Not All Who Wander Are Lost
by Mangaluva

Summary

Touya should have run away on his own and left them behind. But he didn't. (AU in which all four Todoroki siblings ran away together.)

Notes

Why am I so weak for siblings? WHY. This is a very stylistic thing that more or less possessed me after thinking about Fuyumi in particular too much and I finished most of it over a couple of days, so the plan is to post daily for the next ten days.
This is Todoroki Touya, aged fourteen. If you want to know what the hell he thinks he’s doing, frankly, so does he.

He should’ve left then and there, ignored Fuyumi and Natsuo’s pleading. Or gone back to his own hospital room, waited just one more day to sneak out without them catching him, maybe one more week, given his sloughed-off flesh longer to heal. Everything under his bandages itches and aches and burns. He’s dizzy from dehydration, didn’t think to pick up a drink at the station. He didn’t bring anything except the clothes on his back. He doesn’t have food or water or money or even really a plan for when to get off.

He shouldn’t have brought them with him.

What the hell is he doing?

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This is Todoroki Fuyumi, aged twelve. She knows what she should do. She should go home, and take Natsuo and Shouto with her. Shouto probably needs to go back to the hospital, Touya definitely does, but he’s older than her and she’s never been able to make him do anything. She shouldn’t have lied to the staff at the hospital, told them her brothers were sleeping when she left their rooms.

They should all go home.

Shouto is practically swaddled in Natsuo’s hoodie, sleeping on her lap like a baby. The hood hides his distinctive two-tone hair, the bandages covering a wound that will surely become a distinctive scar. He seems to be sleeping peacefully, but every time the train stops and the doors open, he jerks up and she gets a glimpse of a frightened brown eye before he registers that he’s on a train, not at home, and that isn’t Father coming through the door. She rubs circles on his back the way Mama always did (will never do again, Fuyumi doesn’t even know where she’s been taken, Father brushed her off and said he’d tell her when she was older) and Shouto goes back to sleep right away every time.

Touya’s pressed tight to her side, sunken into his own hoodie, Natsuo sitting on his lap for warmth and dozing, the younger boy obscuring any view of the bandages covering what’s left of Touya’s face. When the train is crowded, people bump into Touya’s legs, and his whole body stiffens, pain hissing quietly between his teeth.

She should take all of them home.

She doesn’t want to.

She says nothing.
This is Todoroki Natsuo, aged nine. He wants his mother. He wants to go home. But he doesn’t want to go home to his father.

Father’s always ignored Natsuo. When he was littler, like Shouto, it made him jealous, that Touya got to spend so much time with Father, learning to be a hero. Then he was five, and begged to join hero training, ignoring Fuyumi trying to stop him going into the training room, and Father backhanded him so hard he couldn’t see out of one eye for days. Mama called the school and told them he had the flu until the bruises were gone.

He’s fine with being ignored now. He’s smarter than he was when he was five. It’s not a good thing to be Quirkless, but he knows it’s better than having a Quirk Father likes, like Touya and Shouto. It’s because Natsuo’s Quirkless that it’s not his blood and puke the servants are scrubbing out of the training room daily.

It’s Touya’s and it’s Shouto’s, and now it’s their blood spotting the bandages on their faces, on Touya’s hands whenever they slip out of his hoodie pockets.

Natsuo wants to be a proper big brother, the sort who can protect Shouto, but he doesn’t know how. But he has absolute faith in Touya and Fuyumi.

Wherever it is they’re going, he’ll follow them. He’s only nine, after all. They’re older—Touya’s practically a grown-up.

They probably know what they’re doing.

This is Todoroki Shouto, aged six.

His face hurts a lot. The hospital gave him lots of medicines for it but they didn’t make the pain stop, just made him feel like he was floating away from it, like it’s not really happening to him. He’s very sleepy and he’s not sure if anything’s really happening to him. Sometimes he thinks he’s back at home, sometimes he’s on a train, but he’s pretty sure that Fuyumi’s hand rubbing his back is real.

When they left the hospital she said they weren’t going home. Mama’s gone away where she can’t hurt anyone anymore, and now they’re going away too, somewhere Father isn’t.

Shouto’s okay with not seeing Father anymore. Father hurts him. Father hurt Mama. He hurt Mama until she hurt Shouto.

He wants to go where Mama is and tell her that it’s okay. He knows it wasn’t her fault. It was Father’s fault, the same as whatever’s happened to Touya is Father’s fault. Everything is Father’s fault.

Shouto doesn’t know where they’re going, but he trusts Fuyumi, and lets her lull him back to sleep.

Chapter End Notes

I like writing in this stream-of-consciousness style but certain details don't quite fit in,
so while I think (hope) the following things aren't necessary to follow the fic, they might be interesting to know:
--Touya was trained relentlessly until Shouto's perfect quirk manifested, then pretty much ignored. He was awkwardly getting used to freedom and having some sort of normal-ish childhood and getting to know his siblings when Rei had her mental break and burned Shouto. While Shouto was in hospital Endeavour went back to training Touya, just in case the injury damaged Shouto's quirk somehow, but you can't exactly drop somebody back into an intense training regimen with zero warmup when they've been out of practice for a couple of years, and his fire got out of control and burned himself badly. So he was back in the hospital before Shouto got out, and in this AU, Fuyumi and Natsuo caught him planning to run away and begged to go with him. They had to go fast, before Shouto was discharged.
--Touya still feels a bit of a gulf between him and Fuyumi and Natsuo and sees them as more innocent because they weren't on the receiving end of as much of Endeavour’s abuse. He and Shouto have barely met because one or the other of them was always isolated from the others.
One Year

Chapter Summary

This is not the good life. In an ideal world, it would be best to go home. This is not an ideal world.

Chapter Notes

Interesting fact about trying to research homeless children in Japan: it's really really difficult because something like 95% of homeless people are unemployed adult men and nobody wants to talk about or acknowledge any of them

See the end of the chapter for more notes

This is Todoroki Touya, aged fifteen. He’s trying not to crinkle the plastic packaging of the onigiri he’s stuffed into his pockets. They’re easy to pocket quickly, but loud if you move wrong.

He eyes the zaru soba trays briefly before moving on. They’re too awkward to steal, and no matter how much he wishes he could treat Shouto to his favourite food in the hopes of drawing some kind of reaction from the kid, they have to conserve every yen. He scans the ground for coins whenever he’s out. He’s gotten a few cash-in-hand jobs, lied about his age. His skin hasn’t healed well, but that’s fine, it makes him look older, changes his appearance, makes him look less like Him. The cheap box hair-dye helps, too. Slightly short guy, messy black hair, ugly as shit; not as memorable as some of the people walking around with mutative Quirks. It’s kept him from being recognized.

He also pinches a bottle of cheap foundation. He’s saving up a collection of them. He and Fuyumi have a plan.

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This is Todoroki Fuyumi, aged thirteen. She’s doing her best to teach Natsuo and Shouto some math. She’s pretty sure it’s what she was learning when she was Natsuo’s age, definitely not Shouto’s, but He had Shouto in an accelerated homeschooling program, just like Touya, so he’s keeping up. Every second of Touya and Shouto’s lives had been under His control.

Not anymore. Now, mostly, it’s all down to Fuyumi.

Touya’s the only one that leaves the abandoned lean-to that they’re squatting in. He’s tall enough to pass as a short adult, so him wandering around at all hours doesn’t draw attention, not in the busiest parts of Yokohama. If he was trailed by three kids, though, they’d get found in no time. They’d get sent back.

The lean-to is better than drifting around and hiding under bridges and down alleys, but it’s not nice. When summer kicked in in full, they were all stretched out in the shade as Fuyumi exhausted herself chilling the room at all hours. When she’d finally collapsed, she’d awoken to find that Shouto had nearly given himself frostbite doing his best to cool the place back down. She’s been
doing her best to work with him, teach him to use his ice safely. Then winter came back and it was Touya’s turn to keep them warm and teach Shouto the best he could to use his other side safely, to keep Fuyumi and Natsuo warm whenever Touya’s out.

Regardless of season, whenever Touya’s away, Fuyumi feels chill tingle in her fingers, ready to lash out with her Quirk at the slightest provocation. She’s never been trained to fight, not even a little, and she’s so scared she can’t protect her brothers if a homeless adult finds the lean-to and wants in, or if the police find them, or if He does. Shouto’s been trained to fight, but she doesn’t want him to. She doesn’t want Touya to either, but he’s older and he’s good at it, good enough that he’s so far been able to protect them without using his distinctive blue fire at all.

She hopes Touya’s injuries don’t hurt him when he uses his Quirk. She hasn’t asked how he gets money or food. She focuses on teaching Natsuo and Shouto, comforting them, thinking of stories and games to distract them from being hungry (because they all are, three meals a day are absolutely out of the question and most days they just eat once), making ice for cold sponge baths, keeping them happy and safe.

She misses Mama. She doesn’t know if she’s doing any of this right, but nobody complains. Shouto wakes sobbing from nightmares that he’s back at home, and Fuyumi has nightmares too, of seeing Touya staggering out of the training room with his face literally melting off. No matter how frozen or overheated or hungry or bored or scared they get, crouching in this lean-to, none of them ever question whether or not it’s better than the luxuries and fears of home.

None of them hurt each other.

She tries to study from the random selection of books Touya’s stolen from people’s trash. They have a plan, after all.

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This is Todoroki Natsuo, aged ten.

He wants to go outside, but this isn’t an area with children, it’s a working area. There’s nowhere to go that they wouldn’t stick out, and he’s seen the newspapers Touya sometimes brings back. The four of them are back in the papers again on the one-year anniversary of villains unknown kidnapping the children of the Number Two Hero. Touya doesn’t look anything like the photo anymore, but Natsuo still looks like his, even with the sticky dye turning his hair black instead of white.

His hair’s getting long. None of them get haircuts. There’s no money, and except for Touya, they don’t leave the ramshackle hut they’re hiding in. The walls feel smaller every day, but at the same time, they feel like safety, as if all the things that ever hurt them can’t get through the rusted iron.

Natsuo hugs Shouto a lot, because he wants to make his only younger sibling feel better, but he’s not sure if it helps. Shouto answers when spoken to, reads what Fuyumi gives him and eats what Touya brings back, but if left to his own devices will simply curl up and sleep or stare at the wall. He’s like a little ghost, and Natsuo doesn’t know how to help, so he talks to Shouto about whatever he can think of and hugs him as much as possible and hopes it helps.

He also hugs Shouto because Shouto radiates both heat and chill depending on which side you hug him from and it’s all they’ve got in their ratty lean-to. It’s winter now so whenever he’s back they all huddle with Touya, who’s always so warm.

The rest of the time Natsuo tries to focus on Fuyumi’s lessons. She’s explained the plan, and he
doesn’t want to let her down. Fuyumi’s nicer than his old school teachers, anyway, and it’s almost fun when it’s just him and Fuyumi and Shouto. Touya helps, though he’s not as good at explaining things. It’s still nice, though.

They were never together like this before, all four of them. He wishes Mama could see this.

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This is Todoroki Shouto, aged seven.

His eye doesn’t hurt anymore, much, though his vision out of it is a little fuzzy. He works hard on Fuyumi’s lessons, eats whatever Touya brings him, does his best with his Quirk to cool down or warm up the hut they’re in.

He’s never beaten.

He wakes up from nightmares of being at home, training with Father. Or maybe he wakes up for training from a dream where he’s hidden away in a secret place where he only ever sees Touya and Fuyumi and Natsuo, the siblings he always wanted to know, who teach him kindly and hug him tight.

He’s not sure which one is real.

Chapter End Notes

Running away from home and squatting in a shed in the endless urban maze of the Greater Tokyo Metropolitan Area is, ideally, not how you want kids to live, but ideally you also don't want civil servants slash celebrities to have the money and influence to force marriage and abuse their children with impunity!

I live in Yokohama and it really is just endless, endless crammed streets that meander randomly in and out of being residential and working areas. I can barely comprehend Tokyo sometimes. It seems way too easy to get lost and disappear in it, but that's what these kids are after.

By the way, I was surprised by how many kids here address their mother as "mama", some well into middle school. It seems to be pretty popular, and sure makes it easier for me to teach family words without breaking my "no Japanese in the classroom" rule.
Chapter Summary

School is better, but only because the bar is buried so deep.

Chapter Notes

This chapter introduces playground bullying and shitty teenage boys to the festival of delights that is the Todoroki kids' lives! I'm sorry that all I do is make them suffer to throw in a sprinkling of them thinking about how much they love each other.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

This is Todoroki Touya, aged sixteen. He has a fake ID saying he’s twenty-seven and that his name is Saito Daiki. It’s the lowest he dared go to pass off as Natsuo and Shouto’s dad.

The school is garbage. He knows it is. It’s one of the lowest ranking schools in the whole goddamn country, the building’s falling apart, and the principal openly asked for a bribe to take Natsuo and Shouto without any records. Touya offered to not burn his fucking face off instead.

He fucking hates it. He hates using his fire to scare people into doing what he wants. It makes him feel like Him.

Touya hates the thought of leaving Natsuo and Shouto in this garbage place where he can’t watch over them, but he won’t be able to stalk them because Fuyumi’s going to her equally shitty middle school alone, so he has to watch out for her. She tested well enough in the entrance exam that they accepted her without even looking at her lack of ID and without Touya having to threaten anybody or even turn up, because she’s probably got a higher GPA than her whole goddamn grade put together, but it’s going to make her a fucking target and he knows it. He has to trust Natsuo to look out for Shouto.

Touya’s teaching them to fight after Fuyumi’s lessons, both trying to prepare their younger brothers for school. He hates dredging up thoughts of Him to do it, digging through memories of his training for actual useful fighting information amongst the abuse. He can’t bring himself to raise a hand to Shouto at all, remembering his own training, imagining his littlest brother suffering through that, imagining Shouto remembering that when he looks at Touya. Touya teaches Natsuo, Natsuo teaches Shouto.

He hates all of this. But they can’t crouch in a shack forever. He brought them with him, and he has to make sure that they at least have a future.

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This is Todoroki Fuyumi, aged fourteen. She’s making the best of things. It’s all she does.

Her entrance exam scores were perfect. She tried harder than she needed to. She can tell by the end
of her first homeroom that this middle school is going to be terrible, but at least it gives her a legitimate middle school record from which to apply to better high schools, and she needs to be ready for those entrance exams.

If she can survive the bullying. There’s a lot of it, and unlike her old school, the teachers don’t seem to care so long as it doesn’t interrupt a lesson. She struggles to keep track of the reasons she’s a target, tries to minimize them. She gets good grades, but she doesn’t dare change that. Her hair dye is ugly and she doesn’t wear makeup and she smells weird, but she lives in a shack with no shower and makeup is expensive, all Touya can filch is for covering up Shouto’s burn. She doesn’t smoke or drink, because those are expensive, too, and bad for her health besides.

Maybe those aren’t really the reasons, though. Maybe she’s just funny because of how easy it is to make her flinch, jump, panic. All it takes is a sudden loud noise, the slightest hint of disapproval. Any attention at all feels hostile, threatening. And having missed her last year of grade school and first year of middle school, she missed some significant steps in the collective jump into puberty, so she isn’t prepared to defend herself from hands sneaking up her skirt, up her shirt. She doesn’t own a bra. They’re expensive, but her lack of one’s already been discovered and drawn comments she doesn’t know what to do with. There’s a lot of comments that she doesn’t fully understand, but make her skin crawl.

There’ve been muggings in the area, somebody with a fire Quirk hurting people and taking wallets. Though she doesn’t talk about her day at school when she meets up with her brothers at the train, nevertheless any boys following her to the station or any hands sneaking into her uniform unwanted have an uncanny tendency to wind up burned. Some of those hands belong to teachers.

She hates that Touya is hurting people. She hates that she’s too scared to confront him about it. She hates that it makes her feel safe, because he won’t hurt her or Natsuo or Shouto. She should care more that he’s hurting other people. She does care, but she’s confused and scared and she can’t—

She doesn’t know what to do. So she focuses on her grades, and Natsuo, and Shouto. She sits up late washing their uniforms in buckets and gets up early to check everybody’s roots, ration out black hair dye, do the makeup that hides Shouto’s scar.

She doesn’t tell Touya about the girl gang whose homework she does. They’re threatening about it, they’re threatening about everything, but she says nothing and does her best. At best, maybe they’ll think of her as a friend, protect her so Touya doesn’t have to; at worst, if they’re depending on her for grades, at least one of them will probably twig that they ought to watch out for mousy little Saito Yumiko.

They’re criminals. So’s Touya. But they don’t hurt her. Nobody who hits her now gets away without being punished.

Maybe that shouldn’t mean everything to her, but it does.

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This is Todoroki Natsuo, aged eleven.

He trusts Fuyumi when she says that it’s important that he goes to this shitty school, so he can go to a better middle school, so he can go to a better high school, so—

It’s all so far away. He goes to school because Fuyumi smiles when she sees his grades, and so he can protect Shouto. When he’s finished his homework with Fuyumi, he begs Touya for fighting lessons until he nearly passes out. It’s not scary. Sure, Touya is tall, but he’s not big like Him,
never ever uses his flames at home, and never hurts Natsuo, just shows him what to do.

