a crudely drawn picture of San Fransokyo surrounded by a heart.

“WIN THE RACE, THEN WIN THE HEARTS OF THE PEOPLE, HIRO!” he cheered at the top of his lungs, shaking the sign above his head.

Hiro realized too late he should have seen this coming. In his shock, unfortunately, his thumb jerked over the controls, and his helicopter slowed to a near halt before jerking to the right, crashing into the helicopter now next to him, causing both to crash to the ground.

“Hey!” the girl piloting it protested.

The helicopters behind them jittered in automatic response, slowing and jerking at their pilots’ last second attempt to avoid going down with Hiro and the girl. Some of their materials slid, others’ fell completely out. More helicopters did the same, as if they kept going they’d hit Fred directly, while others tried to avoid hitting him or their peers by darting to the side, which only caused more wrecks and lost cargo.

“Stop, stop, stop!” Professor Roe called, frantic.

The last of the helicopters did, most managing to pause in the air rather than go down or lose their contents.

“Hiro Hamada, what is the meaning of this!?” she demanded.

Hiro blanched. Oh boy. He in trouble for real this time. “I - I - I didn’t know he was going to jump up like that!” Fury boiled in his stomach, and before he could stop himself, Hiro snapped, “I’ve been telling him to leave me alone for two days! He doesn’t listen! He wants me to join a stupid club of his, and won’t quit!”

Fred’s enthusiastic expression crumbled and he lowered the board.

Hiro immediately caught himself, and winced. He hadn’t meant to say that. He hadn’t meant to come off like that.

Professor Roe’s face dropped. Then it turned red as her brow furrowed, and she gestured for Hiro to follow her.

Hiro gulped. Oh boy. Not again. This was getting old. So old.

He followed Professor Roe across the squad, doing his best to ignore the snickers and confused murmurs of his classmates behind them.

“You,” she snapped at Fred when they reached the other side of the quad. “What do you think you’re doing?”

Fred laughed nervously. “Uh, supporting my friend? Is that - Is that not allowed? Because I can leave, no problem.”
“Wrong answer,” Professor Roe snarled. “Besides, you’ve already caused all this damage, so what’s the point in skedaddling? You’ve made your bed, so you get to lay in it. Do you know what the right answer is, young man?”

Fred hesitated. “Uh...I...disrupted your class?”

“Absolutely!” she shot him a predatory smile. “You did! You cost my students their race because nearly all of their projects are lying on the ground thanks to your interruption. I do NOT have time for a second race, not unless I let this class fall behind my other aerial robotics classes. What’s your name?”

“Fr-Fred Frederickson, ma’am,” Fred cowered.

“Wonderful! Fred,” she threw a hand out towards the quad. “You’re going to clean all of this up. Then you’re going to wait until my class ends, so I can speak to you alone, with PLENTY of time to get my point across. Can you take a guess what my point is?”

Fred wavered. “To...not disrupt class?”

“To not disrupt class,” Professor Roe repeated, nodding, “as well as how to take no for an answer, why you shouldn’t be stalking your peers, much less a fourteen year old boy, and how I have very good ears that will hear about it if you continue harassing Hiro to join your little ‘club.’”

It was Fred’s turn to blanche. He sputtered, “B-B-But Professor - You don’t understand how important this ‘club’ is! It could mean - ”

He stopped himself short before he could reveal them, to Hiro’s relief.

Which was great, because otherwise, Hiro was stricken with nothing short of pure horror.

“I don’t care,” she answered simply. “I don’t care. No club is worth behavior like this, and it’s a shame at this age you’re unaware of that. And frankly, it makes me a bit queasy that you’re going to such lengths to recruit such a student as young as Hiro.”

Hiro’s ears burned. “Wait, wait, wait!” he waved his hands in front of him. “Professor Roe, I appreciate the concern, but you’ve got it all wrong! Fred’s my friend. He’s annoying everyone in our friend group to join his COMIC BOOK club! Including my older brother, Tadashi! Who’d kill Fred in a split-second if he was trying what you think he’s trying! Yeah, Fred’s being super annoying,” he sent a death glare Fred’s way, “but he’s not stalking or harassing me!”

Professor Roe gave Hiro a long, even look.

Hiro couldn’t help cringing a little beneath it.

“Hiro,” she began, “do you have Dr. Squires this semester?”

His heart dropped. “E-Excuse me?”

“Dr. Squires,” she repeated. “He was complaining in the faculty lounge the other day about a student who disrupted his class to convince another student to join his comic book club. He had a sign that made Dr. Squires think he was leading some sort of newly established cult, not a club. Were the students in question you two?”

Hiro suddenly felt light-headed.
His face must have said it all, because Professor Roe took his silence for ‘Yes.’ “I thought so. It’s one thing for friends to pester friends, Hiro, but when they go as far as to follow you to your classes, it’s harassment. That, at the least, we have to take care of properly.”

If Hiro could have withered and died on the spot, he would have.

“You think I’m harassing him!?” Fred panicked. “I mean - I can’t - I wasn’t - !”

She held up a hand for silence. “I’ll deal with you after aerial robotics. You’ve wasted enough of my time. Keep your distance from Hiro in class from now on. If you attempt to ditch cleaning up this mess and our meeting, I will find you, Mr. Frederickson.”

“No, no, I’m not going to ditch,” Fred shivered at her tone. “In fact, I’ll start right now!”

Satisfied, Professor Roe turned to Hiro. “Since this is over a comic book club and I trust an email to Tadashi would confirm that Mr. Frederickson is indeed your friend and bugging all of you,” she began, “I won’t go to the dean over this. If he continues this behavior, however, I will take him to Professor Granville’s office. - Relax, Hiro, you’re not in trouble. You’ve done nothing wrong.”

Hiro felt like he was five seconds from blowing apart like a poorly built bot. All of his pieces would scatter around the quad. Regardless of what Roe said, if she went to Granville over Fred, it was off with Hiro’s head. Granville saw them as a pair, after all.

Fred was already scampering around the field, picking up helicopters and pieces of tungsten. Professor Roe took Hiro by the shoulders, most likely in comfort, and escorted him back across the quad.

“I’m sorry about today’s race,” she told the class. “Unfortunately, we really don’t have time for another one. Since this was due to an outside interference and everyone’s projects managed to stay in the air as long as they did, I’ll allow everyone to have an extra bonus point. For my sake of keeping track of it all, though, it will be on the next test, not one of each of your choosings.”

While a few students grumbled, most seemed all right with that.

Hiro wasn’t. His stomach twisted painfully. It did for the rest of the day, which Fred thankfully left him alone for, and honestly, not even eating the yakisoba-pan Aunt Cass made for him anyway made him feel better. In the end, he avoided all of Tadashi’s probing questions and went to bed, hoping, praying the weekend would be better.

But what’s the point with hoping or praying when it comes to Fred and his incredibly thick skull? And he said Hamada skulls were thick. Sure. Not as thick as his, apparently.

Hiro was startled awake in the middle of the night to a skylight in his room. A skylight. A skylight.

HALP shined through Hiro’s windows, across his bed, landing on the homemade mecha clock he and Tadashi had made years ago.

Tadashi startled awake as well, Hiro hearing his brother’s blankets ruffle and a sharp gasp from across the room.

“What’s going on!?” he asked.

Hiro twisted his torso around to peak through the blinds and squinted his eyes against the light.
Fred, in his Fredzilla suit, waved from across the street next to his skylight.

“It’s Fred,” he growled, in his sleep deprivation forgetting how he didn’t want to tell Tadashi about him. He yanked the blinds shut with more force than necessary. “He’s trying to get me to join Big Hero 7! He won’t stop, he’s bugged me all day at school for the past two days, embarrassing me in front of three professors, and now he’s bothering me at home! WHY DOESN’T HE STOP!?”

There was silence on the other side of the room. Then a small burst of light lit up behind the divider, which Hiro quickly realized was Tadashi’s phone.

“...Fred?” his big brother inquired. “Hey, here’s a question: WHAT THE HELL DO YOU THINK YOU’RE DOING!?”

Hiro groaned. Great time to remember why he hadn’t told Tadashi anything. Time for overprotective big brother to get involved. Overprotective big brother mode was great when fleeing bot-fights; not so great when it came to annoying friends.

“No, no, Fred! Stop!” Tadashi ordered. “It’s two-thirty in the morning! This has got to stop! The others and I told you Big Hero 7 was DONE. That wasn’t an invitation to go bug Hiro! If you don’t knock this hero business off, and I swear, if you don’t leave Hiro alone, I WILL go Gogo on you! Understood!?”

Silence once more. The skylight shut off, returning the bedroom to darkness.

Hiro peeked through the blinds again. He saw Fred scurrying down the street, pushing the skylight ahead of him.

Well, all’s well that ends well, he guessed.

“I’m so sorry about that, Hiro,” Tadashi sighed tiredly behind the divider. “Why didn’t you tell me he was bugging you?”

“Because he was bugging everybody,” Hiro grunted, rubbing his eyes. Remembrance struck him. Aggravation followed. “And you told everyone about the time you punched one of my bullies! No offense, but I don’t need you punching Fred to get him off my back.”

Tadashi scoffed. “I’m not going to punch him. Geeze, the one time I got violent. He picked you up by the collar because he didn’t like how smart you were, I had to hit him. Unless Fred’s touched you, I’m won’t hit him.”

“Don’t forget he’s your best friend.”

“If my best friends hurt you, they wouldn’t be my friends, period, anymore, Hiro.”

For what felt like the hundredth time, Hiro didn’t know how to respond.

“Well, Fred never touched me,” he replied quietly.

“So what I’ll do is yell at him. He has to get this through his head, little brother.” Tadashi paused. “Do you wanna come over here?”

Hiro didn’t have a reason not to. He got up and made his way across the room and around the divider, climbing up under the lifted covers with Tadashi.

Tadashi let him settle in. “So, he embarrassed you in front of your professors, huh? What did they
“Oh, you know,” Hiro muttered. “One asked me if I was being harassed, one asked me if I was being recruited into a cult, and the third told me I was being harassed, had heard about the cult thing, and got the heebie-jeebies about Fred trying to recruit someone my age, like I’m five or something.”

In the darkness, he saw the outline of Tadashi’s jaw drop. “He’s been that bad?”

“Frankly, I’m choosing to believe my professors have overactive imaginations.”

“I doubt that, Hiro.” Tadashi shook his head. “He’s more obsessed this time than I thought.”

“That’s what the others said,” he grumbled. “They said he won’t stop until he loses interest.”

“Unfortunately, that’s true. Doesn’t mean we can’t yell at him, though. I’m really sorry. He’s normally not this bad. I guess his ultimate dream coming true got his priorities seriously screwed. It’s not every day you get to be a real superhero,” Tadashi mused. “Did he get in trouble with your professors?”

“Professor Sullivan threatened his mascot job if he kept it up, Dr. Squires talked to Dugan who told Fred to cut it out, and Professor Roe chewed him out bad after class.”

Tadashi winced. “Ooo. And he’s still going. Hey, when we meet up tomorrow night to hang out, we can all talk to him and make it clear no matter what he does, we’re not interested.”

Hiro flinched. “Uh-huh.”

Tadashi cocked his head against the pillow. “What is it?”

Hiro sighed. He was exhausted. He’d let out so much up to this point, why stop now? Plus it was after two in the morning and he wasn’t thinking straight. Yeah, that was it. Maybe a little of a guilty conscious as well. Mostly the sleep deprivation. “Fred might be hounding me like this because I told him before that I would be on the team. Then I changed my mind and didn’t really tell him why.”

Tadashi started. “You did?”

“I did.”

His brother gawked. “You - Okay, start at the beginning. What happened?”

Hiro moaned. How could he phrase this without triggering another ‘not your fault’ spiel?

“Okay,” he sighed. “Fred and I were in your lab.”

“School project?” Tadashi guessed.

“Something like that,” Hiro muttered.

He saw Tadashi frown. “What does that mean?”

“I - I did have a school project to finish, my helicopter,” he lied. “Also, a, uh, new combat chip for Baymax.”

“My robot? Seriously, Hiro?” he groused. “You were going to drag him into this again?”
“Sorry,” Hiro muttered. “The idea was to get the whole gang on board, not just us.”

“Unbelievable,” Tadashi hissed, pinching the bridge of his nose. “Okay, what happened next?”

Hiro squirmed. “Granville caught us. She ripped me a new one for using your lab and used a magnet on your desk as an example of how the tiniest, wrong decision, like a little puff of air, can ruin everything. Basically, if I don’t shape up, I’m gone. She told me I should be more like you since you don’t let yourself get ‘distracted’ and everything. By the way, you have a screw buried in your lab light you might wanna take out the next time you’re there.”

“Whoah, whoah,” Tadashi struggled to sit up. “Granville said being in my lab would get you expelled? And that you should be more like me?”

“Uh, yes?” Hiro remembered Yoshida. “God, please don’t take it the wrong way, big brother. She meant that I should focus on my education - ”

“I know what she meant,” he hissed. “Hiro, that’s - that’s ridiculous! Okay, you were sneaking in my lab and you got in trouble, fair enough. Threatening you with expulsion - ”

“She didn’t threaten to expel me! She - ”

“Used a metaphor to get her point across, I know,” Tadashi interrupted. “Hiro, you’re going to do stupid things. You’re not the first person on campus to do something like that! Plenty of people break into their friends’ labs to get away from the main labs, or swipe tools for a while for personal projects in their dorms, or break into buildings to pull pranks on professors and students on April Fool’s Day, among so much more. No, I don’t expect Granville to let that slide - no one does, when they catch someone - but what the hell?”

“She found out about the bot-fighting,” Hiro griped. “She has a copy of the police report! She showed me it! It’s not hard to see why she’s suspicious!”

Tadashi stiffened. “...What? Are you kidding me!? She does know I got arrested with you, doesn’t she!?”

“You didn’t do anything!”

“The police didn’t care! I was there, so I got written up the same way you did!”

Hiro sat up and threw his arms up. “Well, you’ve never done anything wrong, ever, at school and you’re a legend there. Of course she said I should be like you!”

“No, that’s doesn’t make up for it. Why did she do a background check on you? You were already accepted into SFIT before she got her job. If it wasn’t a problem for the school then, why is it now? As far as she’s concerned, all you’ve done since the fire was stay at home to help take care of me after your microbots were stolen. There is no reason for her to have a vendetta against you. That’s BS, Hiro!”

“Who cares!?” he demanded. “She knows. She’s watching me. One minute I’m doing a good job, the next I’m making her more suspicious. Who cares why she did the backgr- ”

“I care because her little magnet metaphor for getting kicked out of school isn’t worth getting caught in your older brother’s lab! It’s insane!”

Hiro covered his face with his arms, grabbing at his hair. “God, I already had this conversation with Yoshida! I don’t need it again!”
Tadashi did a double take. “What?”

Hiro threw himself against the pillows, moaning loud. Good lord, he had such a stupid, big mouth!

“Yes, I had this conversation with Yoshida!” he burst out, all bets off. Things were already bad, why not make them worse? “She was mad because while I was TRYING to be a better student, I’m practically walking on eggshells to keep from adding more stupid, little things to Granville’s list. She said I’m already a good student and Granville was wrong to handle the lab and bot-fighting the way she did, blah blah blah! She said it should have left me ‘warned,’ not a walking bundle of nerves! Whatever! I don’t care! I just want to get my stupid education so I can graduate, do great things with my big brain, and make you proud! I don’t want to get kicked out! Why is that so hard to understand!?”

Tadashi stared, stupefied.

Hiro covered his eyes, not wanting to see.

“You’re trying to be a better student,” he eventually drew out.

Hiro nodded behind his hands. “I have to prove I belong there. No more mistakes. That’s why I can’t be on Big Hero 7 either; I make too many mistakes, and it always get someone in trouble or hurt. I’m done. I want to do better.”

A beat passed.

He could feel the anger radiating off his brother. Great.

“Ow,” Tadashi growled.

Hiro wrinkled his nose, but didn’t removed his hands. He listened to Baymax activate, the lights of his container lighting up.

“Baymax,” Tadashi ordered before he could say his line, “turn on the lights.”

The lights flicked on. Hiro hissed.

Tadashi grabbed at his hands, yanking them from his eyes.

Hiro squinted against the light once more.

Both Tadashi and Baymax’s heads peered over him, one furious and the other curious.

“Hiro, you’re going to listen to us,” Tadashi said. “You’re a good kid. You ARE. Even when you were bot-fighting. It was a dumb thing to do, but it didn’t make you less of a good kid. I don’t know what Granville’s problem with you is, but even if she had the best intentions for your sake at heart, she had no right to make your guilt problems worse. You’re not going to get expelled for a bunch of little things. You’re not. Come hell or high water, you’re not. Got it?”

“Tadashi - !”

“You’re a great student. You wouldn’t be at SFIT if you weren’t. The things you come up with are incredible! You pass your classes! A few of the robotics professors that have you have mentioned you’re doing great in their emails to me hoping for a fast recovery. They love you. They wouldn’t say that if you were a poor student. You don’t need to be like me, you’re great on your own!”

Hiro struggled to rip his arms away. “Yoshida - !”
“Is absolutely right!”

“Hiro is displaying signs of distress,” Baymax commented. He gently yet firmly removed Tadashi’s hands, and enveloped Hiro in an upright hug. “Restraint is not usually the best way to calm down a patient.”

Tadashi flushed. He pulled at his collar, but went on, undeterred. “I’m already proud of you, Hiro. I’ve been proud of you since you yammered that you had to go to SFIT or you’d lose your mind. Like I said, you’re incredible! You have nothing to prove to me, much less anyone else.”

“And if I get kicked out?” Hiro glowered darkly. “You’ll be real proud of me then, huh?”

“You’re not getting kicked out,” Tadashi countered, equally as dark, and Hiro got the feeling that darkness wasn’t completely directed at him. “You’re not getting expelled or dropping out. I’ll make sure of it. You’ve worked too hard for either to be an option.”

Hiro slumped against Baymax, too tired to argue. They were honestly having this conversation at two-something in the morning. They were having it at all. He sighed heavily.

Tadashi ran a hand through Hiro’s bedhead softly, relaxing his shoulders. “You’ve got too much on your mind, little brother. You blame yourself too much. I know you don’t want to hear it and you don’t believe it, but - everything from the fire to now isn’t your fault. You’re putting too much pressure on yourself. I hate seeing you this way. You’re hurting and I’m at my wits’ end figuring out what to do. I wish I could make you feel better. I really wish I knew what to say.”

Baymax withdrew his arms to stand up fully. Hiro sat up on his own.

“Hiro, as I have said, my confidentiality programs have been updated. Do I have your permission to show Tadashi the footage of the conversation we had with Fred on: Wednesday, September - ”

Hiro balked. “You recorded that!?”

Baymax tilted his head. “It is part of your medical profile, specifically the mental health section.”

Hiro whirled his neck around to scold Tadashi - wouldn’t it be illegal for Baymax to record others without their knowledge or permission!? - but Tadashi was looking down at him with a neutral expression.

“What does this talk with Fred have to do with now?” he questioned.

Hiro was too stunned to speak.

“I cannot show you the footage without Hiro’s permission as per my upgrades,” Baymax informed. “However, I believe it is best you are aware of the conversation in order to alleviate both your mental health statuses. It is not so severe that I would override my confidentiality programs, though. Hiro, do I have your permission?”

“No,” he forced out through clenched teeth, and took a deep breath. “Let’s just talk about it, okay? Not like I have a choice today, I guess.”

Tadashi’s frown deepened. “Hiro…”

Baymax, on the other hand, took that has permission to speak. “While we were in your lab, Hiro opened up to Fred about his emotional state. Hiro blames himself for: bot-fighting, which encouraged you to introduce him to SFIT; creating the microbots that Callaghan later stole;
allowing you to enter the exposition fire that nearly killed you; his, my, Wasabi, Gogo, and Honey Lemon’s encounter with Yokai at the docks; the situation on Akuma Island; the Krei Tech attack and my loss within the portal; and the incident with my exoskeleton.”

Tadashi’s jaw dropped. “All of that? Wait, why are you guilty for me showing you SFIT?”

Hiro held back another sigh. “Because if I hadn’t been bot-fighting, you wouldn’t have tricked me. If you hadn’t tricked me, I wouldn’t have made the microbots, so Callaghan wouldn’t have stolen them, and there’d never been a fire. There.”

Tadashi reached for his shoulder. Hiro cringed at the misty film in his eyes. “God, Hiro.”

“Fred and I managed to convince Hiro each incident was not entirely his fault,” Baymax explained. “We reminded Hiro that Callaghan’s actions were his own, your actions were your own, and I would have overridden any orders to stay with Hiro and Abigail if it meant having their lives. There was little, if anything, he could have done about them. In other situations, such as Akuma Island and my exoskeleton, he has already been forgiven. Fred also added that he desires to keep finding trouble, because recently, our troubles have turned out a positive result, such as: Saving Abigail Callaghan’s life.”

“Yet you’re still blaming yourself,” Tadashi summed up.

Hiro shrugged one shoulder. “It helped somewhat. I know you guys care about me and you choose to follow me when I do something stupid. But I don’t like that I make you guys make the decision in the first place. And a bunch of other stuff,” he muttered the last sentence.

Tadashi tilted his head, and said quietly, “I’m surprised you talked to Fred and Baymax before me. I’m glad it helped, if only some, though.”

“You already talked to me,” Hiro grouched. “I’ve heard your spiels. I get what you say, Tadashi. I just feel like at the end of the day, it all comes back to me. I know, I know - I’m wrong, I’m not as nearly as much to blame as I think I am. It doesn’t take the weight off my chest.”

“Puberty is a difficult, emotional time,” Baymax remarked.

Hiro snorted. “Thanks, Baymax.”

Tadashi shook his head. “So what happened next?”

“I didn’t entirely believe them,” he explained, “but I felt better enough that I agreed to be part of Big Hero 7. Fred said I didn’t have to if I was afraid of messing up again, that he wouldn’t mind. Except, I wanted to. I wanted to save people, because that is important, and I thought this time I could protect you guys instead of getting you hurt. Then Granville caught us. She was only talking about school, but she said balance was hard to achieve and harder to maintain, and all it would take is one, tiny, wrong decision to...well, send a bolt flying up into your lab light. She said I could either follow Fred’s path - I kinda get the feeling she doesn’t like Fred - or yours, since you’re such a great student. It reminded me that, even if I say I’ll protect you guys, I can’t actually promise that. It’s way easier for me to mess up. And if I mess up, I could lose everything; you guys, SFIT, everything. I can’t let that happen. So I’ve been trying to be better her way.”

Nodding slowly, Tadashi said, “I think I got a better idea of what she meant now. I still don’t like that she did a background check on you and she definitely messed you up - Yoshida was right - but I don’t think she had bad intentions. And Fred, you didn’t tell him the whole story why you changed your mind?”
“No, I couldn’t. We just had a talk about dumb feelings that helped, and now I was going back on all of that. How could I tell him that? So I let him think it was just school I was worried about. He didn’t like that, hence he’s been bothering me,” Hiro confessed, rubbing his arms uneasily.

Quietly, Tadashi scooped Hiro’s upper half up in his arms. “You’re a good kid, Hiro. I don’t know what else to say you haven’t heard before. You’re a good kid with a good heart. I really hope someday, you understand that.”

Baymax joined in on the hug. “I agree. Hiro, as I said on Wednesday, everyone chooses their own path, for better or worse. You must find yours. I surmise the guilty path is not the best path. It has not benefited your mental health.”

Tadashi pulled away. “Whatever Granville meant, I need you to do me a favor, Hiro; in this one case, listen to me instead of her. I know you better than she does. Balance isn’t easy to achieve or maintain, yeah, but you’ve long got the school part of balance down. You don’t need to improve. As long as you work hard and don’t slack off, like, say, with your homework,” he gave Hiro’s arm a light punch, smiling small, “you’re gold. If you find yourself needing help, ask for it. I’m here, the others are here, your professors, the tutoring center, make use of all of us. As long as you do, you’re gold. Granville’s not going to do anything. She’s also not going to do anything when you make mistakes, which you’re going to do, because we all - including me - make them, or else Aunt Cass and I are going get very scary on her. In case you didn’t notice, little brother, even the smartest college students aren’t the brightest outside class. It comes with being young.”

“So YOU’VE gotten in trouble at school before?” Hiro questioned, surprised.

Tadashi nodded. “The gang and I go out drinking now and then. Well, those of us old enough to drink drink, but you get the idea. One night, Fred, Gogo, and I stumbled onto campus while the others were watching - I think we were taking Honey Lemon to her dorm - and we decided it would be super fun to race traffic. In the middle of the road. At the edge of campus, a little ways from the gates. Gogo was crazy into it. If it hadn’t been for Wasabi, Honey Lemon, and Professor Dugan, we’d probably be dead.”

“The athletics dean?” Hiro burst out a laugh, astonished. “He caught you trying to do that?”

“Yup,” Tadashi grinned. “The next day, the three of us got a stern talking to, had to complete an hour long alcohol safety course online, and clean up the gym after it closed for the night. The custodians were our supervisors. I never told Aunt Cass because she’d flip, or you because you’d make fun of me.”

“You didn’t get in trouble beyond that?”

“Nope. SFIT’s biggest rules are the huge safety procedures in the lab, theft, bullying and harassment, and so on. You have to have mess up big time a lot to get expelled if you aren’t doing those. What’s important, though, is that when do you do mess up, take responsibility for it. It’s the right thing to do and looks better.” Tadashi’s smile slipped. “Not to the point that you blame yourself for building the microbots, though. I mean, work towards a solution, take whatever fair punishment you get, and move on.”

“A solution, huh?” Hiro glanced at Baymax.

“Solution are beneficial,” he commented.

Hiro took a deep breath. “Okay. Again, I don’t - I don’t feel completely not guilty, but I guess you guys are right. All of you. I don’t know. I keep going back and forth in my head, focusing the bad
and the worse that could have happened. Guess I have to stop that.”

“The healing process is not instant,” Baymax told him. “Relapses are common and to be expected. Giving your best to try, even in small pieces, goes a long way, Hiro.”

Tadashi rubbed his back. “We have to talk to Fred, you know. Get him off your back. I don’t know if you want to come clean to him, but honesty tends to be the best policy. If you don’t, we can keep drilling it into his head we’re not interested in being full time heroes. That’s fine. I just want him to quit stressing you out with his theatrics.”

Hiro nodded. “Yeah, I...I can come clean to him. I know you guys are right, and he and Baymax did help. And you and Yoshida, here. Can you believe she told me if Granville did expel me for breaking into your lab, she’d be the first to fight it? She says my professors love me.”

Tadashi raised his eyebrows pleasantly. “Wow. See? I told you. So, you’ll ease up on yourself? And you’ll start to let things go, right? The fire, Akuma Island, Callaghan, Baymax - it hurts holding onto that, and it hurts seeing you hold onto that.”

Hiro hesitated. “Um, yeah. Uh, can I ask you both something, though?”

“Sure.”

He looked between Tadashi and Baymax. “Would you have really...gone into the fire no matter what? And send me and Abigail out of the portal no matter what?”

Tadashi froze.

Baymax nodded. “Yes. Your health is the most important thing to me. I will always put the lives of my patients ahead of my own safety. It was the only available option. If you had continued to disagree, I would have overridden your commands for your safety.”

Hiro winced. He hated the thought of that. It made his heart hurt.

He supposed, however, deep down, he understood. He and Baymax had risked their lives going into the portal to save Abigail; Hiro had gone in fully aware they might not come back out. And Tadashi was right, they could have died in there. Part of him still wanted to beat himself up for not finding another angle, but...he got what Baymax was saying. It hurt so much to leave one of his best friends in there, but...deep down, he could understand.

He had to let it go. What was done was done. What was important was that Baymax was here, despite it all. He had to let it go.

Hiro turned to Tadashi. This, on the other hand, he was more nervous about.

Tadashi averted his eyes, staring at his lap. He could see the guilt in them.

With a sinking stomach, Hiro already knew what he was about to say.

“Yes,” he eventually confirmed. “No matter what, Hiro. I had to save Callaghan. Anyone who had been in there. The fire started so quick and was so high and out of control in such a short time. I couldn’t wait for the firefighters; by the time they got there, Callaghan might have already died. What if he needed help immediately, in the time before they arrived? I wouldn’t have forgiven myself for not trying.”

Hiro swallowed. “What about you dying? What about me, if I’d lost you? If Aunt Cass and the
gang lost you? Do you know how scared I was at the hospital when they were saving you? Aunt Cass?"

“I’ve heard, Hiro,” Tadashi mumbled.

The night of the fire had been the worst in Hiro’s life. When they found him and rushed him to the hospital, he’d been hanging onto life by a thread. He and Aunt Cass sat in the waiting room, after she ushered the others home because they wouldn’t be able to see Tadashi tonight anyhow and there was no use in six people worrying in there all night when they could get some rest. They sat for hours, Aunt Cass getting up to pace, and both of them crying and thinking of the story from ten years before. Mom and Dad had died in a car accident, Mom on impact and Dad later at the hospital, while the Aunt Cass and the boys waited. Aunt Cass had assured them Dad would be all right, just as she did Tadashi, and Dad ended up dying on the table. Hiro had been terrified the same fate was waiting for his older brother. It had been a miracle it wasn’t.

“I’m sorry,” Tadashi said. “I apologized before, I’ll apologize again. I never want to cause you guys so much pain again. But in that moment, no, you couldn’t have stopped me. I didn’t mean to die, but if it would have saved his life…” his voice cracked.

Hiro swallowed again. Okay.

It wasn’t what he wanted to hear. Not by a long shot. He never wanted to imagine a life without Tadashi. He couldn’t even stand how injured he’d been.

Then again, hadn’t Hiro taken the same risk in the portal? Hiro couldn’t fault his brother for being selfless. While Callaghan had turned out to be a thief who started the fire, Tadashi hadn’t known that; he’d only wanted to save a life. He’d been doing the right thing. The firefighters would argue, and Hiro got that, too, but Tadashi hadn’t ben trying to hurt him. Or anyone. *Somebody has to help.* Hiro had said the same thing before diving into the portal for Abigail.

Somebody had to help.

So they did.

“Okay,” Hiro breathed. “Okay. I think…I can let these go. Not saying they’ll never pop into mind again, but I think I can.”

He smiled shyly.

Tadashi mirrored it. Baymax patted his head.

“That is comforting to hear,” the robot said. “More progress had been made. Perhaps now we should discuss T-”

“It’s been a long night,” Tadashi interrupted. “We should get some sleep. Thank goodness tomorrow’s Saturday, so we can sleep in.”

“You’re right.” Hiro hugged Baymax. “I’m satisfied with my care, buddy. Thank you.”

Baymax blinked. “You’re welcome, Hiro.”

He returned to his charging station.

Hiro jumped up and turned out the lights, then scrambled back into his brother’s bed. “I’ll sleep in here tonight.”
“Fine by me,” Tadashi said, lying down and tossing an arm above Hiro’s head.

Hiro snuggled into the blankets. Although he could have been mistaken, his heart felt a bit lighter.

Chapter End Notes

Remember, my Hiro in this fic is a lot more anxious and guilty than his show canon counterpart. I don't think Granville had bad intentions in that one scene (the only thing I didn't like was the comparison to Tadashi, who was still recently dead; but he's alive here, so that's a moot point for the fic), but it definitely didn't help this version of Hiro, who has 101 things on his mind at the moment.

My goals for this chapter included introducing the other professors, showing at least a little of their personalities, how some of them can see Hiro's new nervousness/Fred's antics, and just how deeply Hiro's being affected by his own stress. Not sure I quite accomplished that, or made it terribly interesting. I apologize again if it dragged for you; I *promise* next chapter goes by faster.

As for the professors, like I said before, I have plans for them in future chapters. Nothing too major (Issue 188 will probably be their most significant appearances), but I wanted them introduced before we get into all that. It's fine if you can't remember or separate them all right now; their purpose in this chapter was basically to show how bad Hiro was stressing thanks to Granville and Fred.

Notes:

- I don't know if I've stated this here or not, but I headcanon Cass and Hiro and Tadashi’s maternal family to have the last name Rudolph (after Cass' voice actress, Maya Rudolph).
- Oh yeah, I should probably mention this: This fic will not be season two compliant. I planned the broad outline out months before season two, and I hate season two :) so don't expect any sort of compliance with it here. Like, I think S2 gave Fred the middle name Flamerion or something, but his middle name is Lee here. I will also not be changing things such as NBB's relationship with Obake to fit the weird 'Daddy' thing S2 has going; he'll be referring to him as Mister and such forth because they had no familial or one-sided familial relationship in season one and 'Mister' is what he called him. Basically, if I didn't make it up ahead of time or it's not in season one, it will not show up here. I'm just pointing this out because I don't want anyone correcting me, "Fred's middle name is actually Flamerion!"
- Professor Dugan is the athletics department dean mentioned in Fred's files on the official Tumblr for the movie.
- I had to incorporate history into the history class since I'm actually a history nerd in real life and understand that subject, unlike science...I picked up Admiral Yi from Extra Credits History. It's pretty interesting, I recommend it if you have an hour to kill and like little story animations.
- One of these days, I'm going to write my overly angstly headcanon of how the Hamada parents died into a fic. For now, I'll just insert part of it here. Purely because
some of my ideas meld together into one universe in my head.

Well, this was a long end of chapter note. Fair warning, chapter six's is longer since it's finally the end of Baymax Returns. I hope you found something enjoyable in this, between all the in-your-face morals and feelings talk.
Fred was on night patrol alone this Saturday evening. Alone, with no one other than himself, his binoculars, and HALP skylight shining in the sky.

The gang had plans to meet up at The Lucky Cat Café later for a bite before heading out to hang, and to be honest, Fred was a bit nervous. He knew he was going to get shredded when he got there. The others weren’t happy with his continued superhero antics, and Tadashi was fully in brocon mode. He was actually how Fred found out he was going to get shredded - he’d called Hiro to ask if he finished reading the links yet, only to have Tadashi answer, telling him he’d taken Hiro out for the day to relax after such a hectic week, and warned that they were going to have a pretty important talk tonight. In other words, shredding time.

He’d admit, he was worried how it was going to go. From Gogo, Honey Lemon, and Wasabi’s constant refusals to Tadashi’s outbursts to Hiro’s ever growing annoyance, something told Fred he wasn’t going to get heroically charged yeses from the gang.

“Still reeling from the bitter taste of disappointment, the lone guardian of justice continues his watch over the city.”

He didn’t get it. Being a superhero was so awesome, and it gave them the chance to defend the weak and innocent. They’d be like all his comic book heroes and his dad (not that they knew about his dad yet). Why wouldn’t they agree? It wasn’t like they all had massive priorities that undoubtedly had to come first because there was no way they could balance them with superhero life.

‘I mean,’ he thought, ‘Tadashi can’t physically be on the field at the moment, but he operates a drone that can be! And Hiro had emotional junk on him, but that doesn’t get in his way, something as simple as SCHOOL does. I really don’t get it.’

He scanned the sky for signals of distress, like’d been doing for the last forty-five minutes. And every night since the Yama incident.

It was a peaceful night. Peaceful nights were good. It meant the city was safe, nothing was going wrong, people weren’t in danger. No explosions, no get away blimps flying away from raging alarms, no supervillains gliding through the sky with a manical laugh. Only a peaceful night.

It had been peaceful night after peaceful since Yama. And before him as well.

There are no villains, Tadashi and Gogo had argued. The gang had bigger problems with school than the city did with crooks, Honey Lemon had informed.

Fred lowered his binoculars and sighed. He had to admit when he was wrong, when he was wrong. “Maybe they were right. Maybe the city doesn’t need HALP.”
'Or superheroes anymore,' he thought dismally, setting his binoculars down and flicking off his skylight, which Heathcliff would retrieve later on his way home with Mom from the family island via helicopter, and turned on his heels.

Might as well tell the team their shredding wasn’t necessary anymore.

What Fred didn’t see, looking up at the sky instead of the street below, was a hoard of familiar exoskeletons marching down the street. His binoculars, pulled by gravity at an uneven angle, fell to the sidewalk below and was crunched by the feet of the bots.

He also didn’t see Yama in the shadows, holding a tablet, hacking into SFIT’s security system ahead of time to disable the alarms and put the cameras on a still frame feedback loop.

He didn’t see any of it.

Hiro leaned against the gang’s table in the café, impatiently tapping his fingers on the wood. “When’s Fred going to get here?”

“When his ‘night patrol’ is over,” Wasabi made the quotation signs. “Don’t worry, he never misses an opportunity to go to Ngo Arcade - especially on Double Points Saturdays.”

Hiro slumped his shoulders. He wasn’t sure whether he was more nervous or agitated waiting to talk to Fred. Once he got here, the gang would move to the garage as a more private place to talk, but Hiro wasn’t positive he wanted to open up in front of the whole gang. They might hug him to make him feel better. Or feel sorry for him. Or coo at him and touch his hair like Aunt Cass did when he was upset. It would be awkward and embarrassing. It also didn’t guarantee Fred would leave everybody alone.

“Calm down,” Tadashi knocked his shoulder lightly from where he was sitting next to Honey Lemon, phone in his hand. “Fred just texted me; he’s on his way.”

Hiro blew a sigh of relief. Good.

“Hey, boys,” Aunt Cass came around the table, heading for the counter with a basin of dirty dishes, “just so you know, after the café closes, I’m going to go to the fish market to grab some butterfish for dinner. So if I’m not home by the time you get back, that’s why.”

“Great, Aunt Cass,” Hiro replied quietly.

Tadashi wrinkled his nose. “Butterfish? After what happened last time?”

Aunt Cass waved her hand. “That’s on you, mister. I cook it in a way that gets rid of most of the oil and you’re not supposed to eat too much in one go. You’re the one who decided to have seconds when I told you not to. You don’t have to eat it if you don’t want to this time, but I’m buying it.”

Gogo, Wasabi, and Honey Lemon look at Tadashi strangely.

Hiro rolled his eyes. “Butterfish can make you sick for two days after eating it. It’s actually banned in a few places. Aunt Cass likes cooking challenges, though, and it’s not going to kill you, so.”

Tadashi shuddered. “So glad the last time she made it was on a Friday. It tastes great, but you guys don’t want to know the consequences. You don’t.”
Wasabi twisted his face in disgust. “Please don’t tell.”

Above the counter, one of the café’s flat screens lit up. “Breaking news now!”

The gang looked up.

“Seemingly indestructible robots have invaded Night Market Square,” the news anchor said, “annihilating everything in their path. We’re also getting reports of destruction on Shimomoto Blvd. I think it would be smart of you to avoid that area. Who is behind this robo-rampage?”

Honey Lemon gasped as footage was shown on the screen.

Hiro’s face hardened, though in his head he was freaking out. The robots on the screen were Baymax - Baymaxes - dozens and dozens of exoskeletons bursting through billboards, throwing cars, shooting laser beams and bolts, and terrorizing the public. He slammed a fist on the table. “Yama,” he growled.

Yama. Yama had done this. Hiro cursed himself; he hadn’t checked the fly since this morning, when Yama was in a meeting with some of his men discussing an illegal storefront they were going to purchase from. He hadn’t checked the footage recorded prior to that, pressed for time to head out with Tadashi, and had planned to review everything so far when he got home tonight. Stupid! He should have been keeping a better eye on him.

Baymaxes were causing all this havoc and destruction. He couldn’t believe it. And he’d thought Yama had only used Baymax as a hostage.

Before he could stop himself, Hiro looked at Tadashi for his reaction - and immediately regretted it.

Tadashi’s face had gone pale, so pale Hiro thought he might be sick. His hands were trembling on the table, eyes wide in horror as he kept them glued on the screen, watching his versions of his creation send people running for their lives. This was not at all what he’d intended for Baymax. He never wanted to create something that would hurt people.

Hiro swallowed. He’d done this. He’d let Yama get a hold of Baymax and copy his design, and he’d been the one who didn’t check his fly. If he had, he could have prevented this.

“He bootlegged Baymax?” Gogo glared.


Fred suddenly popped up at Wasabi’s side. “Okay, so a bunch of killer robots are loose in the city. Know what this sounds like!?”

Wasabi leaned away from him. “Oh, you’re here. Let’s see, a nightmare I had once?”

“No!” Fred leaped away and tossed out his arms. “It sounds like a job for Big Hero 7! Man, and I was about give up on the team! Woo!”

Gogo and Wasabi glared while Honey Lemon bowed her head.

“You guys are going to love the name when you see the T-shirts I had made,” Fred declared.

Gogo scowled, gesturing to the TV. “The police can handle this.”

The news switched to live footage of the scene.
A frantic police officer grabbed the camera. “WE CAN’T HANDLE THIS!”

‘What a great thing to tell the general public,’ Hiro snarked in his head. ‘This is my fault. I did it again! No, no. I can’t wallow in it. I have to do something. Like Tadashi said, I have to take responsibility, and like him and Baymax said, find a solution. I have to stop this.’

Gogo sighed grudgingly, standing up. “Let’s suit up.”

Hiro spun around to face the group. “Baymax needs his armor. I - I’ve got to finish it.”

“What?” Tadashi broke out of his stupor. “You guys can’t! If the police can’t take of them - You guys are going to get hurt! Hiro!”

“We’re the only ones who can handle it,” Hiro argued. He softened. “I got us into this with Yama. I have to fix it, Tadashi. I know you don’t want us in danger, but we might be the city’s only hope!” He ran for the door, then stopped. “I’ll meet you guys, just BE CAREFUL. We’ll be fine, big brother, get your drone ready.”

Without waiting to hear for Tadashi’s sputtering response, Hiro bolted. Baymax was in the garage, where Tadashi had been doing more tweaks to his coding, and the best place Hiro could think of on the spot to get his armor done was at school - he was out of the material at home.

There was no time for wallowing or panicking.

Fred couldn’t help wincing watching Tadashi’s heart visibly drop out of his chest. The others were heading out as well, going to grab their suits and race to Shimomoto Blvd. Fred, however, lingered; Tadashi did not look like he was in a good place.

“You okay, man?” he gently asked.

Tadashi dug his nails into the wood of the table. He gawked at the door, mouth dropped open in horror and disbelief. “No. No, I’m not, Fred. This is a nightmare!”

Fred flinched. He kind of regretted jumping into happy mode as soon the news broke when he got in. He’d momentarily forgotten Tadashi’s reservations. Out of everyone in the gang, aside Hiro (but that was already settled), he was the only one that was uncharacteristically against Big Hero 7.

Fred latched onto Honey Lemon’s empty chair. “Hey, I know I was just celebrating and encouraging this, but like - Hiro’s right. If the police can’t keep the situation under control or stop the bots, real people are in danger. We might the only ones who can stop this.”

“I know. I know!” Tadashi bit his lip, chest heaving. “Don’t you think I know that!?”

Fred faltered. If he didn’t know any better, he’d think Tadashi was on his way to a heart attack. Or, more accurately, a panic attack. He had to resist reaching out for his friend’s shoulder; people having panic attacks typically didn’t like being touched. He didn’t want to make Tadashi feel caged in.

“We’ll be okay,” he tried to tell him instead. “We’re not going to let each other get hurt or killed. Least of all Hiro.”

Before Tadashi could reply - if he was going to reply at all - Aunt Cass came out from the back, patting her hands dry. Her face dropped at the sight of Tadashi and the mostly empty table.
“What happened?” she asked, voice lowering.

“Uh, last minute group project we all forgot about!” Fred lied on the spot. “The others ran off...to the library to study! I’m joining them soon. English major, so I can help with the essays, heehee.”

Aunt Cass’ brow furrowed. She must have heard the flatscreen, because she looked up, and gasped. “Are those Baymaxes!?”

Tadashi nodded numbly. “Uh-huh.”

Aunt Cass rocked her head back and forth between the TV and her nephew, mouth wide. “Oh my god. Oh my god! Tadashi, sweetie, I - ! Did someone steal your blueprints!?”

“I don’t know,” Tadashi choked out. “I don’t know.”

She sprinted around the counter and enveloped him in a quick hug. “The police will get them, don’t worry. I can’t believe it! Someone must have broken into your lab and stolen them!”

“Well,” Tadashi agreed. He swallowed. “I’m going to head upstairs, Aunt Cass. I can’t - I can’t - ”

She nodded, lightly touching his hair. “I understand. Try to relax. They’ll stop them and catch whoever did this. Baymaxes, my god!”

“In slightly better news,” the news anchor reported, “the area the bots are terrorizing has been sectioned off by San Fransokyo PD, blocking them inside. Please avoid this part of the city until the situation has been dealt with. The rest of the city is assumed to be safe and destructive robot-free.”

A map appeared on the screen, the sectioned off part of the city in red.

Aunt Cass stood up, placing a hand over her chest. “Oh, good. That’s good. I told you. The library’s not over there either, thank goodness.” She patted Tadashi’s shoulder. “Do you want me to stay home with you instead of heading out to the market?”

Tadashi shook his head. “I’ll be fine, Aunt Cass. Thanks.”

“Oh. Okay. Okay. Woo.” She shook her head. “A customer’s waving me over. You go upstairs, sweetheart. Fred, tell the others about this just in case so they don’t go to that part of town.”

“I will.”

“Thank you. I’m coming!” she sprinted for the customer across the café.

Fred looked at Tadashi, worried. “Are you going to be okay, dude?”

Tadashi’s face hardened. If Fred had to guess, he’d say in determination. He nodded. “Yeah. No. Yeah. Whatever!” He lifted his chin, looking Fred straight in the eyes. “You get out there with the others. Please keep each other safe, all of you. I’ll get upstairs and get my drone ready.”

Fred brightened - not much, though. Something told him they might have to have a different talk when this was over. “Got it, man. You relax. We’re not going to let anything happen, or my name is Muriel.”

“Fred,” Tadashi scowled pointedly, but the corners of his lips twitched.

That was enough for Fred to beam at. “I’m going, I’m going!”
Hiro paced back and forth across Tadashi’s lab as he waited for the armor to finish printing in the 3D printer. This was taking forever. It was going to keep taking forever if he didn’t think of a way to speed up the process. “Come on, come on, come!”

His eyes found the magnet on Tadashi’s desk. Hiro pressed his lips together in a grin line. He wasn’t supposed to be in here. The lights were off, the main labs closed for once so the custodians could clean the whole place, but that didn’t mean Granville couldn’t catch him. And then he’d never make to the team.

Tiny, wrong decisions, stupid mistakes…

At the window, Baymax inflated.

“You appear to be: agitated,” he remarked.

“Yeah, the city is under attack,” Hiro replied, almost sarcastic, turning his head away and shoving his hands in his pockets.

“And you feel responsible.”

“No duh,” Hiro slouched. “If I’d just run Tadashi’s diagnostics like you guys told me, if I hadn’t run off by myself and let campus security handle it… You didn’t see Tadashi when he saw the news. I know we talked last night, but I don’t see him ever forgiving me for this.”

Baymax tilted his head. “I was not there, correct; however, Tadashi has not blamed you losing my exoskeleton, and based on previous data, he will not hold this against you either. This is not your doing Hiro. You are allowing this to get to you again.”

Hiro groaned. “How can I not? Your stupid armor’s not coming along fast enough so I can’t fix this yet! I want to do what you guys said, take responsibility and solve the problem instead of wallowing, but that’s not exactly easy when I’m stuck here! And I didn’t check my dumb fly; we could have avoided this!” He threw his head back in aggravation.

Baymax held up a finger. “Mistakes are common to everyone. It is as Tadashi said: You will make mistakes, Hiro. Everyone does.”

The 3D printer beeped, the green light lighting up.

Hiro quickly took the shoulder pad out. “Not ones that put the whole city in danger.”

Baymaxes shouldn’t hurt people. Nothing of Tadashi’s should. Let alone Baymax.

Hiro shuddered. If he thought of them as Baymaxes, they’d be that much harder to fight. He had to remember these hadn’t been built by brother and didn’t have the healthcare chip. They were Yama’s bots. …Based on Tadashi’s designs.

“Despite your impatience and press for time, you are working towards a solution,” Baymax offered. “That is what is important.”

Hiro lugged the armor on the table. “Great!”

It didn’t feel like it. It wouldn’t until they got out onto the field with the others.

In person, the rampage the exoskeletons were doling out was a hell of a lot more terrifying. They
were knee-deep into the action, and oh, it was so much worse than on TV. Even the police had scrambled off, choosing to focus on evacuating the panicking citizens rather than fight the exoskeletons. Wasabi almost couldn’t believe he was here.

Tadashi’s drone was hard at work, stunning the exoskeletons one by one as fast as he could. They went down, but they weren’t broken, and who knew how long before their servers were back in order. That’s where Honey Lemon came in, trapping them with fast drying foam that hardened like concrete.

On the other side of the car he and Fred were poised (read: hiding) behind, a running woman tripped over her heel. An exoskeleton closed in on her, powering up its blaster. The woman braced herself. Luckily, Gogo was there in an instant, scooping her up and skating to a farther distance to set her down.

“I gotch’ya!”

The woman got up and took off.

Gogo hurled a disk at the offending exoskeleton’s head, knocking it loose from its neck, exposing the wires below. It fell to the ground in twitching sparks. Its friends were quick to back it up, though, so she sped it out of there.

Honey Lemon, meanwhile, smirked and punched out a combination on her chem purse. It ejected a red chem ball, which she tossed at the small force. Halfway through the air, the chem ball transformed into a ball of foam, which rapidly grew to the size of a boulder and knocked the bots away like bowling pins, crashing them into a vehicle at the end of the road.

Wasabi flinched at the shockwaves.

They weren’t here to cower forever, though.

He and Fred peeked out at the remaining exoskeletons. One was lifting a car.

“Wasabi,” Fred said, “one of us has to be a decoy.”

“Flip for it,” Wasabi replied as the exoskeleton hurled the car high over their heads. “Roof or wheels?”

“Wheels, obviously.”

The car landed on the plaza walkway with a hard crash, smashing its roof in on the concrete.

Wasabi grit his teeth. These things were strong. Of course they were; Baymax was designed to lift a thousand pounds, and that was as a healthcare companion. His heart pounded. They’d be able to squash him like a bug if they got the chance.

His fear rose. To distract himself, he reeled on Fred. “How was that obvious!”

“Watch a movie sometime. A flipped car always lands wheels up.”

Wasabi’s shoulders slumped. Apparently, he forgot this was Fred he was talking to.

“Come on!” Fred rolled away behind the exoskeleton’s back.

Wasabi forced himself to step out on the other side. He picked up a piece of loose granite from the road. The exoskeleton fired at another car.
His instincts were telling him to flee. This was nuts! They couldn’t do this! Wasabi didn’t know why he kept volunteering for this hero stuff. They could die here -

He shoved the thought away. No time for that. People were still running.

He launched the rock at its head.

The rock didn’t have the same affect as Gogo’s disk. Instead, the exoskeleton turned its neck, it’s eyes burning up red.

Wasabi froze, eyes going wide. Oh, he just did that. He really just did that.

The exoskeleton turned around fully, aiming its laser.

Wasabi screamed for his life, dodge rolling to the side. He returned back against the car.

He squeezed his eyes shut. “I DON’T THINK I’M CUT OUT FOR THIS!”

No, no, he wasn’t, he thought as the exoskeleton fired at the car. He wasn’t a hero. Yokai was one thing, Yama was another, this was getting way too out of control. He was terrified. He wasn’t a hero. He was a normal guy with a normal life who wasn’t built for battle. The other two times had been about avenging Tadashi and saving Tadashi and Hiro -

The roar of Fred’s flamethrower filled the air. Wasabi could feel the heat from behind the car. He peaked over.

The exoskeleton wasn’t even singed.

And it had Fred pinned on the ground.

Fred.

Wasabi’s eyes widened. He leap over the car without thinking, activating his laser blades. He charged at the exoskeleton, slashing through it down the the middle.

When the bot was on the ground, Wasabi deactivated his blades and dropped to his knees, panting. Fred sat up, and Honey Lemon ran over, kneeling next to him and grabbing his shoulder for stability. Gogo and Tadashi’s drone quickly followed.

Fred almost died. It had been powering up its hand. One wrong move, and he could have died, if the thing had spun around at the last second and aimed at him. Wasabi’s heart was beating so fast.

“Wasabi!” Honey Lemon yelled. “Are you all right!?"

“No,” he gasped. “No, I’m not. I’m - ”

He could feel his blood pumping through his veins.

It was then he realized his fear had dissipated.

“Great?”

His muscles felt ready to go.

“My adrenaline’s flowing,” he flexed his fingers, a smile spreading across his face. “I’m feeling it. Okay!”
He reactivated his blades and stood. People were in danger and he had to move.

“Who’s next?” he asked. “Bring it! I said bring it!” He saw a couple of exoskeletons grouped together across the street and ran for them. “While I’m riding this adrenaline wave!”

Finally. He always forgot how much he accomplished when the adrenaline kicked in, no matter how scary it was.

But that was something he’d have to work on in the future, he realized in the back of his head. Waiting to the last minute to help could cost people their lives.

He jumped and hacked through the group. “Wooo!”

Hiro slid the thigh armor into place on Baymax. So far, his legs were done. Only the rest of it to go! His lips curled in distaste.

“Hiro,” Baymax spoke up, “do you feel better now?”

Hiro turned his back to grab at more supplies. “I’ll feel better when we beat Yama’s robots.”

They had to get out there. They had to get out there soon, he wasn’t going to leave the other on their own -

A crash sounded outside the lab. It didn’t sound like an ordinary crash, like a janitor dropping a bucket - or nearby. It was loud; like a wall caving in.

Hiro started, alert. “Hang on.”

“Hang on to what?” Baymax inquired.

Hiro ignored him, heading out the door. He quietly stepped down the hall, sticking close to the wall and crouching down at the corner.

He bit his tongue to keep from shouting at what he saw.

Further down that hall stood Yama, armed with three Bay-bots in front of the school’s interactive map.

“You, guard the door,” Yama ordered one, who moved down the other hall.

Yama pressed START on the map. The narrator’s voice chimed, “Welcome to SFIT Virtual Guide. This Saturday, Muirahara Woods Fun Run - ”

Yama grunted, tapping at the screen to skip the introduction and school advertisements.

Baymax appeared behind Hiro. Hiro pushed him back behind the corner and shushed him.

“Yama must have sent out those other bots as a distraction,” he told Baymax quietly.

He peaked back around the corner.

“You are here,” the map told Yama.

He growled. “I’m here. I know I’m here! Where. Is. Here!”

Hiro pulled out his phone, hacking into the team’s headgear in seconds to call them all at once.
“Guys, Yama just broke into the school! I - I think he really wants that thing from Granville’s office.”

“Seriously!?” Wasabi exclaimed, and grunted from the field. “It’s a paperweight!”

“Also, kinda busy right now!” Gogo shouted between grunts.

“Too - many - robots!” Fred yelled.

“Hiro, you should get out of there!” Honey Lemon shouted.

“SECONDED!” Tadashi cried. “Don’t let him know you’re there! Is Baymax ready yet with his rocket launchers?”

“No, not yet,” Hiro told him. “Baymax and I can find a way to hold off Yama. Whatever he wants the paperweight for, we can’t let him nab it.”

Gogo grunted. “We’ll be there soon as we - “ She suddenly went offline.

“Gogo’s alright,” Tadashi informed him. “Seriously, Hiro, DON’T DO IT. Especially if Baymax isn’t ready yet! You’ll get hurt! Wait for us; it doesn’t matter if he gets the paperweight, we’ll get it back! UGH! Okay, you know what, just wait for me, I’ll fly over and stun him on his way out!”

Hiro chewed his lip. If he waited for Tadashi, he might not make it in time and Yama would already be gone. He was sure his fly was still on him so he’d be easy to track later, but by then, he might have already accomplished whatever it was he set out to do - and it had to be bad if this was his new way of getting the thing.

“I’ll be okay,” was the ambiguous answer he chose to give, and hung up.

He looked at Baymax, taking his new chip out of his pocket. “Buddy, time to be a superhero.”

Hiro opened his access port and put the chip in.

Then he looked around the corner again. Yama and his other bots had left, leaving only one behind, presumably to catch any witnesses before they became witnesses.

“First, let’s take out that guy,” he said. “Ready?”

“Yes,” Baymax replied.

The bot moved forward. Hiro ducked across the hall around the corner to another hall, Baymax following. He watched the bot pause.

Then his phone suddenly rang.

Hiro stumbled, scrambling for his phone.

The bot was over there in an instant, punching in Hiro’s direction.

He barely dodged, scrambling around the hall as he answered the phone and tried to avoid the bot. It better not be Tadashi calling him back.

“Hello!?” he failed to keep his voice even.

“Hiro!” Aunt Cass chimed.
Of course.

“H-Hey! A-Aunt Cass, I’m kinda busy!”

“Me, too! The seafood market was jammed, but I got the most amazing deal on butterfish!”

Hiro ran in the other direction from the bot. “Great - Uagh!”

The bot grabbed his hood, yanking him backwards.

“I’ll be home soon!” she said, as the bot flipped Hiro over to hold him by the ankle. “Fred told you about Shimomoto Blvd, right? Stay away from there and the general area on your way home! And be nice to your brother tonight! I can’t believe someone stole Baymax’s designs like that! Now both of you have been stolen from! If I could wring their necks... Do you think they broke into his lab?”

“Oh, maybe?” Hiro said, watching Baymax waddle over to help. “I don’t know. It’s awful! H-Hey, I gotta go, Aunt Cass! Love you byeee!”

The bot dropped Hiro to launch itself at Baymax. Hiro hung up, shoved his phone in his pocket, and leaped on its back.

“Violence is not a recommended solution,” Baymax told the bot.

Hiro, meanwhile, tore off the exterior plate and ripped out its back wires. He fell on his butt as the bot jolted, short-circuited, and collapsed, tearing open Baymax’s vinyl in the process.

Hiro jumped to his feet, running over the bot. “Baymax!”

“Oh no,” Baymax said, deflating through the wide hole. “I am in need of repair.”

Hiro realized he wasn’t otherwise damaged. It was only his vinyl.

Only his vinyl…

Hiro smirked devilishly, rubbing his hands together. “Pal, I have a plan.”

Honey Lemon heard Fred laugh, giddy, as he knocked another exoskeleton flat on its feet. “Hahaha, I could do this all night!”

She saw a bot not far away point it’s laser hand at his back. That wasn’t happening on her watch.

She typed out another formula, one similar to her chemical metal embrittlement, and tossed the ball. It coated over the bot’s hand.

She leaped next to it, tapping another ball against its shoulder. It immediately coated the bot, and in seconds, annihilated it.

“You okay, Freddie?”

This battle was shaping up to be rougher than the one at Yama’s place. It seemed like for every one bot they took down, another twelve showed up to replace it. Luckily, the replacements seemed to be dwindling. Contrary to Fred’s statement, they wouldn’t be here all night.

Her embrittlement formula wasn’t something she liked the thought of using on the field, but these were robots, and her friends were in trouble. The police had seemingly evacuated everyone and
were leaving everything to them, since they were the only ones capable of taking the bots down. Honey Lemon didn’t know whether that was more frustrating or not. Dwindling numbers or not, back up would be nice. Especially since they’d be losing a hand on deck soon.

Fred coughed as he made his way through the pink smoke. “Yes, I am. Thanks to YOU, superhero. Wink!”

Honey Lemon gave him a flat look. “Now’s not the time, Fred.”

“But I’m totally winking in here! You gotta know what that means!”

“I do. Knock it off.” She typed out another chem ball. “We have more bots to take down before the city’s safe.”

Tadashi’s drone entered the picture. “She’s right, knock it off, Fred!” he admonished. “I’m heading out for SFIT. You guys understand I can’t leave Hiro alone with Yama, right? And he’s going to pull something, I just know it.”

Honey Lemon nodded once. “We understand. We’ll hold down the fort, Tadashi. You protect Hiro, and we’ll defend each other and the city.”

“Thank you,” he said, sincere. “We’ll be back as soon as possible! I promise!”

The drone zipped away.

Fred was silent a moment. “Hiro will be okay. The Hamada bros have way thicker skulls than I do, and I’m great! YEAH!”

Honey Lemon watched him leap high in the air for another bot a short distance away, firing his flamethrower.

She hoped so. If she had it her way, they’d all be going after Hiro. Unfortunately, there were still too many bots. The city needed them. They’d follow soon.

Lifting her arm, she flung her chem ball at the next bot to cross her vision.

Hiro and a skeletal Baymax hid behind the corner of the administration office hall as Yama had a bot punch through the door of the office next to Granville’s and went inside. Thank god it was the wrong office.

“Okay, Baymax,” Hiro said, “I’m going to need you do what those bots do.”

Baymax stared down at him, and lifted a finger. “That is not a command I understand.”

“Just do what they do! And get the paperweight,” he told him. “We can’t let Yama have it. Go to Granville’s office, act like they do, and get out of there as soon as possible.”

Baymax did as he was told, bypassing the next door office with a curious look, and halting in front of Granville’s door. He looked to Hiro for confirmation. Hiro nodded rapidly. Baymax hesitantly broke the lock and pushed open the door with a creak.

Hiro watched in silence as he scanned the room and stepped inside.

His heart felt like it was going to beat out of his chest. If there was one thing he could do right tonight, it was get the paperweight out of the school before Yama got his hands on it.
“Urgh! Not in here! Check next door!”

Hiro’s heart shot up his throat. Yama and the bot exited the office, heading for Granville’s, pausing a little inside the doorway.

“Hey!” Yama bit. “Aren’t you the one that’s supposed to be guarding - Ah, never mind. Just help them.”

Hiro thought fast. This wasn’t good. Baymax against two rogue bots his strength and Yama might not get out on his own in one piece, much less sneak out with the paperweight.

The rocket fist. He’d had one nearly done in Tadashi’s lab before the crash.

He hurried through halls to grab it. He burst through the lab, checked the 3D printer, and - Yes! It was complete! He hauled it out, and made a mad dash for the administration hall.

When he got up there and back to Granville’s office, it looked like his hunch was right; Baymax was in trouble, pinned down by the other two bots.

Yama held the paperweight, grinning. “It’s over, Zero!”

Hiro fired up the rocket fist. “The name’s Hiro!”

Yama lifted his head in shock.

Hiro fired.

The rocket fist blasted off. It made a direct hit on Yama, knocking him into the back wall. The paperweight flew out of his hand, landing painfully on the ground. Part of it chipped off.

Hiro didn’t have time to think about the green light that flared out of it. Both he and Yama dived for it.

The paperweight had other plans, however. Somehow, it rose in the air on its own and attached itself to one of the bots pinning Baymax down. Green oozed throughout its body like a virus, highlighting its circuitry. It twitched and flinched, jerking up.

Baymax, under its and the other’s loosened grasp, rolled out from underneath it and rose to his feet.

The bot wouldn’t have it. It grabbed Baymax by the neck, spun him around over his head, and threw him across the room with lightning speed. Baymax crashed through the window, breaking it open, and falling.

Hiro gasped. “BAYMAX!”

He got up and ran for the window. Baymax was hanging off the ledge by one hand.

He grabbed at his arm. “Hang on, Baymax!”

“Hiro, you are in danger,” he reported.

Hiro looked over his shoulder.

The infected bot was coming their way to finish the job.

Until its wires seemed to fry completely. The bot fizzled out, collapsing as it lost its head. The
paperweight dislodged itself. Yama picked it up.

“So that’s why he wants it,” he told himself.

Without another glance in Hiro’s direction, Yama made his leave through the door.

Hiro didn’t have a moment to spare for him either. He redirected his attention to Baymax, unsuccessfully doing his best to lift him back up.

“This is not safe,” Baymax said. “If you do not let me go, you might fall.”

“No, you’ll break!” Hiro argued.

Baymax’s arm slipped.

Hiro quickly caught his fingers with both hands. But he couldn’t hold him long.

The fingers slipped through as well.

“HIRO!”

Tadashi’s drone zoomed into view.

Hiro sucked in a sharp breath.

Then a chem ball appeared under Baymax, providing a safe, bouncy cushion for him to land on and slide off of.

“This was a positive outcome,” he said.

The rest of the team showed up.

“Glad we got here in time!” Wasabi noted.

“There you are!” Tadashi called out. “I swear, I went through almost the whole building looking for you when I saw the broken exoskeleton and the torn vinyl! I thought Yama had you!”

Hiro threw himself out the window, ignoring Tadashi’s sudden shriek not to, and looked up at the drone apologetically. “Sorry. Baymax and I were following Yama to Granville’s office. He just got away with the paperweight. I bet he’s on his way through a backdoor now!”

“I’ll see if I can find him. Stay here!” Tadashi ordered, and zoomed around the building.

Hiro looked at Honey Lemon. “Thanks, Honey Lemon.”

She patted her purse. “We’re not losing anyone on my watch.”

“What happened?” Gogo asked.

“That paperweight - it isn’t just a paperweight,” Hiro explained.

“Wait, you guys really thought it was a paperweight?” Fred interrupted. “Whenever the villain wants something, it’s never what it seems! That’s comic book 101. Granville’s ‘paperweight’ probably has some cool, untold power.” He tapped his claws together in a mysterious gesture.

Tadashi’s drone returned. “He’s either still in the building or already gone. We’ve got to find him.”
“You guys search the building and campus while I fix Baymax and get his suit finished,” Hiro suggested. “I know why he wants it. That thing, it’s like a super charged battery. It broke and attached to one of the bots, and it overpowered it to the point it broke. Yama himself also seemed surprised at what it could do…”

Not to mention, he’d said something about someone else wanting it. A buyer, maybe? Hiro didn’t know. Regardless, whether Yama intended to keep it for himself or sell it, they couldn’t let him get away with it.

And god did he hope his fly was still attached and operational. This would be some pretty damning evidence for the police.

“I’ll search the grounds from above. If I see him, I’ll blast him,” Tadashi promised. “He didn’t hurt you, did he?”

“He never got the chance to touch me, big brother.”

“Good.” Tadashi flew off.

Fred hopped up and down. “Oo, oo! I can have Healthcliff bring over your suit, Hiro!”

“Thanks, Fred,” he smiled.

“I’ll search the grounds with Tadashi,” Gogo volunteered. “Honey Lemon, Wasabi, Fred, you guys search inside.”

“It’s possible he ran inside other buildings,” Wasabi pointed out, “to hide. I’ll help out, too. Honey Lemon and Fred can guard Hiro in the labs.”

Hiro didn’t bother huffing at the notion. He was unarmed and unarmored at the moment. Plus he had work to do. “Let’s get on it. We can’t afford to waste time.”

Yama hadn’t run this much in one day since he was a kid - and even then, not all at once.

He managed to get all the way across the city to Good Luck Alley when he finally thought to pull his phone out and make a call. He’d seen those Big Hero freaks show up on campus on his way out, and just narrowly avoided being caught by the annoying drone and disk thrower. He hadn’t even thought to call one of his men to meet up with him via car or helicopter. He’d only run.

Who could blame him? He’d already dealt with those freaks once and nearly froze to death. And there was the matter of the useless rock. Apparently, it wasn’t so ‘useless’ after all!

His temper flared. Without thinking, he hit the contact he knew he shouldn’t hit at a moment like this.

“This is not just an alloy!” he panted angrily at the near silent click of the pick up. “You could have told me!”

“Why would I do that?” Obake asked, voice as calm and neutral as if he were answering only a minorly irritating question. “You’re a dog fetching a ball. Bring me the ball.”

Yama had enough sense to ignore the insult. However much it irked him, this was Obake he was dealing with. He wanted rid of him, not another horror movie night at his house.

He exited an alley and came to a near stop to breathe. “I’m on my way. But, uh…” he glanced
down at his jumpsuit pocket, which had been on and off again glowing. He had to tell him, or else he’d likely face a bigger wrath than if he didn’t. “There’s something else. Your ball is broken - just a little bit! Bye!”

He hung up and took off running again.

Hopefully, that wouldn’t bite him in the butt too much.

Baymax landed on top of a high San Fransokyo building, Hiro and the girls on his back and Wasabi and Fred clinging to his limbs. Tadashi’s drone hovered beside them.

Fred did a flip as he let go of Baymax. “All right! What do we do now?”

“Time to fire up that super sensor, Baymax!” Hiro said.

Baymax obeyed. “Scanning for Yama.”

While he did that, Hiro tapped the side of his helmet, bringing up an analysis of the paperweight he’d ported over from the others’ scanners, reading over the report the computer did. “Nano induction…”

“Of course!” Fred raced to the heart of the group, holding up his claws. “Please explain, though.”

“That’s what’s happening inside that metal! It can amp up anything electrically powered to a dangerous level,” Hiro declared.

“No wonder he wants it,” Tadashi mused. “Either he makes a pretty penny from it or cause a LOT of damage to whoever he feels like targeting.”

“Yama has been located,” Baymax informed. He pointed. “There.”

“The train station,” Honey Lemon clasped her hands together, the horror dawning on everyone.

“The electric train station!” Wasabi exclaimed.

Hiro was momentarily frozen. He glanced at Tadashi’s drone, which moved its camera to look at him. He and his brother were thinking the same thing: Aunt Cass always came home from the fish market via the train.

“Aunt Cass,” Hiro couldn’t help saying aloud.

“We’ve gotta move!” Tadashi shouted. “Everyone could die if Yama causes a wreck! Civilians in the surrounding area could die if it falls off the tracks or veers off course into a building!”

Yama huffed and panted, coming up to the escalator. He stepped on it, glad to finally come to a real stop.

He wasn’t going to bother calling his men; one train ride, where he could sit and clear his head, and then he’d be a very short run away from the extraction point. He’d willingly admit he might not be thinking the clearest at the moment. When he could finally sit, he would.

He didn’t notice the rock rip out of his pocket until it was already on the step ahead, amping up the escalator.
Yama screamed, trying desperately to hold onto the escalator. It didn’t work. He was suddenly flung forward at the top, bouncing off the platform and onto the tracks.

He barely had his head together as the rock flew up and charged for the train -

Yama gawked. Then moved. “TRAIN!”

He hurled himself back on the platform.

The train sped by at a rate Yama was sure it wasn’t capable of on its own.

A millisecond too late, and he’d have been dead meat.

This was too much. This was too much! He had to get away from Obake and his schemes. He didn’t know how, but he had to!

The team narrowly dodged a rogue aerial turbine as they shot across the sky, racing after the runaway train.

“We have to stop it before it hits central station!” Hiro told everyone. “Gogo, Wasabi, cut off the engine from the rest of the train!”

“Got it,” Gogo repositioned herself and jumped off Baymax.

“Wait, what!?” Wasabi protested, only to be dropped by Baymax.

He landed on Gogo’s back, and Hiro watched from above as she rushed after the train. He could hear Wasabi’s screams from here.

When they caught up to the train, Wasabi reluctantly climbed aboard the back, and headed up the roof.

“Even with the adrenaline!” Hiro could hardly make out his voice over the roaring wind. “I have really mixed feelings about this!”

Wasabi crawled his way across the cars and jumped between two cars, out of Hiro’s sight. The cars came apart, though, but only seemed to slow a fraction.

Hiro and the others followed the remaining train.

“They’ll still crash!” Tadashi called. “We need a soft yet durable force to counter them!”

“Honey Lemon, Fred, slow the passenger cars down!” Hiro barked.

“It’s hero time, Freddie!” Honey Lemon exclaimed, jumping on Fred’s back as he hopped off Baymax and used the tracks to hop into the air before cars.

It took a few tries, and made Wasabi at the front gag and sputter, but Honey Lemon’s chem balls soon brought the cars to a halt.

“Tadashi, you’re not going to be able to stun the engine,” Hiro shouted. “Go find Yama before he escapes!”

“What!? Hiro, what are you - !?”
Hiro forced himself to block his brother out. Now wasn’t the time for overprotectiveness.

“Somebody has to help,” he reminded himself. “Come on, Baymax, it’s up to you and me!”

Baymax landed in front of the train and held his arms out. The train rammed into them, pushing them forwards towards the station.

“HIRO!”

Hiro looked over his shoulder at the station, then down at the paperweight - or whatever it actually was. Metal, that was certain.

He shot his arm forward. He couldn’t reach, but he could do something. “Magnolocks on!”

The thing resisted a few seconds as his magnets kicked into gear, but it ultimately came loose and jumped into Hiro’s hand.

With Baymax’s strength acting as a counter, the train came to a halt just outside the station.

“Oh, Baymax,” Hiro was cut off by the wild electricity streaming wildly out of control from the paperweight. “Whooooaah!”

One of the streaks hit Baymax’s armor.


His rocket boosters went off.

Hiro yelled. They shot straight into the air, right up into the clouds, and still going. In the background, he could hear Tadashi’s frantic screams through his headset.

Hiro didn’t know what to do. He couldn’t think. He had to think. With this kind of power, they’d eventually break through the atmosphere and reach space.

The solution hit him. It was a risk, one that could kill him if he moved wrong, or was wrong, but it just as likely might work.

He ripped his other hand off the magnet on Baymax’s back, and gripped the magnet tightly, using his knees to cling to his friend.

He voice commanded his hand magnets. “Reverse polarity!”

The numbers on his visor went off the charts. The paperweight resisted with all the force it had, until it shot higher in the air above him and Baymax. It exploded.

The force of the explosion sent the pair hurtling to the Earth below, the force of gravity strengthening their descent two-fold.

Hiro detached completely from Baymax. The two were parallel for a moment. Then gravity kicked in and Baymax’s weight send him down faster.

Hiro kicked and flailed, trying to reach him and get back on his back. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Tadashi’s drone hurtling down with them - no, flying. Tadashi was still in control.

“HIRO!” he shouted at the top of his lungs, fear and desperation at max.
Hiro scrambled. He wasn’t going to die on his brother. He wasn’t.

Hiro dived. Baymax slipped away when he got close, but Hiro narrowed his body to fall faster. He soon reached him, and activated his magnets to latch back on.

Hiro opened a compartment in the suit. The wires were completely fried through by the thing; they looked as though they had been ripped apart by hand. Hiro hurried to reconnect them. “Come on, come on!”

They kept falling. Tadashi sailed after them, screaming No, No, NO’s. Unfortunately, there was nothing Tadashi could do for him this time. It was all on Hiro.

Finally, the sparks came together. Baymax sparked to life.

He turned on his rocket boosters and flew to a higher, safer distance before they could splatter on the road.

Hiro sighed in relief.

Tadashi, still beside them, sputtered nonsense into Hiro’s ears.

Baymax perked up. “Hiro, your heart is accelerated and your blood oxygen levels are low.”

“Yeah, Baymax, I got that,” Hiro choked out. “Not bad, actually, considering what could have happened…”

The three met the others on the ground.

“Hiro!” Honey Lemon shouted. “Baymax! I’m so glad you’re okay! We were so worried!”

Tadashi found his voice. “NEVER DO THAT AGAIN, OR I’LL SHOOT YOU INTO THE SKY MYSELF!”

Hiro smiled shakily, sheepish. “I’m sorry, big brother. I’m sorry.”

“Yeah, a little too close to disaster there,” Wasabi pointed out. “Too close for comfort.”

“But,” Gogo drew out the word slowly and smiled, “it wasn’t a disaster.”

Honey Lemon touched his armor, mirroring her smile. “We saved a lot of people together.”

Hiro climbed down. His legs shook, so he hung on to Baymax. “Fred...was actually right all along.”

Tadashi’s drone jerked. “Wait, what!? Did that thing shock you up there!?”

Fred stole the show, however. “Yes, Fred WAS right all along. So, what I’m hearing is, we’re all fully committed to being a superhero team and -”

“NO!” Tadashi shouted. “Absolutely not! You almost died! AGAIN!”

Everyone lost their smiles.

Hiro stared up at the drone. “Tadashi, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean - I didn’t mean for that to happen. But there was no other way. The station is always full of people, and they would have gotten hurt, if not killed. I’m all right now; they wouldn’t have been.”
“I know that!” Tadashi spat. “That doesn’t mean I’m not going to panic when you almost die! Especially when there’s nothing I or anyone else can do to prevent it!”

Hiro winced.

Honey Lemon’s shoulders sagged. “It will never happen again, Tadashi. This was all around a mess and on the spot thinking, but we’re - ”

“You can’t promise that!” he yelled. “If we stay a team, you can’t promise that! You have no idea what will happen!"

Hiro took a deep breath. “Big brother, listen to me. I didn’t want to die either. I’m sorry I put you through that. Again. But it saved lives. No one else could have done what we did tonight. No one else could have stopped Yama. No one else could have halted the train in time with that thing on it. Somebody had to help. I know you’re panicking because you almost lost me, but I learned that from you, all the back at the fire. When you calm down, I know you’ll see it, too; we had to help. And look what we accomplished! Everyone’s safe! Including Aunt Cass! This is why I agreed to be on the team before with Fred. I want to protect people. I want to do...what you’ve inspired me to. And tonight proves Big Hero 7 is necessary, even if there aren’t any more supervillains.”

Tadashi was silent on the other end.

“Tadashi,” Baymax said, “It would be beneficial to everyone, including yourself, if you shared your feelings.”

Fred stepped forward. “Dude?”

“...You’re not going to back out of I tell you to, are you? You’ll stay on the team no matter what, won’t you? And the rest of you, too,” Tadashi eventually spoke, so quiet Hiro almost didn’t hear him.

He nodded. “Yeah.”

More silence. It dragged on.

Gogo, Wasabi, and Honey Lemon exchanged worried looks.

Fred gave the drone a pitying expression.

Hiro swallowed.

“...Fine,” Tadashi said, no emotion in his voice. “We’ll keep it up. You’re right, somebody has to help.”

Hiro smiled. Tadashi was scared right now - he knew the feeling exactly - but he’d get over it and come around fill circle soon enough. He knew his brother would.

He felt good. Despite the near death experience, he felt really good. He might have gotten the team into this mess with Yama but...Yama was always going to steal the paperweight, and that never would have ended well. For all his mistakes, they’d saved people. He’d help saved lives.

This hero thing? It was worth it. No matter what his head tried to tell him otherwise.

The next morning was a Sunday, but weekend classes took place on the campus, so Hiro didn’t think twice about dropping by Professor Granville’s office. It was utterly destroyed last night
thanks to Yama, and Hiro wanted to speak with Professor Granville anyway.

He knocked on the door. When it simply fell over, Hiro realized the place had been more damaged
than he thought.

“Come in, Mr. Hamada,” Granville said, eyeing the door in displeasure.

She was seated on the floor, picking up debris from the mess.

Hiro played the fool. “Whoa, what a mess! What happened?”

Granville picked up a small frame. “There are many unanswered questions. From what the police
have informed me, a thief broke into the building last night. I’m sure you’ll hear about it on the
news soon enough.”

Hiro had to fight to keep a grin off his face. His fly had in fact been in tact and still recording all
last night. After bringing it home, he cut the footage where he popped into Yama’s point of view,
deleted the rest so there’d be no evidence at his house, and anonymously sent the footage to the
police - everything from the meetings with his goons to destroying Granville’s office. If the police
had spoken with Granville, then Hiro assumed they were getting ready to arrest Yama, if they
hadn’t yet.

Granville rose to her feet and placed the frame in a box with other materials. “Can I help you with
something?”

Hiro stumbled through the trash and debris, and looked at her. “I’ve been thinking about what you
said, you know, about balance.” He let himself smile a bit. “Tadashi found his and accomplishes
amazing things.”

“Good,” she remarked. “We agree.”

Hiro wasn’t finished. “But he also takes risks. I mean, when he ran into the fire, he told me
‘sombody has to help.’ I learn a lot from my brother, a lot of good, valuable things - I got into
robotics in the first place because of him! - He’s my inspiration and always will be. But I’m not
him. I have to figure out how to be me, and I’m going to make some mistakes.”

He wasn’t going to abandon or neglect his schoolwork in favor of being a hero. He was going to
keep working hard, like Yoshida, Froeb, and Tadashi said, and find a way to balance it all out. But
like they also said, he wasn’t going to be perfect at it - with or without the heroing.

“Yes,” Granville agreed, sarcastic, turning up her chair and setting the box on the seat. “Impatient
shortcuts, dangerous risks.”

Hiro put his hands behind his back nervously. “Oh, well, those are awfully specific.”

Granville’s face softened. “I have decided working in your brother’s lab will be good for you, Mr.
Hamada.”

Hiro couldn’t believe it. “Really!?"

“Perhaps the legacy Tadashi has built here and his continued performance, both at home and when
he returns to campus, will help you avoid some of those immature mistakes.”

“Couldn’t hurt,” Hiro said, and stepped forward with open arms.
Granville pushed the chair his way and folded her arms.

Hiro slumped on the chair. This again. So much for being cute like all the café customers said. “Yeah, maybe no hug.”

“No, let’s not.”

Fred entered the Hamada garage to find Tadashi at the computer, scribbling in a notebook.

This was it. Fred knew there was a talk that needed to happen between them. Tadashi hadn’t been being himself lately and last night was horrifying for him, Fred knew, and they had to talk it out. He wasn’t going to let this drag out if it didn’t have to. Besides, Tadashi was one of his best friends.

“Hey, Tadashi, whatch’ya up to?” he greeted, striding up to the desk.

Tadashi’s face twisted - and not in a good way.

Ooo, boy. Fred thought that might happen. Not a good sign for him.

“I’m designing a suit,” Tadashi explained through clenched teeth. “When my legs fully heal, I don’t intend on laying in bed behind a drone while you guys are in the field.”

Fred brightened. “Cool, cool! Let me see!”

He peered over Tadashi’s shoulder, ignoring the small growl. (Tadashi wasn’t a tiger about to strike, Tadashi wasn’t a tiger about to strike…)

The suit on the page was identical to Hiro’s suit, but with a visor similar to Wasabi’s. There were stun blasters on the arms and wings on the back. Sciencey mumbo jumbo was mixed in with the layman’s labels.

“Neat, neat,” Fred nodded. “Have you thought about colors yet?”

“No,” Tadashi eununciated on the word.

“You could do orange! No, that would look gaudy. How about white? Or black and white! No, the team’s super colorful. How about what Baymax and Hiro do with alternating purple and red, since you three are like a trio? Only there’s your drone color, and we’ll want people to know it’s you when you get out there…”

“Fred,” Tadashi was practically emitting dark waves, “I don’t care about the color.”

Fred made the wise move of backing away. “Okay. Okay. So, onto the emotional stuff, then? All right. First up, you’re mad at me.”

“You think?” Tadashi growled, but shook his head and sighed. His face fell, skin sagging and making the bags under his eyes much more noticeable. “No. I mean, I am, and part of me wants to smack you for how much you harassed Hiro this week, but not totally. I’m mostly…mad at the situation.”

“Harassed?” People kept using that word. Fred was starting to think it was true. “Did I really? Because you’re not the first person to say that!” He rubbed his neck. “Sorry, man. I didn’t - I got caught up in my own head again. I’ll apologize to Hiro.”
Tadashi’s eyes flashed. The dark waves returned. “Good. Don’t ever do that again, or I’ll go worse than Gogo on you.”

Fred shivered. He’d never felt this nervous around Tadashi before. They were normally pals who joked around together, trolled the others, and shared a love for comics (albeit, his love was more intense). Then again, this was big brother mode he was likely dealing with. Almost positively dealing with.

“Right,” he said. “So, the situation. You still don’t want to be on the team, huh? You don’t have to be, you know. I’m - I’m not going to try to convince you. Not anymore. I know last night was scary for you, and if I was really being that bad before - ”

“Stop.” Tadashi squeezed his eyes shut and opened them. The dark waves faded once more. He looked so tired. “I have to be on the team. Hiro is. I have to watch out for him. I won’t forgive myself if I could have done something in a bad situation and wasn’t there.”

Fred’s hand fell to rub his other arm. “You...don’t particularly trust us after last night, huh?”

Tadashi shook his head. “It’s not that. No one could have stopped the fall, none of us were equipped to. This is a big brother thing, Fred. Besides…” he trailed off.

Fred straightened his shoulders. “What?”

Tadashi stared at the floor between them. “...I almost died in the fire. Hiro’s almost died god knows how many times now. You guys could have died again. How many near death experiences are we going to have? And when’s it not going to work out this time? My parents are already gone, and that tore my family apart emotionally. I can’t handle losing another person. Hiro’s my brother so it’s more personal, I’ll lose my mind if he dies, no arguments, but I’ll break if I lose any of you guys as well. You can’t promise me it won’t happen. You can only try, and trying’s not always good enough.”

Fred fiddled with his hands. Some words of optimism would be good, but he had trouble thinking of a good counter to that that Tadashi would believe.

“...I guess you’ve got a point,” he settled on. “All we can do is try. Hey, I’ll break if any one of us dies, too, you know. I don’t want that. It’s the opposite of what I want out of this.”

Tadashi’s lips curled. “Yet you got your team together anyway.”

Fred nodded. “I did. It’s not just because it’s awesome like you think, man. I wanna help people, too. It’s hero 101; defend the weak and protect the innocent. You can’t deny that we’ve helped a lot of people in the past couple months. We saved them.”

Tadashi shrunk into his chair. If Fred didn’t know any better, he’d think the bags grew.

“I know,” he replied. “I don’t deny it. But I’m scared. I’m terrified. When I came out of that fire, waking up in the hospital - it left its mark, Fred. Not only do I not want to put you guys and my family in that kind of pain again, I don’t want to lose any of you either. Six months ago, I would have thought this was as awesome as you do for the same reasons. Now? The worst case scenarios won’t leave me alone. Hiro and Baymax’s freefall last night didn’t help. I had a nightmare about it as soon as I fell asleep. They didn’t make it in the dream. What if that becomes reality?”

No wonder he was so tired. Fred doubted he fell asleep too early either.

He scratched his temple. “I don’t know. All I can say is that we won’t let it happen to the best of
our abilities. If it ever does, though, you can, uh, feel free to kill me? Heheh, not my best mood lightener…”

Tadashi’s snarling expression silently agreed.

Fred put his arm down. He came over by Tadashi’s side and put a hand on his shoulder. “I wish I knew what to say to make your fears go away. I don’t know what. Anyone can die at any time, but we are more at risk in our suits. I get what you’re saying; believe me, I do. But like Hiro said, it’s your own philosophy that somebody has to help. Hiro’s following in your footsteps in the right kind of way.”

He meant that encouragingly, not as an accusation. If there was one thing everyone knew about Tadashi, it was that he had a brave, selfless, heart of gold. It was good that Hiro was following in his footsteps this way, superhero or not. He hoped Tadashi didn’t take it as an accusation.

Tadashi stared at him blankly. “The fire department would loudly disagree with you. I was an unnecessary body to pull out of the fire, and I could have easily been a dead one. Don’t make me imagine him in my place.”

Okay, not taken as an accusation, but close enough.

“The ethics, Tadashi,” Fred emphasized, correcting him. “That’s what I mean. He’s as selfless as you are. He’s a bit of a punk, but when push comes to shove, he’s willing to do whatever it takes for others just like you are. He’s proved it so many times since he found out the fire wasn’t an accident. Now he wants to make that selflessness a regular part of his life. It’s like being a fireman, only he’ll definitely have the equipment and back up you didn’t at the expo. No offense.”

Tadashi sighed.

Fred pushed the tools on the table next to the computer aside and hopped up. “I’m sorry, man. This isn’t what you want, and maybe I shouldn’t have pushed at all, not just how far I went. But we’re here now and I don’t think Hiro’s going to give up if we change our minds. Being a hero makes him feel good. I don’t know how much he’s told you, but the kid’s been dealing with some serious self-esteem issues lately.”

“I’m aware,” Tadashi said. “We had a talk the other night and he came clean. He told me about your and Baymax’s talk with him. Two things: One, thank you for helping him the way you did, and two, he actually went back on his decision to be on the team because Granvillle shook his self-esteem in all areas up. He just didn’t want to tell you because he felt bad.”

Fred jolted. “What? Are you kidding!? Man, I feel triple bad about bugging him now! I swear, if I’d known it wasn’t just a duel identity thing where he was worried about school, I never would have bothered him! I told him if emotional junk was bothering him, he didn’t have to be on the team! Ah, I gotta make it up to him. To both of you! For everything! Should I - Should I clean your room? Help your aunt out for free in the café? Write all your less sciencey essays? What should I do!”

The corner of Tadashi’s mouth twitched. “Don’t worry about it. He’s been getting better. Just don’t ever bug him like that again. You have to learn boundaries, Fred.”

He nodded apologetically. “I’m sorry, man. I’ll definitely apologize to him next time I see him. Where is he, by the way?”

“At school; said he had to talk to Professor Granville.”
“Ah, gotcha.” Fred kicked his legs. “So, is this why you’ve been against the team the whole time? I mean, in retrospect, you said so, but...you’ve also been grouchy lately. Ever since it came out Callaghan was behind the Yokai mask. The whole thing with the portal and him really freaked you out, didn’t it?”

Tadashi paled. He glanced the other way. “I guess. Sorry I’ve been grouchy. Yeah, it did mess me up. Callaghan - he was why I decided to turn robotics into a career. I got into building as a kid, but when I was ten or eleven, I found this article online about a Robert Callaghan and his latest breakthrough that revolutionized the field and it went into detail about how this breakthrough would help a lot of people. I’ve looked up to him for years, and Aunt Cass says I had stars in my eyes when I got accepted into SFIT and got to meet him. He was a role model. An important one, too, after my dad died and I both had no one and had to work extra hard to be one for Hiro. I felt good around him. When it came out he was actually a monster all along - ”

Tadashi cut off with a strangled noise.

Fred didn’t press. He gently replied, “That’s rough. For the hundredth time, I’m sorry, man. Really sorry. I can only imagine someone I look up to turning out like that.”