Touya won’t teach Shouto, so Natsuo has to. Both of them get bullied a lot for doing well in class and using manners sometimes and smelling funny (because of the dye, and also not having a bath or shower, just Fuyumi’s ice) and Natsuo being Quirkless and never having new things and carrying weird stuff in their bags, because they carry everything they own, because they don’t want to leave things behind, because they have to move around more now so they’re not all seen coming and going from the same shack a lot. Touya doesn’t go to school. He carries around a rucksack full of everybody’s clothes and does some kind of work for money, though when asked he just vaguely says “this and that”. Natsuo thinks he’s probably just stealing stuff and doesn’t want to admit it.

Natsuo’s in trouble for fighting all the time, but he wants other kids to be scared of him. If the littler kids are scared of him, they’ll be scared to hurt Shouto. They’re pretending Touya is their dad but he never gets called in to talk about Natsuo fighting. Natsuo just gets a discipline note to take home and have signed, and he signs it himself and brings it back and the secretary shoves it into the big disciplinary folder labelled Saito Hinata without looking at it. The principal doesn’t seem to like Touya, or Natsuo, or Shouto, or anybody, really.

Natsuo doesn’t like anybody much, either. Nobody except Touya and Fuyumi and Shouto.

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This is Todoroki Shouto, aged eight.

School is probably real. It’s not nice enough to be a dream. Fuyumi’s a better teacher and he liked it better when Natsuo was the only other child around. He’s not learning anything, just fending off bullies without his Quirk because he’s scared of melting or wiping off the makeup that Fuyumi carefully applies every day to hide his scar. They already bully him about all sorts, so if they saw the they’d definitely bully him about that too. Kids mock Natsuo for being Quirkless and say Shouto is too because he won’t use his Quirk.

He’d rather be Quirkless. Father would have ignored him then, the way he always ignored Natsuo.

They never talk about Father, or Mama. They never talk about anything that came before they left the hospital. They don’t talk about a big, warm, clean house, or hot running water, or having enough to eat all the time. They don’t talk about fists, or fire, or tiptoeing around in silence, or never seeing each other. He chokes down the terrible school meals because they’re the most food he gets all day, and if it wasn’t for that he might not go at all. He doesn’t complain, though, because he knows Fuyumi’s doing her best. Sometimes, when he thinks about Mama, her face turns into Fuyumi’s, but only in good memories. Fuyumi would never hurt him.

The bullying isn’t so bad, really. They’re just kids. They can’t hit very hard. They don’t really know how to fight. Shouto can take much harder hits than that, and Natsuo always hits back harder. He teaches Shouto everything that Touya won’t, because Touya won’t fight Shouto. When Shouto thinks about Father, he never turns into Touya.

He’s not happy. But he’s not scared, either. He’s not sure what else there is.

Chapter End Notes

I picked Saito as their fake surname because it's generic as HELL. My boss, a former
coworker, and a grand total of SEVEN entirely unrelated students all have the family name Saito. I did think about having Fun With Puns for a minute, but in the end I figured it would make more sense for them to try and keep a low profile. Daïki was picked as Touya's name because it sounds like Dabi a bit ;P Natsu's name is Hinata because "Natsu" lends itself to nicknames like "Nakkun" or "Nacchan" in Japanese, and those also work as nicknames for Hinata, so the risk of slipups is lower if they stick to affectionate nicknames. (Hinata is a unisex name but a boy usually wouldn't shorten his name to Hina.) Same deal for Fuyumi's fake name being Yumiko; both shorten to "Yumi".
Three Years

Chapter Summary

Fuyumi and Natsuo have to decide on their futures, but all of them struggle to see that far ahead.

Chapter Notes

This chapter specifically brings up teenage pregnancy and compensated dating (Enjokosai, often shortened to Enko). Enko is distinct from prostitution in that it does not necessarily involve sexual favours. Enko is generally understood as an older man paying a younger woman (sometimes but not always a teenage girl) to spend time with him, popularly at a karaoke bar but also going for dinner, to see a movie or other dating activities, and may or may not involve sex. While purchasing sexual favours from anybody under the age of 18 is illegal in Japan, it still happens and arrests are still made.

Enko has also been discussed by Japanese feminists as a form of resistance against the very restrictive traditional Japanese notions of femininity and a means of young women to be financially independent. As a foreigner, I'm not gonna take a stance since it's not my area, just presenting a fuller explanation of something that's discussed in this chapter.

Also anybody planning to @ me with wildly underinformed and incorrect notions about what the age of consent is in Japan is gonna catch these hands

But in general, if discussion of this topic makes you uncomfortable, skip the Fuyumi section and I'll clarify in the endnotes.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

This is Todoroki Touya, aged seventeen. He has three jobs.

Fuyumi wakes him up as she’s taking Shouto and Natsuo to school so he can drag himself to five hours at the 7-11 in a station ten minutes down the line, then as soon as he clocks off he hauls ass to get to the Family Mart shift that starts an hour later forty-five minutes on the train away, then walks another twenty minutes further away for half an hour of dinner and a nap in McDonald’s before another five hours at a Lawson’s a little further on.

Three part-time jobs, spread far enough apart that he won’t be spotted by the same customer or coworker twice. Three five-hour stretches wearing ugly, scratchy-painful shirts, ignoring stuck-up customers trying not to looking grossed out when he hands them their food, and mentally calculating which staff discount gets him a better deal on trash bags or hair dye or soba noodles.

He hates all of humanity with every fiber of his being, especially the ones who won’t take off their fucking headphones when he’s trying to find out if they want a fucking fork or not.
Even Fuyumi’s usually asleep by the time he gets back to the shitty flat they rent now. It’s a roof over their heads, a place to keep spare clothes and toothbrushes, a kitchenette for Fuyumi to feed them all something healthier than cup ramen and onigiri in, a real shower and a toilet that won’t have a homeless man sleeping in it. They still keep important stuff in their bags, school bags doubling as go bags and Touya always toting around a salvaged satchel. It’s stuffed to bursting and almost sewn together with stolen safety pins, but at least they can stow some shit in the flat, and the rain doesn’t get in much except for by that one window that doesn’t close properly.

He hopes Natsuo and Shouto are enjoying having a flat. He barely sees them, because he doesn’t take days off. He’s saving for Fuyumi’s high school entrance exams. The good schools charge just to take the goddamn exams, but there’s no question of settling. He wants her away from the fucking gang she hangs out with, into the kind of place that deserves her, gives her a shot at getting into a good university, making some real money.

That’s how he shoots her down when she tries to get a part-time job. He’s decided. He’s going to work his ass off, she’s going to get good grades and keep her brothers clean and fed and dressed, her and Natsuo and Shouto are all going to go to good universities and get good jobs and by the time he’s thirty Touya can retire and spend the rest of his life guilt-tripping his siblings into supporting him.

It’s half a joke, half a dream. He can’t really imagine being thirty. He’s too tired to imagine anything past making it to his next shift. He drinks so much cheap coffee a day that he’s probably going to give himself a heart attack by twenty-one.

He could just leave again. Try and make it on his own. He’s a damn good thief. He knows how to scare people with his fire, with his fucked up face. He can fight. He could do all sorts of things if he didn’t have to worry about dragging them down with him.

He can’t just leave them here. Every time he sees Endeavor merch in one of the stores, he remembers that. Heroes aren’t real, they’re just criminals who get away with it.

So he’s a criminal and a middle-school dropout dragging his carcass from dead-end job to dead-end job. He can still look after them better than He could. He will. If he can prove that, it’ll all be worth it.

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This is Todoroki Fuyumi, aged fifteen. She’s trying not to think about the offer Sumiko made, passing a note in class. She’s got another one on the hook, and she’s willing to share in exchange for Fuyumi’s entrance exam cheat sheets.

Fuyumi thinks she can trust Sumiko, sort of. When Fuyumi had no idea why she was bleeding in the changing room, panicking because she thought somebody had slashed her and she somebody hadn’t noticed, Sumiko was the one who’d thrown her a tampon and, after the other girls were done laughing at her for not knowing what a period was, explained things most girls had a mother or older sister or aunt to explain to them.

All she’s got is Touya, who apparently didn’t know either, because such things weren’t on His homeschool curriculum, but he brings back tampons when Fuyumi needs them without treating them or her like she’s diseased like the boys at school do, panicking at the hint of blood.

Sumiko usually shares stuff like this with Ayane, not Fuyumi. Ayane missed her period again this month. She’s short-tempered, snappy, scared, and Fuyumi heard her yelling at somebody over the phone, swearing even more colourfully than Touya after fifteen hours of retail a day. Which is
probably why Sumiko’s passing Fuyumi an offer she wishes she could just throw away.

Paid dates are such good money, though. The girls going on them are buying expensive clothes and makeup and jewelry and phones, they don’t need the money for their families the way Fuyumi does. And she wouldn’t be alone—the guy wants two girls, Sumiko and somebody else. It could be Fuyumi. She’s skinny, starved enough to be worth something, and the other girls taught Fuyumi some tricks to make the box hair dye look better, and if somebody helps her with her makeup she apparently cleans up pretty nice. She could make more money in an evening than Touya makes in a month.

It’s not even what’s involved that has her hesitating. She’s never gone that far, but she thinks she could grit her teeth and bear it. She imagines her mother, married for fifteen years to a man she couldn’t stand, bearing him four children. Other women have borne worse, certainly. And according to Sumiko, half the time the guys are too old to do anything anyway, they just want to take pretty teenage girls out to dinner and pretend they’re the kind of guy who can get pretty teenage girls to go to dinner with them. But the last time Touya caught wind of Fuyumi considering this, he said he’d flat-out kill any pervert he caught her with, and she thinks he really means it. He’s bound and determined to support them all on his own, and he won’t let Fuyumi help.

She’s almost old enough to get a normal part-time job, but he refuses that, too, pointing out that all the best high schools forbid it anyway, wanting their students to focus on their studies. She could just go to a half-decent high school, use that money Touya’s putting aside to get Natsuo some nicer middle school applications instead of the half-decent ones he’s settling for. He’s interested in medicine, she thinks. He and Shouto hang out at the library while they wait for her to finish at school and he’s always looking at books about first aid and medical care and human bodies. It’s so expensive, and it needs the best academic record possible. She doesn’t know what she wants to do. She’d rather help Natsuo.

She’s still sure Touya would never hurt her, but she’s still scared of driving him away, this time abandoning them without giving her and Natsuo a chance to stop him.

She endures, and focuses on Natsuo and Shouto, and tries to make plans, and doesn’t throw away Sumiko’s note.

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This is Todoroki Natsuo, aged twelve.

He’s looking forward to middle school. He doesn’t care how long he has to spend on the train to get to somewhere better, he’s giving those entrance exams his all. But he doesn’t want to leave Shouto alone in this shitty elementary. Maybe he should let Shouto fight more of his own fights, so kids will be scared of him instead of the Wrath of Nakkun. Shouto’s still pretty short and slight but he’ll be a fourth grader soon. He knows how to fight. He just rarely has to.

Natsuo doesn’t know anything about choosing a middle school, so he just goes to whatever exams Fuyumi takes him to without even really paying attention to the names of the schools. She was getting ready for middle school entrance exams before, so she must remember what she’s doing. When he gets back his results, Fuyumi will help him pick the best options.

He knows it’s important for his future and all, but he doesn’t know what he wants that future to be. Well, he does. He’d like to be a doctor. He finds medical stuff interesting, and it feels good to be able to patch up his own and Shouto’s bruises and scrapes without having to worry Fuyumi with them, and it would be great if someday he could do something about Shouto’s scar except cover it, or Touya’s everything that never healed right, and maybe if he can help people by being a doctor
it’ll make up for all the people he’s hurting now.

He tells himself he’s not a bully because he’s not doing it for fun, but he hurts other kids every single day and they probably don’t care why he does it.

Plus, you don’t need a Quirk to be a doctor. He’d be valuable, as a doctor. He’d be able to actually help.

But that’s expensive. It needs a lot of expensive university, the kind that you need the best high schools to get into, and you need the best middle schools have a hope at those. No matter how good his grades are, they can’t afford it.

He needs to be realistic. But he can’t think of anything, so he defaults to following Fuyumi and trusting that she knows what she’s doing.

~~~

This is Todoroki Shouto, aged nine. He keeps to himself. He doesn’t have friends except Natsuo, and soon he won’t have Natsuo. So. Better get used to solitude now.

He got into another fight with a boy showing off a new Endeavor lunchbox. The sight of it makes Shout’s hidden scar itch. It probably bothers him so much because they left the hospital early. He wonders if Touya’s whole body feels like this. He hopes not, but he doesn’t know, because he only sees Touya when he’s sleeping.

They get dressed and ready for school silently in the morning, letting Touya sleep until Fuyumi wakes him just as they’re going out the door. Shouto remembers silent mornings, because noise bothered Endeavor in the mornings. But if they wake Touya up, he doesn’t flare up fire, or glare, or slam anybody’s hand on the table. He’s just tired, and it makes Shouto feel bad for waking him instead of scared.

It’s not hard to keep up the lie that Touya is Shouto’s dad. It feels true. He looks like a dad when he shows up for parents’ days in his shabby tenth-hand pawn shop suit. He’s the first thing that Shouto thinks of when somebody says “father”, not distant nightmares that get more distant every day. He pushes them, wanting them further, wanting them gone.

It’s also easy enough to keep up the lie that he doesn’t remember his mother because she ran out on them when Shouto was a baby. He doesn’t have to pretend to remember anything at all. One day for class they have to draw a picture of their families, and it’s easy to draw Natsuo and Touya and he’s started colouring in the hair before he realizes he drew Fuyumi too, as Mama.

It’s harder to remember Mama. He can’t see her face anymore, just… thoughts. The sound of her crying. Knowing she’d put herself between him and Endeavor and get hurt. The sound of a kettle whistling.

He wishes he doesn’t remember that, but at the same time he clings to it, because it’s all he’s got.

Chapter End Notes

For anybody who skipped Fuyumi, she was offered an opportunity to go on a paid date with another teenage girl and the older man who wanted to go out with two girls, the
other teenagers' usual partner having just found out she's pregnant and too wrapped up in sorting that out to go on paid dates. She herself has not been on a paid date yet and is not pregnant, and spends some time weighing up the pros and cons of the opportunity, including the benefits of how much money she could make and the risk that Touya would find out and kill the guy paying teenage girls for dates, which he's threatened to do. She's undecided at the end of the section.

I don't have an exact date on these but so far they've all taken place around early February. Not every chapter will, but I'll try to make it clear when it's happening at another time of year. That's largely because entrance exams, in Japan, mostly take place around late January and early February, so it's a clear transitional point in kids' lives as they grow up as well as a time that's more fraught with fear and tension than the start of the new school year.

Also I gotta say, I worked retail for five years, and no experience in my life has ever made me more tempted to build a doomsday weapon and end humanity here and now for the good of the universe.
Four Years

Chapter Summary

Anybody who says money can't buy happiness has never been starving, or homeless, or desperate, or tried to raise children that way.

Chapter Notes

Order switch! There is a very good reason for that and the reason is that I do not understand Japanese law super duper well so apologies if I've pulled anything completely out of my ass

See the end of the chapter for more notes

This is Todoroki Shouto, aged ten. He’s spending the day with Touya. That’s happening more and more lately, ever since Touya got the new job.

Waste disposal, he says. Shouto didn't know taking away trash paid so well, but there’s so many people in Tokyo all putting their trash out every week, so it must be a lot of work. But he’s not working as much as he was at the combinis and he’s making more money and he has time to spend with Shouto. Maybe he’s trying to make up for scaring Shouto by fighting with Fuyumi.

Shouto feels guilty for ever being scared that Touya would hit Fuyumi. He wouldn’t. He would never. But they stepped outside to have one of their quiet angry discussions in the stairwell instead of in the one-room flat, and this time it turned into shouting, and Shouto couldn’t hear the words but he could hear Fuyumi yelling and she was crying and Mama was crying in his memory and screaming for Father to stop and—

And he burst out, and Touya and Fuyumi were standing feet apart, yelling at each other, both of them had their hands fisted at their sides but it was just because they were yelling and nobody was hitting, and when they saw the look on Shouto’s face they both looked so guilty.

Touya got his new job a few days later, and started being home more and started bringing back more money and they could get Fuyumi’s new high school uniform and Natsuo’s new middle school uniform and bag and books and railcard. His new school’s so far away, and Fuyumi’s just going to an okay high school because she spent all the money Touya was saving on getting Natsuo a good middle school, but it means he can go to a very good high school and go to a very good university and be a doctor. Natsuo spends so long traveling to and from school every day, now Shouto only sees him when he’s sleeping, or else he’s studying long after Shouto’s fallen asleep. Shouto misses him, but he’s proud of him.

Shouto doesn’t know what he wants to be, but that’s okay because Fuyumi says she doesn’t either, and he’s got two years to decide before he even has to pick a middle school. He thinks any middle school at all will be better than his elementary school.

But he’s not thinking about that today. He’s going to see a movie with Touya. He politely thanks
the ticket lady, remembering the manners Mama and Fuyumi taught him, and she smiles and tells Touya how polite his son is. Touya ruffles Shouto’s hair, making it spike up like Touya’s and Natsuo’s does.

It makes him happy. He thinks this is what being happy must feel like, anyway. It’s new, and warm, in a good way.

~~~

This is Todoroki Natsuo, aged thirteen. He’s very tired.

His third train takes fifty-five minutes, so he sets an alarm and falls asleep with his headphones in, playing all the English he needs to learn, cramming in a nap before he gets home and does his homework.