“Well, I shouldn’t be taking it out on you guys,” Tadashi shrugged. “I’m sorry, too. Not like there’s anything I can do, though. I can’t go back in time, I can’t make him the person I thought he was, and I can’t come to an understanding with what he did in a way that takes all this - these feelings of betrayal away. The man I idolized and spent so many years trying to be like tried to murder my little brother, best friends, and so many other people, and he did it with the microbots he stole from Hiro. I can’t forgive that. I can’t - I can’t make peace with that. Not yet.”

“I understand,” Fred reached out for his shoulder once more. “You don’t have to hold it all in, though. You can talk to us anytime. Hey, if you wake up in the middle of the night and feel like talking, feel free to call or text me. All my classes at SF State are in the afternoon, so I won’t mind waking up at three AM to talk for an hour. Callaghan hurt everyone he knew, but we know he hurt you more than any of the rest of us in the gang. We’re here for you, Tadashi.”

Tadashi nodded somberly. “I know. Thank you. You guys are there for me and I appreciate that. You have no idea how much. I’ll keep my temper in check from now on, promise.”

Fred smiled. “As long as you recover, bro, we can handle a few outbursts here and there. So, is there anything I can do to make you feel better about the team? I’m sure there are, like, extra safety measures we can take, or...”

He shook his head. “No. I’ll freak out no matter what, I can tell you that. Just do your best to keep each other safe out there. I’ll do my best with my drone, but like I said a while ago: it haunts me that if something goes south, I’ll safe at home while you guys might have your lives on the line. Just keep an eye out for each other.”

“It’s a dealio!” Fred grinned. “Anything else you want to talk about?”

“No,” Tadashi gave him a watery smile. “I actually want to be alone for a bit, if that’s all right.”

His eyes were misting over.

Fred could see where this was going. He could respect if someone wanted to cry alone. Tadashi had enough stress on his shoulders to add to San Fransokyo Bay, he bet.

He hopped down. “Got it. I’ll be in the café if you need me. Shoot me a text!”
“I will,” Tadashi said.

Tadashi waited until Fred was gone to let out a long, shaky breath.

He hadn’t lied. He’d never lied. Being a superhero was dangerous and he couldn’t handle losing anyone. He’d go mad.

But that wasn’t the full truth. If Tadashi had it his way, the others would never learn the whole truth. There was nothing that could be done about it anyway, and they’d never see him the same way again if they knew. Especially Hiro.

The fire had left its mark, that was true. When Tadashi had seen how worried and afraid his friends and family were, how Aunt Cass and Hiro cried, and how tightly the gang hugged him, all so happy they hadn’t lost him - he realized how dangerous it was to run in there in the first place. His death could have cost himself everything and his loved ones so much grief. He’d never made anyone so frightened before, never almost lost everything like this before, and he had no desire to ever do it again.

Yet he hadn’t regretted what he’d done. It was the right thing. The fire was already so massive and huge in what could have only been a few minutes at the most ...he would have run inside to save anyone, it wasn’t just that it was Callaghan in there. If he could have saved him - if he’d actually needed saving, the monster - he would have. For as much as Tadashi hated what he did to his friends and family, it only made him resolve to go about future endeavors in a safer way; he’d still be willing to risk his life for others. He'd only be more hesitant and take less risky ventures. He didn't want to die.

Then the mask came off and it all went to hell.

Callaghan was alive. Callaghan set the fire. Callaghan stole Hiro’s microbots. Callaghan attempted murder at every turn he made, not caring who was the target. Callaghan was a lie.

Tadashi remembered when he was a kid, several months after his parents died. Hiro was still screaming and shrieking on the floor, kicking and hitting his way out of Aunt Cass’ arms because he’d wanted Mom, not her. Tadashi had tried to distract himself from the latest meltdown by looking up cool robotics stuff online. It had been a hobby of his, after all. Mom and Dad used to help him build models.

Somehow, he’d stumbled upon the article. He’d been amazed by it - he hadn’t yet realized the full capacity science was capable of, let alone what a roboticist could do. And this breakthrough, it did help a lot of people, which touched him at his core.

Now his core felt rattled.

Tadashi had always wanted to help people; that was his main goal in life. Science should do everything in its power to better the lives of humanity. That was why he had made Baymax. It was also why he ran into the fire. Life had value and everyone in trouble deserved to be helped.

He wasn’t sure he could even explain it to himself properly. Callaghan, his role model, the man who’d been on the pedestal Dad couldn’t stand on anymore, who had encouraged and praised Tadashi’s efforts for humanity over and over, time and time again - he’d been a wolf in sheep’s clothing all along and hadn’t cared for any of it.

And Tadashi almost died, almost lost everything, almost just about killed all his loved ones with his near death experience, for a murderous, arsonistic, thief of a liar. He almost died for a man who
had never needed saving. Who deliberately put so many lives at risk, who desired to go further and take lives. His family and friends’ lives included.

Tadashi could no longer say he’d go into the fire, if he could do it all again. Not because Callaghan hadn’t really needed saving - no, it could have been anyone in there, anyone innocent and truly in need of help. The fire had left its mark, and Callaghan had torn that wound open to bloody shreds when the mask came off. He didn’t know if he’d run in there or not. All he knew was that he never wanted to be in that position again, never wanted to -

He swallowed. Well, when it came down to it, he guessed what he was saying was to help people.

No, that wasn’t quite right. He still wanted to help people. He still dreamed of getting Baymax out there and doing so much more. But stunts like the fire? Stunts like what Big Hero 7 would surely pull? No. Tadash had no desire to be the hero who saved them, or for his brother and friends to take the same risk he had. It didn’t matter who needed saving. It couldn’t be them.

Which was stupid. Awful. Horrible. Not him. It made no sense and he couldn’t for the life of him figure out why Callaghan being behind the mask had shaken such a strong foundation of who he was. Life was valuable. People deserved to be saved, even if they were monsters who were in trouble. That’s what he’d always believed. Yet here he was, too frightened to act on that belief anymore, to genuinely act on it like Hiro and the others would as superheroes. He was only staying on the team because it was his brother and best friends, and it’d be a cold day in hell before he let them go alone when he could have done something. He couldn’t lose them. It wasn’t selflessness in the name of protecting the weak and innocent from villains that drove him.

It made him feel like a fraud, the same sort of fraud Callaghan had turned out to be. Tadashi had always looked up to him, learned so much from him, and now that he’d shown his true colors, it was like he’d zapped all the color from Tadashi. He didn’t get why; he didn’t want to be a fraud, and he’d always cared. He cared.

The worst part was, Hiro had finally accepted one thing he’d said to heart, one thing out of the numerous pieces of advice, scoldings, and general beliefs, and he’d chosen that. Somebody has to help. Somebody has to help. Somebody has to help! Look where that had gotten them - near death experiences all around! One of these days, it wasn’t going to stop at near.

Yet Tadashi couldn’t tell Hiro that. He couldn’t tell anyone. They wouldn’t see him as him anymore. They would know he was like Callaghan, that he wasn’t - that he was no longer the guy they thought he was. They might think that had never been him, because really, who lost their faith in the world at something like this?

And the worst part of that would be that Hiro could end up like him. The cycle would continue. Hiro might question his own beliefs, his own selflessness and ability to help others, and it would crumble him like it was crumbling Tadashi. Tadashi was boiling and bubbling and all but screaming on the inside because THAT’S NOT WHO HE IS. yet this was where he was in fact at. It brought his mood down and followed him like a shadow, because how do you lose such a fundamental part of yourself after something so horrifying stupid? Callaghan’s reveal shouldn’t have done this to him, yet it did. Like hell he’d do it to Hiro.

But that didn’t fix the problem of the team. They could all die out there, trying to save others. They could end up how he almost ended up - dead. All the while he’d be neatly tucked at home, safe and out of harm’s way while they got killed thanks to his stupid philosophy that he was ashamed to the bottom of his heart to say he didn’t quite hold anymore. It would all be his fault.
And he didn’t. Understand. Why.

None of it made sense and he couldn’t make sense of it, no matter how he looked at it or spun the memories of Professor Callaghan and Yokai around in his head, day after day. Why had this taken such a key part of him? How had it?

Now his little brother and best friends were going to risk their lives on a regular basis thanks to him. And he couldn’t even tell them the full truth.

Tadashi crumpled in his chair and sobbed, glad he’d left Baymax deactivated in their room - he didn’t want anyone to see him like this.

He hated this. He hated it so much. He didn’t want to be selfish. It wasn’t who he was.

Then again, it hadn’t been who he thought Callaghan was either. Maybe he’d been wrong along about himself, the same way he had Callaghan, and he’d only played up the helping shtick out of admiration. Maybe he’d never really known himself at all.

He hated it. He hated it.

Obake rewatched the footage of the seven manned team fly through the air after saving the electromagnetic train last night. They were a curious group; this was their third appearance, second with all its members if he discounted the unfortunate incident at Yama’s place of business. They were like something out of a comic book or movie, a bunch of children and young adults playing hero. In all his thirty-six years, he couldn’t recall ever seeing a group like them in real life. Yet they got the job done, when they felt showing up.

“Big Hero 7,” he murmured, just as he had last night.

They should be no threat to him. He was an underground man, who took extra care in his discretions. By the time his plan to destroy the old world and rebuild a new one came to fruition, there would be nothing they could do to stop it; they’d be wiped out with the rest of the unworthy, never knowing who was behind the catastrophe or why.

Nevertheless, he took note of them. One small pest had the potential to grow into a large one, an infestation of pests he had no intention of dealing with. He’d keep an eye on them just in case they proved too nosey for their own good.

One of his monitors went off, signalling a call. Obake looked down at it.

It was the dog. No doubt here to roll on his belly for his failure last night.

He answered the call. “What is it?”

“I did. EVERYTHING YOU ASKED OF ME! For MONTHS! I want out, Obake! My debt is repaid! You and I have no further business together!”

Obake tutted in annoyance. “Oh, is that so?”

He pressed a button on his computer.

Yama screamed on the other end. He was home, after all, and Obake was fully aware of his lock down security system.

“You failed last night,” he snapped. “Why should I cut ties with you when you did not do
everything I asked? The alloy is gone now, thanks to you and your sniveling squirming.”

“You never told me what it was! I could have died out there!” his voice shook while still trying to put on an air of fury.

“What a misfortune that would have been,” Obake scoffed. The fool would die in the coming catastrophe anyhow. “Regardless, you do have a point; it IS time we cut ties. You are no longer useful to me, and your mishap last night proved your incompetence for large scale extractions. Our time together is through.”

“Wait, what?” Yama exclaimed. “What does that mean!?”

Obake picked off a tiny piece of fuzz he noticed on his vest. He pressed the button again, shutting off the lockdown system. “It means someone planted a bug on you. Could have been the child you found yourself at the mercy at, could have been the heroes who thrashed you. The police are on their way to your hotel. They should be there any second now to arrest you.”

As if on cue, sirens sounded in the background. Music to his ears.

“I’m - I’m GETTING ARRESTED BECAUSE OF YOU!??” Yama shrieked. “You - You have to help me! I’ll tell them all about you - ”

“Oh yes, please do,” he mocked. “Tell them about the voice and scary demon imagery that haunts you at night. You know for yourself I don’t leave a single trace of evidence of our communications. They’ll only think you’re hallucinating an actual obake and need mental help.”

“YOU - !”

“Goodbye.”

Obake hung up.

He had no time for dilly-dallying; he wasn’t his daughter with her thieving and bot-fighting. There was work to be done.

He’d have to do make do without the alloy. A pity, really, because it would have beneficial to see exactly where he went wrong with his star all those years ago, but it wasn’t the worst that could have happened; he could move forward without it.

Chapter End Notes

All right, let's get this out first since I'm the most nervous about this: Tadashi's problem has been revealed. Does it sound wildly out of character? Let me explain.

Tadashi's arc is a What If idea I had for another fic a long time ago that I never wrote. What if he lived and Callaghan's reveal shook him to his core and made him question his beliefs? What if the knowledge his idol and mentor (for these two fics) was an attempted murderer who didn't care in the slightest about anyone else chilled him to the bone and slowly grew on him like rot, eating him from the inside out, basically turning him into how he now perceives Callaghan - a bitter, angry, resentful man - and how would he feel about that? That's the basis of Tadashi's arc here.
Here, Callaghan unknowingly played a huge role during Tadashi's formative years, because he was who Tadashi looked up when he no longer had anyone to look up to, and had to become a good role model at a young age himself. He was inspired by him. Especially by the good that came out of his work. Callaghan's reveal snapped what Tadashi now views as a lie.

Because of this, along with the trauma he got from the fire, Tadashi's faith in himself as someone who helps others has been shaken. His illusion has been broken. If Callaghan can turn out to be such a monster, who else can? Him? He was already on edge when thinking of dangerous risks thanks to the fire, but now the man who encouraged his selfless attitude turns out to be a lie. That stings. It hits nerves he didn't know he had. So as time goes on, he realizes he can't say he'd run into the fire again - for anyone. Because he's scared, nearly lost his life and hurt his loved ones in the worst way, and his inspiration was a lie all along.

I'll admit I'm tweaking Tadashi's character to make this work. I don't believe this is how he'd be if he had lived. But that's the nature of What If fics; sometimes you have to tweak stuff to make the concept work. But I will NOT be changing who he fundamentally is. Tadashi is a brave and selfless character at heart, whatever he believes about himself in the fic, and (spoilers?) I do have his arc mapped out to show that by the end. He's going to get low in this fic, very low because he'd rather avoid the problem and internalize it than talk or seek help due to the shame he feels and fear he'll continue the cycle as Hiro's inspiration, but that is not where I'll leave him.

Okay. I hoped I explained that well enough. I understand if that's not anyone's cup of tea or where they thought this was going and this turned out to be a disappointing reason.

BTW warning about Issue 188 chapters: As I said in the first chapter, I can't stand Karmi. She's a horrible character with no other purpose than being a bully and shallow love interest, and I've decided, you know what? I'm not going to take this as an opportunity to fix the bullying plotline appropriately for my own sanity; no, instead, I'm going to deal with the bullying plotline in the most self-indulgent way I can without breaking the fic. So if you're a fan of Karmi, hmm, you might not enjoy those chapters. I'd probably skim or skip them, because I've decided rather than cut her future scenes and only mention her once or twice, she's never coming back after this.

All right, I'm done. Let's get on to this chapter's notes:

- This is not the last we'll see of Hiro's insecurities and anxiety. Plus, he's still got issues with 'stealing' Bayma from Tadashi, as briefly touched upon in chapter four. But we will lighten up for a while from here.

- I looked up butterfish recipes for this fic and found out it's actually not a food you want to eat. It won't kill you, but if you don't want to suffer for two days afterwards, it's better to avoid it than eat it. I did find one recipe that claimed to get rid of most of the oil that makes you sick, and two sources that said only a few ounces of the fish would leave you okay, but I'm not sure how seriously to take those. Reportedly, however, it does taste fantastic. Nevertheless, it's still banned in several countries, including Japan!

- Wasabi's character arc was (lightly) introduced. I want him to come into being a hero more easily, leaving his initial fears and dependency on adrenaline rushes behind.
- Sadly, Hiro didn't bother watching the fly footage beyond where he met Yama. He figured it contained nothing important, other than his explicit involvement in the crime scene, and deleted it. (I have long-term changes I want to make, but the team discovering Obake this early on is not one of them.)

- This is not the last we'll see of Yama, but he will be in jail for some time.

- The getting into robotics because of Tadashi thing is canon to the movie. It's in the art book.
Hello again! Just like last time, I'll be posting these chapters together; Issue 188 is already done. After this, I'll be taking a break to work other projects. I've written a LOT for this fic this summer, so I need some time away. I'll probably start on it again in October or November.

Okay, so some things to note here: This is the episode where I rage at the show canon. I'm not writing Fan Friction and Big Problem the way the show presents them (Karmi will be gone by Fan Friction, and considering how poorly written BP is and that it's just a lead in to season 2, which I will not be writing, I'm debating replacing the episode with original chapters.) Either way, that means Issue 188 is where I get to rage at the show's bullying plotline! (I apologize in advance to all my readers who don't give the slightest fuck about Karmi either way.)

I know I said last chapter things will get lighter from here on out, and they will, but things will take a bit of a nosedive here. I looked at my original plans a month or so ago and decided, screw it, if I'm going to write this, then I'm going to write it be as self-indulgent as possible without breaking the fic and get out a bunch of my rage. This is the only episode where I'm going to do this. We'll get back on normal track with the next one.

I will warn any Karmi fans reading this again: I can't stand her and this will not end happily for her. This is self-indulgent as hell for me. You don't have to read this, no one is forcing you to, least of all me, and I'm not going to complain if you hit the back button. (I'd actually *prefer* you hit the back button than do what at least one person on Tumblr did on one of my posts and try to defend her. I don't care if you like Karmi or Karmiro. Everyone (including me) has their little problematic faves, I sincerely don't care who yours are - you can love Karmi to death and ship her with yourselves for all I care, that's your right - but I'm not here as a former bully victim to explain to teenagers and young adults that *bullying is in fact bullying.* These next three chapters aren't an attack on YOU and what you like - sad I have to explain that, but I want to cover my bases here after the response I got on Tumblr - it's me, a former bully victim, being bitchy at the trashiest part of a children's show. These are the only chapters where Karmi will be mentioned, so if you'd rather skip them, please do. I'm not forcing this on you.)

Now all that said, I want to be clear that this isn't JUST me being bitchy at a kid's show because I was in Hiro's shoes as a kid (with my own bullying Karmis, negligent Granvilles, and shitty so-called friends). I sincerely don't believe Tadashi would put up with Hiro being bullied. He clearly didn't approve of it in the movie's cut scenes, and I don't interpret his character as a bully supporter or bystander. In my original plans where this wasn't that self-indulgent, I still had the same response from him in mind: pissed and protective. I also changed the gang's reaction because they're just gross in the show, and I also sincerely doubt Tadashi would let Hiro be anywhere near them if he found what how they responded to him being bullied, and that would mean the end of the team.
How I wrote the final draft is probably not realistic (meaning unlikely to occur in such a way), but hey - I said it's self-indulgent. Again, I apologize to everyone who doesn't give the slightest fuck about Karmi either way. I did try to expand the High Voltage plot to balance it out, but in the end, this got so long both plots had scenes cut or widdled down.

Lastly: Since she won't appear in future chapters, I did try rearranging a few things from later episodes to here, but I realized most of it was just the same behavior she exhibits in Issue 188, not to mention it's hard to get the same feel when the circumstances are different (ie making fun of Hiro for being around a "fake scientist" when Wower isn't present). I do have the rearranged items listed in the end notes, but after those, I stopped. The only major rearranged action is the cyber bullying from Failure Mode, which will be brought up in more detail later.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Most people hated Monday mornings; Cass was one of them, but she loved the breakfast rushes that swept through The Lucky Cat Café too much to grouch about it. The first early morning rush had already lulled to a slow and the second wouldn’t begin for another half hour to forty-five minutes, so Cass had taken a fifteen minute to come upstairs and make a quick breakfast for her boys. Mostly, she just wanted to check on how they were doing.

Tadashi was lying on the couch in the living room, facing the kitchen with his laptop on his lap, already hard at work on his schoolwork. Baymax stood nearby, vigilant in case his creator and patient needed something. Hiro was still upstairs, bumbling around getting dressed and filling his backpack with who knew what by the sounds of it. All in all, it seemed to be a peaceful, usual morning.

Cass bit her cheek as she scrambled their eggs and waited for their toast to finish toasting. That was a good thing. Tadashi had been doom and gloom all day yesterday after Baymax’s blueprints were high-jacked by some Good Luck Alley crime boss, who’d thankfully been caught on his next attempt to break into SFIT. The news had gone on all about it last night and was repeating it this morning. It made her shudder; from what she understood, this Yama fellow, or whatever his full name was, was a big deal in San Fransokyo’s crime world. Cass wasn’t sure she wanted to know why he’d thought to steal her sweet nephew’s healthcare companion project to wreck havoc.

It was unnerving, though. This was the second time her nephews had been stolen from. First Hiro’s microbots, now Tadashi’s Baymax blueprints. Just when things were getting quiet and back to normal, too. It left an uneasy feeling in the pit of her stomach. What was going to happen next? Would something else follow this? She hoped not. Hadn’t her boys gone through enough? It was still September for goodness’ sake.

(Not to mention her own near death encounter the other night on the way home. She hadn’t even realized the true extent of the danger she’d been in until she got off the train and heard about Big Hero 7’s heroics. God help whatever being tried to take her away from her boys, especially when her twenty-one year old would have to take on the responsibility of raising his little brother while going to college, having no job, and currently being disabled - Hell would hath no fury indeed. Cass hadn’t mentioned that to the boys, though, and she wouldn’t. They didn’t need to worry about her on top of everything else.)

Hiro had seemed all right to her yesterday. Happy, even. Oh, he’d ranted along with her about
someone ripping off Baymax, but otherwise he’d been fine. That was good. Tadashi, however, was
understandably more upset. His harmless creation had been used to harm people for goodness’
sake! Cass didn’t blame him. But he’d hardly talked about it, only listened to her and Hiro rant
while he sat uncomfortably and silently nodded along.

This morning, he seemed all right. The doom and gloom vibes had either vanished or were being
well hidden. He’d greeted her casually when he came down stairs, Baymax behind him, and
chuckled about how Hiro was still half asleep and just put his shirt on backwards and inside out.
She and Baymax greeted each other afterwards, and when she asked how he was feeling after this
weekend, he waved her off and told her he was fine.

Then he set to work on his laptop without waiting for breakfast.

Still no talking. Cass was unnerved by that as well. What happened her little fountain that used to
come to her over everything? Had that monster really hurt her baby so much that he was going to
hole it all inside from now on? It wasn’t like becoming an adult had stopped Tadashi from talking
to her three years ago.

She tried not to dwell on it. Traumatic event after traumatic event, he was allowed his privacy.
He’d come to her eventually, she reminded herself. Or, if not, if he’d decided he no longer wanted
to come to her, well, he was an adult and could make that decision - oh, but that made her heart
hurt; why would he suddenly cut her out like that? Maybe he had talked with his friends, though, or
even Hiro. If he wasn’t actually holing it all up inside, that as fine with her. Much as it stung that
he hadn’t come to her after all these years, at the end of the day, she only cared that he’d be all
right. But god she hoped he’d come to her eventually, at least to genuinely let her know he was all
right for real.

The toast popped up.

Cass turned off the oven and scraped the eggs out onto the boys’ plates. She slid the skillet into the
sink and opened the butter. “Sweetie, don’t you want to wait until you’ve eaten to start on your
homework? An empty stomach won’t help your brain. Come on, put the laptop down and I’ll bring
your breakfast over.”

She peered over her shoulder to get a view of Tadashi’s response.

He lifted his head and grinned sheepishly. “Sorry, Aunt Cass. My electrical robotics IV professor
just sent me this forty page PDF for the next unit and I wanted to get a head start on reading it. I
can get up, you don’t have to bring it over.”

“Nonsense, you’re supposed to be resting.”

“I’m allowed to stand and walk, Aunt Cass.”

“Don’t underestimate a woman whose baby was injured to the point of having back surgery, Tadashi,” she half-jokingly warned. “Even when you get off those crutches, I’m still going to be a
buzzing bee who doesn’t want you to push it.”

Tadashi rolled his eyes, but smiled. “Okay, whatever. But I can do the dishes when we’re done
eating. I’ll even put them in the dishwasher so I’m not standing at the sink, where I might fall on
soapy water that got on the floor.” He put a limp wrist on his forehead for dramatic effect.

Cass took her butter knife off the toast she had in her hand to point at him. “Careful, mister. Don’t
push it.”
He grinned wide and she laughed.

It was easier to push her worries aside in moment like this.

As she returned to her buttering, Hiro finally came bouncing down the stairs, dressed correctly and with his backpack over his shoulders.

“Where are you running off to without your breakfast?” she asked, eyeing his backpack.

“Nowhere,” Hiro answered cheerfully. “I just checked my school email and one of my professors is sick today so class is cancelled! Which means instead of going to laser photonics, I have plenty of time to sign out a virtual reality headset from Professor Fujioka while he doesn’t have a class! Do you know how long I’ve been waiting to sign one out?”

Cass put her knife down and picked up the two plates. “I’m going to guess these headsets are more advanced than the video game console thing, right?”

“Way more advanced,” Hiro replied. He ran ahead of Cass to Tadashi’s side, patting Baymax’s arm. “Hey, buddy. You looking after Tadashi today?”

Baymax looked down at him. “Yes. I am currently on standby. Would you like me to go SFIT with you to scan your sick professor?”

“No!” Hiro laughed, and plucked up a piece of toast from the plates Cass set on the coffee table. “Professor Yoshida’s not going to be there today. Besides, Tadashi needs you more than she does.”

Tadashi frowned in annoyance. “Actually, I’m pretty good. All I plan to do today is lie down, get my work done, and watch TV when I’m done. Why don’t you take him to school with you? Obviously, don’t take him class; you can leave him in my lab. But it’s been a while since you two have spent some real time together.”

Cass paused, glancing at Hiro, who stared at his brother strangely. Something was up.

“I mean,” Hiro started, “he’s your healthcare companion.”

“And I’m healing just fine,” Tadashi responded. “Seriously, I’m okay. He’s your friend and it’s good for Baymax to get out there and learn about the world. The more his AI adapts to a variety of situations, including non-medical ones, the more ready he’ll be non-hospital settings. Oh, and he’s your friend and I’m 100% supportive of that, did I mention that? I told you before, I’m not glass.”

Hiro chewed lis lip, hesitant. “Um…”

“Baymax likes spending time with you, too,” Tadashi added. “Right, pal?”

Baymax nodded. “Hiro is my patient. I am a robot, and therefore am not capable of ‘liking,’ but I do care for Hiro in the same way I do you, Tadashi. I will accompany Hiro to school.”

“No, no!” Hiro waved his hands hurriedly. “It’s okay! Really, he’s better off here with you than me!” He shot Baymax a sorry look. “I’ll see you when I get home and the three of us can hang out together! A-Anyway, I gotta go, Granville really hates late students, bye!”

He yanked up the other piece of toast from his plate, completely disregarding the eggs, and bolted for the stairs.

“Hiro!” Tadashi called.
Baymax turned on his feet, silently watching him go.

Cass frowned. “What’s up with him?”

If Tadashi heard her, scowling at the stairs, he didn’t make that clear. “Nurse Hamada,” was all he muttered.

Ahh. Cass got it now. “We’re both protective of you,” she reached over to ruffle his neatly brushed hair, grinning when several locks spiked up like Hiro’s did. “He’ll get over it, don’t worry. Eat his eggs, I don’t want them going to waste. I have to run back down to the café to check on things, so if you need me, you know where to find me.”

Tadashi patted roughly at his hair to get it back down. “Yeah, I will. Thanks.”

Cass shook her head. Her baby was starting to get sick of being babied. Well, at least that was nothing worth worrying about.

With Froeb’s class finally over with by 10:30, Hiro had signed out his virtual reality headset and raced back to Tadashi lab for a test run. So far, within the last half hour of playing with it, it was turning out to be everything he’d imagined. And with no more classes until 2:30, he was free to keep exploring its capabilities.

The ocean the VR set displayed was so life like, Hiro could have sworn he was actually on the sea floor. It was way more realistic than any video game; it didn’t even look like CG. He wondered if the people who made these headsets had used real footage of the ocean to make them. It was so real, he couldn’t help putting his hand out for the curious fish to nibble at his fingers, even though he knew they weren’t real and he wasn’t hooked up to feel them.

“Whoa. Cool,” he muttered to himself.

“Mr. Hamada.”

The fish suddenly all swam away, and a shadow loomed over the ocean floor.

Hiro jerked. “Huh?”

A shark swam up to him in their place, opening its jaws and showing off its sharp teeth.

“Mr. Hamada!”

Hiro yanked the VR set off and turned around in his chair. Granville stood behind him, eyed narrowed and frowning. On the screen beside her, the shark swam away.

“Follow, please,” she told him, turning for the door.

Uh oh. He was in trouble, wasn’t he? She knew Professor Yoshida was out sick, didn’t she, and that’s why he wasn’t in class?

Hiro placed the set on the table beside him and jumped up. “Uh, Professor Granville! Just taking a little break! You know, studies show all work and no - ”

She craned her neck over her shoulder sternly. “Do not play me.”

Hiro faltered. He planted his hands behind his back nervous. “Fair enough. So what’s up?”
“I would imagine,” Granville explained, “being a fourteen year old surrounded by college students presents…” she averted her eyes a moment, “certain social and emotional challenges.”

He blinked. This again? His age? Really?

Hiro shook his head. “No. No, not really.”

If anything, he got along better with his brother and the gang than he had anyone his age. Kids in elementary school had looked at him like he was an alien speaking an alien language when he finished up his class work early and started chatting about robotics engineering and theories he’d picked up from Tadashi’s personal research, and soon made the habit of avoiding him at recess because he was the weird kid who was probably an alien robot that couldn’t speak English or Japanese, normal human languages (he spoke both). And when he’d gotten to high school, well - the fourteen and fifteen year old freshman hadn’t liked thirteen year old seniors any more than the juniors and other seniors had. It had hurt...more than he was willing to admit.

It wasn’t that Hiro hadn’t tried. He did. At one point he even kept robotics and boring homework out of his conversations and brought up the sports and video games he’d liked. It didn’t work. The ‘nicest’ (for lack of a better word) people ignored him completely, the less ‘nice’ ones couldn’t get away from him fast enough and irritably made it clear they didn’t want to be around him, and the worst went out of their way to harass him simply for existing. It didn’t matter what he did, didn’t do, or tried - kids his own age didn’t like him.

Only Tadashi and the gang had never treated him like that. The treated him like he was normal, one of their own, and were interested in what he had say regardless of whether it was video games or robotics. That’s why Tadashi had always been his best friend in the whole world, and with the gang, for once, Hiro actually felt accepted.

Sooo, what Granville was getting at, Hiro had no idea. But he was already dreading the presumption.

“But hey, um,” he hunched his shoulders - this was Granville, though, tough and by the book Granville, “I’m sure whatever you have in mind will show me just how wrong I am.”

“Hmm.” Granville headed for the door. “Follow, Mr. Hamada.”

Hiro gave one last, sad look to the VR set, and reluctantly followed.

Granville gave him no explanation as to where they were going or what they were doing as she took him from the robotics labs to the biological engineering building (not to be confused with regular biology) and up to the lab portion of the building.

“There is someone I would like you to meet,” was she said as she opened the unlocked lab.

The double doors slid open. Granville entered the darkened room with Hiro on her heels, examining the endless beakers and flasks filled with unknown blue liquids.

At the end of the room at a desk surrounded by overhead tools and machinery was a ponytailed girl in a labcoat.

Granville came to a stop. “Mr. Hamada, meet Karmi.”

Karmi. No ‘Miss Surname.’ Huh. Hiro briefly wondered if they were close or something. This wasn’t a set up to be friends with her niece or best friend’s daughter or something was it? Because he didn’t enjoy set ups like that. They were forced and weird.
Speaking of forced...

The girl at the table stood up and faced them, revealing large safety goggles and a surgical mask. She held up a double syringe of green fluid, squirting droplets out.

Hiro’s face twisted. He had a bad feeling about this already.

She opened her lab coat and put the double syringe in the a pocket with other tools (was that even safe while it was filled and leaking?).

Karmi pulled up her goggles and down her mask, and Granville flipped the lights on. She put on the most forced smile and walked towards them, hands clapping together, speaking in the most forced sugary sweet voice, “Hiro! When Professor G asked me to connect with you, I thought this is gonna be super great! And it is!”

She got uncomfortably close to Hiro. Extremely uncomfortably close, to the point their noses were almost touching and Hiro was bending over backwards to lean away from her.

Now that he could see her face, though, Hiro recognized her; he hadn’t known her name, but she was in his thermodynamics I class. They’d never spoken to each other - they’d never even sat close together. They were total strangers.

“So great!” Karmi continued, clearly faking her enthusiasm. And overdoing it, in his opinion. “The greatest!”

Hiro took the single breath pause she made to back away for real. A safe few feet away. “Uh, hello,” he waved, putting on his own fake smile.

At least neither of them really wanted to be here, he guessed. That might make it easier.

“Karmi was the youngest student ever admitted into San Fransokyo Tech,” Granville explained soberly.

Was it Hiro, or did it look like she was glaring at him? It had to be Hiro. Unless Karmi was her niece or friend’s daughter. In which case, Hiro really had a bad feeling.

Karmi’s smile opened reveal clenched teeth, which she spoke through in a strained manner. “Until you.”

Hiro resisted the urge to swallow. Oh, that strain. Something told him any common ground he might have had with Karmi wasn’t actually going to be so common.

If she was the youngest student ever admitted, Hiro had to put her age somewhere between - anywhere a day older than him to sixteen. He knew seventeen year olds, whether they skipped a grade or were waiting to turn eighteen this year, attended SFIT. So yeah, she had to be closer in age to him than the other students (granted, sixteen wasn’t much closer than seventeen, but still). And it seemed like she already hated his guts.

Wonderful. High school all over again.

And Tadashi said there would be no bullies at SFIT because everyone was older and more mature.

Okay, he reigned himself in, he didn’t know if she was a bully yet. She clearly didn’t like him, but she hadn’t done anything yet. They just weren’t going to get along. Like he hadn’t with kids in
high school. Great.

“So she knows what you’re going through,” Granville continued.

“O-Oh, I’m going through something?” Hiro darted his eyes back and forth. He did not want to be here. “Oh, that’s news to me.”

“Now you know,” she said, while Karmi’s face strained to the point she looked like she wanted to kill him, not feign excitement. “Here’s what we’re going to do.”

“We?” Hiro’s voice dropped flatly.

Granville pushed him towards Karmi, who stood up on her toes to appear taller than she already was on him. “You.”

“So super,” she croaked out, like she was about to bust something from the strain.

“I want you to ‘hang’ with Karmi,” Granville said. “I think you can learn something from her socialization experience.”

Karmi nodded along, straining her cheeks further to look happier; Hiro thought she looked a chipmunk.

“Um, sure,” Hiro realized quickly he wasn’t getting out of this, and turned around to face Granville with pleading eyes. “I can probably do Thursday morning.”

“Every day!” Granville thundered. “All week! Keep a journal. I want a full report on my desk on Friday.”

She made her leave without another word.

Hiro’s mouth dropped open, his shoulders falling with them. She was turning this into an assignment!? What, was it going to on his TD I grade? Under what, participation!?

Behind him, Karmi waved and sang in a toddler’s voice, “Bye, Professor G! So pumped to have a new friend!”

When Granville was gone, she dropped the act and rounded on him.

“Here’s the deal,” she told him lowly, shoving her finger into his chest. “Stay out of my face, stay out of my space.” She accentuated it with a shove that pushed him backwards.

Hiro did swallow this time. This was an assignment. A Granville assigned assignment. She did know that, right?

“Um, what happened to ‘hanging’?” he asked.

“Of course you’d ask that!” she mocked. She stepped closer to poke, poke, poke his stomach and splay her fingers in his face, to his annoyance. “You think you’re some special white blood cell,” she jammed her finger into his forehead, “but you’re nothing but a common red blood cell!”

She stalked back to her desk, granting him no more attention.


Blood cells? What did that even mean?
Karmi ignored him, diving back into her work.

Okay, so, bully it was. Whatever that comment meant, it definitely wasn’t supposed to be nice, but an insult.

Because he was the youngest student now instead of her.

Wonderful. Who wouldn’t want to spend a full week with someone who already hated your guts and insulted you for no other reason than she was jealous of your age and brains? Oh right - normal people.

Hiro had no idea what to do with himself. Granville had made this an assignment. It wasn’t like he could just leave. If he could, he would.

Well, he figured, he could... try to get along with her. At least as much as possible to get the assignment done. He’d had to do group projects in high school and most of the time, even if they grumbled about having to work with him, the other members would pitch in to get it done.

Besides, maybe it wouldn’t be that bad. Once they got to talking, she might calm down, open up more, and lose the attitude. For all he knew, she’d been having a bad day or bad week, and now being forced to ‘hang’ with somebody she didn’t know was the straw that broke the camel’s back. It wasn’t like he knew Karmi.

And hey, maybe they could make real friends with each other. They were the youngest students at SFIT and they were both smart, right? One never knew.

Hiro moved around the desk and took a seat in one of the wheeled stools. He took out his phone to record the conversation since he didn’t have a journal on hand and it didn’t look like Karmi had any pencils or paper on hand either.

“So,” he started, trying to sound upbeat. “I’m Hiro Hamada. I’m a robotics engineering major. What’s your major?”

Karmi glanced up from her... Hiro didn’t know what she was injecting and decided he didn’t want to know... and gave him a glaring snarl. She gestured wildly to the lab. “God, you’re an idiot. What does it look like!? I’m a geology major!”

“Uh…” Hiro tried to stay positive. “Okay. Biological engineering?”

She rolled her eyes hard. “No, you idiot. I’m a biotech major! Now shut up, I’m busy with - ” She stopped herself and scoffed. In a high pitched voice, she mocked, “a little boy like you wouldn’t understand real science.”

Hiro narrowed his eyes, but said nothing.

‘Maybe she’s having a bad day. Be optimistic.’

“So,” he slid around on the stool, doing his best not to grind his teeth. “What do you do for fun? When you’re not at school?”

“What part of ‘shut up’ did you not understand?” she barked, picking up her... thing... and taking it to a small freezer across the room, where she exchanged it for a collection of petri dishes.

Hiro had to keep himself from sighing. “Well, I like video games. I also like the Robot Monsters franchise. And I play basketball and soccer sometimes. Oh, and skateboarding is fun. What about
you? Do you like any of that? Or other things, like swimming, art, reading? To be honest, I don’t read much - well, I don’t read much fiction because I spend more time with textbooks to work on my next project, but I guess it’s okay.”

Karmi set up a microscope on the desk and gave him a disgusted look. “For your information, I read fanfiction, and if you don’t get THAT, you don’t have a soul. Which doesn’t surprise me at all.”

Hiro cocked his head slowly in a horrified awe. *What was this girl’s deal?* It wasn’t like he wanted to be here any more than she did.

While he gawked at her and struggled with what to say to that, Karmi put one of the petri dishes under the microscope and examined it.

She pulled a small pad and pen out of one of the drawers - oh, she did have them - and looked through the microscope again. “Observing mutated virus, day 57,” she said, seemingly talking to herself.

Hiro kicked around the chair, wheeling from one end of the table to the other. He honestly had no clue what to say to her. He tapped one of the hand-like overhead tools, and let out a little gasp when it moved. He gently pushed it away with his finger and looked at Karmi, who didn’t pay him any mind whatsoever.

She cooed at the microscope. “Looking good, A1-004.”

“You, uh,” Hiro raised an eyebrow, “you talk to the virus?”

Karmi looked up at him, annoyed. “That was a private conversation! But yes, A1-004 is a dear friend, as are,” she tapped the other petri dishes with the end of her pencil, “R69-5, L4-382, and 95-414, who I’m still getting to know,” she cooed at the last one, and, *blew kisses at like it was a dog.*

Hiro slid his chair to the far end of the table, creeped out. Weren’t these things diseases? He was pretty sure viruses were diseases.

“Sure,” he forced out, laughing awkwardly.

Karmi rounded on him with a glare. “Oh, you think talking to viruses is weird. You. The kid who talks to a mechanical snowman. At least my dangerous microscopic organisms are actually alive.”

Baymax was a healthcare companion that could actually talk and viruses weren’t alive, but Hiro had a feeling bringing those up wouldn’t help him. He held up his hands for peace. “All right, no judgement. Can we just move on?” He held up his phone. “I need to put something in the journal for Granville.”

“Not my problem,” she dismissed him. “Just make me look good because - ” Footsteps. And then Karmi was disturbingly in his face again, sickeningly sweet. “I want this to be a wonderful experience for you!”

Granville appeared at the door.

Hiro had to glare at Karmi for that. “Oh, you are good,” he grumbled.

Karmi’s face was already trembling under the strain. It was truly this hard for her to fake being nice to him, wasn’t it?
‘Seriously, what is this girl’s DEAL?’ he thought to himself. ‘I’ve literally never done anything to her. She can’t even fake being happy around me without acting like her face is gonna pop off.’

“Karmi,” Granville said lightly, and to Hiro’s annoyance, she was smiling, “take Mr. Hamada to lunch in the dining hall. My treat.”

“So super,” Karmi spat out.

God, she was obvious. He’d give her changing her tone at the last second before Granville appeared, but no one could ever buy that she was genuine, could they?

Granville, unfortunately, did buy it, and kept her tone light. “Get acquainted, you two. Have fun! Mandatory fun.”

“Super great idea!” Karmi enthused, shooting up. “On it!”

Granville walked away.

Karmi turned to her virus, ignoring Hiro completely. “I’m sorry, A1-004. I know we were going to do a DNA extraction over lunch,” she took it over to a mini incubator, “but you’re going to have to incubate a little longer.”

She stalked away with a scowl, barking, “Let’s go, genius boy.”

Hiro stayed where he was for a moment. “And Granville thinks I need socialization help?”

He pulled a face that was a mix of disgust and fear. Lunch was not going to end well, he knew it.

Hiro called it; lunch did not end well. After Granville paid and left, Karmi remained stubborn and rude and insulting, and pulling information about herself was like pulling teeth. At one point, he accidentally spilled his drink on the table and she - who didn’t get hit at all - shot up and accused him of doing it on purpose to soak her, and made the guys at the table beside her ‘back her up’ on it. That was the most he gotten her to say in a full minute the whole time (excluding outright insults). Hiro doubted they’d have enough information for the journal by Friday. They’d both get F’s. The last thing Hiro wanted was Karmi pulling down his TD I grade because she was mad he got into school at a younger age than her.

He tried to keep it to himself the rest of the day, after Granville let them go when Hiro had to return the VR set and run to aerial robotics (after which he sped home), but by the time the team gathered for night patrol on top of Noodle Burger (Fred’s choice), where nothing happened for a full hour and a half and the gang started chatting with each other, Hiro couldn’t keep it in any longer and started ranting.

“What is Karmi’s problem!?” he blew up at the end, pacing with his arms up in the air.

“Without a thorough scanning, I am unable to determine if she suffers from any health anomalies,” Baymax said, which only made Hiro scowl.

Tadashi’s drone hovered in the air darkly. “So, she kept touching you, mocking you, and completely refused to cooperate on the assignment. How old did you say she was again?”

Big brother mode was activated. Hiro rolled his eyes. “I don’t know. She was the youngest student before me, so anywhere between fourteen and sixteen. I tried asking her at lunch and she accused me of being a creep. We’re in the same age group! I’m younger than her! But it wasn’t like she
picked me up by the collar, Tadashi, so I don’t think you want to punch her.”

“Who said anything about punching her?” he asked darkly. “I wish you’d told me about this earlier in the day, Hiro. You have to tell Granville.”

Gogo skated down the Noodle Burger sign. “Yeah. You can’t let that go on. If she won’t do her share and is making fun of you, report her.”

“I don’t get how not liking fanfiction means you don’t have a soul,” Wasabi folded his arms, skeptical. “Or why anyone would want to talk to viruses and baby them. Ugh!” he shuddered. “Just knowing we have deadly viruses on school ground gives me the heebie jeebies.”

Honey Lemon frowned. “Do you want me to come along when you have to ‘hang’ out with her tomorrow, Hiro? She’ll either pop herself trying to stay ‘nice’ in front of me or I can call her out on her nonsense. I can also be a witness for when you tell Granville.”

Fred scratched his costume’s chin. “Maybe she should go to the counselor’s if she thinks the viruses are alive and talks to them. Maybe she has a deeper psychological problem? That, or she’s totally going to be a supervillain who ends up mind controlled by these clearly alien viruses.”

Wasabi glowered at him. “Half of what you said makes sense and the other half makes me want to slap you.”

Hiro shook his head wildly. He’d only told them to vent, not to ask for their help or advice. “No, no! None of that! Granville clearly likes her more than she trusts me, so I doubt she’ll listen. I just want to get the assignment done.”

He could feel his brother frowning all the from home via his drone. “Hiro, it’s Granville’s job to do something. Besides, you said you recorded the whole thing, right? There’s your proof so it’s not your word versus Karmi’s.”

Hiro gave his brother’s drone a sour look. Evidently, somebody was forgetting high school. And middle school. And elementary school. “Because teachers have such a good history of helping me with bullies. Sorry, bro, but I don’t even think your punches will help this one.”

Baymax perked up before Tadashi could respond. “My scanner is picking up a disturbance nine blocks to the west.”

“And there’s our cue to stop talking about this before I regret bringing it up,” Hiro retorted. He climbed up on Baymax’s back. “Let’s go!”

Tadashi was seething. He seethed the whole way to the crime scene.

He couldn’t believe it. Hiro was in college, a place filled with adults, and he was being bullied. The one thing he’d told Hiro with certainly would not happen at SFIT. Because everyone was more mature than that. Well, evidently he hadn’t accounted for the previously youngest student, who was not mature in any sense of the word by the sounds of it.

Tadashi had never met Karmi. He might have heard her name before, but he couldn’t say in what context. Being in completely different majors, it made sense; why should he know her? He was popular on campus, true, but that didn’t mean he knew everybody. Oh, but he knew enough about Karmi now.

This had to end. Immediately. He’d promised himself if any bullying did occur at SFIT, he’d nip in
the bud this time. Hiro wasn’t at SFIT to have a repeat of high school.

*Because teachers have such a good history of helping me with bullies.*

The fact this was happening again made him sick to his stomach.

He remembered the talk he’d had with the gang on Hiro’s first day, how kids had never really liked Hiro and he’d been a frequent target of bullying. He remembered witnessing the bullying time and time again himself in high school.

Tadashi being a semi-popular, well liked guy hadn’t protected his little brother any, much less brought him friends. Hiro tried; he talked about robots, video games, movies, sports, and just about anything that came to mind, would ask to hang out, play, even volunteered to tutor and help people with their homework - and in return he got insults, jeers, ordered to get lost, made fun of as a baby in diapers, and was the source of so much mocking laughter. All because he was a young kid with a big brain and no one could stand that.

He’d done his best to defend his brother. He told off everyone who made fun of him, cut friendships off with worms who bad mouthed his brother to his face or took the bullies’ sides, went to Hiro’s teachers, the principal, he even wrote a letter to the superintendent once! The kids who didn’t pick on Hiro and supported Tadashi’s efforts had his back against those who smeared both brothers, but they had too little in common with Hiro and were too insecure and therefore unnerved by his brains to make real friends with him. And the faculty? They basically waved him off, said there wasn’t much they could do beyond the annual anti-bullying assemblies and telling kids to be quiet in class. Unless Hiro was physically attacked, they refused to do anything.

So Tadashi had done something - not on purpose, of course. When one snot had finally gotten the bright idea to lift ten year old Hiro up by the collar, Tadashi’s first thought hadn’t been, ‘Oh boy, now the faculty will do their damn jobs!’ No, he’d seen red and launched himself headfirst at the bully. He’d nearly gotten suspended, but because he was such a good young man and this had been a total, utter, complete, entire, unexpected shock, they’d grudgingly let it go after the other boy’s parents decided against pressing charges. Aunt Cass did come in the next day and tear the school a new one, but the message had already been sent, Tadashi believed. At last, the school took the bullying seriously and started protecting Hiro and punishing bullies. When they saw it of course. Otherwise, Tadashi had already graduated by that point and it was Hiro’s word against theirs.

He couldn’t blame his brother for not trusting Granville to do something about Karmi. Teachers honestly didn’t have a good track record of helping him.

But SFIT was different. They had much stricter anti-bullying and harassment policies.

Victims and bullies were separated as much as possible and the bullies were actually punished. If being told to knock it off, along with whatever punishment the dean decided on, didn’t work then the bully would be sent to the counselors for a series of sessions to get to the bottom of their behavior, and if that failed, expulsion. Bullying and harassment cases were rare, so rare Tadashi had never personally seen or heard of one through the rumor mill, but he knew that was how things were done. It was described in detail in the school handbook - along with the citation that certain levels of bullying and harassment, such as discrimination, assault, and a blatant disregard for the safety of peers would result in *immediate* expulsion, no first and second warnings.

Tadashi knew for a fact through the other heavy rules that been enforced before his eyes - theft and rule defying, reckless endangerment - that SFIT’s administration always followed through with their policies.
Which meant Granville had to help. He couldn’t imagine her doing otherwise. There was no way she favored Karmi like Hiro believed, or at least not to the point of refusing to intervene and uphold policy. She was a strict woman, but from what Tadashi knew of her from their class-related emails and their introduction in his lab, she was also fair and integrous. There was no way she’d let this slip by without a care.

His stomach twisted, though, at the sudden reminder she’d done a background check on Hiro. Why? They hadn’t known each other prior to his first day, and it wasn’t like his and Hiro’s arrest had made headlines. Because he’d mouthed off to her in the lab? That couldn’t be it. Not by a longshot.

Well, it was still her job to intervene on Hiro’s behalf and knock Karmi down a notch. Regardless of her reasoning for the background check, Tadashi refused to be the pessimist and decide she wouldn’t. He trusted the university.

Pop music filled the air surrounding his drone’s speakers, filtering into their bedroom through his laptop. Train of thought broken, Tadashi wrinkled his brow. It sounded like a concert in the middle of the city. That couldn’t be right.

Jets of electricity flew into the sky in front of his cameras, closer and closer as the music got louder and louder. No, it had to be right - somehow.

He shook his head, zooming in behind Hiro and Baymax. It was time to switch gears; he’d contemplate his next step with Hiro and Granville later.

When they reached the scene, Tadashi balked at his screen.

People were dancing on the street. Cheering, whooping, and screaming in admiration. Clapping and jumping for joy. All the while a pair dressed like they were from the 1970s or ‘80s were dancing on the sidewalk, blasting electricity both in the air and at the ATMs to their side. Did he mention people were cheering?

“What is this?” he asked, voice so flat it sounded like a statement in his own ears rather than a question.

“I...don’t know,” Wasabi admitted. “Is this for real?”

“Yes, it is!” Fred cried out, delighted. “Electro-powered supervillains!”

“I don’t think that’s the part they were talking about Fred,” Gogo deadpanned.

Honey Lemon stared at they threw a man at a light pole, who only laughed and threw his arms up. Or, more accurately, she stared at the two uniformed spectators near him. “The police are here. They’re encouraging this!”

This had to be a dream. Tadashi could not believe what his eyes were seeing.

Money flew out of the ATMs in waves, and it wasn’t a moment too long before the duo - who Tadashi realized was an older woman and teen or young adult girl - crouched down to hurriedly collect it.

All the while the police did nothing.

“Hiro, I don’t think we’re in San Fransokyo anymore,” he reported.
Baymax landed on the scene, the impact sending dozens of bills billowing in the air, which did not escape the duo’s attention.

“I’m not sure what’s going on here,” Hiro admitted, giving the women a strange look, “but you’re going to have to give the money back.”

The older woman simply ignored them, choosing to redirect her attention to broken ATMs - specifically one that had a large hole blown into it.

Tadashi aimed his stun blaster.

The younger one, however, threw her head back with a spoiled howl. “I’m a STAR! You don’t interrupt a star when she’s leaving it all on the stage!”

Hiro cocked his head. “And, you are…?”

Tadashi hit the button. The green light of his blaster shot out.

The older woman, unfortunately, backflipped out of reach. His blast only left a scorch mark on the sidewalk.

The duo danced in the middle of the street posing.

“I’m Barb,” the older woman said.

“And I’m Juniper,” the younger said.

“And together, we are,” an energy orb sparkling and crackling with electricity flew up behind them as they tossed out their arms and legs, “High Voltage!”

The team stared.

“Electricity may cause severe burns,” Baymax remarked.

That was true. Tadashi couldn’t care less what they were called; they were a danger to the surrounding people, and it would only take one misdirected jolt or temper flare to either put someone in the hospital or take a life. They weren’t going to let that happen.

‘Especially since we, as the only ones trying to stop them,’ he thought, irked by the clapping officers’ useless presence, ‘will be the first they target.’

He took aim once again.

“I’ve got this,” Gogo announced, and Tadashi didn’t have time to shout, ‘WAIT!’ before she was off, disks in hand.

He managed to redirect his aim slightly to the right to avoid blasting her, but it turned out to be for nothing; Gogo didn’t even reach the duo before being blasted in the air by a dangerously charged blast of electricity. She went flying high the air, landing on her back a god hundred yards away. She sat up, shaking her head.

Tadashi’s blood boiled. Thank goodness she wasn’t zapped or hurt, but ‘High Voltage’ wasn’t going to get the chance to do that again, or worse.

He fired at the pair.
They leaped away in opposite directions, landing on their hands and jumping to their feet. The orb hovered heavily above the open road, sending random jolts each of the pair’s way.

It was their conductor, he realized.

“Fred!” Tadashi called out, thinking fast. “Shoot your flamethrower in the middle of the road! Keep them separated! Honey Lemon, go for the orb with your chem balls!”

“On it, man!” Fred hopped into action in the center of the street, reeling back and shooting a massive wave of fire all the way to the other end of the road.

“Rubber insulates!” Honey Lemon declared, popping out a chem ball and tossing it high.

“Oh no you don’t!” Barb shrieked, sending a thick bolt at the chem ball.

It hit, activating the ball too early and causing the activated rubber to expand. Gravity took its due, and the blob fell into Fred’s flames and falling on the ground, melted.

Tadashi gulped, flinching at the sight on reflex.

Honey Lemon tapped at her purse. “Making another one!”

“Juniper!” Barb shouted. “I need some more flair in those backflips and sparkle in that smile!”

“On it, Mama!” Juniper cried out, leaping into the air.

The orb shifted gears, sending less electricity Barb’s way and more to Juniper. It cackled and cracked around her in a spiral, and when she landed on the ground, her hands clapped together and sent the spiral zipping towards Fred.

Honey Lemon was quick on her feet, leaping to Fred’s side and spatting her chemball on the ground. A wall of rubber shot up, insulating the jolt.

Tadashi took another aim at Juniper, who stood there growling. “You’re RUINING the show!”

He fired.

She glowered at him, seemingly right in the camera, and flipped away at the last second.

Now Tadashi was getting frustrated.

Meanwhile, Hiro, Baymax, and Wasabi concentrated on Barb.

Wasabi charged at the woman, blades out.

“What are you going to do? Cut me!?” Barb mocked. She lifted a leg and threw it out, sending a large bolt his way. “Not today!”

Wasabi dodged it, but wavered. “Er, got a point. I can’t cut you; you’re alive, not a bot.” He retracted his blades, fear overtaking his face. “But I can - tackle you? But I do NOT wanna get shocked - ”

Barb tossed two more bolts, one after the other, at him.

Wasabi screamed, jumping to the side and landing on his stomach on the ground. “Okay, adrenaline hasn’t kicked in like I thought!”
“I got it!” Hiro yelled. He pointed at Barb. “Baymax, rocket fist!”

Baymax raised his arm.

The orb shifted once more, now redirecting the bulk of its energy from Juniper to Barb now.

She lifted her arms above her head, hopped into the air, twirled the electricity around her, and shot it at Hiro and Baymax through her hand.

“NO!” Tadashi shouted, zipping over.

The bolt was too fast, though.

Hiro was quick enough to jump off Baymax, but Baymax didn’t have time to move at all.

The bolt struck. Baymax jerked and twisted, arms and legs and torso bouncing with electricity.

He fell backwards, narrowly avoiding Hiro who rolled away, and sat up, wings bursting out on their own and boosters lighting up. He shot up in the air, like a speedy kite caught in the wind.

Hiro’s mouth fell open in terror. He pulled himself to his feet and ran after him. “BAYMAX!”

“Hiro, keep away!” Tadashi warned, aiming for his creation. “I’ve got him!”

Hiro jerked to a stop, looking up at the drone with pleading eyes.

It was hard to aim with Baymax zipping through the sky like a cartoon balloon losing air. He had to focus, make the best educated guess where Baymax would zip to next. He decided and fired.

This time, Tadashi’s blast landed on his target.

Baymax’s wings struggled to retract and his boosters flared on and off. Within a moment, his wings froze, half contracted, and his boosters shut down completely.

Good; he’d been hoping the blast would counter the bolt and fry his suit into decommission. The only problem now was that his suit was fried and Baymax was out of the fight now.

Baymax fell to the ground with a loud bang, cracking the asphalt beneath him.

“BAYMAX!” Hiro cried, running to his side and kneeling at his head.

“His suit should protect him from the worst damage!” Tadashi shouted at brother. “Don’t worry.”

“I am okay,” Baymax informed in his usual monotone. “However, I cannot move.”

Hiro sighed in relief. “Thank goodness. I’ll be back, buddy!”

Tadashi grit his teeth. He would have preferred if Hiro stayed with Baymax, out of the fight from now on, but there was no use in ordering him to.

He looked back to the team. Fred was still in the middle of the road, Honey Lemon on one side blocking Juniper’s attempts to electrocute him with her rubber chem balls and Juniper avoiding all of her insulating sticky foam chem balls, and Wasabi alternated between launching at Barb, who dodged him at every step, and hopping out of the way of bolt with shrill shrieks.

“You know!” Fred yelled out. “I’d LOVE to do something other than breathe fire at nothing!
Especially before I run out of juice! I haven’t refilled this since we built the suit!”

Hiro ran back to the scene and quickly assessed the situation. “Where’s Gogo!?”

“I’m coming!” she huffed through the comms. In an instant, she slid to a stop at Hiro’s side. “That hit spun my head around in more ways than one. Took me a few minutes to recover. What’s the plan? We need to power these two freaks down.”

“The orb is their conductor,” Tadashi told everyone. “It’s their energy source! We need to take it down!”

Hiro nodded once. “Got it. Do you think you could stun it down, like you did Baymax?”

“Something like THAT? No; I don’t know how that thing is operating, so shooting it could easily blow up on us.”

Hiro frowned. “Okay. Fred, hold out a little longer. Wasabi, Gogo, keep the two of them distracted on each side. Honey Lemon, once they’re distracted, think you can jump on Fred’s shoulders and hit the orb with some insulation?”

“Yeah, I can!” she said.

“Good, wait for the signal. Gogo, move! Wasabi, keep Barb’s attention!”

“Oh, trust me!” Wasabi growled, practically dancing along to avoid bolts. “I have it! Make it quick, Honey Lemon!”

Gogo glided around Honey Lemon and her rubber walls, throwing a disk at Juniper, which the girl dodged.

Honey Lemon spun on her heels and climbed up Fred’s back.

“Waitwaitwait!” Fred screamed. “I wasn’t kidding about not refilling this thing! My tank meter’s in the red and almost empt- Aaaand, now it’s gone!”

Tadashi’s heart leapt to his throat as the flame died.

Gogo hurled another disk at Juniper.

Barb smirked, and threw her arms wide, sending a wide wave of bolts Wasabi’s way. He yelled, turning on his feet and running the other way.

“Juniper!” she called. “Electric fence!”

“Oh yeah! Let’s go!” Juniper cheered.

Tadashi realized too late he should have shot them while they were being distracted, one after the other. He raced to fix this mistake, aiming at Barb as she and Juniper formed their fence.

Barb was too quick for him, though - and Gogo’s disk.

She Jumped out of the blast’s way, landing on Juniper’s side of the street and using the fence to deflect the disk, sending it back to Gogo.

“Two, five, seven, eight!” Barb counted.
Gogo didn’t have time to move either, partially out of their speed and partially out of her own shock. Speaking of shock, her disk, now covered in electrical jolts, struck her in the chest and her backwards.

“Gogo!” Hiro ran after her.

Honey Lemon made a toss for the orb despite the circumstances.

With Gogo and Wasabi down, the pair let the fence disappear. Barb aimed at the chem ball, once again activating it too early, and then Honey Lemon and Fred, who flew backwards just as Gogo did. Juniper focused on Tadashi, sending a bolt his way. He barely dodged.

The duo ran for the ATMs.

“The drone’s not down, Mama!” Juniper said.

She and Barb grabbed their bags by the straps.

“This is enough for now!” Barb replied.

The crowd, including the police, continued to cheer on the villains.

“We love you, Juniper!” one guy Tadashi, irritatingly enough, recognized from campus.

He took aim for the both of them, charging his blast to a larger diameter.

Hiro, however, heard the fellow student’s gush as well. He stood up and ran over, just as irritated as Tadashi was. “They’re robbing ATMs!”

Barb shot a bolt at Hiro. He toppled with a cry.

Without thinking, Tadashi slammed the fire button - too early.

Not that it mattered, because Barb and Juniper danced away.

“No, we’re telling a story through dance!” Barb corrected.

She and her daughter hurled their bags into a strange looking car (was it ripped out of a DeeCee cartoon or something? It reminded Tadashi of an old DeeCee superhero get away car, though he couldn’t recall whose), and hopped inside.

“We love you all!” Juniper waved goodbye as Barb started the engine and took off.

Tadashi wasn’t going to let them get away that easily.

He aimed at the road before them, before Barb’s side specifically and fired.

Barb saw, though, and jerked the car to the side.

The blast hit Juniper with a shriek instead. The girl froze in place.

Barb smashed the breaks, snarling at Tadashi’s drone. He didn’t even see the bolt of electricity until it was frying his monitor’s screen.

“No, no, no!”

When his screen cleared, his drone was lying on the ground and the pair were gone, car and money
“Well, that was a failure,” Wasabi huffed indignantly through the comms.

“I can’t believe this,” Gogo growled.

“Why aren’t the police going after them?!” Honey Lemon snapped. “We’re down and this is their job! Ugh! Is everybody all right?”

“I am fine,” Baymax said. “I cannot scan you all for injuries in my current state. Please assist me in removing my armor so I may begin treating your potential injuries.”

“Baymax,” Tadashi sighed, falling back on his pillows in bed. “You have their signatures, don’t you? We’re going to need you to track them down when we’re recovered.”

“Yes.”

On his screen, he saw his drone being lifted and spun around. Fred’s costume came into view.

“Well, that couldn’t have gone much worse. But hey, everybody’s A-Okay and we should be able to go after High Voltage in, what, an hour? How long does it take to fix Baymax?”

“ Longer than an hour, Fred,” Hiro spat. “Besides, it’s getting late and most of us have morning classes tomorrow. Let’s go home, regroup tomorrow, and go on the hunt for them after dark. Assuming they don’t attack again before we’re ready. Tadashi, I’m taking Baymax straight to the garage.”

Tadashi took a deep breath. What a night. “I’ll meet you there.”

To Hiro’s relief, Baymax was all right within his suit. It was only his armor that needed repairs. He and Tadashi took the armor apart off of him and set to work on replacing and fixing the working inside.

“Tonight was ridiculous,” Tadashi practically stabbed at the wires in Baymax’s back armor. “People were rooting for thieves. The police did nothing and rooted for them, too. Now I know the world has gone mad and everyone’s - ” He shook his head. “Never mind. I’m flabberghasted.”

“I don’t get it either,” Hiro said. “It’s definitely nuts. Not to mention, we almost had them! But they kept blowing us back at every opportunity.”

“I have their DNA signatures stored in my files,” Baymax reminded them. “We will apprehend them, just as we did Callaghan.”

Hiro smiled at the robot, so glad he was safe, but didn’t miss Tadashi’s flinch at the name. “You guys are okay, right?”

Baymax nodded. “Yes,”

“Of course I am; I was in our room the whole time,” his big brother griped bitterly, missing Hiro’s point when it came to him. “They kept dancing out of my way. I only hit Juniper when it was too late and I wasn’t even aiming for her. And I can’t believe I’m saying this, but if our cops are apparently this incompetent, then it is a good thing we’re heroes since I doubt they’ll open an investigation against High Voltage. Then again,” he mused, “that handful shouldn’t represent the whole police department. I wonder if they’d keep their jobs if I sent the footage Baymax or my drone recorded to the chief…”
Hiro’s shoulders slumped. “Let’s stop talking about it. We’re not going to get anywhere until we make a real plan with the team tomorrow, so let’s talk about something else.”

“Fine,” Tadashi snipped. “We’re going to Granville’s office before your thermodynamics class tomorrow. I want this Karmi nonsense over with as soon as possible.”

Hiro wilted. Okay, not what he meant when he said change the subject. “Seriously? What do you think Granville’s going to do? Karmi’s got the wool totally pulled over her eyes and teachers don’t care about bullying anyway. Everyone knows those anti-bullying assemblies and rules are a load of garbage.”

“Not at SFIT,” Tadashi glowered, though not at him. “They mean it, Hiro. They do care. They enforce the rules. You have recorded proof of her being rude and refusing to do your assignment. Granville has to and will take care of it.”

Hiro snorted. “Oh no, Karmi has to help me learn how to socialize and Granville loves her. She calls everyone by their last name, no exceptions like the other professors, but I couldn’t tell you what Karmi’s last name is. AND I swear she looked mad when she said Karmi used to be the youngest student before I came along. Even if we show her the proof, if Granville does anything at all, it’ll be reprimanding me for dare speaking out. That’s how it always is.”

“No, it’s not, and that’s not how it should be either,” Tadashi was firm. “Baymax, have I programmed you with the knowledge of the psychological effects bullying can have on the psyche, particularly a kid’s psyche?”

“I will search my database,” Baymax replied. “...My database has little to no results; however, based on the circumstances and possibly related data, my guess is that the effects are long lasting and detrimental to one’s mental health.”

“Right on the money, buddy,” Tadashi nodded. “Download it like you did with emotional trauma while I was stuck in bed. Then give Hiro the long, detailed, scientifically research explanation of what bullying can do. It can even lead to physical harm, you know.”

Baymax waddled towards the computer to do so.

Hiro groaned. “I don’t NEED that. What part of ‘Granville’s not going to care’ do you not understand? Why would she, a teacher who has it out for me, care when all the teachers I’ve ever had that didn’t have it out for me never did a single thing? It doesn’t matter what Baymax tells me, it won’t change her mind.”

Tadashi scowled. “It’s her job, Hiro.”

“It was my other teachers’ jobs, too. Look how that turned out.” Hiro put his tools down and looked at his older brother with a tired expression. “I know you’re upset because you hate it when I get hurt and you promised everyone at SFIT was too mature to bully me, but there’s nothing you can do, big brother. If you punch Karmi, you’ll get kicked ot of school this time - I know you will.”

Tadashi pressed his lips together in a thin line. “So your plan is do nothing.”

“No,” Hiro corrected. “My plan is to break through Karmi’s shell. If she’s going to SFIT at her age, she has to be smart, too, right? Yeah, she’s mad I’m the youngest student now, but it can’t be the same as in high school, can it? For all I know, she’s having a rough week or something that’s why she’s so...bratty. I mean, the talking to viruses thing is weird, but if I can wear her down with the good ol’ Hamada family charm, maybe she’ll knock it off.”
Tadashi stared at him hard. “...Do you honestly believe that?”

Hiro shrugged. “I mean, yeah?”

Despite it all and how much he didn’t want to be near someone so frustrating and rude for no good reason again - well, it wasn’t like anyone at SFIT was going to work in his favor. And even if they were willing to (fat chance), Hiro wasn’t interested in bitter rivals or making enemies. Karmi wouldn’t magically change if Professor Granville did tell her to knock it off. It would be better to try to win her over, to organically smooth things out.

And if he accomplished that, who knew? They might actually become real friends. Hiro didn’t mind the thought of another friend in the slightest; he liked the idea. And one who was around his age? It might be fun. It would definitely be a first.

Karmi was an annoying brat right now, but there had to be a heart under there. He just had to find a way to locate it.

“It won’t work,” Tadashi stated, voice steel. “Being nice to bullies doesn’t make them your friends, Hiro. You know this. You already tried this plan in high school. It never worked. It doesn’t work period because respect and friendship is a two way street, and if one person can’t bother to even show a little decency, they aren’t going change their ways no matter how hard you try to extend that olive branch. They have to grow the hell up themselves first.”

“Then we’ll get the assignment done and just ignore each other for the rest of college! It’s not like she wants to be around me; she doen’t even talk to me in thermodynamics.”

Tadashi perked up. “She’s in your class? What other classes?”

“None,” Hiro answered. “Only Granville’s. I guess that’s why she thought we should ‘hang.’”

Tadashi relaxed. “Well, you don’t know that she’ll ignore you. Plenty of people, including your classmates, went out of their way to bother you at every opportunity in high school. If Karmi decides bullying you is fun, she’ll keep it up.”

“So I’ll ignore her. I’ve heard all the ‘don’t interact, don’t react!’ spiels at the assemblies, Tadashi, and if this fails, I don’t want to engage with her at all. I’m not at SFIT to make enemies.”

“No, you’ll ignore her until she worms too far under your skin and you crack. You’ll either start to retaliate, break down, or avoid school altogether just to get away from her. None of those are good outcomes. It’s better to deal with it the right way, and believe me, SFIT’s not our old high school. They will take care of it, Hiro. They care about their students.”

Hiro rolled his eyes. Sure they do. Teachers definitely care about anything other than grades.

They wouldn’t do anything. Even Professors Sullivan, Yoshida, and Roe wouldn’t do anything, and they outright told him they’d protect him from bullies (Sullivan), Granville (Yoshida), and Fred (Roe). Sullivan’s words were empty because even if she did care, there was nothing she could against Granville and frankly, he doubted the counseling office would do anything more than ask about his feelings and tell him to get lost, Yoshida had been talking about grades and minor rule breakages, and Fred had kept on after him despite Roe’s verbal thrashing for interrupting her class.

Hiro didn’t trust his professors the way Tadashi did. He had too much experience with teachers doing nothing, acting huffy when they had to speak up post-punch, and going into denial and calling him a liar after Tadashi had graduated and they saw nothing. He respected his SFIT professors and liked them as teachers, but he didn’t believe for one moment they would, or even
could, go to bat for him against Granville or Karmi.

“Can you at least let me try to handle thing on my own before you stick your nose into it?” he pleaded. “Maybe I can get her to see my side and stop it. Maybe I can make a real friend my age. Don’t you want that?”

“Not a friend who’s going to bully you, no. Not at fucking all.”

Hiro whirled back at the swear word. He couldn’t remember the last time he heard Tadashi swore, if ever.

Nevertheless, he refused to back down. Tadashi’s plan wasn’t going to work. His own wasn’t guaranteed, but at least it had a chance. There was no point in going to Granville, unless he wanted to be punished instead.

“Let me try,” he insisted. “If it doesn’t work, you can step in and do your best to work your overprotective big brother magic. Please, Tadashi? I want to try. That’s all.”

“Download complete,” Baymax interjected, and stepped away from the computer. “Hiro, it is best to stay away from bullies as much as possible. I do not advise trying to engage Karmi, whether to continue your assignment or in attempt to make friends. The effects of bullying include, but are not limited to: lowered self-esteem, failing grades, isolation, depression, self-harm, suicidal tendencies.”

“I got it, Baymax,” Hiro cut in. “I’ll be fine.”

“No, you won’t,” Tadashi argued.

Hiro threw his head back and squeezed his eyes shut, counting to five before lowering his head and opening his eyes. “One chance. That’s all I’m asking, big brother. If she’s had a bad week and was taking it out on me today, she might be better tomorrow. She might even apologize! All I’m asking for is once chance, and then you can step in with your -” he stopped himself before he could say ‘useless,’ “plan to tell Granville. Okay? Please.”

Tadashi was silent.

Hiro wondered if begging would do the trick. “Please, Tadashi. I’m pretty sure you’ve said before there’s good in everyone or something. Please, big brother.”

Finally, Tadashi sighed and rubbed the back of his neck. “I’m going to regret this and beat myself up for it. Fine. One chance. If she doesn’t change, I’m stepping in. No amount of pleading’s going to stop me. Got it? If she doesn’t apologize and start acting better, I’m going to Granville. You got that?”

Hiro nodded eagerly. “Yup. Got it, bro.”

“At least take Baymax to school with you tomorrow. He can monitor your emotional state and separate you two if need be, plus he’s collecting dust here at home.”

Baymax cocked his head. “I do not collect dust; I do not have hobbies. Not only that, dust would be unhealthy to collect.”

Hiro had to crack a tiny half-smile at that. “It’s an expression, Baymax. And no.”

“Why not?” Tadashi demanded. “He’s your friend, Hiro.”
“He’s your healthcare companion. You yell at me all the time for making superhero upgrades.”

‘And I won’t take Baymax away from you again,’ he thought instead of saying, remembering the portal with a wallop of guilt he refused to show. ‘Maybe this another relapse Baymax was talking about, but I’m not completely over the portal...or Yama this weekend.’

Tadashi narrowed his eyes. “For the third and last time, I. Am not. Glass. I don’t need Baymax by my side twenty-four seven. He’s not designed to be by a patient like me’s side twenty-four seven. He’ll get more experiences out of following you around and keeping your thick, knuckleheaded skull in tact than he will with me. I just don’t want you messing with my grades and his real purpose. Hey, maybe instead of trying to make a bully your friend, you should hang out with your actual friend.”

“You said I could try!” Hiro accused, sort of purposely taking the opportunity to derail the conversation.

Tadashi dropped his tools and threw his hands up, eyes rolling to the ceiling as if begging whatever god or gods above there were to help him. “Do you ever listen to me? I won’t fall down the stairs just because he’s with you! Seriously, Hiro, just take him!”

“You’re not fully recovered! What if your back goes out of whack, or your legs start hurting out of nowhere? What if you need immediate, real medical attention while Baymax is half way across the city with me?”

“Besides the fact those won’t happen? Aunt Cass is in the café all day and can rush me to the hospital!”

“But what if it’s immediate care you need, like in seconds - ?”

“Hiro,” Tadashi’s expression darkened, “what’s this really about?”

Hiro’s heart stopped. “What?”

“There has to be something more than this. It can’t be that you’re afraid I’ll break apart if you take Baymax. There were a few days a while ago where you agreed to take him,” he reminded him.

Yeah, when Tadashi left the house for Fred’s place and Hiro was more concerned with catching Yama.

Guilt pooled within his chest. He shrugged one shoulder.

He didn’t want to steal Baymax. He remembered their whole conversation about guilt, yeah, yeah, yeah, but that didn’t mean all his anxieties and fears were gone. Part of him still thought about how Tadashi wouldn’t have gone into the fire if it weren’t for him, and wouldn’t have nearly lost all his hard work on his healthcare companion if it weren’t for him. Baymax was his friend, but he was Tadashi’s first, and Tadashi was hurt. Not to mention, in part thanks to Hiro, Baymax had been used for evil - twice now, actually.

“It’s - ” he didn’t know how to explain, and the thought of having another feel better spiel grated on him. “It’s...what happened at the exposition...I...”

Tadashi’s gaze softened.

Hiro drew to a stop, closing his mouth.
Tadashi ran a tired hand through his hair. “Fine. I understand. This isn’t going to last forever, though. I’m not glass and he’s your friend. You care about him just as much as I do and I want you to have this. I’ll keep Baymax home with me for now.”

Hiro relaxed. “Okay. Thanks.”

“Hmm. Just don’t let this Karmi push you around, all right?”

“Deal.”

They silently returned to their work on Baymax’s armor.

Baymax, for his part, only watched - and quietly scanned their emotional states, Hiro would guess.

“Well,” Honey Lemon mused in the cafeteria the next day, “it’s good that we were all there. If we’d split up with only some of us doing night patrol each night like we originally planned, it would have only been Hiro, Gogo, Baymax, and Tadashi out there. I don’t want to think of that.”

“We would have been massacred,” Gogo grumbled. “Thanks for not filling up your gas tank, Fred.”

“Hey, I didn’t think I would shooting down the street at nothing for so long,” Fred defended, jerking a thumb at himself. “That was a whole quarter tank of fuel!”

“It’s not Fred’s fault,” Tadashi said through Hiro’s phone, which his little brother had propped up on the table in his hand so he could see the gang, while he layed in bed at home on his laptop.

“‘High Voltage’ managed to avoid nearly every hit we threw at them.”

“If Fred had refilled his tank even a little, we might have lasted long enough for Honey Lemon to hit the orb,” Gogo pointed out.

“Not necessarily,” Honey Lemon interjected. “All it would have taken was a second for them to blast my chem ball or aim at Fred and I like they did. You don’t know what would have happened for sure, Gogo.”

“Not only all of that,” Hiro waved his free arm frantically. “They got applause! The bad guys! The people clapped for the bad guys! Including the cops!”

Tadashi quietly wondered if the chief of police had seen that footage he’d anonymously sent late last night yet or not. He certainly hoped those officers would get taken off he field. After all, if High Voltage had been in the mood to kill, or one of those ‘fans’ had had common sense and called them out, resulting in getting zapped, well - it would have been on SFPD’s head, And for good reason.

“Well,” he said, “the good news is that Baymax’s armor is ready and he has their DNA signatures. We can gear up and hunt them down tonight. I also did some research last night to find out who they are.”

“You found them on the internet?” Gogo asked, skeptical.

“Surprisingly, yes,” Tadashi answered. “Barbara and Juniper Harding are their real names and they’re from Georgia. Barb went to Georgia Tech and became an electrical engineer. Two years ago, she published a paper about her breakthrough on a new type of shock generator she’d made. Last year she resigned from her job, supposedly to pursue her lifelong dream of dancing, and her
shock generator disappeared from her old company six months later. Amazing what kind of articles you find when type ‘Barb electrically powered orb’ into Google.”

“So,” Honey Lemon pieced together, “I’m guessing the dance career didn’t work out, so she and her daughter stole her old project to...become supervillains? After six months?”

Wasabi tapped his fingers on the table. “I can see why they’d come to California, but San Fransokyo’s not where Hollywood is; that’s L.A. Well, whatever happened, we can’t have a repeat of what happened last night. We have to go in with a solid plan this time, or else they’ll cream us again.”

“For a story through dance,” Gogo huffed, reminding them of Barb’s words.

Hiro slumped forward. “Story of kicking out butts.”

Wasabi leaned over the table and rubbed his temples. “Oh, there’s going to be more butt kicking, I know it. And did you see the way I kept running from Barb? Ugh, why did I choose a yoga elective over martial arts!? Besides the fact we weren’t superheroes yet, I know that.”

Honey Lemon smiled smally and gestured around his body. “One, you centered yourself; two, you strengthened your core, and three, you love the big ball.”

Wasabi chuckled. “Heh, yeah big ball. But seriously, we need more training and planning before we go up against them again.”

“Colorful villains,” Fred wheeled himself around Honey Lemon to stand inbetween them, “underestimated because of their ridiculous personas. Like so many things, it was foretold in comic books.”

“Yes,” Gogo chirped sarcastically. “We should probably run out and study a bunch of comic books to figure out how to beat them!” She scoffed.

“Yeah,” Fred agreed, as if she had meant it. “But in this case, I choose one in particular: Captain Fancy, Issue 188!”

Tadashi groaned loudly. “Seriously? I don’t know which I’m less proud of you for Fred,” his lips twitched traitorously, “the fact you honestly think comic books are going to help us, or you bringing up that rip off of Amazing Man. For shame.”

“Hey!” Fred pointed angrily at Hiro’s phone, and Tadashi couldn’t help letting a smirk slip. “We’ve already had this fight twice! Captain Fancy is not a rip off of Amazing Man and is not a lackluster version of him either!”

Tadashi’s smirk widened. “I didn’t bring up the lackluster bit this time.”

Fred crossed his arms with a pout.

Gogo squeezed her eyes shut. “Don’t ask, don’t ask, don’t ask, don’t - Ugh. What happened to Captain Fancy?”

Fred looked so pleased with himself, Tadashi to roll his eyes. He couldn't help it; they might both be fans of Amazing Man, but when it came to the Captain Fancy rip off debate, they were on opposing sides.

“Captain Fancy lost battle after battle to a mother-daughter acrobat team,” he explained.
“Wow, that is similar,” Honey Lemon remarked.

Fred smirked and pointed at her. “Hmm, hmm?”

“Still a lackluster rip off,” Tadashi pretended to yawn.

“Amazing Man never went up against mother-daughter acrobats!” Fred exclaimed. “Most Amazing Man and Captain Fancy stories are nothing alike!”

“So?” Tadashi scoffed. “Similar backstories, similar builds and hair, and every time Amazing Man hits it big Captain Fancy tries to copy it, all the while flubbing whatever moral or overarching message Amazing Man did. I’ll give Doherty credit that he tried to keep most of his Captain Fancy stories original, but that doesn’t change the fact Amazing Man is two years older and is consistently copied from.”

Gogo groaned. “Someone stop the geeks before they get heated.”

“Yeah, we don’t need to hear another Captain Fancy versus Amazing Man argument,” Wasabi agreed.

“I never heard one,” Hiro commented, semi-interested in the conversation.

“Trust us, you don’t want to, Hiro,” Honey Lemon shook her head.

Tadashi grinned. “Don’t worry, little brother; when you get home, I’ll tutor you in all the ways Amazing Man is better than Captain Fancy.”

Fred slammed his hands on the table. “Excuse you!? How about I educate Hiro in all the ways Captain Fancy is unique and well thought out on his own!”

“He’s my little brother, Fred, he has to be on my side,” Tadashi replied, amused. “Blood is thicker than water.”

“May I remind you that the original quote is that the blood of the covenant is thicker than the water of the womb? Meaning, in other words, siding with friends trumps over older brothers!”

“Okay, I don’t really care who’s better,” Hiro interrupted, also amused. “Does Captain Fancy have a floating shock generator, too?”

“Close,” Fred flopped down on his arms, resting them on the table. “They had a dancing bear named Grizlovich.”

Gogo popped her gum. “Ugh. Shouldn’t have asked. Stupid answer and it got the geeks going.”

“Hey, be happy it’s the only comic thing we fight over,” Tadashi laughed. “Like, we both agree Dr. Glove is cool.”

He frowned when Hiro’s phone suddenly picked up off the table.

“Speaking of fighting a bear,” Hiro muttered as Tadashi got a good view of the side of the table and the gum stuck underneath.

“What?” Tadashi asked.

If anyone heard him, they made no mention of it.
“I’ll go over there with you, Hiro,” Honey Lemon volunteered.

“I can, too,” Fred offered. “Plus, I kind of want to sneak into her lab to see if her viruses talk to me, too. I’m willing to bet money they’re aliens. - OW! Wasabi!”

“That felt so good,” Wasabi breathed airily. “But yeah, Hiro, don’t engage; it’s not worth it.”

“Have you gone to Granville yet?” Gogo asked.

Tadashi’s eyes lidded. Oh. He understood now. Karmi was in the cafeteria.

“No, no, no, and no,” Hiro gruffed. “I’ll go over there by myself.”

Tadashi was surprised Hiro didn’t leave his phone or end the call as he started walking to wherever Karmi was. More than likely, he figured, Hiro forgot he was taking Tadashi with him.

Tadashi pursed his lips, an idea coming to him. He quickly opened a program on his laptop and tapped away at his keyboard. When he was done, the feedback and audio on his screen was being recorded.

“Hi, Karmi,” Hiro greeted brightly, forcing himself to sound cheerful, while Tadashi got a view of only Karmi’s legs under the table. “Hanging out in the cafeteria, too.”

“Uughk,” he heard Karmi grunt, disgusted.

Silence. Scratching of a pen.

“So,” Hiro restarted, “maybe Granville was right. Maybe the two youngest students should… Wait, is that - ?”

A book clapped shut.

“Eyes on your own work, creeper!” Karmi scorned.

Hiro lifted his hands to his jacket pockets, giving Tadashi an angled view of Karmi, who had a nasty look on her face as she stood up, gathered her books, gave Hiro a pointed nasty look, and stomped away.

Hm. That didn’t sound like an apology, sorry I was a jerk yesterday, Hiro, I was having a bad week and unfairly took it out on you.

It also didn’t sound like someone excited to work with Hiro, but rather outright refusing to do her share of the ‘hanging’ assignment. Hm.

Yeah, no, Tadashi wasn’t letting this go on. This wasn’t as nearly as bad as Hiro had described their first meeting as, but it was still rude, stand-off-ish, and completely unwarranted.

Nipping this in the bud before it got worse. Now.

When it became clear Hiro wasn’t going to follow after Karmi, Tadashi stopped the recording. He pulled up another program, hacked into his brother’s phone - oh, the wonders of being a young genius - went into his unlabeled audio files (he should say ‘file;’ there was only one) and copied it to his laptop. He ended the call, picked up his phone, and texted Wasabi.

Me:
Hey, I’m coming to campus to speak with Professor Granville about Karmi. Don’t tell Hiro. If he asks why I hung up, tell him my scars were bothering me and I’m taking my drowsy meds and gonna take a nap.

Wasabi’s reply was almost immediate.

**Wasabi:**

**Got it man. Good Luck.**

Tadashi opened the sound file and listened to the conversation Hiro and Karmi had had the day before, everything from Hiro’s introduction to the disastrous lunch.

Well. This girl was definitely a - No, Tadashi stopped himself; he’d already contributed enough to the swear jar the past couple weeks.

But listening to her, Tadashi would have certainly thought Hiro was right back in high school.

He hooked his phone up to his laptop, transferred the two files, and reached for his crutches.

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Tadashi hobbled down the hall of the robotics labs, past the many offices of the faculty and administration. His phone was ready in hand, the files open and only awaiting his passcode to get into.

He turned the corner, towards the hall where Professor Granville’s office was. By sheer luck, it seemed, he caught her in the hall as well, heading towards her office with a stack of manilla files in her arms.

He hobbled quicker. “Professor Granville!”

She stopped, twisted her torso with a raised eyebrow. “Mr. Hamada? What are you doing here? You’re supposed to be home, resting.”

Tadashi ignored the flare of annoyance in the back of his mind. He wasn’t bedridden anymore; so long as he took it easy and wasn’t on his feet too long, he’d be fine.

“I have something I need to talk to you about.”

Professor Granville turned around fully, both eyebrows raising. “I assume it was so important you couldn’t simply email me?”

“Yes.”

Her brow lowered. Though she looked like she didn’t believe him, she said, “Very well. What is it?”

She didn’t invite him into her office. Tadashi thought that was strange - Callaghan always invited him inside -

*Monster.*

He shook the thought away. It didn’t matter in the end.

“It’s about the assignment you gave Hiro and Karmi,” he began.
Professor Granville’s eyes narrowed. “Is that all? You should have emailed me. What is your concern, Mr. Hamada?”

Tadashi held up his phone. “Hiro’s been recording his ‘hang outs’ with her,” the half-lie slid off his tongue too easily for his liking, but he wasn’t about to admit he’d recorded one of the files himself without anyone’s knowledge. “Karmi may act like she’s hyped to have a new friend in front of you, but once you’re out of the picture, she bullies him. She makes fun of him, she taunts him, she refuses to do the assignment at all, telling Hiro to do it himself and make her look good. I have the files right here for you to listen to. He tried to talk to her in the cafeteria today and all she did was make a disgusted noise, call him a creeper, and leave.”

He paused, waiting for Professor Granville’s reaction.

He saw her pupils widen, but her face remained unchanged. “I see,” she drew out slowly.

Tadashi lowered his hand. He didn’t know whether to ask if she wanted to listen to the files first or ask her what she was going to do about Karmi. So instead, he waited for her to take the reigns.

Eventually, she spoke, “And I am to presume whatever is on your cell phone is indeed proof of bullying?”

It was like glass shattering on the floor.

Tadashi gawked at her. “I’m - I’m sorry?”

“Do not think I’m unaware teenagers have issues with their attitudes, Mr. Hamada,” she stated. “They taunt. They tease. They joke and mess around in ways that are playful to them and look like hazards to the rest of us. I notice your brother isn’t here beside you to complain of Karmi’s behavior; perhaps whatever is on your cell phone was only play that you misinterpreted.”

Tadashi’s stomach dropped. “What.”

It wasn’t even a question.

He was floored.

“If your brother had a problem with Karmi - ”

“He does,” he cut in, breaking out of his stupor. “He complained about her last night! He can’t figure out what her problem is!”

“Then he why is not here? Why are you here, Mr. Hamada?” she snapped. “Am I expected to believe Karmi is bullying you as well? Is that what I am to take from this?”

Tadashi lips fell open. Was this really happening?

He shut his jaw tight and willed his facial muscles to stay neutral. “Hiro’s been bullied before,” he ground out. “It was the worst in high school. Karmi acts exactly like those bullies did and none of his teachers did anything about it. Hiro’s not here because he doesn’t think you’ll actually do anything about it. I’m here because he’s wrong - SFIT has a no tolerance policy on bullying.”

Professor Granville raised her chin. “I am sorry to hear that; however, you have no proof that what is on your cell phone does in fact contain bullying and not play. I’m afraid I’m not familiar with your brother’s former teachers and classmates, and therefore cannot compare them to Karmi.”
“Listen to them before you say that,” Tadashi argued. “There’s one point on here when you walk in on them - ”

“Yet I don’t recall witnessing any bullying,” she interrupted sharply. “Are we done here, Mr. Hamada?”

“No!” Tadashi refused. “This is your job - !”

Professor Granville stood straight. “Do not try to inform me of what my job is and isn’t, Mr. Hamada! I understand the situation much more clearly than you do.”

“No, you don’t!” he snapped. “You’re not listening! My fourteen year old brother, your underage student, is being bullied because this brat doesn’t like that he’s the new youngest student! It’s your job to do something and you’re doing nothing! Don’t you care about your students at all!? He’s a kid!”

Professor’s Granville’s eyes widened. Not in shock, surprise, or sympathy, though; in anger.

“How dare you?” she hissed. “Of course I care about my students!”

“Except Hiro,” Tadashi spat. “You refuse to do anything to help him, just like his old teachers. What do you have against him? The bot-fighting? He’s a dumb fourteen year old who made a mistake and cut that out the moment he saw this place and everything a real future had to offer him. I swear, if Karmi keeps antagonizing him once your little assignment is done with and wears him down to the point he thinks bot-fighting was worth more than college, I will never forgive you. You’re supposed to encourage learning and protect your students’ well-beings, but you can’t even bothered to - ”

“That is ENOUGH, Mr. Hamada!” she exclaimed, crumpling one hand in a fist and striking it through the air down to her side. “You will not accuse me of failing to protect my students!”