Touya worked so hard in all those shitty jobs to pay for those entrance exams for Fuyumi, and then Fuyumi gave up her good high schools to give Natsuo his chance to be a doctor. He didn’t tell her he was thinking about it. How did she know? Fuyumi knows everything. No matter how late Natsuo’s up doing homework or studying, she stays up with him, finishing her own homework and helping Shouto while Natsuo’s still traveling home so she can focus entirely on him when he drags himself through the door.

Touya’s around more, too, offering as much help he can for a guy who dropped out of school at fourteen. Natsuo’s pretty sure that his line about being a trash collector is a crock of shit, but he isn’t sure he wants to know what Touya is doing. He’s pretty sure it’s illegal, and he just… doesn’t want to know.

Whatever Touya’s doing, he’s doing it to support all of them, but Natsuo knows his school is taking up the lion’s share right now, with the long list of expensive textbooks and supplies and uniform pieces. If he doesn’t ask, he can pretend it’s all fine and Touya hasn’t done anything wrong and didn’t throw away his own chance to go back to school to support them when he was barely older than Natsuo is now.

He studies for school, and he studies on his own, too, and he reads about burns, and the pain of them, and what fire does to different levels of skin and tissue and muscle and bone, and he remembers that Touya didn’t throw anything away. He escaped.

He escaped, and he brought them with him. He didn’t throw them away, either. Natsuo studies until he passes out on his textbook so that whatever it is, it won’t be for nothing.

~~~

This is Todoroki Fuyumi, aged sixteen. She’s debating whether or not social media is a good idea. It probably isn’t.

High school is better. She isn’t going to a good good high school, but it’s decent. The teachers are better, the students are held to a higher standard (that is, any standard at all), Fuyumi feels like she’s actually learning for the first time in years, and her uniform skirt has a longer option that goes past her knees. She’s making actual friends, not socializing based on whose homework she’s doing for them.

She isn’t in touch with any of the girls she knew in middle school. Some of them were getting entrance exam help from her and she hopes they made it, hopes they also got away from the parents they hated. A few dropped out before even graduating. She wishes she could have helped
them more than doing their homework, but it’s all she can do to help herself and her brothers, and as scattered as they all are now she can barely keep them in her reach.

She has her first mobile phone. It’s not expensive, but it’s… better than she would expect. Shouto and Natsuo and Touya all have phones too. They have a groupchat that they all message regularly throughout the day, checking in, soothing her to know that she can sort of watch out for Natsuo even when he’s so far away and Shouto when he’s alone at school and Touya when he’s… wherever Touya is. Touya got the phones at work. He gets lots of stuff at work, and he’s getting paid so much better too. He tells Natsuo and Shouto that he’s working in waste disposal. He at least affords Fuyumi the dignity of admitting to her face that that’s a euphemism, and flatly refusing to tell her what he is doing, because he doesn’t want her to worry about it.

She’s scared to push. She feels guilty. It’s her fault that Touya’s—well, he’s been committing crimes for years. She knows that. But he’s progressed to something more serious, and she feels like it’s her fault, for pushing too hard to get a job herself, for trying to go behind his back to set up paid dates. Touya’s so hung up on being the one providing for them, financially, and she never got to respond to him yelling that he wasn’t going to let her throw away her life too because that was the point in that climactic fight where Shouto burst out of the flat with something between rage and terror on his face.

They’d scared him so bad, yelling like that. She won’t let it come to a fight like that again. She won’t. She’ll keep the peace and keep Shouto and Natsuo happy and safe.

She misses her mother, and still doesn’t even know where He had sent her away to. There’s no sign of her in the articles about the missing Todoroki children that she reads on slow public wifi. Just four-year-old photos, money for information, and as soon as she sees a photo of Him she has to close the article. She braved his wiki once and it said that his wife had a breakdown when the children were kidnapped (because of course that’s the story) and has been a recluse ever since, but doesn’t say where.

She shouldn’t have to be the mother. She’s sixteen. She doesn’t want to have to mother her brothers, to worry about feeding them and making sure they’ve got all of their assignments for school and clothes that fit and remember to shower. She doesn’t want to worry all the time about whether or not she’s doing this right or if she’s messing up (but she hasn’t burned anybody’s face off, so she has to be doing better than both of her parents). But just as much, she wishes Touya would let somebody look after him, too.

He didn’t throw them away. She can’t let him throw himself away.

~~~

This is Todoroki Touya, aged eighteen, and he’s fucked.

Waste disposal. It’s an inside joke with himself. His fire burns incredibly hot, a blue flame, and can turn pretty much anything to ash incredibly quickly. There are folks who have use for that, folks who pay cash in hand for a rapid response, no questions and no evidence left. And he doesn’t ask questions, not what the stains on those clothes are or what’s on that paperwork or what was in that stinking chest—

He keeps thinking about the smell. He didn’t ask, didn’t watch while he burned it, but he can’t pretend that he doesn’t know what was in there. He has to accept that he’s crossed some lines that he might not be able to come back from.

And that’s fine. That’s fine. Fuyumi’s not going to as good of a school as she deserves but she’s
still got a shot at a decent future instead of getting herself knocked up or strangled by some fifty-
year-old pervert, and Natsuo might really make it as a doctor. If he does, Touya sort of did that. Okay, sure, he’d definitely go to good schools if they hadn’t left, He wouldn’t have settled for anything less, Natsuo could still have been a doctor, Touya’s just committed what are probably really serious crimes to claw his way into what they were gonna have anyway—

He spends time with Shouto because that reminds him of what he definitely has achieved. Touya remembers being ten, remembers constantly feeling sick from the erratic sleep because He would wake Touya up at random times to test his reaction times, then train him until he puked, and then punish him for being weak enough to vomit that easily—

He has so much hate. He was ten, punished for not keeping up with a highly-trained adult. His flames burned blue, and he was punished for feeling pain from the heat faster than a man who had worn orange flames all day for a decade and a half just to show that he could do it without burning his own face off. Touya has so much rage, and he channels it into burning whatever he’s paid to burn, and leaving a warning mark on anybody who tries to stiff him on his pay or follow him home.

Because Shouto is ten and Touya can take him to movies, and parks, and Skytree, and stage shows. He’s thinking of taking them all to Disneyland for Obon. None of them have ever been. Maybe it really is magical.

But the real magic will be staying out of jail, because a goddamn Pro Hero has dropped on his head and offered him the choice of selling out the really fuckin’ bad dudes he’s currently working for, or going down with them, or taking the risk of trying to kill a fucking Pro Hero.

There’s never been any good options, but this is a whole new level.

What the fuck is he going to do?

~~~

This is Aizawa Shouta, aged twenty-five. He has a hypothesis, and he’s facing a dilemma.

He has to proceed rationally, examine the possibilities and their logical outcomes.

Possibility one: Saito Daiki is exactly as he claims to be, a twenty-nine-year old who presumably dropped out of school given the ages of his two sons, who he has turned to crime to support. Logically, and skin-crawlingly, the high school girl who also appears to live with them would most likely be a girlfriend. If Saito tells Shouta what he needs to know to deal with the gang’s upcoming expansion from drug trafficking to human trafficking, the best option is probably to try to scare him into taking a normal job, keep an eye out to make sure he does, and heavily advise that he lay off the schoolgirls.

Possibility two: Saito Daiki is lying about his identity. Having a well-done steak instead of a face would make that easy. In fact, the possibility is that his whole household is lying; Shouta tailed the guy home once and the girl addressed him as “niisan”, and while that doesn’t rule out her being his girlfriend, because the world is garbage, the boys also addressed her as “oneesan” and “Yumi-nee”. This still doesn’t hard rule anything out, because what the hell would you ask your boyfriend’s kids to call you when they’re only a handful of years younger than you? But they could also all be siblings, and Saito’s lying about his age and relationship to the younger boys to disguise the lack of an actual adult anywhere in that goddamn household.

He watched a little longer and there’s a lot of close contact between all four of them, an ease to
how they move around each other and help each other with hair and bags and school uniforms and steal food from each other that speaks of familiarity, of family. The flat they live in is too small for four whole futons, so they cram two together and in the chill weather they all migrate, consciously or unconsciously, to sleeping piled on top of Saito. That’s when Shouta leaves, certain that the relationship between all of them is close, caring, nonsexual but loving.

And if they’re three brothers and a sister, lying about their identities, at least one of whom has a fire Quirk? There are a lot of missing kids out there, but missing siblings are rare, and this specific configuration is just too astronomically unlikely to be a goddamn coincidence.

So Aizawa Shouta might have a lead on one of the biggest missing persons cases in the whole goddamn country, and he has to decide what to do about it if he does.

Assess the options. Lay them out and rationally analyze the consequences.

Contact the police, offer them a potential location on the missing Todoroki kids and a time when all four are home to be picked up. This should be the obvious choice, but things aren’t sitting right, which is why he keeps spying on the flat instead of calling in a tip.

There’s a distinct lack of kidnapper in this kidnapping case. Nobody goes in and out of the flat except its four inhabitants, and they show no sign of expecting anybody. They show obvious signs of past abuse, but no present fear. The second-youngest boy is going to one of the best middle schools in the whole damn country. Saito spent Sunday taking the youngest boy to watch a parade. Nobody seems to be making them go anywhere they don’t want to go or do anything they don’t want to do. But they haven’t gone home to their father. Shouta definitely doesn’t have enough information for a hypothesis on why they don’t seem to want to go home, though certain behaviour patterns and the fact that both the oldest and youngest of them bear burns that aren’t mentioned in the missing persons report is… suggestive.

But that’s just conjecture, and maybe reporting them and getting them taken home would lead to a happy reunion, relief at being released from some pressure or manipulation too subtle for Shouta to find.

But maybe they don’t want to go back, and reporting them would be to throw them in a situation that was abusive in the past. Maybe it would become better after the fear of losing them, but in Shouta’s experience that’s a fairy tale. Retribution is more common, and that could lead to them running away again, ending up in something worse than the poverty-line but stable situation they appear to be in now.

Reporting them could also cause them to bolt before being taken in, scattering them to disappear entirely this time, losing both their school places and they only visible support they have in each other. Saito’s already hip-deep in a bad situation, but he’s not in quite too far to escape yet, and he’s the only member of the household involved in crime so far. Homeless kids with no access to school, who are actively hiding from most homeless resources to avoid being identified, end up without a lot of options.

Shouta has options right now. Something needs to be done to make them financially solvent, but whoever these people really are, they’re currently not in danger. They’re all eating, all clothed, the younger three are all attending school and doing their homework and attaining good grades. They’re exhibiting some signs of codependency, but that’s not a problem that needs addressed urgently, or should be addressed by forcibly yanking them apart.

There are no significant risks if he takes his time and gathers more information. If he rushes and makes the wrong decision, he could destroy four children.
That’s not an acceptable risk.

He hopes Saito takes his offer. They need to talk.

Chapter End Notes

Missing children cases in Japan really are super rare—that is, missing children reports that are followed up on. Surveys of schools that track children who are enrolled but fail to attend, or supposedly live in the area but failed to enroll, have turned up 24,000 missing kids over the past fifty years but literally everything I read about this is more upsetting because it's so badly handled. On top of that, there's a big moral panic over the massive uptick in child abuse cases, but again, that's REPORTED child abuse cases, and it's been suggested that this is because better public education about what abuse is and how to recognize it means more cases are being brought to police attention before the kids end up dead, which is an upsettingly common result.

BNHA is In The Future, and it's a future where kids' superpowers are being closely tracked and registered, so I would like to believe that better care is being taken to keep kids from going missing or dying of abuse and that Endeavor was just getting away with his shit because he's so rich and influential. But researching for this fic has just been real damn sad.
Five Years

Chapter Summary

It's a holding pattern, a waiting game until time forces change. It inevitably will.

Chapter Notes

Yep Aizawa surprised me too with how soon he showed up in this fic but turns out this was secretly That Time Eraserhead Stole Endeavor's Kids Because He Doesn't Deserve Them all along, who knew

Also I am suing Horikoshi for naming two characters Shouto and Shouta, I have gone over every Eraserhead scene SO many times and I'm pretty sure I've still missed some and if I have please let me know thank you

See the end of the chapter for more notes

This is Todoroki Shouto, aged eleven. He’s skipping school again.

Fuyumi would be disappointed if she found out, so she won’t. The school won’t make a fuss so long as he turns up on test days and keeps scoring well. He’ll do that much, out of gratitude for all the work Fuyumi’s done teaching him, but he’s not wasting any more time than he has to in that place, surrounded by kids he’s never gotten along with and never will, basically killing time until he can go to middle school. Natsuo going to such a prestigious middle school was a real feather in their cap and they’re keen to repeat the trick with Shouto. So long as he scores well, he can do what he wants.

That’s how the world works, he remembers every time he sees Endeavor’s image. There’s a lot of it around. Endeavor’s stock has been rising—he’s still only second place, because there’s simply no surpassing All Might, but the gap in popularity between him and the rest of the Pro Heroes is only growing. He still presents a good image, and nowadays Shouto reads the news on his phone, and sees the way Endeavor sells himself as not only a mighty hero but a sympathetic one, soldiering on to protect the people of Japan out of regret that he could not protect his own children from whatever fate befell them, the absence that drove his wife into a mental hospital from her inability to cope—

That’s all wrong. He put Mama in the hospital before they ran away. Fuyumi told Shouto so. Mama was sent away for hurting Shouto, and she did that weeks before they actually left. But the Number Two Hero gets to tell whatever story he likes, and people eat it up with a spoon and cover their bags and folders and water bottles in his image and every time it fills Shouto’s gut with ugly, bitter anger.

He’s just getting into more fights. There has to be something better he can do with his time.

He hasn’t found it yet, admittedly. He sits in an old park nearby because nobody ever comes by. Mothers won’t bring their children to the broken-down equipment, and the drug dealers don’t skulk
around during the day. He brings books to read, or he plays around on the broken equipment, jumping around using his fire to propel him or making ice slides to slip around on. He doesn’t use his Quirk much at home—raising and lowering his own temperature noticeably enough to change the room around him, yes, but not visible ice and fire. None of them like seeing fire much, and Fuyumi handles ice when they need it. He doesn’t have to use his Quirk.

He likes to, sometimes, just because nobody’s telling him to. It’s just him, doing what he wants when he wants.

He has fun. That'll do for now.

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This is Todoroki Natsuo, aged fourteen. He’s already got to start filling out applications for his top choice high schools, and picking them based on the universities he wants to go to. How far ahead he has to plan is dizzying.

Fuyumi’s there to help, as she always is, and so is Touya, and he appreciates them so much. It’s been on his mind lately that he’s the same age Touya was when they ran away and Fuyumi was younger, and how the hell did they do it? How did they look after him and Shouto? How did they keep it together?

He’s still studying as hard as he can. It’s all expensive, but a couple of the high schools he’s thinking of offer scholarships for high enough academic achievement. He studies while eating, while on the train, while in the bath. He doesn’t stop.

He has to work hard now so he can work harder later, but giving up at this point is an unthinkable waste.

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This is Todoroki Fuyumi, aged seventeen. She still doesn’t know what she wants to do after she graduates next year.

Touya’s still adamant on her going to university, but she’d like to get a job. She’s glad that Touya kept her out of paid dating, but she still can’t shake the feeling that she should be contributing more, swap off that weight with Touya. It’s still too soon for him to write himself off, in Fuyumi’s opinion. He’s not even twenty yet. Good universities won’t take a middle school dropout, but it’s not like he’s not intelligent. He could take some afternoon classes or something, catch up, go to a community college, do something. Anything other than… whatever it is he’s doing now.

She still doesn’t know, so it still probably isn’t legal, and she’s scared to death every day that he’s going to wind up in jail, or the hospital again… or the morgue. She’s terrified of losing him, but has no idea how to save him.

~~~

This is Todoroki Touya, aged nineteen. If you want to know what the fuck he’s doing, frankly, so does he.

He is absolutely not a licensed hero. He’s a middle-school dropout. Nevertheless, he is, for want of a better word, sidekicking for an underground hero.

Eraserhead made him a second offer that hit Touya like a fucking fist to the eye: he wouldn’t immediately report that he’d found Endeavor’s missing children if Touya told him why they were
They’d been fucking found. Touya was this close to burning the guy where he stood out of sheer panic, had actually ignited a flame in his hand, and Eraserhead had very pointedly erased his Quirk.

Explained the fucking weird hero name, anyway.

So he told Eraserhead why only like twenty percent of his body still had skin, and his littlest brother had a burn on his eye, and what that was the culmination of, and looked the man in his fucking spooky red eyes and dared him to honestly say he thought the police could or would do anything about Number Two.

And it’s been a year, and neither the police or Endeavor have knocked down his door or turned up at the others’ schools, and it’s that time of year for the media to dredge up The Tragic Case Of Endeavor’s Missing Kids again and nothing has changed.

Touya told Eraserhead what he wanted to know about himself and the criminals he was working for to save what’s left of his skin, but it didn’t go unnoticed that he was the only person affiliated with those smugglers who didn’t wind up with hero-shaped bootprints all over his ass, and that put an end to his criminal career. Sure, he can still steal shit on his own account, but nobody will pay him to do illegal shit anymore.

Except he doesn’t need them to, because now Eraserhead’s paying him to spy and stalk and find shit out for him. Underground Heroes are allowed to have informants, allowed to protect their identities, allowed to compensate them for the help they provide, and Eraserhead compensates well, so long as Touya doesn’t illegally use his Quirk.