“Then do something about Karmi!” he barked. “When I first met you, you told me to come to you if there was anything I needed, anything that would help me trust you after what your monstrous predecessor did to me. Here I am, and here’s what I need: For you to do your job and help my brother! Cancel your assignment, keep her the hell away from my brother, and make her lose the attitude. Hiro’s self-esteem isn’t worth this!”

Professor Granville was silent. A shadow passed over her face, and then it fell. She breathed in through her nose and exhaled. “Let’s back up one step here, Mr. Hamada. I have nothing against your brother. I only know about the bot-fighting because it’s not every day a fourteen year old attends a prestigious university as this one, and I was curious, so I went through his file. I’ll admit, I had my suspicions when I first read the police report, but he’s proven himself a diligent and kind student. His robotics professors love him and he’s no less exceptional in my class. Add to the fact he’s around Karmi’s age, and he’s the perfect god influence to curb her...less than stellar behavior.”

Tadashi stomach flipped. “Wh- I’m sorry, what did you say?”

She was undaunted. “Karmi has a...record, let’s say. Her file... My predecessor tried everything short of expelling her. It did nothing. Reports still came to my desk at the beginning of the school year, complaining of her mistreatment of her peers. The only option left according to our policy is expulsion, which I refuse to consider. It’s not every day fifteen or sixteen year olds attend a university such as this one either. I am hoping your brother will be able to break through her shell instead.”
“You -” Tadashi was having a hard time comprehending this.

The tactic of sending student to befriend other students wasn’t new to him. Before coming to SFIT, there had been a handful of times teachers had asked him to go sit by, play with, or talk to the shy, seemingly friendless kids of the class or grade. Some of those kids had wound up being his best friends until age and differing interests drifted them apart. He knew exactly what type of situation she was describing; he’d been in Hiro’s shoes before.

Here was the thing, though: _those kids hadn’t been bullies._ They’d been shy, anxious, new, so-called different and therefore left out. They were like his little brother. They hadn’t been known brats who, by now, should have been kicked out of school for mistreating who knew how many students. Tadashi hadn’t been pulled in to fix them when the adults had failed to do so themselves.

This was unbelievable. Absolutely unbelievable.

“You,” he choked out, “have taken a kid with a history of being bullied, told him his _real_ friends can’t meet his emotional and social needs because of his age, and stuck him with a known bully under the impression that _she_ is to help _him_, so he can fix her for you. What the hell is wrong with you!?”

Professor Granville’s expression tightened. “Don’t speak to me like that. Don’t forget that I’m above you.”

“What, are you going to expel me instead?” It took everything in him not to snarl. “Hate to break this to you, _Professor G_, but I’m a genius, too. It’s in my file. The only reason I didn’t graduate high school early was because I liked staying with my friends when I was a kid. Friends; something Hiro didn’t even have in elementary school because the kids his age looked down on him as a freak for being smarter than them. That’s how Karmi looks at him. She goes out of her way to make him feel like trash, just like the kids in high school did, because he’s got in here at a younger age than her.”

“And throughout this week, your brother should be able to break her out of her shell,” Professor Granville was confident. “I made this an assignment for a reason. They both have to participate if they want an A.”

“Karmi’s not interested in doing the assignment. She told Hiro to make her look good and stalks away without talking to him. Is that supposed to make my brother feel good, Professor Granville? That he’s being helped and making a new friend?” he demanded. “What are you going to do if Hiro can’t get to her? What if she keeps bullying him? What if she starts going up to him to bruise his ego, tear him down, make fun of him? What if she keeps bullying other students like you just admitted she’s been doing since last year? What happens then, if nothing else works and you refuse to expel her?”

Professor Granville’ eyes narrowed into slits. “I can see we’re not going to agree. Whatever the case, I will not revoke their assignment. Good afternoon and goodbye, Mr. Hamada.”

She turned around sharply and marched for her office, closing the door behind her with more force than was necessary.

Tadashi stood there, slack-jawed.

This couldn’t be the end of it. It couldn’t be.

He tightened his fists around his crutches.
He wouldn’t let it be.

Chapter End Notes

Rearranged bullying moments:

Karmi calling Hiro an idiot - Prey Date.

"Little boy who wouldn't understand real science" - mocking him as a little boy hanging around a fake scientist in Small Hiro One (fits well with her mocking him about her studying viruses being "called science" later in the episode, at least).

Hiro doesn't have a soul if he doesn't get fanfiction - Fan Friction.

Hiro accidently spilling his drink and her accusing him of doing it on purpose, even though he clearly didn't and it didn't touch her, and has others "back her up" - Kentucky Kaiju, where's his super strength causes him to accidently throw the door (what kind of idiot thinks a 14 could actually do that and why no one questions why the door actually came off the hinges, I'll never know).

Recording other students' failures to post online, with added sound effects - Failure Mode.

It's also worth remembering that Granville didn't set Hiro and Karmi up to actually help Hiro - remember how at the end of the episode, Hiro calls her out on making the assignment "for Karmi" and not so Hiro could socialize with someone his own age that's been in his shoes as the kid on campus? Yeah. I didn't make up that Karmi's been a bitch for longer than we've known her. That's canon; she's clearly been reported before. I'm just taking that and running in a direction that I find sadly in character for her.

Notes:

- Only one here. The Amazing Man thing is mine. Captain Fancy is clearly a parody of Superman in the show, and Amazing Man is my parody of Superman I use in other WIPs (the only published story I have where I mention him so far is Freshman Year), so I thought it'd be funny and break the tension a little to have Tadashi and Fred have a geek war over who's clearly better and who must be a rip off. (It was funnier to me until I realized that sounds like a fandom war...but they're friends and not gonna send each other death threats over it, so it's still funny to me.)
Tadashi stalked into the main labs, blood boiling hot, and all but threw himself into the first empty chair he saw, propping his crutches up to the table beside him without care.

Gogo, Wasabi, Fred, and Honey Lemon looked at him with a mix of curiosity and worry. Hiro was nowhere in sight. Probably in Tadashi lab or class was his guess.

“How did it go?” Fred asked.

Tadashi bit back a growl in his throat. “Terrible. Granville’s known from the start that Karmi’s a bully - she has a _history_, guys! - and thinks Hiro will be such a good influence on her that she’s not going to do anything about her.”

“Wait,” Wasabi wrinkled his nose, “I thought Karmi was supposed to be helping Hiro.”

“Yeah, Granville lied; Hiro’s supposed to be the one helping her break out of her ‘shell,’” Tadashi made the quotations gesture. “I guess she thought telling the truth would make Karmi - I don’t know, more antagonistic? Not that she isn’t already.”

Gogo put a hand on her hip, incredulous. “So she won’t do anything? You’re kidding me.”

“No,” Tadashi moaned, and rested his temple on his fist. “God, what am I going to tell Hiro? I can already hear his ‘I told you so,’ and see him building another wall inside. He acts like it’s just some annoyance, but this stuff does hurt him in the end. He despised high school and couldn’t wait to graduate. I don’t want him despising SFIT.”

Honey Lemon came around the wall of her work station, hands tucked together in front of her, expression resolute. “If Professor Granville won’t do anything, then _we_ should. I wonder how Karmi will react to five older students chewing her out for messing with their best friend and little brother?”

“It might work,” Gogo replied, “or it’ll make it worse. We can intimidate her, but it’s not like we have any real authority over her. We can’t do anything to punish her in the end. If she doesn’t get scared and back off, she’ll just take it all out on Hiro.”

Fred scratched his chin. “Granville’s the dean, but even she’s got a boss. Think we’d get taken seriously if we went over her head?”

Wasabi stared at him, wide-eyed. “Are you serious? I don’t know; on one hand, this should have been dealt with by now, but on the other, everyone above her might shoo us off.”

“All I know is that at SF State, everybody’s got a boss, and if your professor, department dean, the university dean, whatever, doesn’t want to help you, you can always appeal to the next person above them,” Fred shrugged. “They also got connections with other schools. How do you think I got the mascot job over here? Profs at SF State helped me out by emailing Professor Dugan. Maybe they’d know what we can do next.”

Gogo crossed her arms. “Doesn’t change the fact this isn’t SF State. They can’t force SFIT’s staff to do anything.”

Fred opened his mouth, but whatever he was about to say was cut short by a new voice.
“Mr. Hamada! It’s good to see you.”

Tadashi looked up. Professor Sato, hands in his lab coat pockets, approached with a smile.

“This is certainly a surprise,” he continued. “I thought you weren’t coming back until November.”

Tadashi sat up. “I’m not; I’m only visiting. It’s nice to see you, too, Professor.”

He nodded once, smile widening. “So what brings you to the labs? I suppose it’s not to see Mr. Frederickson, Miss Chun, Miss Velazquez, and Mr. Anthony, or your brother. Trouble with your schoolwork?”

Tadashi glanced at the others, who exchanged glances with each other.

Professor Sato was a good guy. Tadashi had had him for Introduction to Robotics back in freshman year and several classes since. He could more easily say he was a fair and upright man than he’d been able to say about Granville last night; he’d known him longer. And he definitely cared about his students’ well-beings. Tadashi had seen him cheer up classmates on the brink before, even if it wasn’t his class they were stressing over.

The neurons in his brain started firing together.

Tadashi knew Professor Sato. And Professors Roe, Froeb, and Sullivan. He knew the entire robotics department and a good number of professors outside of it. They all knew the rules and took good measure to enforce them. Even Professor Callaghan (monster), the fraud that he was, had sternly enforced the university’s policies when he was here. Professor Granville, his sole outlier so far, was new. It could be that only her moral code didn’t fit with the rest of the university’s.

Or he was completely wrong and this would not end well.

Well, it was at least worth a shot.

“Actually,” he eventually answered, “I’m here because Hiro’s being bullied.”

The smile slowly fell of Professor Sato’s face. “Excuse me? Oh… Is it in one of his classes?”

“Sort of,” Tadashi answered. “She bullies him outside class for the most part, but I’m sure it won’t be long before she’s bullying him in the one class they share.”

He tutted. “You should go to Professor Granville about this. She’ll take care of it. Is Hiro all right?”

“He’s fine for now,” he replied. “He wants to try making friends with his bully; it’s the exact same thing he tried in high school when people were bullying him, and I have no idea why he thinks it’ll work now when it didn’t then. And I already went to Granville; she set the whole thing up because she knows Karmi’s a bully and wants Hiro to be a good influence on her. She told them Karmi’s supposed to help Hiro learn how to socialize and turned it into an assignment, and didn’t care at all when I told her Karmi’s been bullying him instead. I even have audio and video proof on my phone here, and she wouldn’t so much as look at them. She flat out told me she won’t help.”

Professor Sato was visibly stunned. “Are - Are you sure? I - Can I see your recordings, then?”

Tadashi started. “Sure. Absolutely.”
He unlocked his phone and opened the files. He started with Hiro’s.

"So," Hiro’s voice began, cheerful. "I’m Hiro Hamada. I’m a robotics engineering major. What’s your major?"

A throaty noise could be heard. "God, you’re an idiot. What does it look like!? I’m a geology major!?”

"Uh..." Hiro sounded unsure of himself. "Okay. Biological engineering?"

"No, you idiot. I’m a biotech major! Now shut up, I’m busy with - “ She stopped herself and scoffed. In a high pitched voice, she mocked, "a little boy like you wouldn’t understand REAL science."

A pause.

"So," He restarted, a bit more force in his cheery tone, "What do you do for fun? When you’re not at school?"

"What part of ‘shut up’ did you not understand?" Karmi barked, and there was more silence.

Hiro eventually spoke up, "Well, I like video games. I also like the Robot Monsters franchise. And I play basketball and soccer sometimes. Oh, and skateboarding is fun. What about you? Do you like any of that? Or other things, like swimming, art, reading? To be honest, I don’t read much - well, I don’t read much fiction because I spend more time with textbooks to work on my next project, but I guess it’s okay."

"For your information, I read fanfiction, and if you don’t get THAT, you don’t have a soul. Which doesn’t surprise me at all," Karmi huffed.

More silence. The sound of a drawer opening and shutting.

"Observing mutated virus, day 57," Karmi now said, not even addressing Hiro.

More silence.

Then cooing from Karmi. "Looking good, A1-004."

"You, uh," Hiro spoke up, "you talk to the virus?"

"That was a private conversation!" Karmi snapped, voice completely serious. "But yes, A1-004 is a dear friend, as are R69-5, L4-382, and 95-414, who I’m still getting to know." More cooing and kissy noises were made.

"Sure," he laughed awkwardly.

"Oh, you think talking to viruses is weird. You. The kid who talks to a mechanical snowman. At least my dangerous microscopic organisms are actually alive."

"All right, no judgement. Can we just move on? I need to put something in the journal for Granville."

"Not my problem," Karmi dismissed. "Just make me look good because - " A break, and then her voice turned sickeningly sweet. "I want this to be a wonderful experience for you!"

A short pause.
"Oh, you are good," Hiro grumbled.

"Karmi," Granville’s voice entered the conversation, concern free and light, "take Mr. Hamada to lunch in the dining hall. My treat."

"So super," Karmi spat in a falsely cheerful voice, so much so it sounded strained.

Granville continued, "Get acquainted, you two. Have fun! Mandatory fun."

"Super great idea!" Karmi exclaimed. "On it!"

Another pause.

Karmi spoke again, once more not addressing Hiro. "I’m sorry, A1-004. I know we were going to do a DNA extraction over lunch," she took it over to a mini incubator, "but you’re going to have to incubate a little longer." Then she barked, "Let’s go, genius boy."

Hiro’s voice was in awe. "And Granville thinks I need socialization help?"

From there the recording skipped to lunch, where Karmi continued to act in the same manner, feigning cheeriness in front of Granville and being hostile when she was gone. She refused to answer the majority of Hiro’s questions, instead insulting him, accusing him of being a creep when he asked about her exact age, and getting a few new voices to ‘back her up’ when she shrieked and accused Hiro of knocking his drink over on purpose, which he denied and pointed out hadn’t even touched her.

Then it was onto today’s recording, where she only called him a creep, gave him a nasty expression, and picked up her books to stalk away.

By the end of it, the rest of the gang looked disgusted and Professor Sato was blanching.

He shook his head fast. “No. No. Those two need to be separated immediately. You said Professor Granville already knows about this?”

Tadashi nodded. “She set them up because this is how Karmi really acts. She admitted she knows.”

“And she refused to do anything about this,” Professor Sato wanted clarification.

“Yes,” he confirmed.

Professor Sato reeled his head back. “No. That is now how we do things at SFIT, especially with our underage students. It’s one thing to introduce good influences to a student, but it’s another to leave them alone in a situation like this. If anything, Professor Granville should be monitoring their behavior together and reprimanding Karmi, but even then - ”

He simply shook his head, astonished.

Tadashi’s heart skipped a beat. “So you don’t approve?”

“Of course not! Why Professor Granville would choose to go about Karmi in this way and refuse to help Hiro is beyond me. There is only so much we can do to keep our adult students under control, but even then not only do we have a no tolerance policy, these are underage students we’re talking about; we have much larger responsibility towards them, particularly victims,” he explained in disbelief. “This is completely unacceptable.”

“Can you do something?” Wasabi asked. “I mean, isn’t Granville your boss?”
“Can you go over her head?” Fred popped up.

Professor Sato didn’t answer right away, a contemplative look on his face.

“Yes,” he soon answered, drawing out the word. “And yes, we can go over her head. I don’t think we’ll have to, though, unless as a last resort. She can’t fire us for telling her to do her job.”

“‘Us’?” Gogo questioned.

“As I said,” he explained slowly. “SFIT has a no tolerance policy and the victim in this case is underage. President Akiyama-Cortez is Professor Granville’s superior, and she called a meeting with the entire faculty the day after Professor Callaghan showed up on the news as Yokai. Although he acted of his own volition and burned down one of our buildings, the university did receive an unfair amount of backlash due to our association with him. President Akiyama-Cortez warned everyone, from the custodians and cafeteria workers to Professor Granville, that SFIT didn’t need anymore scandal, no matter how great or small. If word were to get out we failed to protect a fourteen year old student from bullying - ”

“Because Hiro was smart enough to get into college at a younger age than Karmi,” Tadashi couldn’t help adding.

Professor Sato glanced down at him with wide eyes. “Because our prestigious, scientific, academic institution failed to protect a fourteen year old student from being bullied for being intelligent and hardworking, especially if Hiro chooses to drop out, or god forbid, it gets far enough down the road he attempts to harm himself or take his life, the president will throw the largest fit Professor Granville’s ever seen. The last thing President Akiyama-Cortez wants right now is bad press, and this right now alone would be bad press. She won’t stand for it.”

Wasabi flinched. “You really think it’ll get as far as self-harm or suicide?”

Tadashi glowered. “We’re not letting it get that far in the first place, Wasabi.”

“The point is that she doesn’t want any scandal,” Professor Sato said. “I’d rather get those two separated before we reach that point, but as it currently is, President Akiyama-Cortez will not be happy if she hears Granville isn’t enforcing our policies on something that could damage our reputation further. If it became common knowledge we allowed a fourteen year old genius to be bullied for getting in so young, would you be eager to apply here? Or eager to enroll your underage child? It’s not the same level as Professor Callaghan’s scheme, but it is bad press and would, unfortunately in this case, be fair bad press. She’d be furious if this got out.”

“So,” Honey Lemon said, “you will go over her head?”

“As a last resort, yes,” he said. “But I don’t think it’ll be necessary. If anyone else in our faculty would approve of this situation or Professor Granville’s decisions, I’m afraid I’m unaware of them. Nevertheless, there should be enough of us to put pressure on her to enforce our policies.”

Tadashi was on cloud nine. “Thank you. Thank you so much, Professor! You have no idea how good it is to hear that! What have you got in mind to do? Is there any way we can help?”

“I have ideas,” he mused. “Mr. Hamada, do you know who your brothers’ other professors are? I know he has Froeb and Roe, and they both love him and will absolutely help.”

If Tadashi could leap to his feet right now, he would. “Yes! Professor Sullivan, Professor Yoshida, Dr. Squires, and - and Granville.”
Professor Sato threw out his index finger. “Yoshida’s a good friend of Froeb’s and Sullivan has no patience for bullying or harassment, I know that. Excellent. I also don’t see why Dr. Squires wouldn’t help, although I don’t know him well. Good, good. In fact… Would you please follow me, Mr. Hamada? Chances are, at least two of them are in the faculty lounge. Don’t close those recordings.”

Tadashi beamed. “Yes! I can, I definitely can.”

Professor Sato turned to the others. “Tadashi will get back to you on what I intend later. For now, I want to see how many other professors we can get on our side so I can know what exactly we’re doing. If one thing isn’t possible, it’s onto another…” he trailed off, not specifying what kind of ‘things’ he had in mind.

Grabbing his crutches, Tadashi hauled himself up. “Absolutely. Thank you again so much, Professor Sato. You have no idea how much this means to me.”

“All of our students deserve to be heard and treated fairly,” he stated simply. “If they aren’t, it’s our jobs as teachers to fix that. I’m not going to stand by and do nothing when that goes against my profession - and personal ethics.”

The faculty lounge was larger than Tadashi had imagined; lined with counters, two sinks, a fridge, oven, and microwave, as well as lockers off to one wall and holding several couches, he guessed it could probably comfortably fit up to thirty-five people at once. By his count, sixteen were currently in the room.

He recognized a handful of them: Professor Fujioka, who’d he’d had for advanced computer science I and II, standing by the operating coffee maker; Professor Asakawa, who he’d had for a physics elective in sophomore year and was now the bane of Gogo’s existence with applied particle physics, going over a folder on a couch; Professor Grass, who he’d had for hydraulics II, searching through a locker; and, wonderfully, Professors Froeb, Yoshida, and Roe, the former two of whom were chatting on a couch and the latter placing a brown bag in the fridge.

Professor Sato glanced at Tadashi and coughed into his fist. “Professor Roe, Yoshida, Froeb.”

The three looked up, startled, as did a few other professors - and more when people realized a student was standing in the faculty lounge.

“Tadashi,” Professor Roe spoke up first, voice a mixture of surprise, confusion, and delight. “What brings you here? Students aren’t exactly allowed in the student lounge and you’re supposed to be home…”

“It’s so good to see you, though!” Professor Froeb added, also confused and delighted.

“Is something the matter?” Professor Grass asked, closing his locker.

Professor Sato cleared his throat. “I wanted to speak with you three specifically, but the rest of you are free to join in. It’s about our student, Hiro Hamada - Tadashi here’s younger brother and our new fourteen year old freshman,” he explained for the others in the room.

Pretty much everyone exchanged glances.

“I don’t understand,” Professor Yoshida declared. “You want to talk to us about Mr. Hamada because he’s our student, but the conversation is open to everyone?”
“Yes,” he told her. “You see, Hiro’s being bullied by one of his peers. It doesn’t sit well with her that a fourteen year old is attending our institution.”

An professor unknown to Tadashi gave them a peculiar expression. “You should be going to Grace - Professor Granville for that, not us.”

“I did,” Tadashi said before Professor Sato could reply, arching his brow irritably. “She knows and she doesn’t care. She set Hiro up with Karmi under the pretense that Karmi would help him learn how to socialize on campus because she knows Karmi’s a bully with a ‘record’ and wants Hiro to be a good influence on her. When I told her she’s bullying him instead and offered proof, she turned me away and refused to help.”

Several eyes blinked in astonishment and confusion. Tadashi watched Hiro’s professors’ reactions in particular; Froeb’s mouth fell open, Yoshida jerked her neck back and widened her eyes, and Roe’s face went blank and filled with red.

“Wait, Karmi?” another unknown professor spoke up. “Do you mean one of our other minor students? She’s bullying him for getting into SFIT at fourteen? Isn’t she fifteen?”

“Sixteen,” another professor corrected. “I have her for one of my meteorology classes. I believe it; every time I pair or group students together for an in-class assignment, she’s consistently rude and backtalks her partners without provocation. I’ve reported her to Granville twice, who assured me she’d handle it. In the meantime, she hasn’t improved. I assumed she’d be have a schedule with the counselors by now.”

Part of Tadashi very much doubted that. Hiro was supposed to be the one fixing the little brat, after all.

A fourth professor frowned. “That sounds like a student I had last year. I don’t remember her name. Brown hair tied up in a ponytail, wears leggings and skirts?”

“That’s the one.”

“She always kept up this strange, fake cheeriness when speaking with me. Several students complained of her attitude, which she denied over and over. I finally caught her making fun of her neighbor for receiving a thirty-six on a test - god knows why I remember the number and not her - and reported her to Professor Callaghan.”

A fifth professor jerked his head back. “Karmi, Karen, Kammi - is this the same student Squires raged about at the end of last year for cyber bullying?”

Cyber bullying? Tadashi’s skin crawled.

“I don’t know,” a sixth professor answered. “Sounds about right, but I can’t be sure. I know he raged about the mascot lately.”

“I thought that student got expelled,” the third professor said. “Isn’t cyber bullying one of our qualifications for instant expulsion, no first or second warnings?”

“It depends on the degree on the cyber bullying,” Professor Asakawa replied helpfully.

“Waitwaitwait!” Professor Roe shook her head rapidly. “Explain this to me again. Hiro is being bullied for being an underage student by another underage student with a history of bullying her peers, and Professor Granville is doing nothing because she’s pushing Hiro on this student as a good influence? To help her learn how to socialize?”
“Professor Granville arranged it so they would think Karmi was helping Hiro learn how to socialize,” Professor Sato corrected. “But yes, that’s what’s going on.”

“Karmi hates that she’s not the youngest student anymore, so she’s taking it out on Hiro,” Tadashi bitterly added.

But he guessed this behavior wasn’t unusual at all. Granville hadn’t specified what was on Karmi’s ‘record;’ he hadn’t known about any of this. The cyber bullying claim unnerved him the most.

Professor Roe’s face burned a dark scarlet, expression nothing short of livid.

“And choosing not to protect Hiro when she whirls around to target him next,” Professor Yoshida scorned. “This is beyond unsettling. I had a talk with him last week when Professor Granville scrambled his nerves to the point he was terrified the littlest things would get him expelled. I’ve seen for myself what a good young man he is, and from what I hear here, this Karmi is the opposite - yet she’s not even getting a slap on the wrist while Hiro was all but threatened with expulsion for being in his brother’s lab. This is intolerable.”

“What!?” Professor Roe spat. “She did what - !? Bullying, one of our no tolerance policies, fails to draw forth even a single reprimand from her, but being in one’s brother’s lab is the key to expulsion!? What kind of replacement did the university hire!? Robert was never this incompetent!”

Tadashi twitched. *(Monster. That’s twice now.)*

Froeb only sat there in open shock. “I - I have no idea what to say. Hiro’s a sweetheart and hard worker. You - You said you had proof? What kind of proof?”

“I do,” he croaked out, and forced himself to swallow and pull it together.

Just then, another professor entered the lounge, coming in around him and Professor Sato.

“Hello, everybody!” Professor Sullivan practically sang. “How are - Oh, Mr. Hamada! It’s so good to see you!” Her face fell a tad and she cocked her head. “Why are you in the faculty lounge?”

Professor Grass let out a humorless laugh. “You’re going to love this, Charlotte.”

Her face fell completely. “Oh no. What’s happened? What does this have to do with you, Tadashi?”

“You have Mr. Hamada’s younger brother in one of your classes, don’t you?” Professor Sato asked her.

She nodded slowly. “Yes. Why? Is he okay?”

“One of our other students has a history of bullying her peers, so Professor Granville,” he quickly explained to her, “wanted Hiro to spend time with her in the hopes his influence would curb her behavior. She told the two of them this other student, Karmi, would be helping Hiro learn to socialize at SFIT. She made this a graded assignment to make sure they would work together. Unfortunately, Karmi despises the fact Hiro took her place as the youngest student and has turned her bullying on him. Tadashi tried to go to Professor Granville with the journal recordings Hiro made, but she admitted she already knows about Karmi, hence why she set this up, and won’t separate the two or punish her.”

If Tadashi had thought Professor Roe was livid, Professor Sullivan was a whole ‘nother level.
From her ears to her neck, her skin turned tomato red and she reeled her head back with the most
defiant and appalled expression he’d ever seen. Aunt Cass didn’t even get this mad when he and
Hiro used to wreck the house with their experiments.

“I want to hear these recordings,” she hissed. “Now.”

Tadashi unlocked his phone and played them.

No one in the room looked comfortable as they listened to Karmi snap and snarl at Hiro, tell him to
do the assignment himself and make her look good, treat her deadly viruses as more human than
him, put on her act in front of Granville, and resist and accuse all through lunch. By the time the
much shorter second recording where she hardly spoke to him and stalked off ended, there were
several sneers and blown pupils in the room.

“This can’t be allowed to continue,” Professor Yoshida insisted, leaving no room for arguments.
“We need to have to a discussion with Professor Granville.”

“More than a discussion!” Professor Sullivan raged. “They need to be separated this instant, the
assignment called off, and that girl sent to the councilors! Granville knows about this and
facilitated it!? She’s putting one of our students, our underage students, directly in harm’s way!? My
god! How is Hiro? Is he okay? Has anyone assured him this isn’t his fault and how he should be
treated!?”

“I have,” Tadashi almost squeaked out. He’d never seen a professor so angry before, much less one
as chirpy as Sullivan.

“What does he think of this?” Roe inquired.

“Did he go with you to see Professor Granville?” Professor Froeb asked. “Does he know what she
said? Oh, I almost hope he doesn’t; if I were in his position in school, her reaction would have
crushed me.”

Tadashi scratched the back of his head, suddenly sheepish. “Um, no. Hiro didn’t come with me and
he doesn’t know. Look, this isn’t the first time Hiro’s been targeted. He’s always had these troubles
with kids, all throughout school. High school was the hardest. None of his teachers there helped
him, not really, and it kind of solidified his belief no one will help him. He didn’t think Granville
would care from the start and might have said he thinks she favors Karmi anyhow. For his part,
he’d rather see if he can make real friends with Karmi than ask for help.”

For a moment, the room was stunned into silence. Even Professor Sato gaped at him.

Professor Froeb broke it with a devastated hand to her mouth. “Poor Hiro! I can’t blame him, I’d be
distrusting, too.”

“Bullies don’t make friends,” Professor Roe snapped shortly. “They make targets. That’s why we
separate them, not push them together!”

Professor Yoshida only shook her head. “No wonder he was so anxious talking to me,” she
murmured.

Professor Sullivan was shaking. “I told him! I told him when that mascot was bothering him that if
he ever found himself bullied or harassed to come to one of us or the counselors! I assured him we
would not sit by and let this happen! He promised he would! Oh, but this makes sense, and I’m
glad he wasn’t there when Professor Granville told you this. This is unbelievable! Unacceptable!
He’s fourteen and our responsibility! I can’t believe no one’s ever done anything about this!”
“Of course we have to do something to fix this,” Professor Sato smoothed over. “You’re right, this is not how SFIT responds to bullying. I believe if enough of us make it clear to Professor Granville we won’t tolerate the blatant disregard for our rules, we can make a change. If not, then...you all remember our meeting with President Akiyama-Cortez?”

The room just about froze.

Professor Froeb nodded mutely. “You want to go to her?”

“As a last resort, yes. If this persists and Hiro - or one of our other students Karmi targets - is forced to leave the school or winds up in the hospital and the wrong press finds out, what will that do to our reputation? She won’t stand for it. Our rules exist for a reason and this is the worst time for another scandal.”

One of the unknown professors stood from his place on a couch. “Crowding her office could make a statement, but her office is only so big and we all have wildly different schedules with hundreds of other students to attend to. I’m willing to help in what way I can, but what do you propose? Mass emails? I don’t think it’s a good idea to let this spread around the other students either; I doubt gossip or the possibility of others targeting Hiro is a good idea, even in the scenario most sympathize with him. As you said, he is fourteen.”

Professor Sato nodded. “You’re right. The plan that makes the most sense to me would be to keep this among the faculty; the student body doesn’t need to know. Tadashi and his friends are willing to go to Professor Granville on his behalf, and I was thinking they, along with his professors, including myself, could personally confront her face to face. A petition representing other faculty members’ desire to see our policies properly enforced should also help. I’m willing to go around speaking with as many in private as I can. Otherwise, if that’s not enough for Professor Granville, we have no choice than to go to the president of the university.”

Professor Froeb rose to her feet, clapping her hands together. “I can help you with that! It’s a wonderful idea. If Granville won’t enforce our bullying and harassment policy, what else won’t she enforce? Even if someone reveals they don’t particularly care about bullying, this is still a major concern. A dean must keep proper order on campus.”

Professor Sullivan irately muttered something Tadashi couldn’t hear.

“When would you do this?” Professor Fujioka questioned. “I’ll sign this petition, but a deadline would be good to know.”

Professor Sato looked at Tadashi. “When is this assignment due?”

“Friday,” he answered, a little breathless. This was going far better than he could possibly thought. “I don’t know the exact time; I’ll have to ask Hiro.”

“Friday’s good,” Professor Sato told him. “Get back to me on the exact time. Until then, we’ll work on the petition. Keep Hiro away from Karmi as much as you can. There’s no reason to keep putting him in harm’s way. If you can’t for any reason, such as him seeking her out on his own or Professor Granville forcing them together, make certain Hiro is recording everything. The more tangible evidence we have, the better.”

“We should go to her right now,” Professor Roe grumbled. “I have more than two cents to give her on this subject.”

“I agree,” Professor Sullivan ground out.
“So do I, but,” Professor Yoshida pointed out, “our intervention will be the most effective with all of us there and our petition to back us up. Going to her now would be preferable, yes, but we should strike this issue at our hardest.”

Tadashi was blown away. “Th-Thank you all. This is - The fact you’re all going to go bat for this - I - ”

“You shouldn’t be thanking us at all,” Professor Sullivan interrupted tersely. “This is our job, Mr. Hamada. We’re supposed to take care of this.”

Fred was the only one still in the lab by the time Tadashi got back; Honey Lemon and Wasabi had class, and Gogo had to meet with a professor whose office hours were finally open. That left him lounging on his beat up arm chair, waiting for the news.

When Tadashi came bursting through the lab doors on his crutches, he had the biggest, toothiest smile on his face. “Fred, I’m so happy right now I could kiss you!”

Fred started. He sat up. “Um, think you’ll have to take me out to dinner first.”

“I can do that,” Tadashi planted himself in a wheeled chair, laughing. “The Lucky Cat Café, my treat.”

Fred blinked in surprise. “So...I’m guessing Professor Sato’s got a plan hammered out?”

“Yup!” Tadashi nodded eagerly. “The professors in the lounge were not happy, especially Hiro’s. They were disgusted by Karmi - some of even knew her! - and felt so bad for Hiro after I told them about high school. They’re going to make a petition for Granville to enforce the bullying policy and all of us, his professors and you guys, are going to to her office on Friday to confront her. I just need to figure out a good time for everyone to be there, preferably before Hiro has to present their assignment. I need to ask him what time they’re supposed to. This is fantastic! I KNEW the university would never put up with this!”

Fred sat up straight and grinned. “Awesome! I have three classes in the afternoon on Friday, so morning would work best for me, but I can ditch one if I need to. I’ll text the others. They’re in class, by the way.”

“I figured,” Tadashi said as Fred pulled his phone out and opened a group chat.

He paused. “Should I tell Hiro or do you want to?”

Tadashi sobered some. “Well, uh...leave that to me.”

Fred nodded, opening a chat that excluded Hiro.

For his part, Tadashi scratched the back of his head. “Oh boy. Hiro. He’s gonna be mad when I tell him I went ahead and reported Karmi already. I don’t know how he’ll react to our plan; he’ll probably find it super embarrassing at the least. But it will show him his professors do care… On the other hand, if he gets mad at me and is serious about wanting to make friends with her, he might stop recording his ‘hang outs.’ I know he won’t stop trying with her no matter how much I tell him to stay away from the brat, so we need those recordings.”

Fred hit ‘send’ and looked up, perplexed. “You think so? But he doesn’t like her, why would he do that?”
“Because he doesn’t trust the university to actually do something and he thinks making real friends with her will solve the problem instead,” he ran a hand through his hair and sighed. “And I promised I’d let him try before I went off reporting her. But I saw how she treated him in the cafeteria and I’m not - I know I can’t keep him from going to school and he’s a stubborn kid who’ll keep trying because he’s the right one, and…I won’t let my brother get bullied again, Fred. I saw way too many Karmis pick on and tear him down in high school, and I know deep down that she won’t stop when the assignment’s over. Hiro took her place as the youngest and Granville put him directly on her radar, so she’ll keep at it and it’ll just keep getting worse. The problem is, Hiro’s response to all those other Karmis was to do his best to placate and make friends, no matter how much he hated how they treated him. Maybe he’ll give up and ignore her when he sees it doesn’t work, maybe he won’t, but either way, I have to protect him. Granville won’t, so I have to. I didn’t do enough last time and I refuse to repeat that mistake.”

Huh. Frankly, Fred thought beating up one’s little brother’s bullies was the definition of a protective older brother doing his best (not that Tadashi could do that here; he didn’t want to test whether Granville cared about the no violence policies, which existed for good reason, or not with his best friend). Either way, Tadashi kind of sounded like he was apologizing - and not for going behind Hiro’s back.

“Dude, you’re not the reason he got bullied,” Fred gently assured him. “People are cruel and go after others for the dumbest or no reason. It’s not your fault.”

Tadashi got that look in his eye - the same one he’d had the night Yama had Baymax, that said, ‘Don’t mess with me.’

“I mean,” he clarified sternly, “I should have done more from the start. I should have protected him better, pushed the teachers harder to stop it.”

Fred wasn’t going to be intimidated by this.

“You did your best, man. You guys were seriously outnumbered and no one with power wanted to help. You can’t blame yourself for that.” He shook his head. “Man, you two really are brothers. You blame yourselves too much, you blame yourselves too much for what happens to the other that’s out of your control, and you can’t help trying everything to protect each other without the other knowing. If I had brothers or sisters, I wonder if we’d be like that.”

Tadashi raised his head, eyes narrowed and questioning. “What do you mean by protecting each other without knowing? Fred, what did Hiro do to protect me?”

Fred stiffened. Oh. He probably should have thought that through more.

He chuckled awkwardly, rubbing the back of his neck. “Funny story. Remember how me and Baymax talked to Hiro about emotional junk in your lab?”

“Yeah…”

“You also know how Yama got arrested?”

“…How on Earth are those connected and how much am I going to kill Hiro?”

Fred shrugged stiffly. “Up to you. Anyway, the reason he was in your lab that day was originally to make a fly on the wall sort of spy tool to film Yama doing crime and send it to the police. Apparently, Yama messed with the school’s security system, so the fly was a GREAT idea in the long run because he wouldn’t be in jail right now if it weren’t for Hiro not wanting to him threaten
you ever again. You guys are such brothers, am I right?”

Tadashi stared at him with blown wide eyes that pretty much said, ‘I love the twerp but he’s dead meat.’

Brothers. Ah. Fred was suddenly glad he was an only child and not a younger sibling.

Then Tadashi’s face morphed. It went from silently plotting a loving murder to complemtative. Then it lit up.

“Yeah,” he agreed, far away in his head. “We are. We are a lot alike. Do you know what he did with that fly?”

“Uh, kept it I guess. It’s probably at your house somewhere. Why?”

His face brightened, but in a dark sort of way if that made sense. The hair on Fred’s arms under his sleeves raised in alarm.

Tadashi stood up on his crutches, grinning evilly. “Fred, I’m going to kiss you.”

Fred wondered how scared he should be.

Fred was a big baby, Gogo decided when she checked up on the Hamada brothers at the cafe later that evening as the sun lingered lazily over the horizon, an hour before they were to go on night patrol. Tadashi was about as scary as a bumble bee and this little plan of his was not at all terrifying. She sincerely doubted the fact Tadashi was sitting in a booth with Hiro’s favorite jacket and a sewing needle meant Hiro had been slaughtered and buried under the garage.

“So…” she folded her arms, grabbing his attention away from his stitching, “where is the knucklehead?”

Tadashi gave her a once over, as if taking in that she was in fact standing before him, and returned to sewing the front corner of Hiro’s hood. “Upstairs, tearing his side of the room apart for this. He loses his clothes so easily and this is his favorite. It’s not like he doesn’t have a dozen coats and hoodies.”

“Uh huh,” Gogo shifted her weight to her hip. “So you stole it. Not gonna ask how, but will ask what you’re doing. What are you doing with it?”

Tadashi briefly glanced at her, then returned to examining his stitching. “Nothing I haven’t done before. Fred told you about his little fly?”

“Yep.”

“Good, then I don’t have to tell you about that. Hiro will never listen to me if I tell him about Sato’s plan and to stay away from Karmi, so I’m not telling him until the last minute, but I need insurance in case he stops recording her and starts writing a real, censored, journal of their ‘hang outs.’ So now not only does he have a tracker in all of his hoodies, he has his little fly in this one as well. I love my little baby brother sometimes, did you know that? For once he’s done half my job for me.”

Okay, Gogo was a tad creeped out by the sorta sinisterly innocent smile on his face. She understood the necessity of the trackers, considering Hiro’s old habit of hanging around Good Luck Alley, something the whole gang was sworn not to tell him about, but this?
She unfolded her arms. “Don’t you think you’re going a bit overboard?”

When Tadashi slowly raised his head with a tightlipped frown, Gogo suddenly understood why Fred called the brothers brocons and claimed dark waves emitted from Tadashi’s body on another plane of existence. (And she thought he just read too many comics and manga).

“Going overboard,” he said in a hypnotic voice, “would be getting myself kicked out of school for physically attacking the brat before she’s gotten violent with Hiro. I’m not doing that. She’s poked and prodded and gotten in his personal space and I want to smack her away for that, but I’m not stupid, Gogo. Until she throws a twiggy fist or wraps her germy fingers around my brother’s clothes or hair, she’s not worth throwing my future away for. Do you know how awful Hiro would feel if I got kicked out because of her? He’d feel terrible and I won’t let that happen. I thought you knew I was smarter than that, Gogo.”

She backed away a step. You know what, she was the youngest of her family, the baby, not an older sister, she wanted no part in whatever older sibling instinct was possessing Tadashi at the moment. She’d watch out for Hiro this week, be there on Friday, but she would not let herself walk into whatever bear trap Big Brother Tadashi was laying out for her at the moment.

“Okay…” she said. “You do you. Moving on… Are we tracking down High Voltage tonight? Honey Lemon and Wasabi want to do some more training and get a strategy together before we go after them, so I was thinking cancel night patrol and get some practice in. Has Baymax located them?”

Tadashi furrowed his brow in confusion. “High Vol- ? Oh.” His face fell into a neutral expression. “They really need a team name, huh? Uh, yeah, Baymax’s scanner is fixed so as long as they’re in the city he can detect them. Training’s not a bad idea, so if they’re not up to something tonight, we can get their location and start mapping out a capture plan. If they are, then we’ll have to make do and hope for the best. ...I hope they’re not doing anything tonight. I’d rather not go in blind.”

Gogo nodded. “Sounds good to me.”

Tadashi smiled, a non-creepy one. He held up Hiro’s jacket. “Does this look obvious? Can you see the new stitches, or did I do a good job? You can’t see the fly’s eyes, can you?”

She stared at the blue fabric. “Uhhh, no. I can’t.”

He beamed.

“TADASHI!” Hiro could be heard from upstairs.

“Great,” he said, ignoring the call and stuffing the needle, and the other tools Gogo now realized he had - matching blue thread and a small sewing knife - under the table. “I’ll get rid of these before we leave.”

Gogo turned her head and watched Hiro come tumbling down the stairs and racing around the corner into the cafe.

Tadashi held up his arm to signal where he was. “Hey, little brother!”

Back at the stairs, Baymax calmly navigated his way down.

Hiro came to a halt in front of the booth, next to Gogo. He gave Tadashi an intense glare. “THERE’S my jacket! What are you doing with it!”
Tadashi’s expression flattened, and he held up the jacket with disinterest.

Hiro snatched it away.

“I washed it is what I did,” he deadpanned. “That thing hasn’t seen the washer in three months. I was starting to smell it on you.”

Gogo swallowed a baby barf.

Hiro glared at Tadashi with skepticism, then took a nose-cloth deep sniff of the hood. He jerked his head back and gave his older brother a stern look. “You’re no brother of mine! It smells CLEAN now! But thanks, it’s also nice!” Gogo gawked as he switched gears to cheerful, pulling the jacket on quickly. “We gotta head out soon, I’m gonna get Baymax dressed. Come on, buddy!”

Hiro shot for the door while Baymax finally waddled past them.

“Hello, Gogo,” he greeted, holding up his hand as he walked by. “Hello, Tadashi.”

Gogo craned her neck around to gawk at Tadashi.

He only shrugged. “I did wash it. I couldn’t have his coat for no reason; alibis are a necessity in this house.”

Gogo had never been more glad she was the youngest of a family of girls, with no brothers, than in that moment.

Honey Lemon jumped off Baymax along with the others when they got to the top of a mildly high building towards the center of the city. They would do one scan for trouble and one for High Voltage’s location, and if there was nothing going on, they’d head off to Fred’s place for late night training.

It would have been nice if they could have trained during the day, but that would have been a tight fit with each of their classes crowding up their day. It was Tuesday, after all, not Saturday or Sunday. Ah, well; nothing they could do about it now. Other than hope High Voltage wasn’t going to perform a second night in a row. It would be better to lay some groundwork with the rest of the team before they went in again.

Between classes and worrying about Hiro, Honey Lemon had been going over yesterday night’s fight in her head. The shock generator was clearly their power source; the closer they were to it, the easier it was to generate bolts and share power with each other. Likewise, the farther away the two were, the harder it was. Taking down the generator was ideal, but if they couldn’t do that, separating the duo from it as much as possible would be their best shot.

“Scanning for,” Baymax announced, “signs of distress, and, Barbara and Juniper Harding. ...Distress detected. Barbara and Juniper Harding located. High Voltage is currently attacking: Nishi Road. That way.”

He pointed to the direction.

Honey Lemon’s heart fell. So much for that.

“Everyone hop back on,” Hiro ordered.

Honey Lemon climbed aboard beside him, Gogo on his other side and Fred and Wasabi going for
Baymax’s arms. Tadashi’s drone hovered above them.

“The shock generator is their source of power,” she reminded. “That should be our first priority. They’re less of a threat without it.”

“We need a plan, fast,” Tadashi said as the team took off. “We can’t truly assess the situation until we get there, but we have to have some sort of strategy. Baymax has to keep a safe distance from their bolts - we don’t want a repeat of yesterday night - and Honey Lemon, your chemballs can insulate it.”

Wasabi shuddered at the view of the ground below. “Whatever happens, we definitely gotta find time to train tomorrow; my nerves are on fire. Okay, so what do we do?”

Honey Lemon looked to Hiro and Gogo.

Hiro frowned and lowered his head, thinking.

Gogo raised her chin. “Occam’s razor - the simplest plan is the best plan. We’ll distract those two while Honey Lemon, you go for the generator. Then we go all in on them.”

Hiro’s frown deepened. “They had us all over the place last time and managed to get us at the last second. They’re quick on their feet and have faster counterreactions. We have to account for that. Hehh, we’re going to have do our best to stay in sync with them and each other. Keep your ears and eyes open, guys.”

Fred gave a clawed thumbs up. “Got it!”

Honey Lemon’s heart pounded. It was ridiculous, after their encounters with Yokai and Yama, but something about their last fight with High Voltage gave her a bad feeling about this one.

On the bright side, Tadashi thought irately, it seemed his tip to the police department had had an effect after all. While civilians continued to cheer and scream in admiration as they had before - Juniper was lapping it up like a Mochi did milk - he recognized the same officers from yesterday on the scene, and they weren’t clapping along. The chief must have forced them to do their jobs this time, because they were tied up and scowling outside the turned over loading truck.

At least they didn’t appear to have any electrical burns, he noted. Barb and Juniper certainly had the power to instant kill any unprotected opponent, like the officers, but they seemed to be avoiding seriously hurting anyone, if this was something to go by. Theft and public endangerment were without a doubt going on their arrest files, but he supposed they didn’t want murder or attempted murder there; there would be no going back from that in court.

Then again, they wanted to be stars. It said so in Barb’s resignation and the pair’s actions. They stole, but they also made a show out of it. The money, fame, and glory were their top priorities, he realized. He wouldn’t assume they’d never seriously hurt or kill anyone - he didn’t know yet how far they could be pushed - but if they were currently only interested in deflecting and scattering enemies, the team might be able to use that to their advantage.

“US, Juniper,” he heard Barb ground out at her daughter, halting her pillage of the truck to scold, “they love us.”

They were standing more or less in place. Tadashi could get them right now, one after the other - or at least one before they saw them. He decided on Barb - she was the electrical engineer who built the generator, after all - and aimed.
The others landed on the plaza across the street and dispatched.

“HEY!” Gogo yelled.

Tadashi finger missed the button. He grit his teeth. ‘Dang it, Gogo. Maybe we didn’t need a distraction yet. One is easier to take down than two. Fine, whatever.’

The duo looked up.

“You two got lucky last time,” Gogo declared, eyes narrowed. “You won’t tonight!”

She jumped and skid down the rail of the plaza steps, striking her landing and hitting Nishi Road. Wasabi and Fred leaped in after her, forming a triangle on the street.

Honey Lemon stayed on the plaza, running to the side instead. Hiro and Baymax remained where they were.

“Juniper!” Barb shouted, and Tadashi was immediately on alert, redirecting his aim for Juniper. “Squat dance, with feeling!”

Tadashi swore under his breath as she backflipped out of his blast range, causing him to scorch the ground.

Juniper landed backwards on her palms and soles, and kicked her legs, out sending bolts Gogo’s way.

They hit her skates, sending them flying from Gogo’s feet into the air, and barreling her over on her front with a shout.

Wasabi jumped ahead of her, but froze on the spot. He smiled nervously.

Tadashi grit his teeth again. The adrenaline hadn’t kicked in yet. ‘Oh no.’

He realimed for Barb.

“Probably not the right time right now,” Wasabi forced out, keeping their attention, “but your dance moves are perfection!”

Barb flipped out of Tadashi’s range, missing the stun blast to his aggravation, and lifted her leg to stroke her thigh with a coy smile. “She does have my thighs.”

And with that, she hurled a wave of bolts Wasabi’s way, just as she had yesterday, and he was dancing with a shriek before Tadashi knew it.

‘Unbelievable,’ he thought.

Grimacing, he sent another blast her way.

Barb avoided it with the same precision, laughing loud, and sent a spare shock from the next wave his drone’s way.

He jerked to avoid it.

Meanwhile, Honey Lemon jumped into the air from behind, a chemball in hand.

Barb, now turned around, noticed her. “Juniper!”
The duo leaped, and the shock generator followed Juniper’s way. The chemball hit the truck instead.

Juniper slid down the road, and caught the orb in her hands.

Tadashi’s eyes bulged. Her hands - she had it in her hands! Her bare hands!

He had to do more research into electricity and how it filtered through the body. He had previously assumed there was something about their outfits under the cloth that was protecting and enabling them, but -

Generating never leaving her fingers, Juniper threw her arms out and shot a powerful bolt at Honey Lemon. It hit her square in the armor, and sent her hurtling so high in the air, she was above several buildings.

Tadashi’s heart just about stopped as all the air left his lungs. ‘NO!’

Fred leapt into action, soaring high to catch her. Hiro and Baymax followed, grabbing the pair and helping them safely to the ground.

High Voltage - ugh, fine - was unperturbed. They came close together, shook their shoulders, dancing, and created a spherical bolt of electricity that they launched the gang’s way.

“Watch out!” Hiro yelled.

The others divided away and Baymax shot into the air.

The sphere didn’t keep going towards the plaza, though - to Tadashi’s horror, it turned upright and followed them into the air.

‘H-How did they do that!? ’ he thought frantically.

He didn’t have time to wonder long, however; at the last second, he saw a second one coming his way.

He zipped his drone upwards, flying away from it. Like its sister bolt, the second sphere followed him.

He thought quickly. ‘I have to get it to hit something else, that’s the only way to stop it. The tree, the truck - No, those’ll cause fires! I can’t send it back to them; assuming I can catch them, if they aren’t prepared for it, it COULD kill them and I’m not doing that. There’s also Hiro and Baymax, Hiro - ’

Hiro.

Tadashi shot his drone upwards as fast as he could. Hiro and Baymax circled in the sky, trying to get out of the bolt’s range, but it was still coming.

He made a mad dash for the first sphere. At the last possible second, he jerked.

The spheres clashed. For a moment, they paused in the air, one large, cackling sphere. Then it fizzled out in a wild array of sparks.

Tadashi didn’t have time to be relieved, unfortunately - one spark managed to catch Baymax, and it was enough to send him out of control again.
“No, no, no!” he screamed. “Baymax, Hiro!”

The spark turned into bolts and in a flash, Hiro was falling from Baymax’s back.

His stomach revolted. “HIRO!”

Fred hopped high into the air once more, catching him. “I got him, Tadashi!”

Tadashi only calmed somewhat. Baymax was still flying haphazardly. He aimed and fired. ‘Sorry, buddy. I’ll fix you again.’

“Power - Power - SURGE - Power - ”

Baymax was able to launch his rocket fist before the stun blast hit him, frying his armor and allowing him to fall to the ground. The rocket fist smashed into a street light, cracking it in half. The top tipped over.

The crowd beneath the pole’s reach dispersed in a hurry.

Except for one stupid girl too busy on her phone -

Tadashi recognized the girl in the same second Hiro launched himself out of Fred’s arms to save her. They rolled away, Hiro on top of her.

Tadashi raced over. When he got in range, Karmi was giggling and he saw the flash of her phone and Hiro reeling back.

Tadashi’s mouth dried. Their helmets were see-through and those two were face to face. He could only imagine the blackmail.

‘The little - ’

He fired at her hands.

Karmi wasn’t injured by the stun blast, but she did shriek as her phone flew out of her hands. Hiro leapt off of her and stumbled back. She jumped for her phone, releasing a mournful howl at the blackened screen. “It’s broken!”

She sent a vicious glare his drone’s way.

Tadashi smiled. That felt good. He’d deal with her entirely after the fight.

He turned his drone around.

All of the rest of the team’s eyes were on Hiro. Tadashi searched the scene. High Voltage, along with several bags of money, were nowhere in sight.

“Where did they go!” he demanded.

The others hurriedly looked around.

The distant sound of a car’s screeching tires and fading music suddenly gave him his answer.

They were gone, in who knew what direction, and Baymax’s scanner was once again broken.

Grinding his teeth, Tadashi’s whirled back around on Karmi - who was also gone.
“You’ve got to be kidding me!” he hollered.

The next day, the gang was moping in the cafeteria at their loss. Well, that and Hiro was worrying over Karmi having seen his face while Tadashi pondered how to get her to keep her mouth shut, assuming she hadn’t told anyone yet. He’d even come to campus, despite Hiro’s insistence otherwise, to confront her personally.

“Seven to two,” Gogo glowered, feet up on the table, “and they still kicked our butts. Again!”

Honey Lemon’s face hardened. “I’d call it seven to three. I’m counting that energy orb thing. Shock generator. Ugh.”

Fred pressed his finger into the table. “You mean that thing that makes it like the circus bear in Captain Fancy Issue 188?”

Tadashi scowled at him. Between their second loss, nearly losing Hiro and Honey Lemon last night, Baymax’s second frying, Karmi’s picture taking, and his own pride as an Amazing Man fan, he was not in the mood to hear this. “It’s not at all like the bear, Fred! You made me read the leaked pages online with you, the orb and bear have nothing to do with each other!”

Fred shot his finger at him. “Yes, they do! Grizlovich was the mastermind the whole time!”

“Okay, who cares?” Hiro shoved his hands in his jacket pockets. “As if losing was bad enough, Karmi got a good look at my face!”

Wasabi didn’t seem terribly concerned. “Tell her you have a clone?”

Tadashi sent a death glare at him. Wasabi sombered and scooted an inch away.

Hiro took his joke seriously, though. “Wasabi, she’s biotech; she’ll see right through that.”

“This is important, guys,” Tadashi informed them darkly, watching the gang squirm under his gaze. “If any of our identities get out, that means trouble for us - either in the form of the police because vigilantism is illegal, or bad guys coming after us in our homes. Frankly, I don’t want to wake up to find the police dragging Hiro out of bed or High Voltage electrocuting him. Do you? Phrase your answers carefully.”

They exchanged nervous glances. Fred muttered something along the lines of dark energy.

Hiro was the only one who looked up at him at with a deadpan stare. “Thank you for the mental images, overprotective big brother.”

Tadashi merely shrugged. This was his job. “I’m serious, though. No one can know who any of us are.”

Hiro turned his head, and sighed.

Tadashi’s eyes followed his, and narrowed. Guess who was sitting across the room.

Hiro stepped forward. “Might as well get it over with.”

Tadashi followed him, ignoring the slight glare Hiro threw over his shoulder. They’d had this argument last night; he wasn’t going to let him confront her about their identities alone, his own be damned.
“Hey, Karmi,” Hiro called out casually as they approached.

She whipped her head around with a snarl and shot up, irksomely close in Hiro’s personal space, causing him to back up, and folded her arms. “Looks like I caught you!”

“Hey,” Hiro tried to smile. It faltered, but soon returned, anxious “Karmi, um - Any chance I could convince you to keep this quiet?”

Tadashi pressed his lips together in a thin line.

“Eww,” she moaned, and bent haughtily with one hand on her hip. “You think I want people to know you have a crush on me?”

Hiro did a double take. “Ew, what!?”

Tadashi brow jumped to his hairline. ‘What!?’ was right.

Karmi threw her head back dramatically. “It’s sooo obvious! You’re always saying stuff like, ‘Hey, Karmi, we should work on our project.’ N5-4 totally called it.”

“Wait, no - !” Hiro shuddered in disgust.

Tadashi stepped forward, shoving himself between the two of them. He was only a foot taller than Hiro, but he only went up to his shoulders; Karmi might have been taller than his brother, but he still towered over her. “Knock it the fuck off right now, Karmi,” he warned. “Hiro does not have a crush on you and you know it. He’s trying to do the assignment Granville gave both of you and is grading you on. No one could have a crush on you after how repulsively you treat them, and you are not worth an F. Grow the fuck up. And in case you didn’t notice, your viruses aren’t alive and they don’t actually talk back to you. N whatever didn’t call anything, you’re just being an obnoxious bully - which is sadly normal for you, from what I hear.”

Hiro blinked rapidly up at him, surprised.

Karmi cowered under his glower, but soon glared up at him. “Oh, and you think you’re so much better? Because everyone loves you and your lame ideas? You’re a creepy FREAK just like him! I guess it runs in the family!”

Tadashi wasn’t going to rise to the bait. “I’m warning you right now, Karmi: Grow. The fuck. Up. You’re not getting away with how you’ve treated Hiro so far, I can promise you that, and you’ll only be digging your own grave further if you don’t stop this now. Am I clear?”

She wrinkled her nose, face twisting. “Or what? You’ll tell Professor Granville? Ha! She’ll never believe you; unlike that uptight loser Callaghan, I have her wrapped around my finger and can do whatever I want! She never punishes me no matter who tells her WHAT. So there!”

“Are you forgetting,” Tadashi curled his lips, careful not to reveal the real plan yet, “that Hiro’s been recording your ‘hang outs’? It won’t be your word against his.”

Her face fell, but she recovered quickly enough. “You won’t show her. You’re going to make me look good.”

Before Tadashi could demand why on Earth he would do that, Hiro swiped her dead phone. “What
What about last night -?

Karmi snatched it back. “That guy saved my life! He can say ‘Hey, Karmi’ to me all he wants! Unlike you!”

Tadashi scanned her face, which she was now lovingly rubbing her phone against. His eye twitched in disbelief. She really made no connection between Hiro and the hero who got her butt out of the street light’s way. It wasn’t even denial; she flat out didn’t know.

‘And this girl goes to SFIT?’

“Okaaay,” Hiro was sincerely creeped out, and turned on his heel, speaking fast, “ByeKarmi!”

Tadashi moved to follow him, but paused. He sent her one final glare. “You’re more than old enough to know how you treat people is wrong, and considering where we are, you should know better than to bully Hiro because you’re jealous he was smart enough to get in here younger than you. You ARE going to regret this, Karmi.”

“Bite me!” she snapped.

‘Oh, I will,’ he thought, and turned his back on her completely. ‘You don’t mess with older brothers’ little brothers.’

Hiro paused half way back to the gang, who were watching them from afar, and threw his hands out at Tadashi. “Does she seriously not know!? And she loves me - the other me!”

“How did it go?” Honey Lemon asked, and gasped. “She knows? Ooo, I can make a memory wiping potion!”

Tadashi stared at her. “That’s not science,” he repeated her own words, the very words she told Fred all the time.

“But I think I finally cracked the code with Freddie’s help!”

Tadashi stared at her still. “I heard words come out of your mouth but they weren’t English, Japanese, or Spanish. Can you use one of them this time? Preferably one of the first two, I don’t speak Spanish.”

Honey Lemon flicked her wrist out in dismissal.

“She didn’t know it was me!” Hiro blurted.

“What?” Wasabi jerked his head up. “How could she not know?”

“It’s worse,” he continued. “She’s in love with him. Me. I - I don’t know, it’s complicated.”

Fred grinned. “Ahhh, the power of the secret identity. Intrepid investigator Rita Rampart never realized cab driver Lash Looper was secretly Captain Fancy!”

Tadashi groaned. “Enough with the rip off!”

Fred slammed his hands on the table. “He is not a rip off!”
“Rita Rampart and that plot are rip offs of ace reporter Ayano Zane and her duel relationship with Amazing Man,” Tadashi argued. “Besides, secret identities are part of every superhero story, Fred!”

“They are completely different characters and plots!” Fred maintained. “Following the same tropes doesn’t make one a rip off!”

Gogo scoffed. “They’re at it again. Can’t you be comic geeks some other time?”

Fred pushed out of his chair and grabbed Gogo by the hand. “I’ll show you all! Come on, to Fred’s room!”

“Wait - !” Gogo was ignored as Fred yanked her across the cafeteria.

“What about training tonight?” Wasabi asked worriedly, watching them go, leaving behind whatever conversation they’d been having while the brothers were gone.

“I guess tomorrow night,” Honey Lemon rubbed his shoulder, sympathetic.

Tadashi shook his head. “I don’t know what Karmi’s deal is, but she doesn’t know. She’s completely clueless. Just put it out of your head, Hiro; this is better than her knowing after all. It doesn’t matter if she has a crush on your hero self - all that matters is that she stops bullying you.”

Hiro didn’t seem to find that answer helpful. He sulked. “God, I - Ugh. Fine. Just please don’t tell me you’re going to go Granville now.”

Tadashi exchanged glances with Honey Lemon and Wasabi. He could read their stares: You haven’t told him yet?

“...I’m not going to Granville. Today,” he reluctantly told Hiro. “But this has to stop, Hiro. Don’t tell me you still want to make friends with her after that.”

His shoulders slumped. He looked tired. “I don’t want any enemies at school and no one’s going to do anything anyway, big brother. I know if I try hard enough, I can reach the...non-bully part of her that doesn’t have a weird crush on me. Probably.”

Tadashi frowned. “You did that all throughout high school. Why would it suddenly work now, Hiro?”

He scowled. “Because this is stupid! Bullying is stupid, rivalries are stupid, I don’t want people targeting me! Teachers don’t care, they never have, and nothing YOU do is going to help either! Just leave it alone and let me handle this!”

He stalked off towards the exit.

Tadashi’s heart sank.

“You haven’t told him?” Honey Lemon asked quietly, an edge of criticism in her voice.

“I thought we were all going to go to Granville with his professors and that petition,” Wasabi added, skeptical.

“We are,” Tadashi sighed. “I will tell him, I swear. But if I tell him too early, he’s going to flip out. He might try to stop us somehow.”

“What about keeping him away from Karmi?” Honey Lemon inquired. “Professor Sato told you to
keep them apart as much as possible. I get when you thought she knew about Big Hero 7, but it’s Wednesday; they have two more days to ‘hang out.’”

He shook his head hopelessly. “I’m trying, but if I flat out tell him to stay away, I know he won’t listen. Either way, he’s going to try to be her friend.”

“He’s going to be mad when he finds out you kept this from him,” Wasabi pointed out.

Tadashi rubbed his neck. “I know.”

“Tadashi - Mr. Hamada! Miss Velazquez, Mr. Anthony!”

Tadashi turned his head. Professor Sato came striding up to them, smiling.

“Good news,” he announced. “I discussed it with most of Hiro’s other professors, and we all have a free block of time to confront Professor Granville on Friday. Do you know when are he and Karmi meant to present?”

Tadashi searched his brain for the conversation he’d had with Hiro last night, when they eventually veered off from Karmi knowing to her bullying. “At - At one. As soon as he gets out of Yoshida’s class, he has to come straight to her office.”

Professor Sato nodded pleasantly. He held up a piece of paper with all sorts of classes and names listed on it, and gave it to Tadashi.

“Excellent. It’s cutting it close for time,” he admitted, “but between ten-thirty and eleven on Friday, no one is teaching or has office hours running. The rest of the day is nearly booked; we have a shared hour together from one to two, but that would be the same time as the presentation. And there’s just no way for tomorrow, on Thursday; we’re all booked one way or another.”

“We’re all free between ten-thirty and eleven,” Wasabi said. “We’ll be there, too.”

Tadashi thought about it. A half hour should be more than enough, even if it was cutting it close. He saw that Professor Yoshida’s class - the one Hiro was in - started at eleven. And his class with Froeb was the one that ended at ten-thirty.

“I still need to talk to Dr. Squires,” Professor Sato said. “I emailed him last night, but he never got back to me. He has a class ending about ten minutes before my office hours begin, so I have to hurry over there soon.”

Tadashi lifted his head. “Do you want me to go talk to him?” he inquired. “That way you don’t miss anyone that comes to your office. I have plenty of time, sir.”

Professor Sato hesitated. “Have you had him before?”

“No, but I know enough of Hiro’s schedule to know where his class is.”

The professor frowned. “We don’t teach all of our classes in the same room, Mr. Hamada.”

“But the general education courses are all in the same building,” he pointed out. “Okay, which room are you going to now?”

Professor Sato told him.

He nodded. “That’s Hiro’s. It won’t be a problem, Professor. I can do it for you. You’ve done so much for us anyhow.”
Professor Squires pursed his lips. “Dr. Squires… All right, if you really want to. Tell him what’s going on and about my email. He can come talk to me if he has any further questions. Thank you, Tadashi.”

“Of course.”

He glanced at his watch. “I have to go. His class is getting out soon, so you should be on your way. It’s not the end of the world if he refuses, but I don’t think he will from what I’ve heard. Feel free to email me later, or drop by my office afterwards with the news; if I don’t have any students, we can talk.”

“All right.”

Professor Sato smiled faintly, and left.

Tadashi turned to the other two, who looked up at him apprehensively.

“You want us to come, too?” Wasabi offered. “I’ve heard stuff about Squires. He kinda sounds intimidating. I’ve heard he’s got a real temper.”

He shook his head no. “You guys have classes coming up; I can do this on my own.”

“If you’re sure…” Honey Lemon trailed off uneasily. “Let us know how it goes.”

Tadashi found Hiro’s world history I classroom and waited as the current class filed out before peeking inside. The professor he assumed he was Dr. Squires sat at the desk in the middle of the front of the room, speaking with a young woman on the other side of it, half-turned as if to leave. He waited until she turned fully and stepped towards the door to make his way inside.

When the young woman caught sight of him, her cheeks flushed. As they approached, she came to a halt and stuttered, “H-Hi, T-Tadashi!”

Tadashi paused, smiling lightly at her. “Hey.”

She mirrored the smile, and took off for the door without another word.

Tadashi raised an eyebrow, but thought nothing more of it; he knew quite a few girls on campus had crushes on him. He wasn’t too interested in dating at the moment, though.

Dr. Squires turned his chair as he came up to the desk. “Hello,” he greeted uncertainly. “Can I help you?”

“Hi,” Tadashi replied. “My name is Tadashi Hamada. My younger brother Hiro is in your world history I class.”

Realization floated across the professor’s face and he nodded once. “I see. So what brings you here, Mr. Hamada? Will your brother not be attending class tomorrow? I can give you a copy of tomorrow’s course work if that’s the case.”

“No, he will be, but thank you,” he said.

So far, Dr. Squires didn’t seem as bad as Hiro made him out to be. Then again, Hiro wasn’t a fan of history and Tadashi remembered that one ancient world paper he had complained about. He could guess they didn’t see eye to eye, but the man didn’t seem as ‘annoying’ as Hiro claimed. Or as intimidating as Wasabi thought.
Dr. Squires frowned. “Then why are you here? It’s too late to enroll in one my classes, the deadline passed quite a while ago.”

“Have you gotten the email from Professor Sato?”

His frown deepened. “I have 146 emails in my inbox right now due to teaching five classes and giving major assignments in four of them at the moment, Mr. Hamada. Forgive me if I’m behind. No, I haven’t, and I likely won’t get to it until tonight. Perhaps you could inform me of its contents now?”

Tadashi took a deep breath. “Okay. Um, first, have you ever had another student named Karmi? I don’t know her last name, but some of the other professors said you caught her cyber bullying last year.”

Dr. Squires’ fingers tightened on the arms of his chair. Tadashi could almost hear him grinding his teeth.

“Yes,” he ground out. “I also have her for American history II this semester, sadly. Professor Sanderson is out until January, so her students have been shuffled around to the other history professors and I got stuck with her. And yes, I did catch her cyber bullying last year. At the end of the spring semester one of my students,” his eyes slid towards the door, possibly indicating the young woman who just left, “had trouble giving her end of the term presentation. I have a soft spot for that student; I believe she has social anxiety. I offered her the chance to present her project alone outside of class to make her more comfortable, but she refused. When it came time to present in front of everybody, she froze, and fumbled to read to her notes. I caught Karmi with her phone out, laughing quietly and recording the whole thing. The student saw, and soon so did others in the class. When I came up behind her, she was about to post it on social media. She even added sound effects, I later learned after her phone was confiscated. I’ve become infamous on campus for spending ten minutes of class screaming at a student. What does this have to do with Hiro? They’re not in the same class, I can assure you that. As I said, she’s in my American history II.”

Tadashi’s stomach sank. No; no, he did not want Karmi anywhere near his brother after hearing that. God help Hiro if he ever has trouble in thermodynamics (and god help her if Tadashi ever hears about it).

“Karmi and Hiro have a different class together,” he told him. “One of Professor Granville’s. She knows that Karmi has a history of mistreating other students, so she thought Hiro might be a good influence on her.”

“Hmm,” Dr. Squires put his temple against his fist. “Your brother is a good young man. There’s only been one day so far where he’s bothered to sit up straight and act like he’s paying attention in my class, but he works hard, doesn’t disrupt his peers, and is one of my best students. He’d probably be in the top five if his participation grade wasn’t so low. You said Professor Granville, not Sato?”

“What?” Tadashi shook his head. Okay, he hadn’t known about that when he’d told Hiro he didn’t need to do better in class. “I’ll tell Hiro to knock it off and participate more. Uh, but yeah. Professor Granville. She set them up together, only she told them she wanted Karmi to help him learn to socialize around campus.”

Dr. Squires’ brow furrowed. He removed his fist. “Karmi...helping your brother learn to socialize.”

“Yes, sir.”
“Karmi...who I’ve never seen get along with anyone, helping your brother...who, if I don’t see him strolling the grounds with a full group of others, I can hear from quite a distance away...socialize.” He blinked.

Tadashi was sheepish. Yeah, his brother and friends could be loud when they wanted. Which wasn’t infrequently.

“They didn’t believe that, did they?” Dr. Squires inquired. “There’s no possible way anyone could believe she could help him learn to socialize, even if he truly needed it.”

“I don’t know,” he admitted. Hiro had sounded like he couldn’t believe it, but he hadn’t seemed to catch on to the lie yet. “Here’s the thing: Karmi’s not helping Hiro. She’s not trying the least bit. Granville wants them to present a journal of all their ‘hang outs’ and what Hiro’s learned on Friday, but Karmi isn’t interested. Hiro took her place as the youngest student, so when she isn’t ignoring or blowing him off, she’s outright bullying him for it.”

He pulled a face. “I sympathize, Mr. Hamada, I honestly do. But why have you come to me about this instead of Professor Granville? I also fail to see how Professor Sato fits into this.”

“I did go to her,” he explained. “I went to her with two recordings of Karmi’s bullying. At first she accused me of misinterpreting the recordings without listening to them, then she admitted she knows what Karmi’s like and won’t call off the assignment. She won’t step in, punish Karmi, or protect Hiro. Despite the fact Karmi’s name has been put on her desk several times before this - which she admitted flat out to me.”

Dr. Squires sat up. His frown lengthened across his face, which turned dark pink.

“Is that so?” he muttered, as if talking to himself. “Well, that is certainly a problem. The girl should been expelled the first time her name hit Professor Granville’s desk!”

Tadashi’s curiosity was piqued. “What do you mean?”

Dr. Squires jolted, as if remembering he was there. He cleared his throat. “After I was finished screaming at Karmi in front of the whole class last year, I marched her down to Professor Callaghan’s office.”

Tadashi fought not to flinch. The name shouldn’t bother him as nearly as much as it did.

“He wasn’t thrilled,” Dr. Squires continued without missing a beat. “It wasn’t the first time she had been personally escorted to his office, but this was her worst offense. Apparently, the girl has no ability whatsoever to be civil to her classmates in any of her classes, if they make the mistake of breathing wrong in her direction. Professor Callaghan had already been through the list with her; he’d warned her multiple times, sent her to counseling twice, and punished her frequently with mandatory community service projects on campus. God knows why he didn’t expel her then and there, but he did warn her that she had not left the university with a good impression that year, and the first day her name landed on his desk in the fall would be her last day at SFIT. I supposed he wanted to give her one last chance to improve, perhaps on account of her young age. I say if she wants to act like a high school bully, send her back to high school entirely.”

That time, Tadashi did flinch. “Bullying doesn’t belong in any school, sir.”

Dr. Squires pursed his lips. “True, true; poor choice of words. Nonetheless, she doesn’t belong here. I can’t fathom why Professor Granville has chosen to not only keep her here, but allow her to bully another one of our other students? I presume you went to Professor Sato next?”
He nodded. “That’s what the email is about. No one’s happy about this, so he’s getting as many professors as he can to sign a petition to get Professor Granville to enforce the bullying and harassment policy.”

“I’ll gladly sign it,” he offered immediately. “Thankfully, she’s thought twice about recording one of her peers in my class again, but she has even less respect for me than your brother. I understand your brother; he doesn’t like history. I don’t appreciate open displays of boredom, but I understand where it comes from. She has a grudge against me, and if she and Janic- my other student - were in the same class together, I know she would go after her as well. Hiro shouldn’t have to put up with her because the university took her diaper away and told her it’s time to put on big girl pull-ups, she’s no longer the baby of the student body. No, her abhorrent attitude has gone on long enough and it’s high past time something meaningful was done.”

“Actually,” Tadashi said, “since you’re his professor, and have the added bonus of being familiar with Karmi, we were hoping you’d join the rest of his professors and my and Hiro’s friends in confronting Granville personally.”

“Done,” he agreed without question. “When will it happen? I won’t neglect my classes, so it has to be between them.”

“On Friday. We’re still figuring out the exact time because of everyone’s classes, including yours, but before they present would be preferable. When are you free before one?”

‘Please say between ten-thirty and eleven,’ Tadashi prayed.

“Before one?” he repeated. “Oh, no. I have two back-to-back two hour classes from eight-thirty to twelve-thirty, and another class beginning at two that won’t end until three-thirty. Unless we’re talking first thing in the morning; then I’m free.”

Tadashi’s face fell. He remembered the paper Sato gave him. “Professor Roe teaches a five to seven-thirty in the morning class and Professor Sato has a class from seven to nine. Squeezing between twelve-thirty and one won’t work either because Hiro and Professor Yoshida get out of class at one. I’d really rather not do this after they’ve already presented, sir.”

Dr. Squires tapped his fingers on his chair. “When exactly do they present?”

“As soon as Hiro gets out of laser photonics, he’s to report to Granville’s office. So, uh, a couple minutes after one?”

“Then I suppose your choices are to wait until later in the day or arrange the confrontation for today or tomorrow,” he stated simply. “Were you planning to use that time to get signatures?”

His shoulders slumped. “That, and no one’s schedule really fits...especially at this point in the day today…”

“Then it’s either after they’ve presented,” Dr. Squires told him, “or at the time the presentation would begin. Would that work?”

Tadashi stilled. “I - I don’t know. That’s - That’s cutting it super close, don’t you think?”

“It is,” he agreed, and his lips twitched. “It also means Karmi will witness first hand how much the faculty disapproves of her atrocious behavior, even if Professor Granville doesn’t. For Hiro’s sake, I’d send him elsewhere so he doesn’t have to watch; interventions like this can sometimes be difficult for victims to witness, so perhaps he should wait in the hall. If Professor Granville refuses to listen to us, what’s the next plan? Or is that it?”
He swallowed. “We - We send the recordings and an explanation of what’s going on to the university president.”

Dr. Squires’ eyes lit up. “To President Akyiama-Cortez? Wonderful! I should have thought of that myself. Oh, she won’t be pleased with Granville or Karmi at all. I still have a copy of the cyber bullying report from last year in my files. I can bring that along. If all else fails, I can send it in beside your recordings.”

“I’ll see if I can arrange a better time,” Tadashi said. “Professor Sato will likely email you again.”

“Of course, of course,” Dr. Squires rose to his feet. “Figure it out and let me know. As I said, it’s about time something meaningful has been done about the girl.”

Tadashi bit his lip. Scheduling this was going to be harder than he thought. Cutting it so close to the last minute and potentially having Hiro or Karmi there wasn’t at all what he’d planned. But he’d honestly rather not wait until they’d finished presenting; he had too good of a feeling Hiro would rely on old habits and lie in order to convince Karmi to be his friend. He had no desire to deal with the aftermath of that.

Nevertheless, he was glad to have Dr. Squires on board. “Thank you, Professor. You have no idea how much I appreciate your help.”

“You’re welcome, Mr. Hamada. I realize I said I have soft spot for my other student, but the truth of the matter is that I don’t tolerate the mistreatment of any of my students,” he told him. “Speaking of which, your, er, friend isn’t still bothering your brother to join his comic book club, is he?”

Tadashi bit his tongue in surprise. ‘Fred,’ he thought darkly. “No, sir. I told him off for it. He’s sorry and stopped.”

“Good, because I think he mortified Hiro when he displayed that cult-like sign to my class,” Dr. Squires remarked irritably.

Cult-like. Oh, god. ‘Fred…’

Dr. Squires calmed and held out his hand. “If that’s all, Mr. Hamada.”

Tadashi pushed his weight to one crutch and shook his hand, pushing Fred to the corner of his mind and remembering his manners. “Right. Thank you again, sir.”

He desperately hoped this wouldn’t backfire on him.
“We’ll start you with the basics,” Fred announced, pulling open one of the many drawers of his bedroom shelves, revealing it to be a long filing cabinet. “Since you’re new to comics, we’ll start with BattleMax, and Avenger Duck, and maybe throw in a little - ”

Gogo honestly didn’t care. She was only here because Fred had dragged her. That, and she was a teensy bit curious how a comic about circus bears was going to help them. High Voltage had beaten them twice now, and at this point, she almost ready to do anything to nail them.

“Skip the training wheels,” she snapped, brushing her fingers over the file labels. “I’m going straight to Captain Fancy 188.”

Fred sputtered, racing to slam the cabinet closed.

Gogo retracted her fingers, caught off guard.

“No!” he yelled, planting himself back against the shelf.

Gogo put her hands on her hips. “Fred,” she asked steadily, “It’s the only way we’ll figure out how to beat High Voltage. You said so yourself. I won’t crease its stupid pages or anything.”

“Stupid!?” Fred cried. He pointed an angry finger at her. “You need to dial it down before you crease our friendship.”

Gogo scowled, crossing her arms.

“You don’t rummage through classics comics like we’re barbarians,” he scolded.

She raised a mocking brow. “According to Tadashi, Captain Fancy isn’t a classic; it’s a rip off of Amazing Man.”

Fred straightened in a huff. “One, you are not ready for the amazingness of Amazing Man. Two, while Tadashi and I are both dirty fanboys of Amazing Man, he is wrong on every level when it comes comes to the Amazing Man-Captain Fancy controversy. Don’t quote a false prophet.”

False prophet. Gogo’s arms sagged. She signed up to be a nerd, not a geek. She tuned whatever he said as he put some other comic book away after that.

Then all of a sudden a metal cannister was in her face.

“Gum,” Fred said, holding out a utensil next to it.

Gogo glowered, but reached into her mouth to hand it over.

“Thank you!” Fred dropped into the cannister. He tapped the utensil tongs together. “And the back up!”

Gogo started, but reluctantly handed the second wad in her mouth over.

Fred set them aside, grabbing a pair of gloves. “Hands up!”
Gogo obeyed, if only to get this over with faster.

Fred put his own gloves on, and as he stepped away, quickly admitted quietly, “Also, I should probably tell you I don’t have Captain Fancy Issue 188. Okay!”

Gogo’s neck snapped up. “What.” Suddenly, she remembered Tadashi’s comment on reading leaked pages online with Fred. She sent a death glare at his back. “Fred!”

Fred, back still to her, put a hand to his chin. “I only know what’s in it based on whispered rumor and alleged leaks.”

Gogo’s will faltered. “Please don’t start at the beginning!”

“I’ll start at the beginning!” Fred decided enthusiastically.

Gogo facepalmed and looked around the room pleadingly.

Fred grabbed a flashlight and flicked it on his face, even though she couldn’t see it.

“It’s 1963. Disgruntled artist AJ Doherts slips a wildly inappropriate drawing of Captain Fancy into Issue 188. It wasn’t until after it was printed that people discovered the offending image. The entire run is pulped, save for one copy, smuggled to freedom. Few have ever seen it. To my eternal frustration, I am not one of those lucky few.”

Gogo crossed her arms again. “So where is it now?”

Fred peered over his shoulder with a glare. “In the clutches of my arch-nemesis. Be forewarned, he’s a dark and dangerous foe.”

A comic geek was a dark and dangerous foe.

Aaaaand Gogo didn’t care anymore. “Great. I know you’re going to drag me to meet him, but let’s do it tomorrow. Honey Lemon and Wasabi wanted to train tonight, remember?”

Fred considered this thoughtfully. “Hmmm… True, they did... And I can’t stand the little fiend... All right, tomorrow night at sunset!”

“At six, when both our classes are over,” she corrected sternly, grabbing her phone out to text the others.

Fred shot a finger up in the air. “At six!”

It wasn’t long before the whole group was in Fred’s backyard for training, most of the gang suited up.

Wasabi was eager to practice against an opponent he could neither cut nor cut the weapons of, so he was up first. Honey Lemon had mass produced a quantity of harmlessly durable chemball to launch at him from a distance while she, Hiro, and Fred ran across the yard, dodging his attacks and flinging them at them. Gogo had participated during the first twenty minutes, but quickly grew bored with the activity - it wasn’t helping her any and she didn’t feel it was fair to have Wasabi up against four opponents when they were training for two. So now she was taking a break on the deck, where Tadashi, Baymax, and Heathcliff were.

Heathcliff and Baymax were supervising from afar for injuries, while Tadashi was busy adding a thin yet strong layer of insulation to the inside circuitry of Baymax’s suit. Gogo sat down beside
his chair, one leg propped up and her arm resting on her knee. Her helmet was on her other side.

“So,” she began, “got any ideas in that genius brain of yours how to actually beat High Voltage?”

Tadashi glanced at her behind his goggles, and lifted the tool in his hand from the chest armor in his lap. “We need a real strategy, that’s for sure. Jumping in and making uncoordinated, individual decisions on the spot isn’t helping us. Luckily, since we’ve fought them twice now, we have a somewhat better idea of their moves and tactics than before.”

“In other words…” she prompted.

He sighed. “In other words, High Voltage is an incredibly athletic, flexible, and quick-thinking duo with the potential to blow us a good hundred yards away on our butts and that’s without critically injuring us. Your suits don’t fry the same way Baymax’s does because they’re not as hooked up to your weapons, which aren’t all electrically powered anyway, but I do think they’re not trying to kill us. Well, yet, anyway. Barb and Juniper are self-absorbed and egotistical. They want all the perks of real stars: money, fame, and endless love and praise. They’ll attack anyone that gets in their way, but they don’t seriously hurt them, civilian, officer, or superhero. They either don’t have it in them to seriously hurt anyone for conscience reasons, or they don’t want murder charges stacked up against them if they do get arrested. Whatever the case, they’re smart and agile enough that underestimating them is a mistake and we need to be on guard, coordinated, and ready to take advantage of whatever we can to stop them as much as possible.”

Gogo was slightly taken back. That was a pretty accurate assessment. He had put into words everything she had thought but couldn’t herself. Mainly, based on their previous fights, all her thoughts on the situation ended up coming back to how annoying and irksome the duo were.

“So what’s the plan?” she questioned. “How are we going to do this?”

Tadashi dove back into his work. “I don’t know. I’ve been so preoccupied with Hiro and all this bully nonsense, I’m barely thinking of High Voltage. Before you sat down, I was mostly worrying about how we’re going to Granville’s office at the same time Hiro and the brat present.”

If Gogo was slightly taken back before, she was fully startled now.

The situation with Hiro was pretty damn important - their best friend and his brother was being bullied, and the highest ranking person on campus didn’t care - but she didn’t find it as nearly as threatening as High Voltage. The idiots on the streets might laugh and cheer at them, but the fact remained electricity could kill; she didn’t need all her electromagnetic and engineering courses over the past three years to tell her that. Even if they weren’t out to kill, it would only take one accident to, at the very least, put someone in the hospital. Gogo understood how nerve-wracking the bullying was, but to the point he - Mr. I’ll Run Into a Burning Building to Save a Life Even Though I’m Not a Fireman and Know Better Than This - was too consumed by that to give much thought to High Voltage?

That was...she didn’t know quite how to describe that. Unsettling was the best she could think of.

“Are you all right, Tadashi?” she inquired, not sure what to make of him; she was torn between concern and flat out disbelief.

He looked up at her, surprised. “Yeah, why?”

“You…” she trailed off, but forced herself to get it together. “You’re not worried they might accidentally hurt someone?”
The look Tadashi gave her was nothing short of wounded, and Gogo immediately bit her tongue in guilt at it.

“Of course I am,” he replied quietly, somehow sounding like a kicked puppy. “How - ? What gave you that idea? I want them stopped as much as you do so no one does get hurt, accidentally or not. What do you think I am, some sort of monster?”

Gogo’s gut told her to go back. Something was off about this and she didn’t like it. “No! I just - I figured you must be confident they won’t hurt anybody in the end if you’re more worried about Hiro.”

Behind the safety goggles, Tadashi’s eyes still displayed hurt, but she noticed his jaw tighten. “I’m worried about both,” he told her, in a controlled voice. Nevertheless, she picked up on a twinge of fear in his next line. “I’m not a monster, Gogo, I swear; I do care. Hiro’s my brother and I’m worried about him is all. I know we’ll beat High Voltage in the end, once we have a real plan. I’m not so sure Hiro will come out of Friday unscathed, especially if he sees Granville not caring and we have to go to the president next. Please don’t think I’m like - Please don’t think I don’t care about people; that’s not me at all.”

Alarms were going off in her head, but Gogo couldn’t diagnose what exactly was the problem. She hadn’t accused him of not caring, but that’s what he was interpreting her confusion as. She looked up to Baymax for help, who was staring down at Tadashi.

“My scanners indicate:” he began, “a high drop in your mood, Tadashi. You are exhibiting signs of: stress, sadness, fear, irrita-”

“I get it, Baymax,” he cut the robot off.

Gogo blinked. “I’m - I’m sorry. I didn’t mean it like that, Tadashi.”

Baymax waddled around to face them. “Perhaps it would be a good idea to confide in Gogo your feelings, Tadashi.”

She raised an eyebrow. “Yeah? What feelings?”

Tadashi’s shoulders slumped and his brow furrowed. He sighed again, this time aggravated. “I’m worried about both,” he repeated. “We seriously need to stop High Voltage and I have to figure out what to tell Hiro about Friday. It’s bothering me like you wouldn’t believe. That’s all.”

Gogo peaked around Baymax to get a view of Heathcliff’s reaction; he was hearing this, too. Heathcliff, however, remained as rigid as ever, with his eyes on the others.

Tadashi gave her a faint, thin smile. “Look, I’m worried so I’m overthinking stuff. I’m sorry. I thought you said something that you didn’t and overreacted.”

She tilted her head. ‘You thought I called you a monster. Where did that come from?’ This was unsettling, but Gogo wasn’t one to hold back or mince words, so she asked that aloud. “What did I say that made you think I was accusing you of being a monster?”

His expression slipped and he paled. “Nothing.”

“It wasn’t nothing,” she pressed. “You admitted I didn’t say that, but something made you think it. What’s wrong, Tadashi?”

Baymax put a comforting hand on the back of Tadashi’s neck. “Talking to friends is good for one’s
emotional health. I encourage you to speak up, Tadashi.”

For a split second, Tadashi’s face twisted in a way that Gogo hadn’t seen his face twist before. Before she could identify what it was, unfortunately, he let the expression fall and lidded his eyes in exhaustion.

“You implied I didn’t care about people being hurt,” he murmured. “In the end, Callaghan didn’t care who got hurt, despite everything we knew about him before.”

Gogo was stunned. “Callaghan? You thought I compared you to Callaghan?”

She went over what she said aloud in her head. No, she hadn’t implied that at all, she’d chosen her words carefully. But that’s kind of what she’s thought, hadn’t she - that was he more concerned with the bullying than High Voltage? That’s why it threw her off. Had she said something else aloud that she hadn’t realized? Tadashi had never given her such a wounded look before, as if she had somehow betrayed him.

Then again, she knew how much he used to look up to and aspire to be like Callaghan. Perhaps Yokai had done him more damage than she noticed before.

“Tadashi, I would never accuse you of being like him,” she told him vehemently. “You’re nothing alike. I was surprised is all. You sounded - Whatever, I was wrong. I know you’re not like that. You’re not.”

Tadashi gave her another faint, thin smile. “We both apologized. Let’s forget about it.”

Baymax removed his hand. “Tadashi, you should continue -”

“Baymax, Fred just set his mom’s flower bed on fire. That’s a safety hazard; go put it out, please,” Tadashi pointed to where Fred was currently hopping from foot to foot, yelling about his mom was going to kill him.

“I’ll get the fire extinguisher,” Heathcliff volunteered, as Baymax’s safety protocol kicked in and he left the deck. Heathcliff moved towards the mansion.

Gogo rose to her feet. “Baymax wants you to talk about your feelings, eh? And you don’t want to?”

Tadashi gazed up at her like a deer in headlights.

She put a reassuring hand on his shoulder. “Hey, I get it. I’m not much of a talker myself. But when you’re ready, we’re here for you. Just know that I’d never think to put you and Callaghan in the same box. You could never be the man he revealed himself to be.”

He nodded dumbly. “Thanks.”

The others were making their way over.

Gogo decided it was time to change the subject. “So High Voltage. What are we going to do about them?”

The rest of the gang, sans Baymax putting out the flower bed, gathered round. Hiro kept his eyes on the robot as he stood beside the others.