And Eraserhead still hasn’t reported them, and Touya’s afraid to ask why. His best guess is that right now, he’s useful, and so long as his siblings aren’t in danger and he’s useful, they’ll be safe. Still, he doesn’t like feeling like he’s depending on somebody else. There isn’t anybody else on this shit-infested planet he actually trusts with his siblings, let alone a goddamn hero.

Sure, Eraserhead seems legit. Heroes are good at seeming. Touya’s known that since he was old enough to know anything at all.

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This is Aizawa Shouta, aged twenty-six, hoping he’s doing the right thing.

Todoroki Touya’s smart, and familiar with moving around without drawing too much notice. Shouta’s been letting the teenager (nineteen, Todoroki Touya will only be nineteen now) do more and more of his legwork, and he suspects Touya might be lying when he promises not to use his Quirk but he can’t prove anything and he’s not going to make it a problem unless Touya makes it a problem.

It’s a middle ground between ignoring the Todoroki siblings, abandoning them, and reporting them, until he can determine the best course of action. He’s reluctant to make a move without more information, but he’s in a holding pattern because he can’t get any. He can’t get permission to speak to Todoroki Rei, because he’s not officially attached to the Todoroki investigation and her husband won’t approve any visitors at all. He can’t find any teachers who ever taught Touya or Shouto before because both were homeschooled, and he can’t get access to any information on who those tutors were. There’s nobody who remembers anything about the younger Fuyumi and Natsuo except that they were quiet, polite and no trouble in class, which really doesn’t tell him much. Fuyumi’s fourth-grade homeroom teacher committed suicide over what turned out to be a false
grade-fixing scandal, which is potentially concerning, but she hasn’t left any family and her former coworkers don’t want to talk about the tragedy. He’s still working on getting some kind of legitimate conversation with a former or current employee of the Todoroki estate, but he’s already been shut down once by Endeavor himself, who doesn’t want some no-name “junior” hero interfering in the professional investigation into finding his children.

Being no-name is the point of being an underground hero, but the flashy Number Two wouldn’t understand that. Or maybe it’s on purpose.

Maybe he’ll take that teaching post Kayama forwarded to him. The whatever-he-is hero, Nezu, is the principal of UA now. He’s terrifyingly smart, and UA is a prestigious institution. It might give Shouta the protection and leverage he needs to run this investigation properly.

But for now, the safest way to proceed is to wait, watch, and gather what information he can.

Chapter End Notes

I got into a pretty extensive chat about Japanese suffixes and sibling nicknames in the comments of the last chapter, so for anybody who's interested but didn't read (all information based purely on observation of my students):

"Oneesan" and "Oniisan" are fairly common ways to address one's older siblings, but might be said to be the terms that are most formal without being FORMAL-formal. Shouto addresses Fuyumi and Natsuo as Oneesan and Oniisan respectively because he's the youngest and feels a slight distance from his older siblings as the disassociating baby of the family. Fuyumi is marginally down the formality ladder by addressing Touya as "Niisan". The next rung down in formality is addressing them by a name or shortened form of their name with "-neesan" or "-niisan" attached as a suffix. Natsuo sits on the next one down which is shortening those suffixes too, so he addresses Fuyumi as "Yumi-nee" and Touya as "Touya-nii" sometimes when they’re just around their flat. In public they all call him "Tou-san" which would be an unusually formal way to address one's older sibling, even the eldest, but is hilarious because it sounds identical to "Tou-san" meaning father, geddit. You can also adjust formality levels by swapping out the "san" for "chan", making "o/neechan" and "o/niichan". All of this kind of personal address stuff is going to vary wildly from person to person and relationship to relationship, so there aren't many hard and fast rules.

For younger siblings, while "Imouto" and "Otouto" are the words for younger sister and brother respectively, I've never heard a kid use those words to directly address a younger sibling. To refer to them, yes--Just today I had the most heart-meltingly adorable interaction with a three-year-old boy who excitedly dragged me out of the classroom I was cleaning to come see his mother and his brand new baby sibling, squealing "IMOUTO DESU :D" repeatedly while pointing at the baby because he’s so excited to be a big brother, I DIED. Anyway. All of Shouto's siblings call him "Shoucchan", written like that instead of "Shou-chan" because with baby nicknames it is often pronounced as one word. Being the baby of the family can result in getting addressed by your baby nickname for years, sometimes until middle school at the latest, sometimes even longer for girls. (The observant who didn't know this before will notice that yes, this means Izuku still addresses Bakugo with a baby nickname and
it probably rubs him up the wrong way but I do wish he'd use his words to express that instead of explosions.) Natsuo was also probably a "Nacchan" as a kid but changed to "Nakkun" about grade-school age and that's still what Fuyumi and Touya call him. Older siblings also sometimes just address younger siblings flat out by their names with no suffixes--Touya just calls Fuyumi "Yumi". Very, very rarely, when he feels the need to be emotionally supportive or some shit, like she's having an extra tough minute and maybe he needs to be fucking tender or something, he calls her "Yumi-chan".

Since I have a hard "no Japanese in the classroom" rule to stick to to set an example I'm not allowed to address kids by their Japanese nicknames, no matter how cute, but I don't ban the kids from addressing each other with Japanese suffixes so long as the sentence is otherwise in English, so I still hear a lot of nicknames. My favourite is that the name "Kanon" (I have four Kanons, all in different classes, thankfully) is almost universally shortened to "Non-chan". It's REAL heckin cute

I like having something cute to talk about in this A/N instead of sad statistics
Six Years

Chapter Summary

Everybody's got something to prove, something to hide, or both.

Chapter Notes

I'm kinda tickled by the way BNHA uses terms like hero, villain and sidekick as actual legal descriptions. Like, you need a specific license to call yourself a hero, sidekick is a job description (I cracked up when it mentioned Iida's brother having SIXTY-FIVE sidekicks at his agency, holy shit, even Batman doesn't have that many) and villain seems to define a specific type of criminal rather than a charmingly old-timey way of referring to all criminals. I really enjoy it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

This is Todoroki Shouto, aged twelve. He can’t wait for middle school. He can’t wait for something to change.

He’s counting the days, marking them off on the back cover of a workbook. All the entrance exam money went to Natsuo’s high school and Fuyumi’s college, but that’s fine. They’ll both get into great schools, and Shouto will pick a middle school based on whatever’s closest to them, so they can move again. Then Natsuo won’t have to travel so long. Shouto misses him.

It’s the waiting he hates most of all, that he’s always hated. Waiting for Touya to come home, waiting for the bell to ring so he can go home, waiting for exam results, waiting, waiting, waiting.

He wants to move, and he doesn’t care in what direction. Just so long as things change.

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This is Todoroki Natsuo, aged fifteen. He’s sick with anxiety waiting for the results of his entrance exams. He has to get into the right school. He can’t waste all of this.

He knows there are kids going to these high schools who aren’t working a fraction as hard as he is, because they’re coming from the same place he once was; a wealthy, influential family able to rattle some coins to get what they want. He faintly remembers a nanny explaining to Fuyumi that she’d only be going to one middle school entrance exam because it had already been chosen for her, so just to focus on that one.

No backups was so emblematic of the way He always did things. All things were done His way, and alternative options did not even enter His field of view. Natsuo would have studied where he was told to study, and he wouldn’t even have had to try, because the whole world was expected to bend to His whims, not just His children.

If he gets in, though, Natsuo knows it’s because of his own hard work and nothing else, his own
intelligence, his own worth.

He can prove that he doesn’t need a Quirk to have value. And if He never knows, that’s fine.

This is Todoroki Fuyumi, aged eighteen. She was just going to apply around to the same universities as her friends, but then Rino mentions that she could see her being a teacher, and everybody agrees that it would suit Yumi-chan perfectly! She often leads study groups and group projects and everybody tells her that she’s better at explaining things than the teachers and—

Yeah. She does like it, now that she thinks about it. Helping her friends, teaching Natsuo and Shouto. She never thought about that before, whether or not she actually enjoyed it, just did it because it needed done, but she thinks she really does.

Teaching college. Okay. She doesn’t have any better ideas. And when she suggests it, Touya looks delighted, sweeping her off her feet with a hug while he tells her how perfect it is, and Natsuo and Shouto dogpile her, agreeing that absolutely, she’ll be the best teacher ever, she already is.

Reading prospectuses, she notes the childcare qualifications that are part of learning to teach. Teachers have a responsibility to care for and protect their students, after all.

Hirata-sensei had been so gentle, so careful about the questions she asked. And she’d promised to do her best to help. And then she’d been dismissed from the school, her teaching license revoked, some sort of scandal the school carefully kept away from the students, and a few weeks later there’d been whispers that she’d become a delay on the Yamanote line—

Statistically speaking, one in four hundred children suffer abuse. Statistically speaking, almost none of them are children of the Number Two Hero, and she knows she’ll have none of those four in her classroom.

But maybe she’ll have somebody she can actually help.

This is Todoroki Touya, aged twenty. He sort of regrets never going to UA like He wanted Touya to, nailing the Hero course, then letting the license rot in a drawer, unused, just to drive Endeavor up the wall.

Or maybe becoming an underground hero like Eraserhead, who nobody ever recognizes or knows anything about because that’s how the man likes it but still actually does heroic shit. It would piss Endeavor off so much if his perfect child became a hero and nobody fucking knew about it. Maybe the only thing that would piss him off more was one of his kids becoming All Might’s sidekick. Shame All Might hasn’t taken any sidekicks in a few years, publicly announcing that he was going solo and wishing Sir Nighteye well in opening his own agency.

The problem is, Endeavor is still taking sidekicks, lots of them. Which means he’ll be paying close attention to the provisional hero license exams, looking for up-and-coming heroes with potential. Touya could apply as an adult, actually get licensed to legally use his Quirk, but if Endeavor notices him, they’re all fucked. Shouto and Natsuo are both still young enough to be forced back into Endeavor’s custody, Touya and Fuyumi old enough to face charges. He could confess to kidnapping, take the criminal charges on himself, sure—but he didn’t kidnap them, they wanted to go—but that would still leave Shouto, Natsuo and Fuyumi at Endeavor’s mercy.

He’d have a lot of lost time to make up for, a lot of rage to take out.
Touya vents about this to Eraserhead one evening anyway on a stakeout, because he’s not making Fuyumi any more worried about him than she already is but Eraserhead’s a fucking adult and also probably suspects what’s on Touya’s mind anyway. Eraserhead’s concerns are pragmatic; jail risks aside, if Touya got caught taking the hero license exam under a fake ID, he’d be forever barred from taking it under his real name. He doesn’t bring up whether or not Touya could pass when competing against mostly teenagers from dedicated hero schools, treats that as a given and the results as the main concern.

It’s… weird. Gratifying, to have Touya being good enough treated as a given. Nothing was ever good enough for Endeavor, and if his younger siblings look up to him—they shouldn’t—that’s different from an actual professional seeing something worthwhile in him.

Eraserhead’s made it clear that he doesn’t waste time on lost causes.

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This is Yamada Hizashi, aged twenty-seven, and he’s goddamn thrilled to be working with his best friend.

He’s the kind of guy who thrives on social energy but doesn’t get as much time as he’d like to actually socialize, having three jobs and all, and over time his opportunities to catch up with Shouta have gotten sparser and sparser. Shouta lived on Hizashi’s spare futon for two-thirds of their time at UA together, but since graduating and moving out, it feels like they’ve just drifted apart. It doesn’t help that as an underground hero, Shouta mostly works nights and sleeps through the day, while Hizashi’s either teaching or patrolling during the day and recording his show in the evenings. But now that they’re both teaching, they can hang out on campus during the day, between classes, almost like being back in their own schooldays. He owes Nemuri all of her drinks, forever, for tipping Shouta off to the job opening.

He was worried they might have drifted apart, but working with Shouta’s as easy as studying with him ever was, and he’s got his deadpan down to such an art form that he’s got Hizashi constantly guessing whether he’s subtly trolling or is just that fresh out of fucks to give. Case in point, the number of times Hizashi’s walked past his classroom to see that he’s gotten out a goddamn sleeping bag and taken a nap while his students are working on an assignment or having a discussion. It’s a bit of a throwback, spotting Shouta sleeping in random places, but the underground hero does have a flat, he’s just never there because he has three jobs. Sure, so does Hizashi, but most of the teachers take advantage of being exempt from keeping up regular patrols due to working at UA. Not Aizawa Shouta.

He’s so fucking weird, and Hizashi’s so stoked to have him on board. Plus, these days he’s got stubble all the time and Hizashi’s honest enough with himself to admit he’s into it. Like, Shouta still looks like a tired hobo all the time, but somehow the scruff makes it work for him. A weirder, hotter edition of what was already one of Hizashi’s favourite people in the world? Sign him the fuck up!

That said, amongst all of Shouta’s familiar weirdness—all pro heroes are kinda weird, it’s just part of the job, underground heroes even more so because they’re so solitary—there’s some new weirdness, chiefly how much he hates the Number Two Hero, Endeavor. Hizashi doesn’t recall Shouta having strong opinions on the guy before. For the most part, Shouta doesn’t have strong opinions on other heroes at all. If they’re a pro, they’ve made the cut, and that’s all there is to it. But when it comes to Endeavor, apparently there’s something more to it.

…Well, the guy is a dick sometimes. Most of the time, really. Every time Hizashi’s ever met him, and almost any time he’s recorded interacting with a fan or the media. Doesn’t pay enough
attention to the amount of property damage he does with his flames, either, and the more Shouta points it out the more Hizashi starts to take it personally, because he’s trained damn hard to keep his own Quirk under control. He’s not boasting—well, he is a little, but this is still a fact—but he could level buildings with a sneeze and yet he doesn’t. Endeavor could at least try.

Shouta is bound and determined to find fault in everything Endeavor does, and he’s making good points, so before long Hizashi finds himself feeling vague distaste with everything Endeavor does, too.

His show’s about positivity, of course, hyping folks up about the heroes who are there to protect them. He’s not going to actively trash a high-profile Hero on air. But contrary to popular belief, Present Mic is a performer who understands subtlety extremely well, the little drips that can build up or wear away at public opinion. That’s his job. Hizashi is the master of the backhanded compliment, and he doesn’t need to be using his Quirk for his voice to do damage, not with how many people listen to it every week.

He loves the spotlight, but that doesn’t mean he doesn’t know how to be sneaky. He’s been Eraserhead’s best friend for twelve years, after all.

And he also knows that Shouta is hiding something. Contrary to popular belief, that’s new, and it’s worrying him.

Chapter End Notes

Suddenly a wild Present Mic appears to be a POV character! Didn't expect him to turn up or be so fun to write either but he really fixed some shit for me so he deserves his own scene

The line about Eraserhead having three jobs, by the way, is because I'm importing a headcanon from the truly incredible

and the pain of my mother will not let me go

by koisurufortunecookie, in which on top of being a teacher and a pro hero, Eraserhead is also a licensed social worker. I love that fic and that idea for Aizawa, and it fits extremely well for some stuff I wanted to use Aizawa for later in the fic as well as fitting some backstory headcanons I have for him. (Which, to clarify, probably will not be spelled out in detail here because this isn't his story, he's just a character in it, but I might add some more stuff in notes later)
Chapter Summary

Things have changed, and that's good, but fragile.

Chapter Notes

Did you know that My Neighbour Totoro is the most popular Ghibli movie in Japan? Literally all kids know and love that movie with their whole hearts. I think I’ve seen every one of my students with a Totoro t-shirt, bag, pencil, eraser, phone charm or socks at least once. They all know the Totoro song and I once went to a kindergarten Sports Day where they all sang it before starting (also, Youchien Undokai? CUTEST. THING. EVER.) I once worked at a kindergarten with a Totoro clock that chimed out the hours. They LOVE Totoro. And I feel in my soul that a) Endeavor never put up with his kids doing frivolous shit like watching whole movies and b) they would have a lot of feelings about the part where a little girl runs away from home to go see her mother in hospital

See the end of the chapter for more notes

This is Todoroki Shouto, aged thirteen. He’s going to a friend’s house for the first time ever.

Midoriya’s chattering nonstop, which means he’s anxious, too. It’s making Shouto tense, and he doesn’t like it. He normally feels more at ease around Midoriya, because he’s so friendly and eager and sure, he’s a chatterbox, but that’s fine because he can carry a conversation for both of them. Midoriya only usually gets anxious around Bakugo. What’s making him anxious at home?

Midoriya’s mother is almost overwhelming in her excitement when she greets them at the door, ushering Shouto in to have a seat on the couch, where she’s prepared tea and snacks. Shouto can’t help staring around the neat, roomy apartment. It’s been years since he lived in more than one room, so for all Izuku’s mumbled apologies of how small it is or how old the furniture is, it’s beautiful to Shouto’s eyes.

It’s cluttered, too, but not in a kind of messy way like his family’s apartment, where they don’t own a lot of stuff and a lot of what they do own isn’t very organized. He doesn’t really remember before, not anymore, but he has a sense of sparseness, mostly inferred. Every time they move, it’s almost a race to see who can clutter up the place first, with Shouto’s gachapon figures winding up across every flat surface and Natsuo covering the walls in posters and pictures and Fuyumi going to Daiso to load up on more than she can carry and Touya piling up all the garbage manga he can lay hands on (garbage in terms of quality, and where he’s getting it). They still keep the most important things in their bags, ready to run again at any time, but all of them seem unsettled in an empty space, or even one that’s just too neat.