“When it comes to High Voltage,” Tadashi started, “we can’t really come up with anything
concrete; we don’t know exactly what they’ll do. But we do know enough to put something together. We just have to be flexible enough that if they pull something out of the blue, we won’t be scattered and scrambled like we were before.”

“Like a back up plan!” Fred jumped up and down. “So if plan A doesn’t work, onto plan B!”

“Sort of,” Tadashi replied. “It’s more so that we’ll be prepared for anything.”

“The shock generator is their power source,” Honey Lemon said. “That’s the key to taking them down.”

“We’ll need a better distraction to get them away from it,” Hiro pointed out.

Heathcliff exited the mansion, extinguisher in hand, only to see Baymax waddling away from the foamy flower bed. He turned back inside.

Baymax returned to the group. “According to my data, Barb Harding directs several of Juniper Harding’s actions; however, she is also frequently frustrated with both our appearances and her daughter. My scans have detected her high level of frustration on both Monday and Tuesday night.”

“She was scolding her when we got there last time,” Wasabi nodded. “You wanna try turning them against each other?”

Baymax blinked. “I am merely reporting my data.”

“It’s good data,” Hiro rubbed his chin. “They’ve got massive egos. If we turn their egos against each other, that might give us enough time for Tadashi to stun them and for us to get the generator.”

Tadashi frowned. “It might, but I don’t want to rely on that too heavily. For all we know, they’ll just bicker while saying in tune with each other.”

Hiro pursed his lips. “They used some of the same tricks against us yesterday that they did the last time. The bolts at Wasabi, making Baymax go haywire, flipping away from all of our attacks - they introduced some new stuff yesterday, but it might indicate a pattern.”

“Or it’s because that’s how they beat our butts the first time,” Gogo grunted sarcastically. Then it hit her. “Which, if it is, we can use to our advance next time. If they believe the same moves will beat us, we can work around them.”

Hiro nodded. “Exactly. And - And, all of their moves basically come down to shooting electricity at us. Bolts, spheres, sparks. They did have that fence that redirected Gogo’s disk and somehow had those spheres chasing after us, but it’s all just electricity - powerful electricity, but electricity.”

“And they aren’t trying to kill us at the moment,” Tadashi stated. “Their offense is essentially defense. The goal isn’t the hurt us, it’s to keep us away as much as possible. Distance is their goal. They keep us at arms length, scatter us to divert our attentions, and make their escape with money in hand while we’re fumbling around from afar.”

Fred threw back his suit’s hand. “Huh. I wonder if they’re doing it on purpose.”

Gogo shot him a flat look. “What do you think, Fred? That their battle tactics are coincidental?”

Ignoring his awkward laugh, Gogo thought about it. This could very well work in their favor. High Voltage had to think they were incompetent losers by now, so of course they’d rely on the same
tricks. Of their more creative ones, it still boiled down to a game of keep away. The duo could leap out of range of anything - provided they knew it was coming. And they made their escape when they believed the team was too distracted to handle them. And Barb did get frustrated with Juniper’s ego, the same ego she had.

All the pieces were in front of them. It was simply a matter of putting them together in a way that fit now.

“I might have it,” she told the group quietly

“What’s your idea, Gogo?” Honey Lemon asked.

She glanced down at the armor in Tadashi’s lap. “There’s no doubt they’ll use the same tricks as before. If some of us work as distractions, and of them a few act as though they’ve been beat again, the others can jump in to get the generator. Let’s say, you, Wasabi, Fred, and Honey Lemon and I confront them directly. If Wasabi and I were to go down and struggle to get back up, but you three are still an active threat and can keep them busy - and we can use their egos to keep their mouths and minds on us - then Hiro and an insulated Baymax can fly down behind them and snatch the generator.”

Honey Lemon brought her arms up vertical with her chest, grinning. “That’s great, Gogo!”

Tadashi and Hiro exchanged looks.

“It is,” Tadashi said. “But one problem we’ve had both times is not getting in each other’s way and staying on our feet. We want to keep their attention on us, but as soon as one of us is down, they go for the others - and they’ve done a good job of picking us off one by one. That’s why we have to be coordinated.”

“Plus, won’t they notice if Baymax and I aren’t there?” Hiro questioned. “I’m tiny, but Baymax is huge and they’ve gone for him twice; they’ll notice he’s not there for sure. It cold set them off. Otherwise, it is a great plan.”

Fred tapped his claws together, a fake sigh on his lips. “I guess this is why we’ll have to consult Captain Fancy issue 188.”

Tadashi rolled his eyes hard. “You do that, Fred. Good luck convincing the angry munchkin to let you have a look at it.”

Gogo folded her arms. “I’m guessing the angry munchkin is his ‘archenemy’?”

Tadashi gave her a cheshire grin. “Has Fred mentioned he’s eleven yet?”

Her eyes popped out of her head. “He’s WHAT?”

Fred jumped into a wide legged stance and curled his claws above his palms. “He cut the power to my house to get that comic!”

Wasabi, Honey Lemon, and Hiro looked at him strangely.

Gogo looked at Tadashi, in disbelief that Fred’s ‘archenemy’ was a little kid. “Have you met this kid?”

His smile tightened. He shrugged one shoulder. “He’s a brat, that’s for sure, but he’s nothing compared to what Hiro used to be.”
Hiro’s jaw dropped. “Hey! What does that mean!?”

Tadashi laughed. “I’ve spent fourteen years babysitting you, a good seven of which I pulled the same dangerous stunts with you. We were both worse than he could ever hope to be, but you’ve always had a thing for pushing farther than I have, little brother. Do you even remember being eleven? Personality-wise, though, we were little angels compared to him.”

Gogo facepalmed. “Great. And I get to meet him tomorrow. This’ll be fun.”

Wasabi took a hesitant step backwards. “Yeah, anyway, let’s get back to training. That way, when we face High Voltage, no one actually goes flying for real. I don’t wanna tap dance on the street a third time.”

“Good idea,” Hiro agreed, already running off. “Let’s do that!”

Fred pouted, saying nothing as he followed Hiro and Wasabi onto the grass.

Gogo was about to head after them as well, when she overheard Honey Lemon say, “You haven’t told Hiro about Friday yet, have you?”

She halted in her tracks. “Huh?”

Tadashi looked like he wanted to melt on the spot. “I will, you guys. I just - he’s not going to take it well.”

“But so many professors are vouching for him,” Honey Lemon pointed out. “He has to believe they care when he hears that.”

“If he finds out Granville didn’t care, the rest won’t matter,” he argued. “And I can already him pointing out the president won’t care either, she’ll just want to avoid a scandal - assuming this would even turn into a scandal. He’s determined to make Karmi his friend, and he can be a deviant, sly, little thing when he wants to be. He might try to pull something to stop us because he’ll think we’ll ruin his chances of winning her over.”

Gogo blinked. “Are you sure he will? What could he possibly do at this point? Tell Granville a petition is being signed to make her do her job?”

“He’ll think of something,” Tadashi muttered darkly. “You think I like seeing him around that obnoxious brat? Listening to more and more evidence of her tearing him down? But he won’t listen to me. If I tell Hiro to stay away from a place or somebody, you know what he does? Decides he knows best and does what he wants anyway, all the while doing what he can to cover himself. He tries to make friends with bullies and he goes to Good Luck Alley. All he’ll do is get mad that I’ve interfered and go head over heels trying to fix it before I’ve ruined it for him. That could mean disaster for us.”

“So when are you going to tell him about our intervention?” Gogo asked. “At the presentation?”

Tadashi hesitated. “No! But...tomorrow night. I’ll tell him tomorrow night. Or when he gets out of Granville’s class Friday morning. As long he doesn’t have time to do something stupid…”

“You can’t keep it from him forever,” Honey Lemon was firm. “Don’t wait until the last second, Tadashi. He has a right to know beforehand.”

“You’re right, you’re right,” he ran a hand over his face. “I know. But I won’t risk him sabotaging us in the hopes Karmi will like him more. She won’t. I’ll tell him tomorrow night.”
Reluctantly, Gogo and Honey Lemon trekked into the grass, exchanging glances.

The next evening, on Thursday, Gogo reluctantly allowed Fred to drag her to his so-called foe’s place. Which turned out to be a comic book store the kid hung out in. If she was supposed to be impressed, especially with the way Fred stood angled at the door, arms crossed and refusing to look at the eleven year old, he was sorely mistaken. The kid sitting the the clerk counter was a sort, chubby thing idly reading a comic, likely while his dad or whoever owned the store was in the back.

She couldn’t believe they were doing this. That dumb comic better have had the secret to beating High Voltage, or else Fed was going to hear it from her.

Gogo walked up to the counter and hit the bell, grabbing the boy’s attention. “Hey, kid, go get your dad or whoever runs this place. We need to talk to the owner.”

She’d rather ask his dad, an adult not involved in whatever rivalry Fred and the kid had, for the comic than his little son.

An arm descended from the ceiling to take the comic out of the kid’s hands, who smiled at her. “You’re talking to the owner, dream girl.”

Gogo raised an eyebrow high.

Fred slinked over. “Chilling, isn’t he?”

Not in the slightest.

The kid’s chair lowered and he walked underneath the counter bar. “Richardson Mole,” he cam around the corner and took Gogo’s hand, raising her other brow. “San Fransokyo’s most eligible eleven year old. And you are…?”

Gogo snatched her hand away before he could kiss her glove. “Much older than you!”

That didn’t deter the kid. “Nice.”

Gogo marched backwards. No, she wasn’t dealing with this. That comic better be worth it. “Fred, talk to him.”

Fred did, scolding, “Hey! This is a business call, Richardson! Keep it professional.”

The kid accepted that. “Very well.”

“We need to see Captain Fancy 188,” Gogo told him.

The kid put his finger to his chin, retreating to the counter. “Ah, the very issue I sniped from you at that online auction.”

Fred clenched his hand. “You cut the power to my house!”

“Those charges were never proven.”

Fred launched himself at the kid with a scream. Gogo intercepted and hurled him back. They didn’t need charges.

“Can we just see the dumb comic book?”
The kid turned around with a smirk. “Oh, I like you angry, dream girl.”

She narrowed her eyes. It was tempting to correct him that her name was Gogo or Ethel, not dream girl, but she had about as much desire to tell him her name or nickname as she did to call him by his name in her head.

The kid moved for the fake phone booth. “Follow me to - The Mole Hole!”

Taking the phone off the rack, the floor revealed itself to be an elevator and he disappeared beneath it.

Gogo and Fred stared.

“I’m waiting!” he called from below.

Fred and Gogo cramped inside, her head pressed awkwardly against his chest. (She hated being the short one and she hated that Fred was six foot.)

It turned out the floor wasn’t an elevator after all; it was a trap door. The both fell through the tube, Gogo landing butt first on a chair that moved the side while Fred hit the floor face first with a cry. When he sat up, holding his head painfully, they both got a good (read: terrible) view of the room.

To put it shortly, because Gogo was sure her brain was melting in her skull, it was arcade of Fred-themed video games designed to hurt or kill fake Freds.

They both stood. Gogo wondered if she had fallen into Wonderland. She did not want to be Alice.

The kid was shooting Fred cut outs with a slime gun when they found him.

“I told you he hates me,” Fred glowered.

“Beat my high score on any of these,” the kid said, “and I’ll let you see Captain Fancy 188.”

Gogo’s eye caught one game in particular and approached it. “Wack-a-Fred,” she commented, picking up the bat and hitting her palm. She did love wack-a-mole - she used to beat her sisters all the time at fairs as a kid - and some days she and Wasabi made a sort of competition out of how much they wanted smack Fred. “Let’s do this one.”

“Ooo, poor choice,” the kid mused. “This is my favorite game and my high score is - ”

Gogo ignored him and hit start. The Freds popped up and screeched “OW!” in a chorus of cries as she racked up the score, the real Fred cringing behind her, until the cheap plastic was literally breaking beneath her bat. Her final score was 999,999,999.

The kid’s eyes lit up. “I’m impressed.”

Fred shuddered. “I have concerns.”

The kid approached another game and hit a button, causing it to rise and reveal a steel plated door.

“Gum,” he held out a utensil like Fred had yesterday.

Gogo frowned, but handed it over.

To her disgust, he smelled it. “Strawberry. Nice.”
He put his hand on the lock pad and unlocked it, revealing the dumb comic, to Fred’s awe.

“It’s beautiful,” he breathed.

“Oh, just give it,” Gogo demanded, reaching forward.

Fred grabbed her wrist. “Bububup! Gloves!”

Hiro finally broke and took Baymax to school with him. He couldn’t help himself, despite his own protests; twice this week, the robot had been zapped out of control, and while his armor had protected him, his armor had also been the near cause of his own breakage both times. How often Baymax had been in danger lately was starting to weigh on Hiro’s shoulders. He felt better with him safe at his side at home, and maybe he’d woken up today after a particularly vivid nightmare and didn’t want to leave without him. He’d scowled and ignored Tadashi’s victorious smile this morning as much as he could.

It was good, though, to have him back around following Hiro between his classes and supervising his safety in the labs and Tadashi’s lab, making unintentionally silly comments and poking around curiously at he he observed. Hiro felt - was ‘safer’ the word? Or ‘more at ease’ the phrase? Relaxed and happier seemed to fit. He liked relaxed and happy.

Even without the recent disasters and last night’s nightmare, Hiro figured he shouldn’t have been surprised. Baymax was one of his best friends and like a second brother to him, strange as it might have sounded to others. Of course he made him feel more relaxed and happier.

Which was great, because he’d need that extra level of calm facing his next ordeal. Classes were over for the day and Friday was tomorrow. Karmi had to work on the journal with him.

Not that he was going to record it this time. Tadashi had had that look on his face and that tone in his voice yesterday; Hiro didn’t doubt he might go to Granville soon. Not that he thought she would listen, but still. Tadashi may have babysat him for him fourteen years, but Hiro had been babysat by him and once upon a time they were partners in crime to Aunt Cass’ frequent exhaustion, so he knew his brother could get crafty when he wanted. Hiro was likely being paranoid - no matter what Tadashi did, it wouldn’t work - but nevertheless, he kept the app closed on his phone as he walked the halls of the biological engineering building.

“Hiro,” Baymax said, “I do not recommend approaching Karmi. Your neurotransmitter levels indicate: apprehension, frustration, fear - ”

Hiro repressed a sigh as he went on. So much for relaxed and happy. “Yeah, I know, buddy. You don’t have to tell me what I feel.”

Baymax lowered his head to look down at him. “The effects of bullying can be severely psychologically damaging. One might argue deliberately seeking out a bully is a form of self-harm. It is against my protocol to allow my patients to harm themselves.”

Hiro rolled his eyes. God. “I’m not seeking her out to get bullied, Baymax, so don’t worry about it. I’m not ‘self-harming.’ I want to make friends with her.”

“I do not understand,” he replied. “Healthy friendships do not involve bullying.”

“Which is why if I make friends with her, she’ll STOP bullying me,” Hiro informed him. “That’s what I’m going for.”
“My data does not suggest a likelihood of success in this venture.”

Hiro rolled his eyes again as they came up to Karmi’s lab. ‘Yup, he’s my brother all right. Two overprotective brothers. Yay me.’

The doors slid open before him and he entered the lab with ease. The room was once again darkened, with Karmi at a table over a microscope.

“Hey, Karmi,” Hiro greeted, coming up to her. Then he remembered the previous day’s gross crush accusation. “I - I mean - ! Hi, Karmi, how’s it, uh, going?”

Karmi looked up at him, but didn’t deign to respond, instead returning to her microscope.

Hiro looked around, between the virus petri dish on the table, the blown up screen of the virus sample behind them, and Karmi’s biohazard suit, suddenly uncomfortable.

“Should I be wearing a biohazard suit?” he asked.

Karmi’s response was flat, almost sarcastic. “Are your eyes bleeding?”

Hiro’s eyes widened. He realized he had no idea what kind of viruses she worked with - only that they were deadly.

Baymax, upon hearing that, took Hiro by the chin and scanned his eyes. “They are currently not.”

Karmi lifted her face with a sick smile. “Then you’re fine!” She lowered it and shrugged. “Probably.”

Hiro swallowed. That wasn’t funny.

But if Baymax wasn’t worried, he had no reason to be, right?

“So,” he struggled to think of something to connect with her on, “you like, uh, dangerous organisms?”

“Duh,” she spat, lifting her face one more to roll her eyes to the ceiling in annoyance. She pulled away from the microscope to jab him in the chest with her gloved fingers. “By studying them, we can figure out therapeutic uses for them. It’s called ‘science,’” she mocked.

She picked up her pen and notepad and walked away.

At least that was a real answer, despite the mockery. Hiro smiled invitingly. “That’s actually interesting. ‘When you’re done, we could talk about my journal.” He took out his phone and opened the copy of the assignment Granville had sent him. “Uh, you know, j-just the one that’s due Friday.”

He couldn’t help the irritation in his voice. Okay, she did get to him.

Karmi scoffed as she typed at her computer. “Nobody cares.” She furrowed her brow and narrowed her eyes, shooting him a look. “Hand me N5-4,” she ordered.

Hiro started. “Oh, uh, sure.”

He put his phone down and looked around the table. There was only the one petri dish, but it was unlabeled. Was this the one she was studying, or was N5-4 the next one she was going to examine? He didn’t want to incite another bitter remark by handing her the wrong dish.
His phone vibrated. Wasabi’s picture was on the screen.

Before Hiro could react, though, the vibrations shook the petri dish, and the room around him suddenly was bathed in red light. An alarm sounded. He jumped up in terror. Oh no; the virus hadn’t gotten loose, had it!?

Karmi gasped loud. She shot over, eyes glued to the dish as she picked it up like an injured animal. “No! You KILLED N5-4!”

Baymax raised a finger, his chest lighting up with statistical data and facts. “This is a fortunate outcome. N5-4 would have soon reached a contagion factor of ten.”

His chest changed to a skull and bones symbol. Hiro did not like the looks of that; but by the sounds of it, the virus hadn’t gotten loose then, right?”

Karmi wasn’t paying attention. Her voice lowered and shook. “N5-4 was the first pathogen I ever grew.”

Baymax didn’t reply to that. “I will download instruction for proper disinfection methods to ensure no part of N5-4 survives.”

Karmi jerked her head around. “He was more than a flesh-eating virus!” She held the petri dish close, turning it sideways vertically and pressing it to her chest. “He was a friend.”

Flesh-eating. Friend. Hiro was disturbed.

“If you have any more N5-4,” he watched Karmi’s face harden in anger as Baymax continued, “in storage, we should also dispose of - ”

Karmi flung of the petri dish down hard on the table. “SHUT HIM UP!”

Hiro cringed in fear.

Baymax blinked. “I see you are upset. I have relaxation suggestions.”

As he listed his suggestions off, Karmi opened her lips, showing off her clenched teeth, and scowled all the more as Wasabi called again.

“Well!” she screamed. “ANSWER IT!”

Hiro clamored to grab his phone and spun around, pressing it to his ear after hitting the green button.

“High Voltage!” Wasabi didn’t wait for a hello. “San Fransokyo Trust! Now!”

“Okay, yeah,” Hiro forced out. “I-I’ll be there as soon as I can.”

He hung up and turned back around to Karmi, who was glaring fiercely at him. She looked like she was about to kill him. He tried to smile.

“So, something came up, and I need, um, we need to uh...Baymax and I gotta go.”

Karmi flung herself in his face. “YOU THINK I WANT YOU TO STAY!??”

Hiro didn’t need to hear anymore. He backed away slowly, and yanked the still talking Baymax along with him by the arm.
So much for that.

He scrambled out of the lab and made a mad dash down the hall to get to Tadashi’s lab, where their suits were.

It looked like he would be doing their assignment alone after all. He wanted to beat himself over the head. How could he get her to like him and knock off the attitude? He hadn’t mean to kill her flesh-eating virus, no more than he meant to take her place as the youngest student.

Hiro remembered the brief panic on her face when Tadashi brought up his recordings yesterday. Telling on her wouldn’t work, he knew, but it seemed Karmi didn’t know that. Maybe showing her he wasn’t about to rat her out to Granville would make up for today, or convince her at last he was genuine about being friends?

He wanted to sigh. He didn’t know. He’d have to figure it out later, though.

Back upstairs, Gogo watched as Fred leafed through the comic and the kid dusted his shelves. She’d tried reading over his shoulder, but quickly remembered why she didn’t read comics in the first place, and left it up to him.

Fred gasped when he found the page with the ‘offending image.’

“Good luck unseeing that,” the kid smirked.

Gogo had seen worse on the internet. She elbowed Fred. “Oh, come on. Grow up. Read faster.”

Fred regarded her with purse lips. “A wise man once said if you want to find a solution, you can’t rush Fred.”

Gogo grabbed his ear.

“Owowow! I’ll read faster!”

She let him go and he flipped the page. “Uh huh. Well, this is shedding some new light on the subject.”

Gogo’s phone rang. She picked it up and answered. “Yeah?”

“High Voltage!” Wasabi was frantic. “San Fransokyo Trust! Now!”

Gogo hung up without a word and turned to Fred.

“Yes! I get it!” Fred cheered.

“So you actually found an answer in that thing?” she questioned.

“Couldn’t be more clear,” Fred was confident.

“Great,” she said, dragging him away, ignoring the kid. “Time to roll.”

Gogo sped through the streets, suited up and with Fred on her back, the comms linked between everyone so they could quickly throw together a plan as they gathered at the bank.

“Where is everybody?” Tadashi demanded. “I’m on my way; my drone just left the café.”
“Honey Lemon and I are a few blocks away from the bank,” Wasabi replied.

“We’ll be there in two minutes!” she added.

“Wait for us!” Hiro ordered. “If they come out to escape, that’s one thing, but don’t go in there without a plan. We know from before they won’t hurt the workers inside.”

“Fred found a way to beat High Voltage,” Gogo announced to the others. “Captain Fancy had the answer after all. Fred, tell them.”

Fred jerked on top of her. “Wait, what!? No, that’s not what I said! I meant I found a solution to Hiro’s problem with Karmi knowing his secret identity! Basically, no one knows Lash Looper is Captain Fancy because people see what they want to see.”

Gogo had to resist the urge to launch him off her back.

“FRED!” she and Tadashi shouted in unison.

Fred winced, and bit irritably, “I’m sorry, Mom and Dad, but I never said I found a solution to High Voltage! Honestly, Issue 188 was kind of a let down. Maybe Richardson did me a favor when he cut the power to my house.”

Gogo groaned.

“Okay,” Hiro moved on, “then Gogo’s plan it is. I’m gonna make a minor change, though; Baymax and I will play bait. He’s insulated now, so they shouldn’t be able to send him blasting off again, but we can make it look like it. Wasabi, Barb will probably expect you to be an easy target again, so you go pretend to go down with us.”

“But I - !” He sighed. “Fine. I’m not pumped with adrenaline yet anyway.”

“Sorry. Next time, buddy. Fred, Gogo, you’ll be the real distractions, along with Tadashi, while Honey Lemon goes for the generator with her chemballs.”

A thought suddenly struck Gogo. Cut the power, Fred said. High Voltage would be expecting the same beat downs as the last two times.

“Hold it, genius,” she told Hiro, “I’ve got my own changes in mind. Listen up!”

The team burst in on High Voltage the moment they had the vault door open. Honey Lemon thought fast, producing and launching a chemball that sealed the large opening shut with slime.

‘I hope Gogo’s plan works,’ she thought.

Barb and Juniper whirled around.

“You don’t have to steal, you know,” Wasabi said next to her. “You guys have real talent!”

“Yeah!” Honey Lemon agreed. “You should audition for Top Feet!”

Barb was incensed. “Stars don’t audition!”

She sent a blast of bolts their way, bigger than what she had at their other fights.

‘No wonder Hollywood didn’t work out for them with that attitude,’ Honey Lemon thought as they
leaped out of the way. ‘I REALLY hope Gogo’s plan works. I don’t think they’re in the same mood tonight as they were before.’

Juniper twirled after them, her electricity spinning around her in a spiral. She threw her leg out with a stop, hurling the electricity towards them.

Honey Lemon threw herself the other way while Wasabi ducked to the floor.

The bolts hit the teller beam behind them. Honey Lemon’s heart leapt to her throat. It cut straight through the thickness, breaking the beam up and allowing it to fall.

Wasabi gasped, freezing on the spot.

Her fingers flew to her purse to make a protective sheild for him, but Hiro and Baymax beat her to it. They darted beneath the falling debris, catching the largest piece before it could land on Wasabi.

“Time to power down, ladies,” Hiro called out.

“Step off!” Juniper bounced on her feet. “We’re the headliners here! It’s Juniper’s time to shine!”

Barb jumped to her daughter’s side. “Juniper Launch! Two five seven eight!”

The electricity cackled around Juniper, and before Honey Lemon could see it, she was speeding towards them in the air like a missile.

Baymax caught her in his fist.

Juniper froze, perplexed, but then smiled devilishly. She planted her hands on his wrist, transferring her electricity.

“Buddy,” Hiro whispered.

Baymax dropped her and made a play at losing control, shooting into the air, careful to avoid the ceiling.

“Where’s your done?” Barb mocked. “Not here to save your friendly giant and baby boy?”

“I am not a baby!” Hiro yelled.

Gogo and Fred sped into the room, Fred leaping from her back. Gogo raced for Barb.

With a chuckle, Barb flicked a decently sized sphere at her skates.

Gogo was hurled backwards. Honey Lemon ran her way while Fred shot fire at the duo, deliberately missing, and Wasabi made a launch for Barb.

“You okay?” she whispered.

“Peachy,” she whispered back, and glanced at how Fred, a flailing Baymax, and Wasabi’s bodies shielded them from view. “Perfect. Insulation.”

Honey Lemon produced the chemballs. “Be careful. I think without the civilians around, they’re more comfortable using harsher attacks.”

She splotched two balls on her hand disks and handed her the other two.
“I’ve got it,” Gogo assured her. “Tadashi, you in range?”

“As much as I can be,” he answered through the comms.

Honey Lemon watched as Gogo picked herself up, waiting for an opening to present itself.

Barb sent wave after wave at Wasabi, who hopped and jumped away from them as best as he could, alternating between leaping back and advancing further. Juniper threw her arms out, whipping bolt after bolt at Fred.

Hiro glanced their way. “Baymax, move to the left some.”

Baymax opened, twisting and flailing along the way.

Honey Lemon and Gogo saw their opening. Barb and Wasabi were on one side, Fred and Juniper on the other. There was a clear path down the middle to the generator.

Gogo made a mad dash for it, zipping across the floor.

Barb and Juniper noticed her. They simultaneously sent bolts at her feet.

Gogo let them, launching in the air at the last second as her skates came off. She flattened her body out, diving for the orb. She released her disks, aiming them at the duo’s faces, which gave her enough time to slam her hands and the chemballs around the orb.

They landed on the floor with a THUNK, the orb completely encased in hardening insulation. She let it drop out of her hands like a bowling ball.

Juniper and Barb gaped. Juniper tried to hurl a bolt, but only sparks came out, hardly leaving her wrist.

“Use a catchphrase!” Fred encouraged. “Something that sounds dumb, like a joke, only it’s not!”

“Last dance, freaks,” Gogo announced, drawing her disks back to her with her magnets.

Fred laughed under his costume’s head. “GOOD ONE!”

Juniper looked uneasily at her mother. Barb held out her hand high.

“Juniper,” she said, “escape dance! Two five seven eight!”

It was then Tadashi’s drone made its appearance. “Not this time!”

He fired. Juniper and Barb gasped as the stun blast hit him, freezing their limbs and collapsing to the floor.

“Finally,” he sighed in relief. “Great work, guys! Gogo, that was amazing thinking on your part.”

Gogo smiled.

Honey Lemon and the others sprinted over.

Baymax scanned Barb and Juniper. “They are uninjured. The stun blast should wear off in a matter of hours.”

“They’ll be in police custody by then,” Honey Lemon said with a grin. “No more crime dancing.”
“Only one issue left,” she heard Tadashi mutter lowly on the comms.

“Yeah,” Hiro agreed. “Handing them over. Unless we should beat i before the cops arrive. Vigilantism is illegal, right?”

Honey Lemon frowned. She didn’t think that was what Tadashi meant.

When they got home and up to their room, Hiro settled into his chair at his computer and opened up a word document to work on his speech for tomorrow. First a rough draft to get his thoughts and ideas of what Granville would want to hear down, then a polished version to actually present tomorrow.

He had decided not to rat Karmi out. Not that it would help him anyway, when it came to Granville, but when it came to Karmi, she really might finally see he wasn’t interested in being her enemy. They had enough in common with being young and geniuses; he honestly would have preferred being her friend over target. If this didn’t prove it to her, he didn’t know what would.

This week, Karmi and I were paired together in order for to help me adjust to college life as an underage student. Being two underage geniuses surrounded by adults, Karmi enthusiastically, nicely, and helpfully -

“What are you doing?”

Hiro spun his chair around.

Tadashi stared down at him, face blank and lips tight.

Hiro slouched. “Writing a rough draft of my speech tomorrow.”

Tadashi read the word document over his head. His eyes hardened. “You are going to lie.”

“What else would I do?” he scoffed.

Tadashi sucked in a deep breath. “Hiro...I went to Professor Granville already.”

Hiro perked up slightly. “Oh...What did she say?”

The brief silence and visible hesitance on his brother’s face told him everything. Hiro let his body sag. He didn’t know why a small part of him was surprisingly disappointed; he’d known this would happen. “She didn’t care, did she?”

Tadashi opened his mouth desperately, but nothing came out.

Hiro curled his lips, both in an ironic smile and a sympathetic one. “I’m sorry?” he tried. “I know you thought SFIT was different -”

Tadashi suddenly found his voice. “SFIT is different, Hiro! I went to other professors after her. They’re going to help me confront her and make her enforce the bullying and harassment policy.”

Hiro burst out a breathless, frantic laugh that had no warmth, the filter between his mouth and brain broken. He thought of Sullivan and Yoshida, and how they acted like they might have cared, but whose words would mean nothing in his situation. “So? They can’t make her do her job, Tadashi. They’re beneath her. Besides, what makes you think they were telling the truth when they said they’d help? My teachers in high school said they’d take care of the bullying there, too.”
Tadashi’s adam’s apple bobbed. “They care, Hiro. They care more than you think. Karmi has a history. If Callaghan were still there, she would have been expelled by now.”

A wave of emotion washed over Hiro at that name. He didn’t have clear feelings for the former professor after what he did. Part of him despised the old man for what he did to Tadashi, for how he became Yokai and didn’t care about anyone’s lives. Part of him, horrifyingly, empathized with him. He did everything because he thought someone had killed his daughter and took no responsibility; Hiro had nearly killed him because he’d nearly killed his brother and took no responsibility. That knowledge took him back to garage where he’d cried into his brother’s neck and apologized for violating Baymax. God only knew what he might have done had Tadashi been dead at that point. He didn’t want to talk about Callaghan.

“It doesn’t matter what Callaghan would or wouldn’t have done,” he declared. “Granville’s there and she already told you that she doesn’t care. Which means it doesn’t matter if I lie or not tomorrow. She won’t help. At least this way, Karmi might realize I want to be real friends with her instead of enemies.”

Tadashi shook his head furiously, his eyes begging Hiro to listen. “No, she won’t! You KNOW she won’t! She’ll take it as a sign she can keep doing this to you! Bullies don’t take these kinds of things as olive branches, Hiro; they’re relieved to know they can get away with whatever they want because you’ve proven you’ll never tell. Please understand that.”

“So what should I do?” he didn’t mean to bark, but he did. “Drop out of SFIT? Transfer somewhere else? I don’t want to leave San Fransokyo to go to another prestigious science university! And what if this happens again there? What do you want me to do, Tadashi?”

His brother grit his teeth. “The gang, a group of professors, and I are going to Granville tomorrow with a petition signed by a bunch of other professors. If she still doesn’t care, we’re going over her head to the president of the university.”

Hiro flicked his wrist. “Well, good luck with that! The president will really care about two kids squabbling! I bet she’ll even fire Granville!” He slouched further and gave him an apologetic look. “Look, I know what you’re trying to do and I appreciate it. It’s the same thing you did in high school: everything you can to protect me.”

‘You always do everything you can to protect me. Unlike me, who doesn’t do enough to protect you.’

He batted the thought away. “I know you love me - I love you, too - and that’s why you’re so adamant about this. But this is the one thing you can’t protect me from. It’s the only thing you’ve never been able to, and you never will. You have to let it go. Karmi can’t bully me forever; and if she tries, if she never wants to be friends, then oh well. There’s nothing anyone can do. I’ll try to ignore her and that’s it.”

He couldn’t ignore the guilt pooling within him at the crushed expression on Tadashi’s face. He was right, though; that was the hard part.

“You’re wrong, little brother,” he whispered. “I’m sorry about high school. I’m sorry I didn’t do enough. But I’ll show you how wrong you are tomorrow. You’re right, I love you - that’s why I’m not giving up. I’ll never give up on you. You know that, too.”

Hiro jerked forward. “It’s not that you didn’t do ‘enough!’ And you tell me not blame myself for stuff out of my control! You did everything, but you can’t - you can’t - !” His body slackened against the back of the chair. Was there anything he could say to convince him? “I’m sorry. I
should have never ranted to you guys about Karmi.”

Tadashi scanned him with his eyes. “I would have found out anyway. Believe me.”

Hiro sighed. No, there was no use here. He spun his chair back around. “You do what you want
tomorrow. Just please don’t feel guilty when it doesn’t work. I have homework to get done.”

He heard Tadashi’s crutches move away quietly, and tried to shove down the guilt.

God, he hated hurting his brother.

Disheartened by Hiro’s lack of faith, Tadashi slid behind the divider and climbed into bed, pulling
his laptop off his desk. He had to put all his evidence together and transfer it to his phone. He’d rip
the fly out of Hiro’s jacket after he went to sleep.

He’d show him how wrong he was tomorrow. He would.

Tadashi reviewed all of this week’s footage on his laptop, headphones plugged in so as not to
disturb Hiro. He would edit out everything to do with Big Hero 7 and everything not involving
Karmi, but first he had to go over everything to see what he might have missed via Hiro’s fly.

Turned out there was only one scene he hadn’t seen for himself yet, one that took place just before
tonight’s battle.

Tadashi. Was left. Seething.

Tadashi sat in the robotics lab near Honey Lemon’s station, still frothing at the mouth over Hiro
and Karmi’s last encounter. He had it pulled up on his phone, watching it over and over, like the
madman he apparently was now, filling him more and more with rage each time it ended.

“Are you sure you should be watching that so many times?” Honey Lemon asked, concerned.

They were the only two of their group in the lab. It was currently nine forty-two; everybody else
was in class. A little over three hours to go before the confrontation with Granville.

Tadashi shrugged bitterly. “She put my brother’s life in danger and only cared about the flesh-
eating virus. Are your eyes bleeding, Honey Lemon?”

She flinched behind her work table. “That has to get her in trouble, bully or not.”

“Better,” he growled. “If it doesn’t, I’m emailing this to Akiyama-Cortez the minute we’re kicked
out of her office and asking her if this is representative of the kind of safety measures SFIT
provides its students. Maybe a threat to take this to the media will get her full attention.”

Honey Lemon opened her mouth, only to close it. She shrugged, despondent.

Tadashi didn’t want to go to the media. Something like this would tank the university’s reputation
immensely, and he had no desire to do that to the school he loved so much. Besides, everybody had
assured him Akiyama-Cortez would never tolerate any potential scandal, big or small - and this
would surely be a huge one. Yet a part of him was eagerly tempting the rest of him to do it now.

The side doors of the lab opened. Professor Sato entered, and came over to Tadashi and Honey
Lemon.
“Just who I was hoping to see,” Professor Sato greeted kindly. He took in Tadashi’s sour mood. “Are you all right, Mr. Hamada?”

“No,” Tadashi kept his voice under tight control so as not to spit, but his tone was devoid of emotion. He held up his phone and replayed the video. “Watch this.”

Professor Sato paled to milk white as he watched. “Oh my.”

Tadashi nodded. “Uh huh. Think that’ll convince Granville, or should I look up the president’s email now?”

“When was this?” he demanded.

“Yesterday evening.”

Professor Sato pulled a hand down his face. “Oh boy. Hiro - and your Baymax - should have been put through an emergency decontamination routine before leaving just in case. No professors saw this, did they?”

“Nope,” Tadashi popped his lips on the word.

Honey Lemon nearly dropped her beaker. “You don’t think the virus got out, do you? If it’s flesh-eating one, it - it would have killed Hiro by now, wouldn’t it?”

He shook his head slowly. “I - I don’t know much about it, I’m afraid. Anything, actually. For all I know, the virus waits before attacking its host.”

Tadashi curled his lips. “If it had gotten out, Baymax would have detected it and started treating Hiro right away while he contacted emergency services. He’s not really equipped to deal with a virus on that scale, so I don’t know for sure if he could have saved Hiro’s life, but he would have detected it and did all he could to ensure his health. Hiro’s fine.”

Professor Sato tapped his the side of his lab coat nervously. “Are you certain? There’s no chance?”

“I collaborated with medical professionals of what felt like a hundred fields that the university put me in contact with when I was working on his healthcare chip,” Tadashi explained. “I’m certain. And thank god for that, because if she had gotten my little brother killed by a flesh-eating virus, I’d have killed her by now. I’m not exaggerating, Professor, and I don’t care at the moment what kind of trouble admitting that gets me in. Karmi would be dead right now if Hiro caught her virus.”

“Tadashi!” Honey Lemon gasped.

Tadashi avoided her gaze. He knew what she was thinking - and who, likely, she could be comparing him to now, along with the events that occured on Akuma Island. He couldn’t bring himself to care, though. Hiro was his brother, and if his negligence in keeping them apart - fuck evidence and Hiro’s stubbornness, he should have kept them away from each other entirely, even if it meant tying his brother to his bed at home for the rest of the week - got Hiro killed by a flesh-eating virus, he’d never forgive himself. Never. He hadn’t dreamed Karmi’s bullying would go this far - and it could have worse. It would have been all his fault. And hers.

“I don’t like this,” Professor Sato muttered. He put his hand on his forehead, sweeping up the front of his hair like Hiro often did. “That’s way too far. She shouldn’t be working in her own, unsupervised lab if that’s how she operates.”

Tadashi raised his chin. “Isn’t this expulsion-worthy? Or will Granville just ignore it like she
ignores everything else?"

His original intentions hadn’t been to get the girl expelled; whatever punishment she got, she got, and so long as she was punished and kept the hell away from Hiro, Tadashi hadn’t cared. He also didn’t have any hope Granville would take this seriously, since she appeared unable to take anything about the brat seriously. Part of him almost expected her to tell Hiro - or some other unfortunate student - to do her job for her again, to fix Karmi for her because she didn’t feel like doing it, and not care if the student failed because Karmi had zero regard for anyone else’s life let alone -

Professor Sato gave him a hopeless look. “Yes, and I don’t know. But this will be taken care of, Mr. Hamada, I promise you that. In fact, this fits with what I wanted to tell you. I was speaking to some of the biological engineering professors and they recommended I go to the department dean. Biotech falls under biological engineering here, and Professor Marsden has heard just about everything when it comes to Karmi.”

Honey Lemon did drop her beaker this time, one luckily labeled H2O.

“P-Professor Marsden…?” her lip quivered, terrified. “You’re going to her!? She’s - !”

Professor Sato smiled crookedly, without humor. “I see you’re acquainted, Miss Velazquez.”

Honey Lemon reached for her hair, her long, untied hair. “I had her in sophomore year. F-For an elective. I didn’t tie my hair up in a bun. She started screaming at me at the top of her lungs and kicked me out of the class for the rest of the day because if I couldn’t bother to follow basic safety procedures, I shouldn’t be there at all. We were only working with the common cold germs.”

“Yes, she takes the rules very seriously, no matter how small they seem,” he replied evenly. “Professor Marsden worked at three universities before SFIT, two hospitals, and I don’t know how many research labs. She knows how deadly her field is. She doesn’t tolerate anything. I highly doubt Karmi would have pulled this in front of her.”

A small crack of light ruptured within Tadashi’s chest. “Really? What - What will she say to this? Because I never want Karmi near my brother ever again. I want her - and I mean her, not Hiro, he shouldn’t be punished - taken out of Granville’s class, for them to never be put in the same class again while they’re both here, and for her to never so much as STEP within a hundred feet of Hiro again. Never, Professor Sato; I never want Hiro to see her again.”

“That’s more than fair,” he said, scratching the back of his head. “I don’t know what Professor Marsden’s exact reaction will be, but it won’t be good. I’m on my way to speak with her now, since her office hours are at this time. Would you like to accompany me?”

Tadashi was already grabbing his crutches. “Absolutely. Honey Lemon - ?”

She shook her head rapidly, hair flying behind her. “No! I’ll - I’ll show up at one, but she hates me and I’m scared of her! I don’t want her yelling at me while you’re there! I’ll stay here, don’t worry about it!”

Tadashi clucked his tongue in sympathy. “Okay. Thanks anyway.” He looked at Sato. “Professor, let’s go. I can’t wait to meet her.”

Outside Professor Marsden’s office - which, Tadashi interestingly noted, was right next door to Professor Granville’s - Professor Sato suddenly stopped and grabbed his wrist.
“Mr. Hamada,” he warned gravely, “before we go in there, I want to make sure you understand something: I wasn’t kidding when I said Professor Marsden doesn’t tolerate anything. I spoke in depth with the professors under her. She’s gone to Granville three times this month alone over Karmi’s behavior and was the one who put her name on Callaghan’s desk half the time last year. Karmi doesn’t act up in front of her, but many of the things she’s done hit her desk before finding its way to the university dean’s. She knows what Karmi’s really like, she’s all but sick of her, and they assured me what we already had would be enough for her to confront Granville with us.”

“With us?” Tadashi’s eyes brightened. “I was kind of hoping this wasn’t just for the petition.”

The strict look on Professor Sato’s face cleaned the happy smile off Tadashi’s. “You saw the way your friend reacted to just hearing her name. Professor Marsden is a wonderful teacher, very thorough and very devoted. She also, indisputably, has the worst temper on campus. She screamed at your friend and kicked her out of class because her hair could have gotten contaminated with common cold germs. She makes Dr. Squires, who I was little leary of sending you alone to given his strict nature, like a kitten. When she’s angry, she makes Granville look sweet, I was told.”

Tadashi didn’t understand. “That all sounds good to me, sir. What’s the problem?”

He gestured to the pocket holding his phone, expression stone. “I wouldn’t be saying this if I wasn’t serious. Do not show her what Karmi did yesterday yet. You can show her the others if she wants to see them, but keep that one under wraps until one. I’ll deal with the fall out when she demands to know why she wasn’t informed earlier, you leave that to me alone. I don’t just want Karmi punished for this, I want Granville to start enforcing our policies and protecting our students from bullies. I can guarantee you Professor Marsden will not stand for yesterday’s actions, but I can’t guarantee you Granville will start handling bullying properly. I know this likely sounds manipulative, but I want Professor Granville to see Professor Marsden at her absolute worst after we’ve explained Karmi did this as an extreme form of bullying - this is how far our students, who all in one way or another work with dangerous, potentially life-threatening materials, can go when they feel like targeting another student. Hiro could have died without a hazmat suit. Do you understand me, Mr. Hamada?”

Tadashi swallowed, the depths of his words suddenly hitting him. “I understand.”

“Good,” Professor Sato dropped his wrist, “because I never want to hear of a student on our grounds getting this far again because their behavior wasn’t adequately handled before. Our policies exist for a reason, Mr. Hamada. This should have never happened.”

He swallowed again and nodded.

Professor Sato scrutinized him. “I know you care. I know you realize how important this is, and how much you want to protect your brother. But to me, to the rest of the faculty, your brother is one part of a much larger issue. It’s our job to keep you as safe as we can socially, but physically as well. Your healthcare companion project may be a harmless, helpful robot, Tadashi, but the fact is, as a student, you had access to extremely dangerous material and tools creating him that could easily be turned into weapons against your peers. A small, sharp piece of metal is all it takes to injure or kill someone. We have so much here that the every day person doesn’t have access to, but you do. Karmi could not only have killed Hiro, she could have caused an epidemic, if not a pandemic. Hiro shouldn’t have even been able to get into her lab while she was working so closely with that virus. It should have been sealed off.”

Tadashi’s mouth went dry. His thoughts couldn’t form a coherent response to that, other than, ‘Of course, sir, that’s makes perfect sense.’
Professor Sato, finished, knocked on the door.

A woman’s voice filtered through the wood. “Come in.”

He opened the door and they walked inside.

Professor Marsden sat at her desk, expression cool, eyes locked on her computer screen. She was an older woman, fifties or sixties, skinny and long limbed. Her hair was bushy and pale blonde, her eyes brown and curved almonds underneath her glasses. She was likely mixed Japanese and white like he and Hiro were. She glanced up at them, not turning her head.

“How may I help you?” she asked, tone neutral.

Tadashi looked at Professor Sato, who took the reigns.

“We’re here to discuss with you one of your biotech students, Karmi,” he began.