None of his older siblings will talk about before, not ever, and it’s all faded into a pushed-away fog, but the shape of it is sort of there, in what they value and what they don’t. Words they don’t
use, things they don’t talk about.

Midoriya says Okaa-san so easily, so affectionately. She ruffles his hair like Touya ruffles Shouto’s, and even as Izuku complains about her babying him, he leans into the touch. She’s not what he’s anxious of.

Midoriya Inko babbles as much as her son does, and it’s through this nervous-excited babble that she lets slip that Midoriya hasn’t brought a friend home before, not since he and Bakugo stopped being friends, which has Midoriya so embarrassed that before Shouto can really get a word in he’s being dragged off to hang out in Midoriya’s room.

So Shouto’s anxious because he’s never been to a friend’s house before, but Midoriya’s just as anxious because he hasn’t had a friend over since preschool. That’s kind of comforting, in a weird way. Midoriya doesn’t have any expectations for Shouto to meet. And his mother seems genuine, nervous and kind just like her son, while his father apparently lives abroad and is nothing to worry about. There’s nothing to worry about at all, here.

Midoriya’s room is an explosion of All Might merch. Shouto’s never seen so much All Might in one place in his life. He knows Midoriya’s a major Hho fanboy, of course, and All Might most of all. He learned that on his first day of middle school. Aside from that, the things he learned, in order, were:

1. Shouto learned that being excited to have his first school uniform (because then he doesn’t have to wear what are obviously hand-me-downs until they fall to pieces and deal with snide comments about those, because going to middle school was supposed to mean being a bit more grown-up) and wearing it properly is abnormal via a number of snide comments about being stuck-up and looking like his mother dressed him.
2. Shouto learned that responding that he doesn’t have a mother is not the correct response, since it just makes people uncomfortable, and that makes them defensive enough to sling more insults. What the correct response is, or even if there is one, remains unclear to this day.
3. Shouto learned that the loudest, angriest boy in class is Bakugo Katsuki, who is not only unwilling to allow Midoriya to sit within a two-desk radius of him but does not appreciate having Midoriya in the same classroom as him at all.
4. Shouto learned that this is because Midoriya is Quirkless, like Natsuo. This was announced loudly, with a tone of disgust, as if declaring him a plague carrier, and punctuated with an explosion set off in the shorter boy’s face just to make him flinch.
5. Shouto learned that Midoriya will not punch Bakugo, the way Natsuo always punches people who make fun of him for being Quirkless. Midoriya flinched and tried not to cry in front of the class and shrank back from the fire in his face while his attempts to speak up for himself shriveled and died under Bakugo’s laughter.
6. Shouto learned that, while he is used to other peoples’ tears, and flinches, and playground bullying, it’s specifically the smell of burned hair that brings these things together and transforms them into a memory of his mother, which it turns out he has after all.
7. Shouto learned that Bakugo Katsuki is not good at taking a punch.
8. Shouto learned that the teachers don’t really care about an actual fight breaking out until a desk got set on fire.
9. Shouto learned, slightly before this, that he can actually take Bakugo without using a Quirk at all, because Bakugo Katsuki is a bully who’s used to being bigger and tougher and having a stronger Quirk than his victims and doesn’t even know the basics of proper fighting. Even if Shouto did have to use his Quirk, he’d only use his ice, since that’s all Fuyumi put on his health form. Fire-and-ice stands out too much, and they have to try not to stand out, though getting into fights with a guy who blows up tables when he’s losing probably means Shouto
still isn’t very good at blending in.

10. At lunchtime, Shouto learned that this was the first time since Bakugo’s Quirk emerged that anybody stood up to him and won.

11. Shouto learned that this was the first time anybody had ever stood up for Midoriya, and that this meant that, instead of being scared of Shouto or finding him weird, Midoriya wanted to eat lunch with him.

12. Over lunch, Shouto learned more than he had ever thought it possible to know about All Might.

Bakugo has not gotten much better at taking a punch, or accepting a loss, or learning to not pick a fight in the first place, even though he’s been getting a lot of practice.

And now Midoriya is Shouto’s first ever friend, and doesn’t care if Shouto behaves weird or only ever eats the gross free school lunches or doesn’t talk much, and Shouto doesn’t care how much Bakugo talks shit or Midoriya talks about heroes. Shouto’s siblings have never believed in heroes, because they’ve all seen what the Number Two Hero is like behind closed doors, and if he’s the second best that means the rest are probably no better. But Midoriya believes in heroes, believes with a passion like nothing Shouto’s ever seen in the idea of people who go out to save others with a smile that makes them feel safe.

They watch All Might videos Midoriya’s computer when Shouto reassures him that he doesn’t think all the All Might merch is childish, and Shouto remembers that he once thought heroes could be like that, too. He remembers this video, watched in secret with Mama, with a promise not to tell Father that they’d watched it. He remembers a quiet question.

Do you want to be a hero, Shouto?

For years, he couldn’t imagine anybody wanting to be a hero, because being a hero meant being like Him. But once upon a time, it had meant something else to Mama, and it could have meant something else to Shouto. Something good, like what it means for Midoriya.

Shouto startles when Inko knocks on the door, knocking Midoriya’s Wild Wild Pussycats figurine set off the desk and onto the floor. He panics, apologizing frantically, what if he broke something, what if they’re angry—

Midoriya isn’t angry. He asks if Shouto’s okay when helping him pick up the figurines. Inko apologizes to Shouto for startling him, then tells them that dinner is ready. He’s not in trouble. Nothing bad happens.

Dinner is delicious. Midoriya says it looks as good as Ghibli food and when Shouto doesn’t understand what that means he panics again at the shock on Midoriya’s face, wondering if he’s finally said something too weird for even the endlessly patient Midoriya to put up with—

Then Midoriya’s face lights up like a firework when he tells Shouto that they’re having a Studio Ghibli movie marathon and there’s no escape and Shouto is absolutely powerless to say no.

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This is Todoroki Natsuo, aged sixteen. He just about had a handle on middle school, and somehow high school’s even more work.

But they live closer to his school, now, and Shouto goes to a different middle school than the awful one Fuyumi did, which also isn’t great but at least he’s made a friend there. Natsuo gets to spend longer at home and, true, it’s mostly spent doing homework and studying, but he can study while
spending time with the little brother he wanted to guide and protect.

He’s missed Shouto. Natsuo’s had to pour everything into following the dream of being a doctor, of not letting Fuyumi and Touya down, but he’s scared he’s letting Shouto down too. He’s scared, a little, that Shouto might resent him for not being around, or that they’ve grown too far apart to be friends anymore.

His fears are unfounded. Shouto’s thirteen now, but when Natsuo walks in the door hours earlier than he used to, Shouto smiles the same way he did as a child when he first spotted Natsuo at playtime or lunchtime or hometime. He’s not as quiet as he used to be, and it’s great, because as a little kid Shouto was so distant from everyone and everything, but now he’s got a story every day, even if it’s usually the same story about something his friend Midoriya said followed by a fight with a bully called Bakugo.

Natsuo hasn’t met Midoriya and feels like he could write a book about the kid. Midoriya’s a hero fan, and wants to be a hero when he grows up, and spends almost all his free time watching interviews and recordings of fights so he can think about their Quirks and how they work. Natsuo thinks the kid’s in for a pretty nasty shock when he finds out what heroes are really like, behind closed doors.

Midoriya’s Quirkless, like Natsuo. It’s so weird to hear Shouto say this happily. Natsuo actually needs Fuyumi to explain to him that because of him, Shouto doesn’t see being Quirkless as a bad thing.

Midoriya’s an All Might fan, most of all, and Shouto talks a little too long about how Midoriya smiles when talking about his favourite hero. Natsuo’s first thought is how much He would hate it if Shouto turned into an All Might fan.

A while later, it occurs to him that maybe Shouto has a crush on an All Might fan, which is something He would hate on every possible level. Protecting and supporting Shouto has been one of the most important parts of Natsuo’s life since he was nine, of course, but somehow it actually manages to intensify at the mere imagining of His retribution if He found out.

Natsuo’s still patching up scrapes and bruises and burns when he gets home, because Bakugo has a blasting Quirk, but it’s worth it for the way Shouto talks about Midoriya, and if Natsuo starts losing out on his time with Shouto again because Shouto’s spending more and more time with Midoriya, it’s worth it to see such joy in Shouto’s life.

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This is Todoroki Fuyumi, aged nineteen, and everyone was right. Teaching college fits her like a glove, and it leaves her with more free time than she expected, even after finishing all of her assignments. She can be home for Shouto and Natsuo more, and Natsuo is home more, now that they’ve moved closer to his school. They can spend more time together, all four of them together and awake at the same time for what might be the first time since the shack.

Though she’s also delighted that Shouto’s going to a friend’s house for the first time ever. Their own small flat has nothing to really show a friend who comes to visit, and Shouto and Natsuo’s cover story of Touya being their dad has never accounted for her. It’s never needed to before; she claimed to live alone all through high school and none of them have ever brought anyone home, until now. It’s not something they have to explain so long as other people aren’t in their home space, and they all know how to talk around it around other people. It’s so easy to hide what’s happening at home.
But if Midoriya’s having friends over to his home, maybe he has nothing to hide. Maybe he’s normal. Fuyumi hopes to the bottom of her heart that he is, because Shouto’s first friend is the light of his life right now, and anybody who makes any of her brothers that happy deserves the best, in Fuyumi’s opinion.

She’d like to meet him someday, but first she needs to spin some reason to know Shouto. According to Touya, his boss thought Fuyumi was Touya’s girlfriend at first, which is, sure, a cover story people would believe, but also, ew. That’s her brother.

She’s never expected to meet anybody Touya works with, because whatever he’s gotten into he’s always taken great care not to bring it home with him before now, but if she did she probably would’ve expected them to be conscious, with only a fifty/fifty chance of bleeding. And she trusts Touya, she does, but what the hell is he thinking?

This is Todoroki Touya, aged twenty-one, and he’s not sure if this qualifies as kidnapping. He probably should’ve gone to a police box or something, but also, fuck that.

He still isn’t legally attached to Eraserhead’s agency, or whatever it is underground heroes have. He’s regularly paid as an informant, which allows for a comfortable level of plausible deniability on Eraserhead’s part, since as a Pro Hero he absolutely should report any info he has on kidnapped children regardless of whether or not he thinks they might not have actually been kidnapped and might be just fucking fine where they are, thank you.

But it’s been three years since Eraserhead promised not to report a lead on the missing Todorokis if Touya gave him a good reason why, and Touya did, and Eraserhead’s kept his promise, so when Touya’s running away from a fight that went real far south with an underground hero bleeding all over his shoulder, Touya doesn’t hesitate (well, doesn’t hesitate for long) to drag his ass to the nearest safe hiding place, even if it is his own flat.

Which is also how his siblings learn that he’s actually doing something that is more or less mostly kind of legal these days. He hadn’t exactly meant to hide it from them, though he also never actually told them that he was supporting them on ill-gotten gains before, either. Well, they’re not stupid—obviously, given the schools they’ve gotten into. He knew Fuyumi knew, and evidently Natsuo did too, going how delighted he is that Eraserhead isn’t a criminal. As if Touya would ever bring the kind of lowlifes he used to work with back to his siblings.

Then again, he wouldn’t have expected himself to bring a hero back, either. That’s probably pretty fucked, that having a hero and a criminal around are equally scary prospects, but it’s not like they don’t have a damn good reason for that.

But Eraserhead’s legit. He doesn’t have a discernible personal life, due to having three jobs, and all three are low on both pay and exposure. Touya knows damn well how underpaid and understaffed social workers are, because those were some of the cheapest bribes Endeavor ever dished out. From what Eraserhead’s explained, the bulk of what he does is handling removals from households facing charges, because if an abusive parent is gonna get violent, having a Pro Hero who can erase Quirks is a fucking godsend. He’s getting a social worker’s pay to have abusive parents sling shit and possibly attack him on evenings and weekends. And underground heroes do get paid by the criminals they bring in, but by the secretive nature of what they do don’t get any of the perks of popularity like merchandise, interviews or advertising deals, the stuff that rakes in the big money for a lot of pro heroes. And even UA can’t possibly pay its teachers enough for it to be worth dealing with fucking teenagers all day on top of two other jobs unless you actually, maybe, give a
If he wanted to make money and keep his privacy, all Eraserhead has to do is report that he’s found the Number Two Hero’s missing kids. Last Touya checked, there was still a very hefty reward on offer for their recovery, and Endeavor would probably make it even more worth Eraserhead’s while to keep the whole thing discreet until the end of time. But he still hasn’t turned them in.

Which leads Touya back to the conclusion that, despite being an adult and a hero, there’s a distinct possibility that Eraserhead is not, in fact, a complete piece of shit.

He doesn’t lay all this out to his siblings. He just tells them that Eraserhead can be trusted, and they just believe him, just like that. Fuyumi suggests that they don’t tell Shouto, who texted over to say that a movie marathon’s begun so he’s sleeping over a friend’s house for the first time ever, and none of the emergency codewords were in the text, so he’d fine and they shouldn’t worry him. Natsuo has already cracked out some out-of-date medical textbook and the first-aid kit and gotten to work cleaning Eraserhead’s injuries.

Touya really hopes he hasn’t just monumentally fucked up.

~~~

This is Aizawa Shouta, aged twenty-eight, and he has no idea where he is.

He isn’t completely unaccustomed to passing out somewhere after a fight gone bad, though he hasn’t done it in a long time. He’s still alive because he’s learned to cut and run when he’s in over his head, usually at least managing to drag himself to the nearest police box or hospital or somewhere else he can be assured of getting medical attention after he collapses. He’s not surprised he got his ass kicked, since what was meant to be a fairly straightforward serial killer takedown went very far south when the killer’s heretofore unknown partners got the drop on him. He vaguely remembers hearing Todoroki Touya’s voice, and since the guy’s both unlicensed and a runaway in hiding Shouta hopes to hell he wasn’t irrational enough to use his fire Quirk even if—

That’s Todoroki Touya’s voice he hears now. The guy has a pretty distinctive rasp, due to the damage to his throat. It helps him sound older, like a guy who could conceivably have teenage sons instead of barely being out of his teens himself. There’s a young woman’s voice too, then the beep of a microwave.

Wait a minute. Is he in the Todorokis’ flat?!

He opens his eyes, and he’s in the Todoroki siblings’ flat.

It wouldn’t make sense for it to be anywhere else, because that has to be Todoroki Fuyumi taking two mugs of tea out of the microwave. Of course, the photo of her that always makes the rounds whenever it’s that time of year to dredge up the story of the missing Todoroki children is of a slightly plump twelve-year-old girl with white hair and glasses, but she’d be twenty-one now. This much leaner young woman looks that age, and up close her face retains some similarities under the black dye-job. He can tell it’s a dye-job because while she’s thought to dye her eyebrows, her eyelashes are still white. Hopefully she usually wears mascara.

And she’s talking quietly with Todoroki Touya, who’s lounging nearby with his legs stretched out under a three-legged kotatsu, the missing corner propped up by a pile of tatty manga that’s clearly been stolen out of somebody’s garbage, just like the table, which still has half a torn trash pickup sticker on the top. On the other side of the table is a teenage boy who’s probably Todoroki Natsuo, bearing the same black dye-job as his siblings, as evidenced by him having the same white
eyelashes as his sister. Touya has neither eyebrows nor eyelashes at all. It’s harder to see the nine-
year-old from the missing photo in the high schooler chewing on a pen while he frowns at a school
textbook, but he does bear a striking resemblance to how Endeavor might look if he dropped about
two hundred pounds and the decorative facial fire.

Shouta decides he’s not going to say that. He doesn’t know what he *is* going to say. He is acutely
aware of how tentative and fragile this situation is. They are abused and they are runaways, two
terms that aren’t quite synonyms but have a significant enough overlap that there’s room in the
middle of the venn diagram to write “lowest possible stocks of trust in adults in general and
authority figures even more so”. Endeavor must have destroyed their faith in heroes, in particular.
Nevertheless, Touya didn’t just drop Shouta off at the nearest clinic or police box and run, or do so
after treating his injuries. Shouta can feel that his injuries have been well treated, and then he’s
been allowed to rest here, in their *home*.

They’re anxious. It takes Fuyumi only a few seconds and a nervous glance that must have been
repeating all through her evening—it’s late at night now, pitch-black through the sliver of window
visible past the heavy curtains—to notice that Shouta’s awake, and it startles her badly enough to
drop the mug she was handing to Touya. It doesn’t have far to fall onto the table, so it doesn’t
break, but it does spill hot tea all over the table and the older brother in question, who leaps
backwards like a goddamn cat, hissing in pain and pulling his trousers off. His whole body isn’t as
badly burned as his face and arms, but enough that he has to be extremely temperature sensitive.

Shouta doesn’t move, doesn’t say anything as Fuyumi frantically cleans up, Touya goes to the
clothes horse for clean, non-burning trousers and Natsuo comes over to check on the patient,
clutching one of the free first aid pamphlets some clinics stock and awkwardly starting on a
checkup. Shouta answers the questions as calmly as he can, as if he is the one speaking to an
injured victim. He should check what time it is, how long he’s been out, text Hizashi so he doesn’t
worry that Shouta’s dead in an alley somewhere, but visibly contacting another hero while in this
flat is probably a bad idea. He might actually have their trust, and that’s no doubt a rare and fragile
commodity.

If he f*cks this up, there will be no second chances.

Chapter End Notes

Remember Bakugo going on about how shitty their middle school is in canon, and
Shouto in this fic thinking about how they can't afford nice middle schools? Well

Also teaching words for clothes in English is the worst because all of the teaching
materials are American so trousers are labelled "pants" except "pantsu" is a loanword
used in Japanese the same way it's used in the UK--for underwear. So I am forced to
introduce the word "pants" with a straight face and then weather the gales of blissfully
free six-to-seven-year-old-laughter and deal with the fact that nothing else is getting
done this lesson

Also I do generally believe that people who make tea in the microwave are sinners but
they're Japanese so obviously they drink tea and it's not like the Todoroki siblings are
going to willingly own a kettle so I forgive them
Eight Years

Chapter Summary

They should be able to plan around their dreams, not their fears. They should HAVE dreams, and hopes, and love.

Chapter Notes

Did I ever mention that the song I keep listening to on repeat while writing is Dessa's "Children's Work"? That song is such a mood for this story

All some children do is work

See the end of the chapter for more notes

This is Todoroki Shouto, aged fourteen, and he has no goddamn idea why he said that.

Well, he does, sort of. He was mad at Bakugo, which isn’t itself weird, though it hasn’t happened in a while. At the start of second year the two of them finally settled on just ignoring each other, and Bakugo also, by extension, ignoring Izuku. Shouto hates how long Bakugo’s been bullying Izuku, long enough for all of Bakugo’s foul words about Izuku being weak and useless and Deku for being Quirkless to have seeped deep into Izuku’s very perception of himself, and hates how confident Bakugo is in his capacity to cause destruction (because that shouldn’t be all it takes to be a hero, but it is, and Shouto hates that too), but most of all Shouto hates how much Izuku actually misses him. Bakugo hasn’t treated him kindly since preschool and Izuku still misses him. It makes Shouto angry, an ugly, acidic jealousy that he swallows rather than spit it out on Izuku, because Shouto would much rather see that sun-bright smile.

It’s the way Izuku smiles when he talks about going to UA and becoming a hero, even though he’s Quirkless. But he didn’t smile when the teacher announced those ambitions to the whole class, and Bakugo’s head snapped up like a dog on a scent, already smoking with rage.

And Shouto could’ve just kicked Bakugo’s ass, as usual, reminded him why he doesn’t get to just attack Izuku without consequences anymore, so why the hell did he yell that he wants to go to UA too?

He doesn’t. Well, a little part of him does. Izuku wants to go so badly, and he’s Shouto’s only friend, the only thing making this trash middle school bearable, and Shouto can’t imagine high school without him. And Izuku’s belief in heroism is infectious—even if Shouto knows that heroes aren’t really as good as Izuku thinks they are, he kind of wants to be the kind of hero Izuku believes in. He could be better, do better, do something good with his life, just like his siblings and as unlike Endeavor as possible.

But Endeavor’s the problem. Endeavor ruined heroes for all of them, and Shouto doesn’t know if he can fix that. Going to UA means spending all day with heroes, studying heroes, talking about heroes, and he doesn’t want to put his siblings through that, even second-hand. Not to mention that
pro heroes from all over the country keep an eye on UA to look for future sidekicks, and even if he registers with his fake health form stating that his only Quirk is his ice, there’s still a risk of being noticed. He can’t endanger his siblings, everything they’ve achieved, all they’ve made it through together since they ran away, on a whim based on wanting to cling to his friend like a child.

Izuku wants to be a hero like Shouto’s never wanted anything in his life, and he’s just… reflecting that glow, that’s all. He doesn’t actually want to be a hero, he tells himself, and even if he did, it’s not worth risking his siblings to him. They rescued him, they’ve loved him and raised him and never, ever hurt him, and that’s worth more to him than a borrowed dream. They’re everything to him.

~~~

This is Todoroki Natsuo, aged seventeen, and he’s already doing university entrance exam prep. Free time is a very distant, purely theoretical concept. A myth. A cryptid.

Still, he wants to help Shouto look at high schools, and he’s a little worried that Shouto still seems to have no preferences at all. He’s got passions, now, many of them learned from his best friend but also some he’s picked up himself, like learning to cook because said best friend’s mother gave him some tips and he wants to surprise Fuyumi for her birthday, and now he cooks more often than not because Fuyumi’s got so much homework and extra study and placements to attend. He’s good at it, and it seems to make him happy to contribute, and all Natsuo wants is for him to be happy.

Well, he wants Shouto to be safe, too, of course. But the older they get, the angrier he gets about how much time they’ve spent hiding and afraid. Touya’s spent years functioning as an informant for an actually decent hero, when he’s more than smart and capable and powerful enough to get a license to use his Quirk and be a real hero, if he hadn’t dropped out of school to hide from a man who might still find them if he did get a license. Fuyumi’s gotten an education, but she’s spent so much time caretaking for her brothers since she was literally a child herself that Natsuo still isn’t sure if she's studying teaching because she wants to, or because she’s never had time to want anything for herself, and instead just stuck with something she knows and doesn’t dislike. And their sacrifices have allowed Natsuo to push for a goal that most would call impossible, given their situation, and he appreciates them and he loves them but he’s so angry on their behalf, angry that they’ve ever had to sacrifice anything, angry at all that they’ve lost that he can’t get back for them.

Shouto stands up and fights on behalf of his friend almost every day, but still seems afraid to assert anything for himself. He shouldn’t be. None of them should have to be. But if Natsuo can’t get back the futures that Touya and Fuyumi lost, he can still do whatever it takes to give Shouto whatever dreams he has.

~~~

This is Todoroki Fuyumi, aged twenty, and she loves teaching school. She loves her brothers and she’s so, so proud of everything they’re doing with their lives right now.

What she doesn’t love is Shouto’s insistence that he doesn’t really care what high school he goes to. He’s not actually indifferent, he’s adamant, and that means he’s hiding something, and she can’t remember Shouto ever actively hiding something from her before. Not mentioning when he’s skipped school or gotten into a fight again, he’s done that plenty, but always owned up if she confronted him on it. He’s never hidden a problem. But now he is, and she can’t imagine why he’d hide his choice of high school.

She worries for a while, with guilt, if this is a result of prioritizing Natsuo’s schooling so much. Maybe Shouto feels like he’s not important, in comparison, that Natsuo’s university is the only
thing that matters. It’s not true—okay, Fuyumi is completely gung-ho about supporting Natsuo in getting into med school, but it’s his *dream*. She’ll give just as much to Shouto, as soon as she knows what his dreams *are*—

She knows what Midoriya Izuku’s dreams are, of course. She still hasn’t met Shouto’s best friend and hopeless crush, but she’s glad he makes Shouto happy. Touya’s never mentioned an interest in anybody at all, and Natsuo complains that dating sounds like it’d take too much time and energy that he doesn’t have, and Fuyumi’s turned down three guys who’ve asked her out, even though they were all cute and two of them took the rejections politely, because she feels so much anxiety about dating, about somebody touching her familiarly without being *family*, about a man looking at her like that, about worrying about what men *want* from her—

Shouto and Midoriya are just kids, of course, just fourteen (*the same age Touya was when they left, when he took responsibility for all of them*) and she’s happy for them to continue to be so. But it’d be nice for at least one of them to have somebody they loved, romantically. Maybe one of the boys will get the guts up to ask the other out before they go off to high school, when Midoriya wants to go to—

Oh. Shouto wants to go to high school with Midoriya. He wants to go to UA.

No. Nope. Bad idea, on every level. She doesn’t want Shouto to have a boyfriend *that* badly.

But she can’t ignore what Shouto wants, either.

But it’s too dangerous. For him, for *all* of them.

But she doesn’t own him, so it’s not her decision to make.

But she’s his sister, and she’s raised him for eight goddamn years, longer than their parents did, and surely that entitles her to *some* say in where he goes to high school.

But not enough to stop him if that’s what he has his heart set on. And if he does, could she really bring herself to try and stop him? When he finally has a dream for his life?

…none of this matters if he never actually brings it up, right?

She wishes Touya was home so she could talk to him. He doesn’t always tell her everything, but he’s always straightforward, and as soon as he instantly points out what a ridiculous idea it is, she’ll feel more settled about it.

~~~

This is Todoroki Touya, aged twenty-two, and his whole body hurts, but, like, more than usual.

There’s also a cat on his chest. It’s sleeping, just like Touya was until something jostled his legs and woke him up. It’s another cat, stretching out on his legs and also going to sleep. Cats like warm things, right? Even when he’s not trying, he runs warm. When it’s not summer-hot, his siblings have always wound up piling on him in their sleep. Just like these goddamn cats.

He’s on a sofa. It’s not a piece of furniture that he’s been on in a very long time. It’s weird, sleeping this high off the ground instead of on a cheap futon, almost dizzying, or maybe that’s a concussion. He’s not totally sure what happened.

He got into a fight, he knows that much. He’s not actually supposed to help Eraserhead with takedowns—he’s an informant, not a sidekick, and he isn’t licensed to use his Quirk, but he can
fucking fight, okay? And Eraserhead sometimes, maybe, ever so slightly gets himself in over his damn head and won’t admit it. So Touya hung around after he was supposed to leave, and got involved when he saw the fight going nasty, and now he’s lying on a couch, with cats on him, experiencing pain and staring vaguely at a coffee table strewn with newspapers and magazines. It’s a real spectrum. There’s plenty of legit newspapers, in Japanese and English, but also the kind of magazines that are so garbage that Touya wouldn’t even steal them, he’d just leave them in the rubbish, where they belong. It’s that time of year, so several of them mention a wild story about the Missing Todoroki Children on the cover somewhere. The top one posits that all four of them, including a cross-dressing Fuyumi, are the real identities of a popular J-pop band. Okay then. Those sure are words somebody got paid money to write, huh.

He can hear Eraserhead’s voice, quietly, so he’s probably not dead, but does mean that he had to haul Touya’s dumb ass away from a fight that Touya was supposed to help him in. And he didn’t take Touya to a hospital, which he’s grateful for. Too much trouble. And hopefully means he isn’t actually hurt that bad. But does mean that Touya might be about to get his ass dragged over the coals for using his Quirk in that fight. The nailgun guy fucking startled him, alright? Firing metal bolts from your wrists like a fucked up Spiderman is a fucked up Quirk and Touya’s not sorry he started pitching fire, since he did vaporize one of those bolts in mid-air before it hit Eraserhead in the head which was not currently erasing the fucking nailgun Quirk.

Using his fire that much might be why he hurts so much. It always hurt, and he was always supposed to ignore it. Fuck. Having to ignore it is why he doesn’t have a goodly portion of his skin anymore. You’d think he’d have learned his lesson. No, apparently he doesn’t learn, ever. Then again, if he didn’t know how to ignore being in pain, he’d never get anything done.

There’s a second voice, murmuring back to Eraserhead, and that has Touya uncomfy. As a rule, he doesn’t like not knowing who’s around him when he’s unconscious. No matter how tired, he could never fall asleep on trains. Even when he’s on his own, he needs to feel like he’s on guard, watching out for… whatever. Anything. Everything.

He should text Fuyumi, let her know he’s not dead. Yet. Eraserhead might’ve just dragged him back to wherever he is to kill Touya when he wakes up.

Fuck. Is he in Eraserhead’s house?

~~~

This is Yamada Hizashi, aged twenty-nine, and he’s not surprised. Like, not even a little.

He really should be more surprised that one of the four most famous missing people in the country is sleeping off some kind of Quirk exhaustion on his couch right now, but on some level, he was prepared for this kind of thing when he asked Shouta to move in with him (formally, as opposed to crashing on his couch after patrol a lot, then steadily winding up with his own toothbrush, sock drawer and nightstand). This is absolutely the kind of thing Shouta would get himself mixed up in, and if Hizashi loves him and wants to stay with him, he has to accept that this is the kind of thing that he’s mixed up in now too.

Which he does, actually. Shouta seems a little perplexed by it, but honestly, this explains a lot, especially the Endeavor hate. Which is definitely valid, if the Flame Hero’s responsible for the distinctively flame injuries on the guy on the couch.

Plus, Shouta sympathizing with homeless abused kids is as predictable as All Might winning a fight, or Nemuri causing a moral outrage.
That doesn’t mean that Hizashi thinks Shouta’s judgment is clouded. The man’s so methodical that people often mistake him for being unemotional, but he’s just absolutely dedicated to making sure that whether he’s teaching or working a case, he’s doing the right thing. Not leaving a potential victim somewhere dangerous, but not dragging a kid out of a safe place, either. He doesn’t want to let anybody fall in the cracks and get crushed.

It was what he needed when he was a teenager, and he didn’t get it, so now he’s determined to be that. Which is something Hizashi loves about him, how he took what some people called a villain Quirk and the kind of backstory that veritably churns out drunks and criminals and became such a hero.

It just means that the Todoroki siblings are now their problem.

But that’s a good thing, because Hizashi is ready to help and he already has a plan for how. These kids can’t stay hidden forever and, frankly, they shouldn’t have to. They shouldn’t have to be afraid and silent.

Shouta’s waiting on hard evidence that he isn’t going to get, but that isn’t all that matters when the target’s such a public figure. The hero rankings aren’t a popularity contest, which is why Endeavor ranks so high despite generally being so unlikeable, but that doesn’t make popularity meaningless, either. Thanks to the effect All Might’s had on the industry, how much the people like and trust their heroes matters.

And people don’t like being lied to, especially not when emotions are involved. Endeavor’s compensated for being unlikeable (and less liked by the day, Hizashi is proud to say) by being a tragic figure, victim of a destroyed family. Four adult, or as good as, children speaking up and pointing out that he’s the one who destroyed said family would put a goddamn Texas Smash of a dent in that story.

Shouta doesn’t care about his image, so he hasn’t thought through how much Endeavor does, and how, when the kids are ready for it, that could be their way to freedom.

Chapter End Notes

On the one hand, I am not a fan of garbage tabloids that just flat out make shit up because they are part of a very toxic and invasive culture regarding the personal lives of celebrities. On the other hand, they do come out with some hilarious shit sometimes. I don't actually know if Japan has these kind of tabloids because I am an illiterate who can only read signs in kindergartens because they're in hiragana.

I feel like a part of aging into adulthood, for me and a lot of people I know, was developing a lot of anger on the behalf of your past self and those around you back then, when you start to really comprehend just how young you were and how badly you were failed by certain people in your lives. Sometimes the anger helps because it represents self-worth you didn't have before, and being angry at certain things can help you flush them out of your system, but it gets some people stuck in the past, too. It's an imperfect world and complicated as shit and sometimes I think the most any of us can hope for is simply to do better ourselves for the future.

Also I don't know what temperatures you need to vaporize any metals or if blue fire is that hot but who knows how Quirks work right somebody could totally fire nails made
out of a metal that vaporizes in a blue flame right
All of my research energy went to sad statistics about homeless kids and psychological
studies of abuse victims, extra chemistry lessons is a step further than I have the
energy for. Also in the first draft I had Touya refer to melting nails in midair except I
realized that that would just lead to high-velocity boiling liquid metal, which is not
better.
Nine Years

Chapter Summary

They should be celebrating. If they were normal, if they were safe, they could just celebrate. But they chose this, every step of the way.

Chapter Notes

I ended up splitting the last chapter in two for pacing and length reasons which is why the chapter count hopped up to twelve. But there's also some material that didn't quite fit in this fic as it is, so some oneshots in a more conventional prose style might pop up eventually. Thank you so much to everybody who's been reading and commenting over the past week and a bit!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

This is Todoroki Shouto, aged fifteen, and he just found out that he passed the UA entrance exams.

He wants to tell Izuku — no, first he wants to know if Izuku got in too. Izuku’s been working out so hard ever since the slime thing, he could get in, even Quirkless. But if he didn’t, it'll be easy for Shouto to decide to reject his acceptance, go somewhere else.

The entrance exam was… exciting. Using his Quirk a lot, even just half of it, was an incredible rush. Even better was when he was the only person who’d spotted an invisible girl getting pinned down (he’s good at triangulating raised voices) and helped her out by freezing two of the robots converging on her, giving her the freedom to move and smash the weak joints of the last one with a length of pipe. Even though he’d gotten more points than her, she’d thanked him for helping. He’d helped.

He’d like to keep doing that, but he’s not going to his best friend’s dream school if said best friend didn’t make it in.

But if Izuku did make it in, there’s nothing to stop him going if he wants to.

There’s the threat of Endeavor, but they decided. Well, Shouto was willing to keep hiding rather than put all of them at risk, but they decided that no. They decided that if Shouto wants this, then it’s worth the risk. And they saw right through Shouto when he tried to lie and say it didn’t really matter.

So he took the exam. And he passed. And he could go to UA, with Izuku, and he feels happy and terrified at the same time.

He and his siblings are all sitting in silence. He wishes one of them would say something.

~~~
This is Todoroki Natsuo, aged eighteen, and his acceptance letter to his first choice university is pinned into a place of pride on the refrigerator. Shouto’s acceptance letter to UA is a motherfucking hologram. Of All Might.

He briefly imagines another life, where they never left, and Shouto got into UA because that was what He wanted, and All Might was suddenly and without warning projected into their living room, right in His face.