Professor Marsden’s brow flattened in a mixture of contempt and exhaustion. “I see,” she sighed, and reached into a drawer to fish out a form and pen, which she layed out on her desk. “You can fill this out, it’s for my records. I’ll report it to Professor Granville and speak with Karmi.”

Tadashi could read the unsaid words in the twitch of her lips. ‘Because a certain someone else won’t.’

Professor Sato looked at the form, then reached over to take it, leaving the pen. “Of course. But we’re not here just to fill out a form and have you speak with them. The faculty is putting together a petition to make Professor Granville enforce our bullying and harassment policies, and a group of us, along with a group of students, are going to confront her ourselves. I’d like to ask you to join us.”

Professor Marsden lifted her head. The corners of her lips twitched upwards slightly, but they didn’t stay up. If she had any questions as to why they were planning a confrontation and a petition like this, she did not ask. “Is that so? Karmi’s finally pushed the faculty and student body this far, hm? I can’t say I’m surprised.”

Tadashi glanced around, suddenly unsure of himself, and pulled out his phone. “She’s bullying my brother, ma’am, because he’s the new youngest student. Professor Granville knows this, but instead of separating them, she’s the one who pushed them together in the first place. She wants them to present a journal today at one, talking about how Karmi’s helped Hiro socialize on campus. All Karmi’s done, though, is bully him, and because he’s been bullied before and doesn’t believe teachers or professors care, he’s going to lie to Professor Granville in the hopes Karmi will be nice to him from now on. Granville already knows she’s been bullying him instead of doing the assignment, but she refuses to step in; she thinks Hiro is a good influence on Karmi, so I can’t see her doing anything once he lies. It would help us so much if you supported us in person.”

“I accept.”

Tadashi balked at the immediate yet casual response.

Professor Marsden opened another drawer and pulled out a thick stack of papers. She turned her chair to face them fully and peered up at them coolly. “These are my copies of Karmi’s disciplinary records. Before he turned criminal, Professor Callaghan was kind enough to give me copies of each incident not reported to my desk. I’m sure more from this school year that didn’t go through me are in Professor Granville’s files. Karmi is childish, rotten, and thinks herself a little queen playing the little fool with her professors. This is more than enough to justify expulsion; we have a no
tolerance policy, after all.”

Tadashi stared at the stack in horror. He compared it to his own packets of notes and homework professors often gave him; it couldn’t be any less than fifteen pages.

“Thank you, Professor Marsden, I can’t tell you how much we appreciate this,” Professor Sato bowed his head. “I assume you’re free at one, then?”

“As a matter of fact, I’m not,” she answered, and turned back to her computer. “But this has been a long time coming, and I will not miss giving my share to the dean. Thank you for asking a few hours in advance, despite the short notice; I’m sure my Introduction to Germs, Bacteria, and Viruses students will be happy to hear our twelve-thirty class has been cancelled for the day and they have an additional three days to work on their essays.”

Tadashi’s eyes widened. “You’re cancelling class for this!?”

Professor Marsden glanced at him with hooded eyes, and Tadashi now understood what Professor Sato meant when he said he was told she was all but sick of Karmi. “Yes, I am. As I said, this has been a long time coming.”

“If Professor Granville continues to ignore our policies,” Professor Sato went on, “I think we have enough evidence to go to President Akiyama-Cortez, don’t you? We do have a no tolerance policy, you’re right.”

“Absolutely,” she agreed, not looking up. “I’m emailing my students as we speak. You said we’ll meet at her office at one?”

“That’s when my brother and Karmi are meant to present their assignment,” Tadashi said.

“All of our schedules didn’t fit any other way,” Professor Sato admitted.

She frowned. “Hmph. Well, so be it. I’ll be there and I’ll bring my records. Thank you…?”

Tadashi realized she was asking their names. She didn’t even know their names.

“Professor Sato,” the professor said, “and this is Tadashi Hamada.”

“Ah, that’s right; you’re from the robotics department,” she nodded in understanding. “I’m sorry, I couldn’t quite remember. And I know I’ve heard your name around here, Mr. Hamada. You’re quite popular with the faculty and student body. Thank you again for inviting me. I’ll be there at one o’clock sharp.”

“It’s us who should be thanking you,” Professor Sato declared. “So thank you. Mr. Hamada, come along.”

Professor Marsden didn’t look up as they left her office, shutting the door behind them.

Professor Sato shuddered, and regarded Tadashi’s Ghost Ninja shirt. “Please tell me I’m not the only one who was cold in there?”

Tadashi had no answer to that. “She seemed all right to me. Maybe metaphorically a little cold...but she seemed busy and like she really doesn’t like Karmi.”

Professor Sato wrinkled his nose. “Yes, that’s true, but I like to think myself a good judge of character. I’ve never spoken with her directly before, and now that I have, I’m certain I’ll be a dead
man by the end of the day. Metaphorically, of course.” He waved his hand. “But I can handle it, don’t worry about that - or her coming after you. Make sure you have your phone ready for one, Mr. Hamada.”

He nodded. “I will. Thanks again, Professor Sato. For everything.”

He gave another crooked smile. “No problem. Let’s just hope we don’t have to go above Granville’s head after all.”

One o’clock came heart poundingly fast for Tadashi after the trip to Professor Marsden’s office. He hadn’t expected that. Everyone else was busy with classes and homework while he sat around fidgeting and waiting, yet before he knew it, the time had come and he was standing in the hall outside of Granville’s office with Baymax beside him.

Honey Lemon and Fred were the first to join him, followed not long after by Wasabi, then Gogo. The professors began to show up as well, Sullivan and Roe together, then Sato, Squires, and Froeb. Professor Froeb held a manilla folder in her arms, which Tadashi was delighted to see was about two inches thick. Marsden, Yoshida, and Hiro were still missing, likely on their way, when Karmi appeared around the corner and jerked to a stop down the hall.

She eyed the large group warily. “What’s going on?”

The sight of the girl and her irritably suspicious face was enough to spark a heavy fuse in Tadashi’s chest. ‘She put Hiro’s life in danger and only cared about the virus.’

“We’re waiting to see Professor Granville,” he spat.

He could see the question marks running through Karmi’s head. She and Hiro were supposed to be presenting their assignment; Granville couldn’t have a meeting with a bunch of other students and professors at the same time. What about their assignment? Tadashi watched the lightbulb in her mind spring to life, as if this let her off the hook - or, more specifically, destroyed the chance of Hiro ratting on her to Granville today.

“Ookaay,” she took a step backwards, moving to turn around.

“Don’t go too far,” Dr. Squires warned with a growl. “This meeting is about you.”

Karmi froze. Her eyes narrowed and jaw tightened at him, but then she noticed the other professors, and Tadashi could see her facial muscle straining hard as she forced them to relax. Well, if one could call trembling muscles ‘relaxed.’

“Me?” she fought to make her voice light. “What could I - ?”

Her gaze found Tadashi’s. Her eyes suddenly widened. A flash of panic flew across her face before she forced it back under strained control. Much more strained, judging by how the skin under her one eye twitched and her lips seemed unable to stay closed no matter how much she bit them together.

It was then that Hiro appeared around the corner at the other end of the hall.

He stopped dead in his tracks, almost dropping the phone in his hand. Tadashi couldn’t help wincing as he watched Hiro’s heart drop to his stomach on his face.

“Oh no,” his little brother muttered, then exclaimed loudly, “you’re doing this now!? I thought - I
thought you would do it BEFORE our presentation!"

Tadashi gave an apologetic smile. “Our schedules didn’t fit together that way. I’m sorry. I forgot to mention that last night.”

Hiro gaped at him in horror.

Professor Yoshida appeared around the corner, coming up around Hiro. She must have heard them from the other hall, because she informed him gently, “If we could have arranged this for another time, we would have, Mr. Hamada; we tried. You don’t have to be here for this. If you’d like, you’re free to go - there will be no presentations today. Leave Professor Granville to us.”

Karmi made a strangled sound in her throat. “That means I can leave, too! Right, ma’am?”

Professor Yoshida sent her a cold look, unfazed by the forced sweetness of her tone. “No. You’ll stay.”

Karmi’s features strained to the point Tadashi thought her eyeballs and cheeks would burst. Between clenched teeth, she said, “Whatever they told you I did, they’re lying.”

The expression Professor Froeb shot at her was demonic. “Video doesn’t lie, nor do more than a dozen accusers and twice as many witnesses. Keep talking, miss; dig yourself further into this hole than you already have. We’ll see how it affects the outcome.”

Karmi’s frame shook.

“Where’s Professor Marsden?” Professor Roe inquired. “I’d like to get started. I’m sure Professor Granville is wondering where Karmi and Hiro are by now.”

“Let’s give her a minute,” Professor Sato advised. “I’m sure she’s on her way.”

“Pr-professor Marsden?” Karmi squeaked, her other, non-twitching eye struggling to stay open, as if the lids were swelling. “Why - Why should she be here? She loves me!”

Gogo shifted her weight to one hip. “ Apparently not.”

Professor Sullivan moved towards Hiro and placed a hand softly on his shoulder. “You are excused if you want to be, Hiro. You’re the victim here, so you’re not in any trouble - believe me, come hell or high water, you will not be getting in trouble for this. You don’t have to stay like she does.”

Hiro’s mouth opened, but no words came out. Tadashi flinched when he shot him worried eyes.

Baymax took the initiative, wadding over to Hiro and patting his head comfortingly. “There, there. You are in distress. Separating oneself from distressing situations is recommended to decrease stress. We can go to the cafeteria or Tadashi’s lab, or wherever you prefer.”

Hiro placed a grounding hand on Baymax’s stomach, pressing his fingers into the vinyl and steadying himself as he hunched his shoulders. He shook his head rapidly. “No way! I’m not - I’m not -!” He didn’t finish the thought, at a loss for words. Nevertheless, he refused to leave.

Tadashi frowned. He wished they could have done this earlier in the morning, without either of them present. But nothing could change where they were now.

Professor Marsden’s office door opened, with her backing out of it with her fifteen-ish page stack
of files in her arms, closing the door in front of her. She turned and took in the scene with a frown.

Karmi snapped out of her frozen state and clapped her hands together. “Professor M! There seems to have been a SUPER big mistake here!”

Her frown deepened and her eyes narrowed. “Pull it together and knock off the disturbing silly faces, Karmi; you’re not two years old. Act like it!”

Karmi stilled so quickly Tadashi thought a gust of wind would be able to knock her off like cardboard. The twisted expression she wore, forced smile and seemingly swollen eye and all, remained but were just as still.

Professor Marsden brushed through the crowd and advanced on Professor Granville’s door. “What are we waiting out here for? Everyone looks to be here to me. Let’s go.”

She grabbed the door handle and threw the door open with ease, marching inside. Tadashi exchanged glances with the gang, then waited as everyone else filed in.

“Come along, Karmi,” Professor Roe warned at the girl, pausing at the door.

Karmi swallowed and dragged her feet inside, Roe briskly following after her.

Professor Sullivan and Baymax peered down at Hiro who, as if in a hypnotic state, entered as well. They went in after him, Professor Sullivan grabbing the door handle, and Tadashi finally made his way inside.

The group spread itself thin in an arc facing Professor Granville’s desk. Tadashi, being the last one in, found himself in the middle as the professors, save Marsden, flanked his right while she, Baymax, and the gang flanked his left. Karmi and Hiro, a good two feet apart, stood apprehensively between the arc and the desk.

Professor Granville, for her part, gawked at the large group in bewilderment from behind her desk. “What is this?”

Professor Sat lifted his chin. “An intervention of sorts.”

Her eyes bulged. “An intervention!? For what?”

He stood tall. “For your failure to uphold one of SFIT’s top policies.”

Her face relaxed, her eyes now narrowed. “That’s a bold accusation, Professor Sato. Which policy have I apparently failed to uphold?”

“Our bullying and harassment policy,” he answered.

Cold realization washed over Granville’s face. Her cheeks reddened.

Emboldened, Tadashi moved his crutches and walked past Hiro and Karm, up to her desk so close that his shirt was touching the wood.

“I came to you earlier this week with the news that Karmi has been bullying my brother. You revealed that you not only already knew about her behavior from previous reports both this school year and last year, but you were also willing to let it go on in the hopes Hiro would change Karmi’s behavior for you. As a result, he’s been insulted over and over, ignored, poked and prodded like a toy, ordered about like a servant, belittled like a little boy, and talked down to because Karmi has a
jealousy problem. You admitted you knew all about her bullying, which is why you set this socialization charade up, and you lost all measure of plausible deniability that she was hurting Hiro the minute I came to you. Considering your job as a professor and dean, and SFIT’s no tolerance rules on bullying and harassment, yes, I would say Professor Sato’s correct in his accusation that you’ve failed to uphold a top policy.”

Professor Granville was stunned into silence.

Tadashi pulled out his phone. “Let’s listen to the evidence this time, Professor. You can tell me if all of this is playful bickering between friendly teenagers who happen to have normal attitude problems.”

He set his phone down on the desk, volume amplified so the whole room could hear, and pressed play.

"So," Hiro’s voice began, cheerful. "I’m Hiro Hamada. I’m a robotics engineering major. What’s your major?"

A throaty noise could be heard. "God, you’re an idiot. What does it look like!? I’m a geology major!?"

No one spoke as the recording went through, Karmi rebuking all of Hiro’s attempts to start conversation, snapping at him and only showing sweetness towards her self-admitted deadly organisms, which she argued were alive and made more sense to talk to than a ‘mechanical snowman.’ The recording went through lunch, where she had no kind words for him, only snips and shrieking accusations of being a creep and trying to get his drink her on purpose. Tadashi made sure Professor Granville could see the screen when it came to both cafeteria attempts, the one where Karmi made a disgusted noise at Hiro’s hello and pointedly left with only a creeper insult, no real conversation, and the one from Wednesday, detailing her disgust at a supposed crush indicated by Hiro’s desire to get the assignment done and her presumptions about Granville being wrapped around her finger no matter what she did.

Professor Granville’s eyes were blown wide by the end of it, face entirely flushed.

Tadashi glanced over his shoulder at Karmi. Her face was crumpled and teeth chattering in fear.

“IT’s - It’s a misunderstanding!” the girl tried to cry. “None of that - It’s not - I was kidding! We were joking around! Especially about you being wrapped around my finger, Professor G! You know I’m not really like that!”

Professor Sullivan was enflamed. “Joking!? That’s your excuse!? Where did you get that, the internet, where stupid teenage girls and man childs think they can get away with bullying if they claim it was a joke!? That’s not going to cut it here, Karmi! You were bullying Hiro, disrespecting Tadashi and Professor Granville, as well as Professor Callaghan for his previous attempts to discipline you, and god know you were not KIDDING. The behavior shown in those recordings is abysmal, especially for a girl your age and at an advanced institution like this! You’re FAR old enough to know better! Are you going to claim being a child justifies your behavior next? Because I assure you, I doubt you would be claiming the same if Hiro, who’s younger than you was doing the same! It’s time to grow up and face the consequences, Karmi!”

Karmi’s jaw fell. Her shoulders shook. She looked to Professor Marsden, pleading, “Professor M, tell them that’s not me! I’m not like that, really! You know me from all your classes!”

Professor Marsden raised her nose high, glare scrutinizing. She calmly walked over to the side of
“These are my copies of all of Karmi’s disciplinary reports from August 19th of last year to today. Seventeen pages, seventeen reports. Fourteen are from last year, three from this school year. I’m sure there are more in your own filing cabinets from this year. It seems Karmi can’t go a full month without at least one incident. Curious, isn’t it? I’m amazed that she’s still with us, but I suppose that might be attributed to the university’s reluctance to let go of a potential genius to attach its name to? Hogwash to me, whatever the case, but still curious. One in particular I found interesting was this one,” she flipped a few pages of her stack, “a case of cyber bullying. It notes that this was the final straw, and the next report would lead to immediate expulsion. Dr. Squires, I believe this is your name on the report; care to give your thoughts on that particular incident?”

Dr. Squires grinned bitterly. He gave Karmi a venomous look. “One of my students was presenting a project to the class. For the sake of the student’s privacy, given the other students in the room, I’ll just say it didn’t go well. Karmi here decided it would be appropriate to film the student as the presentation blundered, adding silly sound effects to the audio. She was about to post it to social media when I caught her. That was the most disgusting display of behavior I’ve ever seen in my classroom. Any professor, any teacher who claims to cherish their students, would not have an ounce of my respect for allowing it to occur unchastised and unpunished in their classroom. Don’t you agree, Professor Granville? Or was it simple children being children and therefore nothing to you?”

Baymax chose that moment to jump in, his chest lighting up with accompanying visuals. “The effects of cyber bullying are found to be severely damaging to victims, and is unfortunately common among teenagers. All forms of bullying, including cyber, verbal, emotional, mental, and physical, can lead to distressing consequences for victims, including but not limited to: lowered self-esteem, failing grades, self- and/or peer-inflicted isolation, depression, self-harm, and suicidal ideation, tendencies, and attempts, and in drastic cases, success. Children and teenagers who are the victims of bullying are statistically more likely to adjust poorly to their academic environment, have difficulties sleeping - which can have negative effects on their alertness and energy levels during the day - and experience an increase in anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues. Victims have reported how, over time, the bullying lead to negative viewpoints of themselves, blaming of themselves for their situations, the lessening of healthy relationships with friends and family, and an increase in physical ailments. I have found no benefits to being bullied. As Hiro’s healthcare companion, I must insist on future prevention for the sake of his health.”

“That,” Professor Roe spat, “is exactly why we have this policy in place! The same goes for our adult students, but our responsibility to protect our underage students is larger! They are minors in our care, and while they’re on campus, we are the only ones standing between them and harm’s way. Hiro is fourteen years old; when he’s on our grounds, we are being fully charged with his safety and well-being by his guardian. If we fail to protect him, how can we claim to protect any underage student entrusted to us? Hell, how can we claim to have a zero tolerance policy when nothing was being done when her targets were adults, who were older than her!? Seven years ago, I applied to work at a phenomenal academic institution famous for its contributions to numerous scientific fields - not to an urban Lord of the Flies setting!”

Fred flinched. “Lord of the Flies? That’s a nasty comparison. Well, I guess considering what Tadashi found last night…”

“I second Professor Roe’s statement,” Professor Yoshida went on as if he hadn’t spoken. “I have grown children around our adult students’ ages, and I know I would be furious if I ever found out they were being treated as Hiro has been as adults. If they were fourteen and I trusted a prestigious university to look after them only to find out this was occuring? I would pull my children out right
away, rip away the chance for the university to claim a child genius as theirs. I didn’t come to SFIT from my last position to watch my students be bullied. The fact that this has been allowed to continue into this school year under a new dean, especially at a much freer rate, is abhorrent. You call yourself a strict but fair professor, but I see no fairness in allowing children to be victimized. You have no credibility here, Grace Granville; you knew the risks of putting Hiro and Karmi together, and you failed to act when Karmi targeted him. I don’t believe a person like yourself has any right to teach at a university such as this one, let alone be its dean. Karmi’s not the only one here who should have known better.”

Professor Granville’s face lost all color. She appeared nauseous to Tadashi; it reminded him of the way Hiro went bone white right before he was about to throw up from the flu or too much food. She said nothing in response.

Professor Sullivan regarded her coolly. “I think I understand what you were trying to do, Professor Granville. In a way, I can respect that; you did seek out a way to curb Karmi’s disgusting behavior, and a good influence can certainly help. However, as stated, you lost all plausible deniability when you found out Karmi was indeed bullying him. Until I was made aware of this, I believed your claims that you care about your students deeply and how your new, limits-ensuring programs was for their safety, because their well-beings were your top priority. I’m not so sure now. If you really care, if you’re so determined in curbing her through a good influence, why did you fail to protect Hiro when it became clear she was bullying him? Perhaps you only care about the physical safety of our students and no more, and even then only to avoid law suits. Their well-beings aren’t what’s important.”

That got Professor Granville to her feet. She was still pale and stunned, but her eyes were filled with a mixture of outrage and hurt. “That is a false assessment, Professor Sullivan! My students’ safety means everything to me, for their well-beings! I will not tolerate such a lie!”

“It’s not a lie if it’s what your actions have convinced me,” Sullivan raged back. “If I’m wrong, prove it! From now on, uphold our policies, god damn it! Anti-bullying policies are in place at just about every academic environment today, why aren’t you enforcing ours!?”

Professor Froeb stepped forward, coming up next to Tadashi, and laying her folder down, unfolding the top. “I think everybody else has covered all of my thoughts perfectly and with clarity. I’m in agreement with my colleagues, Professor Granville. All of them - those in this room, and on this petition. You’ll note that nearly everyone left their own personal message on their thoughts of your recent conduct. If you still can’t find it within yourself to acknowledge SFIT’s rules, perhaps this will convince you.”

Professor Granville lost all fervor at the thick petition.

Tadashi glanced over the top page, reading broken phrases from the upsidedown-to-him paragraphs.

...bullying over intelligence, particularly a youth’s intelligence, has no place at a thriving university whose purpose is to instill and encourage learning...

...personally seen how detrimental bullying is to students...

...would resign before I allowed one student to harass another for being young and smart...

...our policies exist for a reason and I am ashamed this has gone on as long as it has...

...there is no excuse for a professor to be a bystander of all things!
Professor Froeb smiled a shark tooth smile and stepped back a few paces, putting a tightly gripped hand on Karmi’s shoulder, ignoring the girl’s whimper. “And if that still isn’t enough, perhaps President Akiyama-Cortez should review the matter and make a decision. What was it she said about scandals, no matter how small…?”

Professor Granville’s mouth fell open. “The president!? You would go over my head over this!?”

“Yes,” Professor Sato’s answer was immediate. “If you’re unfit to do your job, then it should go to someone who will uphold our policies. I’m not sure you realize just how far our students can go if they feel like attacking their peers, Professor Granville. Tadashi?”

Tadashi jerked his chin in Professor Marsden’s direction. “You’re going to want to watch this, ma’am. This happened yesterday evening in Karmi’s lab, while she was working on a flesh-eating virus.”

Professor Marsden’s eyes widened, but she said nothing, instead leaning over to see the screen of his phone better.

Professor Granville’s gaze followed hers.

Tadashi pressed play.

From Hiro’s point of view, the doors slid open. Within the darkened room stood Karmi, dressed in a hazmat suit and bending over a microscope.

"Hey, Karmi," Hiro called out in the footage, walking up to her.

“Pause it!” Professor Marsden ordered.

Tadashi did a double take - huh? - but obeyed.

Professor Marsden glowered at Karmi sharply, making the girl squirm. “Why. Was your lab. Not properly sealed if you were working so closely with this virus as to require a biohazard suit!?" She stood up to full height, her face twisting in boiling anger. Her voice grew louder and louder as she spoke. “How the HELL did he manage to get in there!? Are you trying to infect the entire university with a FLESH-EATING VIRUS!? We seal up the labs and require proper decontamination and authorization before entering for a REASON, Karmi! Clearly I was sorely, sorely mistaken to grant you your own lab!”

She paused for a breath, about to yell more at the now thoroughly trembling girl, but Tadashi caught her. “Ma’am, this isn’t the worst part. You’re going to want to keep watching.”

Professor Marsden redirected her attention to him like she just remembered he was there. “Not the worst? Oooh, we’re going to have to have a talk when this is over Karmi,” she growled. “Consider your private lab privileges revoked. Depending on what else is on here, you’ll be lucky if I allow you in a public lab under three professors’ combined supervision!”

Karmi whined, eyes welling with tears. Tadashi didn’t feel sorry for her - they both knew what was coming next in the video. Whatever she got for it, she would deserve.

He pressed play.

Hiro stammered. "I - I mean - ! Hi, Karmi, how’s it, uh, going?"

Karmi looked up at him, but didn’t respond, eyes returning to her microscope.
Hiro peered around the room before honing in on Karmi. "Should I be wearing a biohazard suit?"

It was Professor Marsden who paused it this time, slamming her finger so hard on Tadashi’s phone he was afraid for a split second the screen had cracked.

“He’s not even wearing a biohazard suit!” she hollered. “What the hell is wrong with you!? You not only let anyone who feels like it wander into your lab while you’re working with LETHAL VIRUSES THAT COULD INFECT THE WHOLE SCHOOL, you saw for yourself he was unprotected and went back to your work!? YOU - !”

“Ma’am!” Tadashi flinched when her infuriated gaze landed him. “You need to hear how she answered Hiro’s question. You won’t like it.”

From her chin to the tips of her ears, Professor Marsden’s face burned fiery red. Her voice was dangerously low. “Play it.”

Karmi didn’t so much as look at Hiro, tone completely unconcerned. "Are your eyes bleeding?"

Baymax took Hiro by the chin and scanned his eyes. "They are currently not."

Karmi lifted her face with a sick smile. "Then you're fine!" She lowered it and shrugged. "Probably."

Tadashi paused before Professor Marsden could break his phone this time.

She was shaking, fists clenched, in an absolute rage. “ARE YOUR EYES BLEEDING!? PROBABLY!? I OUGHT TO THROW YOU OFF CAMPUS MYSELF! SO NOT ONLY HAVE YOU FAILED TO KEEP YOUR LAB PROPERLY SEALED AND DID NOTHING WHEN YOU SAW AN UNPROTECTED STUDENT WANDER INSIDE, YOU MADE AN ABSOLUTE JOKE OUT OF IT! IF YOU NEEDED TO BE IN A BIOHAZARD SUIT, THEN SO THE HELL DID HE!”

Karmi melted like a castle under dragon flame. To her credit, her tears didn’t fall yet, but her face was wrinkled and morphed like they were about to burst. “I - I’m - ”

“Sorry!?” Professor Marsden howled. “You don’t get to claim you’re ‘sorry’ when you could have killed him! You could have killed the entire student body and faculty had your virus escaped! If you had any sense of concern in your being, you would have decontaminated him and sent him on his way, locking the door after him! YOU DID NOT! You made a JOKE out of the situation, out of his potential harm and death! I WILL NOT HAVE IT, OR YOUR LIES!”

Tadashi glanced at Professor Granville. Her lips were open in shock, eyes wide and disbelieving. He noticed her hands trembling slightly.

“That’s still not the worst part, Professor,” he said.

The shriek Professor Marsden released was purely animal. “WHAT!? HOW MUCH WORSE COULD IT GET!? DID SHE NOT DECONTAMINATE HIM AT THE END!?”

“Yes, and more,” he said.

Her expression fell completely off her face, the most stunned and horrified expression on her now. Professor Marsden’s voice was surprisingly small. “W-What? What do you mean ‘more’?”

Tadashi hit play.
"So," Hiro tried after a pause, "you like, uh, dangerous organisms?"

"Duh," Karmi spat, lifting her face one more to roll her eyes to the ceiling. She pulled away from the microscope to jab him in the chest with her gloved fingers. "By studying them, we can figure out therapeutic uses for them. It’s called ‘science,’" she mocked.

She picked up her pen and notepad and walked away.

"That’s actually interesting." Hiro dug out his phone. "When you’re done, we could talk about my journal." He took out his phone and showed it to her. "Uh, you know, j-just the one that’s due Friday."

Karmi scoffed as she typed at her computer. "Nobody cares." She furrowed her brow and narrowed her eyes, shooting him a look. "Hand me N5-4," she ordered.

Hiro started. "Oh, uh, sure."

He put his phone down and looked around the table. His phone vibrated, Wasabi’s picture appearing on the screen.

The vibrations shook the petri dish, and the room around him suddenly was bathed in red light. An alarm sounded overhead. Hiro jumped.

Off-screen, Professor Marsden went white as a ghost, hand flying to her chest as if she were having a heart attack. For the moment, she had no words.

On-screen, Karmi gasped loud. She shot over, eyes glued to the dish as she picked it up like an injured animal. "No! You KILLED N5-4!"

Baymax raised a finger, his chest lighting up with statistical data and facts. "This is a fortunate outcome. N5-4 would have soon reached a contagion factor of ten."

His chest changed to a skull and bones symbol, indicating just how deadly that would have been. No wonder she was wearing a hazmat suit.

Karmi wasn’t paying attention, though. Her voice lowered and shook. "N5-4 was the first pathogen I ever grew."

Baymax ignored that. "I will download instruction for proper disinfection methods to ensure no part of N5-4 survives."

Karmi jerked her head around. "He was more than a flesh-eating virus!" She held the petri dish close, turning it sideways vertically and pressing it to her chest. "He was a friend."

"If you have any more N5-4," he watched Karmi’s face harden in anger as Baymax continued, "in storage, we should also dispose of - "

Karmi flung of the petri dish down hard on the table. "SHUT HIM UP!"

Hiro cringed.

Baymax blinked. "I see you are upset. I have relaxation suggestions."

As he listed his suggestions off, Karmi opened her lips, showing off her clenched teeth, and scowled all the more as Wasabi called again.
"WELL!?" she screamed. "ANSWER IT!"

Hiro clamored to grab his phone and spun around, pressing it to his ear after hitting the green button. Wasabi's half of the conversation wasn't picked up.

"Okay, yeah," Hiro forced out. "I-I'll be there as soon as I can."

He hung up and turned back around to Karmi, who was glaring fiercely at him. She looked like she was about to kill him.

"So, something came up, and I need, um, we need to uh...Baymax and I gotta go."

Karmi flung herself in his face. "YOU THINK I WANT YOU TO STAY!?"

He backed away slowly, and yanked the still talking Baymax along with him by the arm, and scrambled out the door.

The video ended.

Professor Marsden looked faint. “The alarms went off. The - the emergency light - The virus could have escaped - neither Hiro nor the robot were decontaminated - You’re lucky to be alive right now - She only cared about the virus, mourning it like it’s a person, no concern for the real person next to - Never in all my years - ”

The fury suddenly returned in full forced. She whirled around on Professor Granville, making her lean back in terror, and slammed her hand on the desk so hard her papers flew. “I WANT HER GONE! I WILL NOT HAVE IT, I WILL NOT TOLERATE THIS! I REFUSE TO KEEP HER IN MY PROGRAM, AND I WILL TAKE THIS TO THE PRESIDENT IF YOU’RE TOO INCOMPETENT TO DEAL WITH THIS TO THE FULLEST EXTENT IT WARRANTS! MY GOD, IF N5-4 GOT OUT, THAT BOY WOULD BE DEAD RIGHT NOW! FOR ALL WE KNOW, IT DID GET OUT AND THERE ARE STUDENTS DYING OR DEAD IN THEIR DORMS, AT HOME, IN HOSPITALS, AND HAVE SPREAD THE VIRUS FURTHER! WE COULD HAVE A CITY-WIDE EPIDEMIC ON OUR HANDS! I ASSURE YOU, IF WE DO, IT WILL NOT BE ON MY HEAD! I WILL NOT TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THIS! IT’S ON YOU!” Her voice lowered so low, Tadashi almost didn’t hear her next bit. “Or perhaps the rumors were true and you are so disgustingly negligent that you don’t mind killing our students for your own selfish agendas.”

He had no idea what that meant - what rumors? - but that got Professor Granville. Her eyes hardened. She sobered up, standing tall and turning to the group.

“I should apologize,” she began, lips pursed. “I see now that I have in fact failed in my duties, both as your professor and university dean. It was never my intention to put Mr. Hamada in harm’s way, yet I have - socially and medically.”

Tadashi turned to see Hiro’s reaction.

Hiro was practically stone, eyes wide as saucers and every inch of him unmoving.

Professor Granville honed in on Karmi, voice sharp. “As for you, I was clearly wrong to have more faith in your future here at SFIT than my predecessor had by the end of the previous school year. It won’t happen again. I’m upholding his last decision regarding you: Karmi, you are expelled.”

Karmi threw her fists at her sides, the tears streaming down now. “NO!”
Professor Marsden whipped around the desk, stalking towards her with a vengeance. “No!? NO!?
You have no right to speak here! If you’re old enough and smart enough to attend a university,
much less SFIT, then you are old enough and smart enough to remember the CRITICALLY
IMPORTANT SAFETY PROCEDURES THAT COME WITH WORKING IN BIOTECH!” She
stalked so close to her that Karmi stumbled backwards. “You KNEW what kind of danger Mr.
Hamada was in when he entered your lab unprotected while you were working with a flesh-eating
virus whose contagion level was approaching TEN, KARMI! You KNEW he could have been
KILLED! You KNEW that without decontamination, N5-4 could have infected and killed
EVERYONE here! You have no claim to ignorance here, no defense, no justification! You had
more empathy for a non-living MAN-EATER than you did your own peers! You are sick. I
suppose that shouldn’t be surprising, however, considering you’ve shown yourself to be so
delusional to think the viruses - the very viruses that would kill YOU in a heartbeat - are your
friends who TALK BACK to you! SHUT YOUR VILE MOUTH, YOU HAVE NO GROUNDS
TO PROTEST THIS!”

While Karmi blubbered nonsense through her tears, Professor Marsden spun around to face
Tadashi. “You. I want those videos sent to me, especially the last one. I have friends and former
colleagues all over the nation, and I know if one of them had a student so negligent and carelessly
homicidal, I’d want to know about it before the little worm applied at my university next.” She
spun back around on Karmi, advancing further, following the girl as she fled backwards. “When
I’m done with you, you won’t even be able to sell prescription drugs over the counter at the local
pharmacy! Oooh, we are not done with this conversation, Karmi, we have so much more to talk
about in my office!”

“Professor Marsden!” Professor Granville called as Karmi was backed into the door.

She whipped her neck around, expression daring Granville to continue. “My student - former
student - not yours. Your part in this is done!”

She grabbed Karmi by the forearm, ripped open the door, and yanked the shrieking girl out,
slamming the door behind her. There was a second slam not a moment later, fainter, and the
incoherent screams of Professor Marsden could be heard behind the side wall.

Professor Granville swallowed, then cleared her throat. She looked down at Hiro. “I apologize
again, Mr. Hamada. I should have supervised the two of you at all times, and listened to your
brother when he approached me. I’m sorry to the both of you. If I could take this whole experience
back, I would.”

She eyed Tadashi, waiting for a response.

He nodded once. “Thank you.”

“From now on, I will uphold our bullying and harassment policies to the letter.” She shook her
head, expression slacking in exhaustion. “I thought Karmi was merely misguided and needed - No,
I won’t use that as an excuse. This was - This has been - ”

“Inexcusable,” Professor Sullivan finished for her.

“Disgraceful,” Professor Roe added.

“Disturbing,” Professor Yoshida scowled.

“Damaging,” Professor Froeb huffed.
“Unnecessary,” Dr. Squires asserted. “She should have been expelled from the start.”

“I hope you understand that any of our students can go as far as Karmi, or farther,” Professor Sato said. “She didn’t directly attack Hiro, but her blatant disregard for human life, all because she’s jealous of Hiro’s performance at his age, could have cost not just his life, but others’ as well. We have so many dangerous materials and equipment here. The law suits that could follow after a student like her would be the least of our worries. Bullying isn’t always simple, and while certainly never harmless it isn’t always small either. There are real risks and consequences associated with letting such behavior go.”

“You couldn’t have known Karmi would put Hiro’s life on the line like that,” Tadashi admitted, “but you did know enough to put a stop to it. You didn’t. That, I don’t think I’ll ever understand.”

Professor Granville sighed. “It was wrong of me. That’s all I’ll say. Hiro, are you all right after all this?”

Hiro nodded slightly, still practically stone.

Professor Roe looked at the clock. “Hiro, you’re excused from aerial robotics in forty-five minutes; don’t worry about class, I’ll email you the make up work. You look like you need to sit down for a long while and relax.”

Baymax waddled over and wrapped his arms around him. “There, there. You are likely feeling embarrassed, but this has provided you with a positive outcome in the long run. It will be okay.”

“Students, you are dismissed,” Professor Granville said. “The rest of you, I’d like to have a private word, if you would.”

Professor Sato nodded firmly. “Of course we would.”

The gang headed for the door, Baymax gently pushing along Hiro, who walked numbly. When the door was shut behind them, Honey Lemon shuddered.

“Professor Marsden is scary!” she whined.

“Her?” Wasabi shook his head rapidly. “No! That virus is! I’m not going get any sleep until it’s confirmed it didn’t get out.”

“It didn’t,” Tadashi reassured, and that was enough for Hiro to snap out of it.

“What is wrong with you!?” he shouted, throwing up his arms. “You had no right to show them those things! To show everybody! How did you even get them!?”

A pit formed in Tadashi’s stomach. He fished in his pocket. “I hacked your phone. Also, this.”

Fred tapped his finger tips together, smiling nervously.

“I’m sorry, Hiro,” Tadashi apologized sincerely. “But there was no way I was letting this go. As long as I’m around, no one is ever going to hurt you. I’m sorry I hacked your phone and bugged you, and didn’t tell you enough of my plan.” He bowed his head. He hated the betrayed look in
Hiro’s misting eyes. “I hope you can forgive me for that.”

To his surprise, though, Hiro only threw himself at him, burying his face in his shirt with a whine. Tadashi wrapped an arm tight around him. Baymax stepped forward and hugged them, Hiro squeezed in the middle. Gogo joined in, then Fred and Wasabi, and Honey Lemon.

After a long moment, Hiro lifted his head. “You had no right to show anyone those. I don’t want people to - to see - I’m not - Can we go now?”

“Yeah, we can go,” he answered.

The gang had relocated to the main labs, where the others eventually fell into work and Fred hounded Wasabi on another not-science idea. Tadashi and Hiro sat close by one another, the former chewing his lip and the other limp in his chair.

“I don’t hate you,” Hiro muttered. “I just don’t like that you showed everybody those. Isn’t it bad enough when people see it in person?”

“I’m sorry,” he apologized again. “I just needed proof. He said-she saids don’t tend to work out well for the victim.”

Hiro kicked the air. “...Yeah, I know. I get it, big brother. You were looking out for me, like you always do.” He sighed and sat up. “What I seriously can’t believe is that it worked. You were...actually right. Most of my professors and all the other ones on campus did care, for real, and you actually changed Granville’s mind. I mean, you had to threaten her job to do it, but you did. Thanks.”

Tadashi tentatively smiled. “I’m your big brother. That’s my job. If I don’t have your back, who does?”

Hiro shrugged. “I don’t know. Do you think… Do you think anyone my own age will ever like me? Now I know even geniuses hate me.”

Tadashi frowned. “Of course they will. Karmi was a - a -”

“Bitch?” Hiro gave him a bitter smile. “I know all the swear words in the book, you know.”

“Language,” he warned. “You’re my little brother; you’re eternally five in my book, no matter how old you get.”

Hiro burst out a sparse laugh.

“But yeah,” Tadashi agreed. “She was. Don’t let people like her and from high school get to you.”

“Or elementary and middle school? Face it, Tadashi, nobody likes me. They never have, never will.” He shrugged hopelessly. “I wanted to show Karmi that by not ratting out on her, I wanted to be friends. She was a pain at every turn, but I’d rather a pain that grows up and stops being a pain than one that would be at my throat forever. But I guess I knew deep down it wouldn’t work, like you said. Karmi would have just accused me of having that stupid crush on her and kept bullying me.”

“She would have,” Tadashi agreed, “but you’re wrong about nobody liking you. There’s the gang, and there will be others, including kids your age. We just have to find them.”
Hiro’s smile turned bittersweet. “If you say so.”

The lab doors burst open. Professor Marsden glided through, Professor Sato following with a pained expression and covering his ear. She came up to the brothers, peering down at them over her glasses.

“I want to apologize on behalf of the biological engineering department and the biotech major,” she began. “I always deferred to the university dean when it came to Karmi, and only recently thought about disciplining her myself. I should have been more astute. Are you okay, Mr. Hamada?”

Hiro fidgeted, avoiding her gaze. “Yeah, I’m fine. Thank you.”

She turned to Tadashi. “I do want copies of those videos. If Karmi tries to apply to any other university, they have a right to know how she regards the rules, safety, and her peers in the lab.”

He nodded. “Got it. I’ll send them when I get the chance.”

“How is Karmi?” Hiro inquired.

“Bawling her eyes out in the counseling office while we wait for her parents to pick her up, if that’s what you mean,” she replied tersely. “Otherwise, I don’t know and I don’t care. The sooner she’s off the grounds, the sooner my skin stops crawling. I want you both to understand that if anything like this ever happens again - yesterday’s incident - you need to find one of my professors and be decontaminated immediately. The viruses I stock and allow my students to grow are incredibly dangerous and lethal. Had Karmi had no prior record, I still would have raged the way I did and demanded her expulsion. This is a matter of life and death.”

They both nodded quickly. “Understood.”

“Good.” She turned, noticed Professor Granville entering the lab, and moved for the other lab doors. “Again, I apologize on behalf of my department. I hope you two have a good day.”

Professor Granville approached, eyeing Professor Marsden as she left. “Mr. Hamada and Mr. Hamada. I hope you’re doing well.”

“We are,” Hiro mumbled.

“I’m glad to hear it,” she said. “I also want to apologize again. I never intended to hurt you, Hiro. I admit that I did not handle the situation appropriately, and that was a failing entirely of my own. I’m sorry.”

He forced a smile. “To be fair, I didn’t expect you to care anyway.”

She frowned deeply. “That is also a failure of mine. I should have proved you wrong at first chance.”

The smile wiped off his face. Hiro suddenly became very interested in a loose string on his shorts.

She looked at Tadashi. “You were right about one thing earlier this week, Mr. Hamada. I did say you could come to me with anything to help earn your trust, yet I fear I’ve broken whatever little we had before. I’m sorry.”

Tadashi raised his chin. “If you really are, you’ll never let this happen again to anyone. You have shattered quite a bit of my respect for you this week, Professor.” He ignored the look Hiro shot him. “I can’t say I know how long it’ll take you to repair it.”
“That’s fair,” she admitted. “I hope I can. That said, this will indeed not happen again. I’ve learned my lesson; I hold some of the blame for Karmi’s behavior, allowing it to run as long as it did, and I will not allow this mistake to repeat in the future. I’m sorry it took all of this in order for me to learn that. It shouldn’t have taken the victimization of a student to open up my eyes to the danger I put you in.”

“Thanks,” Tadashi said. “As long as you mean that, I think we can all move on from this.”

She nodded, and walked away.

He looked at Hiro. “Hey. Since we’re talking about lessons learned, I won’t do this in the future, if you end up bullied again. I’ll talk to you and get whatever I need with your permission, okay?”

Hiro shook his head tiredly. “Enough apologizing already. Yeah, I got it; thank you. But, uh, I’ll never admit this again but thanks for...for doing it this way this time. I would have never given you those recordings. If it hadn’t been for you, nothing would have changed. So thanks.”

“I’ll always be here for you, Hiro,” he promised. “Even if I’m embarrassingly overprotective and go overboard. I’m here for you.”

Always, he promised himself.

Chapter End Notes

Ding dong, the witch is dead!

 Seriously, she’s never coming back after this. I will never write Karmi's name in another fic again, I'm washing my hands of her. She already never existed in my Big Hero 6 fics (obviously, being a show character), but I can now officially declare that she will never exist in any of my Big Hero 6: The Series fics either. Seriously, she and whatever entities spawned her were never born in my fics' universes.

Reminder that I'm not interested in explaining to folks that bullying is in fact bullying, and I'm not keeping any comments that want to defend Karmi or condemn me for writing this the way I did. I told you before that I can't stand her and that this was going to be self-indulgent as hell. If you came this far, you knew were getting into and could have easily pressed the back button.

To everybody else, my self-indulgent fix-it is done. I promise I won't do this again in future chapters. I just - No matter what, I was never going to write Issue 188 and the bullying plotline in a way that follows the show. I can't stand it, and I sincerely don't believe that doing nothing/protecting the bully would be in Tadashi's character. If I had kept Tadashi dead and wrote this under some other premise, I still would have written this in a way that fixes the gang's reactions, defends Hiro, and thoroughly punishes Karmi and reprimands Granville (for not doing anything about her in later episodes - that's why I crack down on her so hard here). But I'm done now, no more Karmi, no more reason for me to go out of my way like this again, I'm good. We'll be back on normal track with the next episode chapter, which will likely either come out in November or December (I need a break).

I hope this was at least somewhat enjoyable. If not, I'm sorry.
Notes:

- Upon rewatching the episode and other Karmi moments, I realized she makes a lot of strange, ugly faces. Ugh.

- I channeled Margaret Houlihan from M*A*S*H for Professor Marsden. It was delightful.

- I realized while writing this that I never write character descriptions describing the characters' races. I didn't when I introduced Granville in chapter one or any of the professors from Hiro's Journal. It makes no difference with the character we already know (everyone knows Granville is dark-skinned), but I decided to try it out with my OC. If you're curious about the others, I see Sato and Yoshida as Japanese (kind of obvious, haha), Roe as light brown, and Froeb, Sullivan, and Squires as white. But if you want to picture them as other ethnicities or mixed, go ahead.

- I botched the timeline with Mole a bit. When I was planning this out, I forgot when that happened, and only realized my mistake when I was writing the final draft and double checking the show for their canon lines. I decided against fixing it because I was in too deep by then.

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