He presses a hand to his mouth to keep from laughing. The tension in the room is too thick.

He and Shouto are going to some of the best schools in the country under false names. There isn’t just the risk of being forced back into Endeavor’s home anymore—all of them except Shouto are too old for that to be a concern, and Shouto’s old enough to argue his own custody, if it becomes a problem. It’s the risk of losing everything they’ve achieved under false names when their lies are exposed.

It’s not fair. None of them have done anything wrong. Well, Touya probably has, but he’s been financially supporting all of them for half of Natsuo’s life while they’ve all been hiding. They just want to live with people who don’t hurt them and follow their dreams. Why do they have to be scared of people knowing that?

Which is why when he found out Shouto wanted to go to UA, he argued in favour. He doesn’t want to deny Shouto on the incredibly rare occasion that he wants something, and even less wants to deny him the company of his best and only friend throughout high school. Natsuo’s had schoolfriends, but he’s never socialized outside of school hours. Too much work, too much risk of giving away something he shouldn’t if somebody gets too close. But he doesn’t want to make Shouto live at a distance from people. He doesn’t want their lives to be ruled by fear.

But they are afraid. They shouldn’t have to be afraid, but they are.

And he has no idea what to say.

~~~

This is Todoroki Fuyumi, aged twenty-one, and she should congratulate Shouto.

He’s getting into a prestigious high school from a less-than-impressive academic background. The entrance exam doesn’t charge, like most schools as renowned as UA, but that’s because they want the best of the best from any walk of life, and that means Shouto had to beat hundreds of aspiring heroes to get in. That means he is the best of the best. That is, objectively, a good thing. It assures him of a good future even if he doesn’t stick on being a hero.

If it doesn’t destroy his future by bringing it to His attention.

It’s too late to be worrying about that, or at least, too late to be making any decisions based on that fear. They decided that Shouto should go for the entrance exam if he wants to, and to support him, and that means that they’ve all decided to accept the consequences.

Maybe there won’t be any. Elemental Quirks aren’t that uncommon, and Shouto’s unrecognizable from the six-year-old in the Missing Persons photo. If he keeps his head down at school, He might not notice or recognize him. They might get away with it.

She has to hope. It’s the only thing she can do.

~~~
This is Todoroki Touya, aged twenty-three, and he’s getting pretty familiar with this feeling.

This feeling of having changed nothing, of only making what would have happened more difficult, more exhausting, more dangerous.

This feeling of all of them being in danger, and it being all his fault for running away in the first place and bringing the rest of them along with him. Whatever happens next, it’s not Shouto’s fault, he’s determined about that. He won’t blame Shouto for normal human shit like wanting to go to high school with a friend. He’s not going to blame him for being a kid.

At least he is at kid at fifteen. Touya sure as shit wasn’t. He achieved that, at least.

He can’t blame Shouto, and he knows he should lay this all on Endeavor, but honestly, he keeps forgetting about that bastard. He’s not even a person in Touya’s mind anymore, really, more like a flood or an earthquake, a disaster that destroyed their lives a long time ago but is hard to hate for it because destroy is what shit like that does. What the fuck else is it gonna do? There’s no controlling or stopping the random bad luck that makes shit like that strike.

But Touya made a choice, and they all followed him. And he made another choice when he decided to agree to let Shouto apply to UA. And that means if this all blows up in their faces, that’s on him.

He’ll take the shit. That’s what he does. It might be all he’s good for. That’s fine. Still seems to be good enough to get Shouto into UA without ever having to beat him until he puked or, like, at all. Funny, that.

He reaches over and ruffles Shouto’s hair, and feels the tension melt out of the kid and the room. Shouto’s getting tall, though not as tall as that lanky fucker Natsuo. But he’s still a kid, and he’s going to a damn good high school with his best friend, and all Touya wants is for that to be a good thing.

~~~

This is Midoriya Izuku, aged fifteen. He’s clutching his phone in trembling hands while his mother starts on the fixings for a celebratory dinner.

He still can’t believe that he got into UA. He still can’t believe how he got into UA. Okay, so he broke most of his limbs, but the power was like nothing he could have ever imagined. Watching that building-sized robot fall away from his fist…

It was like being All-Might.

He hasn’t explained quite what happened to his mother yet. He doesn’t want to worry her with the whole broken limbs thing, and he still isn’t totally sure how to explain him having a Quirk now. Maybe he could say it wouldn’t manifest before he started working out because he wasn’t strong enough for it? All Might said something like that when they started training, right? That it would make his limbs explode if he tried to use One For All without being ready for it? He’d thought All Might was just being dramatic but no, that seems like a legitimate risk now.

Okay, so he needed to work out for his body to handle his Quirk, and he subconsciously suppressed it until now. That seems like a fair explanation. It’s not like there’s a sensible alternative that anybody else would really think of.

He wants to tell Shouma. He doesn’t like having to lie to his mother or his best friend about the training he’s been doing, or the true nature of his Quirk, or the fact that he personally knows All
Might. Shouma’s been his best friend since the first day of middle school, when he was the first person ever to stand up for Izuku. His brother’s Quirkless, just like Izuku—even though Izuku’s not Quirkless anymore, but Shouma doesn’t know that yet. Izuku’s never gotten to meet Shouma’s brother because he goes to a prestigious high school and he’s always busy, it’s obvious every time Shouma mentions his brother how much he loves him and how proud he is. He’s never met Shouma’s dad, either, since the guy’s apparently always working to pay for Shouma and Hinata’s schools, but he has to be a great guy to have raised somebody like Shouma all by himself.

He hopes Shouma got into UA too. He wants to go to high school with his best friend. He wants to fight alongside his best friend, rather than being protected by him, finally be equal to somebody as amazing as Saito Shouma.

He wants to see Shouma smile when he finds out that Izuku got into UA. Shouma’s default expression is so distant, that when Izuku can make him smile, really smile, all the way up to his eyes, he feels like the greatest hero in the world.

Chapter End Notes

Okay so in the main timeline Shouto did the recommendations exam so he probably wasn't waiting on an acceptance hologram but can you IMAGINE Endeavor with a faceful of Surprise All Might

It's gonna get worse before it gets better. Buckle up.
Backfire

Chapter Summary

The sword drops. And yet they're still here.

Chapter Notes

Haha welp I said I split this in two for length/pacing reasons and this still wound up a quarter as long as the last ten chapters put together here we go

Hey, so, uh, see like all of the abuse and disassociation warnings up at the top there? Yeah.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

This is Todoroki Shouto, aged fifteen, and he fucked up.

~~~

This is Midoriya Izuku, aged fifteen, and he miscalculated.

~~~

This is Todoroki Shouto and he used his fire in the cavalry battle, he slipped up, he panicked when Izuku started glowing with that strange new power of his, he should have been more careful—

~~~

This is Midoriya Izuku and he shouldn’t have used One For All in the cavalry battle, it was too much and it’s pushed something out of Shouma that he seems terrified of. If he didn’t know he could do fire, that would be one thing, but even though he wouldn’t really answer Izuku’s questions it’s clear Shouma did know about his fire and has kept it secret, and while it hurts to know that Shouma kept such an important secret from him it’s not like Izuku’s told him everything, either, about One For All and All Might, and something about the fire has Shouma so scared—

~~~

This is Todoroki Shouto and he knows that pro heroes from all over the country are here, Izuku was babbling a mile a minute before the first round as the cameras panned over the stands, he didn’t spot Endeavor but that doesn’t mean he’s not watching, doesn’t mean he didn’t see the moment the roving cameras were on Shouto at the same moment that fire flared up from his left side—

~~~

This is Todoroki Fuyumi, aged twenty-one, and she’s got one hand in Touya’s and the other in Natsuo’s so she doesn’t lose them in the crowds milling about getting snacks and going to the toilet
between rounds, eyes desperately scanning for the *staff and students only* door they saw when they wished Shouto luck this morning, a million years ago—

~~~

This is Todoroki Shouto

And that is Endeavor standing there in the door, flames on his face and his eyes are

No that’s no a sad look or a happy look, that’s shock and it’s turning into

Shouto *remembers* that look and no

No those are bad memories no no *stay away*—

~~~

This is Midoriya Izuku and he’s supposed to be getting ready for his first match, they’ve all been given private waiting rooms to prep for their matches, but all he can think about is the fear on Shouma’s face and then he hears a desperate scream and furious shouting

He’s never heard Shouma *scared*.

~~~

This is Todoroki Natsuo, aged eighteen, and *before they ran away* whenever he heard Shouto cry out all he could do was cover his ears and close his eyes and wait for it to be over but then from the first day on the playground he discovered a new response, an impulse that he’s coded into his limbic system

He ducks and dodges past the cowboy trying to tell them they can’t be down here and he lets go of Fuyumi’s hand and he *runs* and he doesn’t know where he is or where he’s going but he follows Shouto’s voice into a waiting room

And there is Shouto standing by a table with a chair on the ground behind him, white in the face and shaking

And there is Endeavor standing over him

And here is Natsuo, in the way.

~~~

This is Todoroki Fuyumi and she ran after Natsuo the moment he slipped from her grasp but he’s taller, longer-legged, a faster runner, she almost loses him in the corridors but she sees a door slam closed and hears somebody yelling out in *fury*

And when she opens the door and sees Shouto standing by a table with naked terror on his face

And *Endeavor* is there

And Natsuo is between them and it’s *him* yelling in fury, right there in Endeavor’s face, closer than she’s ever seen anybody dare get to the Flame Hero, and she’s so proud

But the flames on Endeavor’s face are licking at Natsuo’s cheeks
And his hands are fists
And oh god no not again

This is Todoroki Natsuo and he can name every muscle and tendon in the arm that moves when a
hand clenches into a fist and he can see them doing it now and he can see the fire on Endeavor’s
face flaring up and for a wild moment

He wants him to do it

He wants Endeavor to hit him, strike him, burn him

Right here, right now, in this place full of witnesses, some kids running in from other waiting
rooms, calling for teachers and heroes who are probably already on their way to calm down the
disturbance

He wants Endeavor to do something he can’t take back and damn the consequences

He’s so scared.

But he’s going to protect Shouto.

This is Todoroki Touya, aged twenty-three, and if Endeavor lays one fucking finger on Natsuo,
Touya will kill him, and damn the witnesses—

This is Aizawa Shouta, aged thirty, and he’s only half-listening to Recovery Girl chewing him out
for overdoing his Quirk.

He knows he nearly died fairly recently and all, but what was he supposed to do, let Endeavor and
Touya literally murder each other in front of half a dozen confused students and the utterly
horrified Saito Sho—

Not Saito Shouma. It’s out there now. Todoroki Shouto. Identified by a furious Todoroki Enji,
demanding at the top of his lungs that the police arrest his eldest son for kidnapping the other three
children, All Might himself being needed to physically holding the Flame Hero back from
returning to the waiting room

Where there are four Todoroki children, the youngest two of whom have taken turns vomiting their
panic into the sink in the corner, and three of them are adults now, custodially speaking, but one
isn’t and that’s where it’s all going to get so complicated

Complicated because of custody, and because he became a student at the most prestigious hero
school in Japan with a fake ID and a fake Quirk registry that hid half of his ability

Complicated because Shouta knew all of this but if anybody finds out that he didn’t report missing
children his social work, teaching and hero licenses will all be at risk, he could be pinned as the
nonexistent kidnapper himself alongside or instead of Touya, and if that happens he can’t help
Shouto

He has to admit to knowing Saito Daiki, but he has plausible deniability regarding his informant’s
identity, and with that he can be of use.

Todoroki Shouto is his student, and that means there’s a lot Shouta can do for him, if he’s careful.

It’s a rational deception. He’ll worry about how right or wrong it is once he sees how it all shakes out.

~~~

This is Todoroki Shouto, aged fifteen, and he doesn’t know where his siblings are.

He’s in the recovery room at the school. He’s alone, right now. It’s dark outside. Has the Sports Festival finished? He doesn’t know who won. He doesn’t know how long it’s been.

He doesn’t know what’s going to happen.

Is Natsuo okay?

~~~

This is Todoroki Natsuo and he’s spoken to so many different people by now that he’s not sure if this one’s a police officer or a therapist or a lawyer.

Well, he hasn’t spoken much. They haven’t done anything wrong, but he knows how little that matters when Endeavor is involved. So he says nothing, because he doesn’t know what to say.

Where’s Shouto?

~~~

This is Todoroki Shouto, aged fifteen, and this place is too big.

Aizawa-sensei explains that he’ll be living here while custody is figured out. They’re building lots of them, planning to house all of the students on campus, and this one’s finished so he can live here.

Aizawa-sensei explains that Shouto’s not allowed to know where his siblings are, but they might be allowed to come visit soon, if Shouto wants them to. Endeavor can ask to come visit but Shouto doesn’t have to agree to it.

Aizawa-sensei looks very tired. More than usual. Has he been sleeping? Has Shouto? He’s not sure how long it’s been since the Sports Festival. Some of Aizawa-sensei’s bandages are off, enough to see the bags under his eyes.

He’s not sure how to sleep all alone in this big, empty dorm, with so many rooms and all of them are big and nobody is in them.

Aizawa-sensei has his sleeping bag. Has he been carrying it the whole time, or did he go get it? He says other teachers who live near campus will take turns keeping Shouto company, so he’s not alone.

He gets the feeling that Aizawa-sensei has explained all of this before, and feels bad that he’ll probably have to explain it again, because thoughts are so slippery in Shouto’s head right now.

~~~
This is Todoroki Touya and he can’t sleep.

It’s been explained that this isn’t jail, this is holding. There’s a difference. He hasn’t been convicted of anything yet, just charged. A distinction without a difference, probably. Endeavor’s going to pin all of this on Touya and he’s probably going to see to it that Fuyumi and Natsuo’s schools kick them out, disown them himself, and Shouto’ll be forced to go back to that house—

He’s wearing Quirk restraints, but if he wasn’t, he’d burn this whole fucking place down to go find his siblings.

It’s killing him, making his ravaged skin crawl, that they’re not here, where he is, that he’s all alone in this empty room.

And he can’t sleep. He can barely breathe.

~~~

This is Todoroki Fuyumi and she will not rest until she has her brothers back.

The police only released her and Natsuo, told them that Touya was being charged with their kidnapping and to get a lawyer, and then to get another one to dispute Shouto’s custody. Natsuo brought her here, to his university’s twenty-four-hour library, and his student ID still works for the time being so they’re logged into library computers hunting for somebody, anybody who can help them.

She’s not a lawyer, but she’ll fight herself if she has to. She won’t freeze up again because she did and she failed and the worst has happened because of it and it is not going to get worse than this.

So the only way to go is up.

~~~

This is Midoriya Izuku, aged fifteen. He doesn’t spend his train ride in the morning reading about hero fights anymore, aside from that time Stain attacked Endeavor outside of a courthouse.

He’s following the court proceedings closely, or as closely as his understanding of the law allows. There are kidnapping charges and there are abuse charges and there are lawyers giving complicated statements every day while Endeavor strides in and out of the courthouse literally burning with anger and surrounded by a wall of lackeys and lawyers and Shouma’s—Shouto’s sister walks in and out with one lawyer at one side and her brother at the other and her head held high and determination set hard into her face.

Shouto has three siblings, not one, and it’s like being separated from them has carved parts out of him. But he’s a flight risk, not allowed off campus, not even supposed to move around without an escort to stop him running away (again, he ran away from home when he was six years old, ran away from a father that was hurting him at six years old, not an angry kid with a powerful Quirk and a power complex like Kacchan but a goddamn adult, a trained Hero) and he’s not even allowed to have his own phone until his custody’s settled, so Izuku brings him the news. Well, the good news. He’s left out Stain, and Endeavor’s press conference, and a lot of the legal statements.

He just wants Shouto to know that his siblings are out there, and to keep him going until his family can be reunited. He wants Shouto to be happy, as much as he’s ever wanted anything in his life, even One For All.

Okay, so he’s kind of in love with his best friend, and didn’t realize that until he nearly lost him.
He never had friends before Shouto, not since he was in kindergarten, so he hadn’t quite gathered the difference between loving his friend and *loving* his friend until he came to UA and got *other* friends, who he also loves a lot, but, well…

He missed Shouto, missed being able to talk to him forever without feeling anxious that he was being *too* passionate and it would get weird, because Shouto said that passion inspired him. He missed hearing Shouto awkwardly explain some injoke with his brother (*siblings?*) that he’d accidentally referred to, because even if he was embarrassed Shouto always smiled so gently when talking about his sibling(s), with so much love that even a lifelong only child like Izuku could feel touched by it. He missed training together, and the moment he realized that even though Shouto had always protected Izuku from bullying, he wasn’t *holding back*, he wasn’t thinking of Izuku as still weak because he never *had*. He missed him so much and he’d probably mumbled as much way too often before Uraraka had taken him aside and quietly asked if he—

Okay, he’s in love with his best friend. He doesn’t have much experience in a lot of things—having friends, talking to people without babbling, having a Quirk, using that Quirk without breaking bones, being in love—but he’s pretty sure that loving somebody means valuing their happiness. Izuku unloading his potentially one-sided feelings on Shouto won’t make him happy right now. What he needs is clear, what will make him happy is obvious. He needs his family back.

Even with All Might’s power, Izuku can’t bring them back to Shouto. He can’t just fly over buildings, scoop them up and bring them home. It’s so much more complicated than that. So he brings Shouto news, and hopes it’s enough.

~~~

This is Yamada Hizashi, aged thirty, and he’s being a responsible adult, really. He’s giving these kids a secure outlet for their destructive impulses and supervising them to make sure they don’t get hurt. Isn’t that basically what they do at UA?

And okay, he’s kind of proud of these destructive impulses. It’s not often that classes 1-A and 1-B team up, but it was probably 1-A who came up with the idea to collect all the Endeavor merch on campus and destroy it and Inasa from 1-B who got the rest of his class in on it. He’s been a vocal Endeavor anti since long before the abuse accusations broke, and has been pretty smug about having been right all along.

They haven’t gotten a *lot* of Endeavor merch, not because students are reluctant to give it up but because there simply isn’t much around, which Hizashi takes quiet pride in. All Endeavor had going for him was the excuse that he was an asshole who went overboard fighting villains because he’d lost his children to villains unknown, but now everybody’s read the real message in the mirror, that he lost his family *because* he’s an abusive asshole, and most people are pretty happy to give up whatever branded pencils or folders they still had kicking around.

Sero has a camera, because of course he does. Hizashi’s privately relieved that they talked themselves out of burning the pile of merch they’ve accumulated after Aoyama pointed out that burning the French flag is the only way to respectfully dispose of it and the same might hold true for Flame Hero merch.

Ashido’s suggested melting it all with her Quirk. Clever girl. He kind of wants to give her some extra credit for that bit of problem solving, and it’ll be a useful way to learn to use her Quirk. Rescue missions often lead to a lot of garbage piling up that needs safely destroyed, after all.

~~~
This is Todoroki Touya, aged twenty-four, and his lawyers assure him that, slowly but surely, they’re winning.

He has two, because he really fucking needs them, with a third lawyer from the same office fighting for Shouto’s custody with Fuyumi. Getting Touya off of criminal charges and laying some successfully on Endeavor will sure as shit make the custody fight easier, but Endeavor’s lawyers have thrown up every possible road block, weaving red tape like it’s their fucking Quirk, and sometimes it seems like it’s all Touya can do to hold his ground. It *itches*, having to leave everything in anybody else’s hands but his own, no matter how good his lawyers are. One has a Quirk that means he can tell when somebody’s hiding a secret, and the younger one can tell when somebody’s lying to him. Neither Quirks are admissible as evidence in court, but it means that when they’re cross-examining witnesses, they’re utterly unstoppable about honing in on lies and corruption. Steadily, they’re wearing down Endeavor’s defenses, or so they keep assuring Touya.

It does mean that Touya can’t bullshit them himself, though. His and Shouto’s faces look like pretty damning evidence against Endeavor, except for how *He* didn’t actually cause either of their burns directly, and the lawyers found that out the first time they talked to Touya. He thought that might fuck them, having to explain that it was *Mom* who burned Shouto, and Touya did this with his own fire, but apparently Endeavor ignoring his child’s insistence that he was in pain until Touya set himself alight is just as bad if not worse than just setting your fucking kid on fire yourself. Or beating your wife until she has such a severe mental breakdown that she can’t even bear to look at a child with the same *colouring* as her husband.

Touya wonders if Mom would have burn him if he’d walked in on her during her breakdown, or Natsuo. He wonders if Endeavor would have locked her away if it hadn’t been his perfect tool, his masterpiece, who’d paid the price. He has more what-ifs than ever now that he spends every day raking over his past in excruciating detail for police and lawyers and therapists instead of trying not to think about it, or in holding, alone with his thoughts.

It’s not jail, they assure him, just holding, while the case is progressing. He knows he’s done a lot of shit wrong, and it’ll be a goddamn miracle if he doesn’t end up in jail for real, but he doesn’t regret running away. He knows he’s done a lot of shit wrong, and it’ll be a goddamn miracle if he doesn’t end up in jail for real, but he doesn’t regret running away. He knows without a doubt, now, that it was the right thing to do, to leave and take his siblings with him, and he’s known it better than he’s known anything in his life from the moment he locked eyes with Endeavor in that waiting room.

Even if it wasn’t legal, it was *right*.

~~~

This is Todoroki Fuyumi, aged twenty-two, and she thinks she should be more scared to face her father in court while fighting for custody of her brother. She should be afraid of the man who abused her and her mother and brothers. Her hands should shake. Her stomach should turn. She should struggle to breathe.

The fear drowned her at the Sports Festival and he didn’t even *know*, because he didn’t see her, he’s never seen her. His gaze, as always, was on Shouto and Touya, with a rage in his eyes that stopped her heart.

But then there was her little brother Natsuo, taller than her now, almost as tall as Endeavor, tall enough to get right in his burning face with a snarl on his lips and his own hate in his eyes. Her Quirkless little brother stood between their oldest brother and father with their powerful Quirks flaring, burning with nothing but his own rage, and Fuyumi was so scared for him but so *proud* of him, too. Proud of his courage, proud of the strength he had borne of nothing that Endeavor had ever valued—
Proud of the strength he had in that moment when she was drowning in the cold depths of her fear.

They took Shouto away. She froze up, and they took Shouto away. But they haven’t given him back to Endeavor yet. She can still get them back.

She remains frozen, calm, smooth. She’s lost her place at teaching college, but most of her professors still want to talk to her, not as teachers but as interviewers, researchers, child psychologists hungry for what she can tell them about life as a homeless child and life raising homeless children, about abuse and paid dating and poor schools and running away.

She tells them all she can, anything that will prevent other children winding up in her situation, but she makes sure she gets paid for these interviews too, and the TV shows that want to talk to a Todoroki, and the radio shows, and the youtube channels. Shouto’s in custody and Touya’s in holding while he’s on criminal charges and Natsuo is suddenly so unsure of himself and afraid to speak, so she’s the one speaking for all of them now, the one earning the money to support them and their lawyers, the one who all eyes and ears are turned towards, and she easily cuts a far more sympathetic figure than her father does.

Her lawyer handling the custody dispute, who has an empathetic Quirk, comments on how it always startles her how much she can feel happening below Fuyumi’s calm, gentle surface. Fuyumi straightens her spine, sets her shoulders, and marches into the courtroom to spend another day fighting to get her brother back.

When she sees Endeavor sitting with his lawyers, she does not feel afraid anymore. She thinks of her mother, and being the mother to her burned and burning brothers, the brave and brilliant boys that he would destroy, and feels only ice-cold hate.

He looks at her, and meets her eyes for what might be the first time in their lives (for he never looked at her, and her eyes were always demurely downcast in his presence, back when she was still a child, before she had to give that up because of him) and she hopes he can see it.

~~~

This is Todoroki Natsuo, aged nineteen, and technically he hasn’t lost his university placement yet, but he is on suspension until all the legalities are ironed out. Which is probably fair, and better than he expected, really.

It means he has more free time than he’s had since grade school, and that means his full-time job is now supporting Fuyumi. He’s not the cook Shouto is, but he knows about nutrition and shit, he’s studying what the body needs (he knows what lack of nutrition in the developmental years does to a body, knows why he’s so much taller than Touya and Fuyumi and Shouto probably will be too) and even if he can’t cook he can buy what Fuyumi needs to keep her going on her damn near sleepless quest to get their voices out there and get their brothers back. She meets with their lawyers daily, has an update interview with Present Mic’s segment following the case weekly, and either she or Natsuo are constantly seeing a parade of court-appointed therapists assessing, assessing, assessing.

Natsuo’s not a doctor yet, but he has a diagnosis: fucked up. Preferred treatment; surgical removal of the fear of Endeavor, topical application of hugs from his absent brothers.

Natsuo visits Touya daily, updating him. Touya looks exhausted, but, like, even more than usual. Natsuo’s trying to talk him into seeing the prison doctor, who has a Quirk that might be able to do something about Touya’s burns, might help him be in less pain, but he keeps refusing. Is he just being stubborn, or is it deliberate? He looks like he’s in pain, and maybe he’s going for that, so any jury that looks at him sees a victim, not a villain.
Or maybe he’s punishing himself. He blames himself for all of this, for all of them being in this position, and try as he might Natsuo still can’t convince him that it’s okay because—

Well, it isn’t. They’re apart. That’s not okay. But that’s Endeavor’s fault, not Touya’s, not Shouto’s, not anybody except His, and Natsuo hates Him so much but he also keeps waking up in a cold sweat when he remembers facing Endeavor down in that waiting room, wakes up clawing at phantom burns he didn’t get and screaming at blows that didn’t land. Without that burning rage that came from needing to protect Shouto, he’s so afraid—

But Fuyumi is here, like she’s always been, unshakeable, not sleeping, not stopping. Endeavor has always been a titanic figure, but now Fuyumi is like an iceberg he never saw coming until it was too late to turn, because he never saw her.

She can save Touya and Shouto. Natsuo believes that with his whole heart. But there’s one more person that needs saved, one more visit that Natsuo is going to make, one thing that he can handle for Fuyumi. She might need somebody to handle this for her, because he can’t imagine how complicated her feelings must be on the mother she had to replace.

Natsuo is also scared as he waits in the hospital lobby, his feelings also full of complications, but he’s always found it easier to be brave for others than for himself.

~~~

This is Aizawa Shouta, aged thirty-one, and he hasn’t lied in court. He hasn’t had to. All Endeavor’s lawyers called him in to testify about were what crimes he knows or suspects Touya committed as Saito Daiki, and he doesn’t need to lie about that, because Touya turned enough evidence to start working as an informant with a clan slate and his assistance and intel were instrumental in some major cases. But they didn’t seem to want to hear about that, and chased him back out of the courtroom as fast as they could.

It’s odd, prepping for patrol without checking in with Touya. He hadn’t realized how much he had been depending on the younger man’s intel gathering, or having an extra set of eyes watching his back in case things went south.

He’s distracting himself by listening to Hizashi’s show, and god, he loves that man so much. He’s a goddamn genius. Present Mic should be called the Parasocial Hero, because people who listen to his show trust him so much without ever having met him. Ever since having Todoroki Fuyumi on his show became a weekly event (Everybody knows Endeavor hates interviews Hizashi points out every time he deletes an email from one of Endeavor’s representatives unopened) people have been coming out of the woodwork to discuss the Todoroki case who’ve always been too scared to talk to the police, or CPS, or Shouta himself when he tried to reach out to them. Teachers, doctors, former employees, former sidekicks. And once they’ve told their story on the air, with Present Mic there to encourage them, it’s easier to tell it again, in court, for the record. Juries aren’t supposed to let radio shows influence what they decide, but witnesses are another story.

Endeavor’s playing the innocent, victim of a smear campaign perpetrated by his oldest, mentally unstable son warping the minds of the rest of his children, but Shouta knows the look in his eyes when the man looked at his children for the first time in a decade, fists clenched, perhaps inches from striking if Shouta and the other teachers had arrived a moment later. He has the same look on his eyes every time they cross paths in court. Rage that he has been made a fool of. The promise of retribution. The arrogant certainty that this will still work out in his favour, because all things do.

Shouta doesn’t blink, because he can’t wait to see the moment that arrogance finally breaks.
This is Todoroki Shouto, aged fifteen, and he’s in the changing room with Kirishima, who’s dyeing his hair.

Kirishima’s friends with Bakugo, so Shouto’s not sure how or when he became friends with Shouto. He didn’t realize he was apparently already friends with so much of the class, enough that none of them care that he lied to them. They’ve just been calling him “Shou”, now, not Saito or Shouma or Shouto or Todoroki. He’s not sure if they asked them to or if they just decided to, to make things easier.

He’s been sleepwalking, it feels like, and when he wakes up his siblings aren’t here, but neither is Endeavor.

His friends are here. Kirishima is here, dying his hair, because he thinks it’ll make Shouto feel better to have black hair again, like he’s had the whole time they’ve been free. Sometimes Uraraka is here, with coupons, discussing cooking on a budget and money-saving tips and Shouto knows about that, he’s been watching Fuyumi do it all his life. Sometimes Iida is here, and they talk about their brothers, and looking up to them, and missing them. It’s not a happy talk, often, but it goes to some deep places that Shouto’s had to leave untouched and let wither, and it’s better than talking to all the different therapists he has to see. Talking to Tsuyu is much the same. She’s so calm and honest and she looks after her younger siblings most of the time, too, her parents never hurt her but they’re never there and she just seems to understand. Ashido and Kaminari and Sero are here talking about a movie, or music, or something, something that doesn’t matter, something fun, something safe.

Izuku is here. Shouto’s lied to him longer than anybody but, then, he’s admitted that he’s lied too. It’s a lot, Izuku’s Quirk, All Might, and it doesn’t seem to have sunk in, and it doesn’t matter. It doesn’t matter, because Izuku’s still his best friend, and he’s here. Still believing in heroes, still believing in Shouto, and bringing him news, every day, that Fuyumi and Natsuo and Touya are out there and fighting.

They’re not here, but Shouto’s not alone, either.

Chapter End Notes

We are through the dark forest now. The final chapter is for bringing us back out into the light.

Backfire has a lot of meanings that apply to this chapter, and one of them is that it's a name for the controlled fires farmers set to fields to burn off dead crops and debris to allow fresh growth.

Me, suddenly finding myself needing minor lawyer characters in any fanfic: I'll just drape the thinnest possible veil over the Ace Attorney cast and call it a day.
It's the first day of the rest of their lives.

The ending you all earned by reading this far. Warnings for fluff and sap, so incredibly sappy

See the end of the chapter for more notes

This is Todoroki Touya, aged twenty-four, and he has to sign a list of all his possessions that were seized when he was arrested.

He signs it. He has no fucking clue if it’s correct. The cops could have stolen all the shit in his bag for all he knows. He gave his shit up as gone as soon as they gave him that prison jumpsuit. He didn’t know they kept it and actually gave it back.

He walks out of holding in the same clothes he walked in wearing, and it’s disorienting. As if that goddam Sports Festival was just this morning, and everything between some kind of weird nightmare.

But Fuyumi is here, crying and crying as she hugs him and he’s probably fucking crying too, hugging her back as it hits him that this is real. She did it.

Innocent of all charges. He’s free, and she did that.

She has custody of Shouto too, but apparently the whole student body of UA are living on-campus now, after some shit last summer where some kids nearly got kidnapped or something. So he lives at the school, still, with his friends, but they can visit whenever they want and that’s where they’re going right now. Shouto’s homeroom teacher, one Aizawa Shouta, AKA Eraserhead, has already signed off on the family visitor passes.

That guy is Touya’s second-favourite hero right now, after his sister.

This is Todoroki Fuyumi, aged twenty-two. It’s her day off, the sun is shining, Touya is free, they’re going to see Natsuo and Shouto, and they all have restraining orders banning Todoroki Enji from being within five hundred metres of any of their places of living, work or study.

It’s a good day.

She doesn’t even mind, really, that she can’t become a teacher anymore because even if she was never charged with anything, the board of education is pretty touchy about hiring anybody so publicly involved with a criminal investigation. She has to laugh, remembering some of the
teachers she had growing up, who were apparently fine so long as they stayed under the radar.

Still, what she wanted wasn’t to be a teacher, it was to help at-risk children and specifically her brothers, and there are other routes to that. She’s interning at the same law firm that won her cases against Endeavor, earning money and credit hours towards going to actually study law. All of their lawyers specialize in criminal defence, and having somebody on board interested in family law would really help them diversify, according to the senior lawyer. Somebody who could specialize in helping abuse victims win freedom and recompense from the ones who hurt them.

But that’s years down the line, and right now what she’s doing is earning money and the right to go back to school eventually and really able to help people, which is still all she wants to do.

Shouto’s waiting for them at the UA gate, accompanied by Midoriya, as usual. Fuyumi’s pleased to see that he doesn’t seem to have broken any bones lately, then she’s distracted by the size of the smile on Shouto’s face, the joy and relief at seeing Touya free as he practically tackles his oldest brother.

Shouto and Touya are the same height now. Shouto’s so grown up, well on his way to becoming a real hero. He’s already fought real villains. He might never be fully safe, because that’s not what that job’s about, but here, in his home, he need fear nothing.

Midoriya politely introduces himself to Touya, then tells them that Shouto’s class is planning a surprise party to celebrate the four of them being together again and he wanted to forewarn them in case a roomful of people suddenly jumping up and yelling loudly at them is not their definition of a Fun Time.

Fuyumi really likes this kid.

But they’re not all here, because Natsuo isn’t here with Shouto.

She texts him and he responds that he’s almost there, he just had to pick somebody up first. There are no danger codes. Fuyumi relaxes.

It’s a beautiful day, and soon they’ll all be together again, and this time for good.

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This is Todoroki Natsuo, aged nineteen. He’s thinking of changing the name. According to his mother, her maiden name was Yukimura, so if she gets a divorce she’ll go back to that. He thinks he could rock Yukimura Natsuo.

He’ll have to talk to Fuyumi’s new coworkers, see if any of them can put him in touch with a good divorce lawyer, though at this stage, a toddler could probably argue his mother’s divorce case and walk away with everything. Todoroki Enji, the artist formerly known as Endeavor before his hero license was revoked, has been convicted of child abuse or neglect four times over, as well as domestic abuse, bribery and corruption. There’s probably a lot more. Natsuo was probably too busy screaming and hugging Fuyumi to hear.

Their mother was supposed to be discharged years ago, after responding to her care and being deemed no longer a danger to herself and others, so long as she didn’t return to the same environment. And she’s not going back to the man who’s still her husband, for the time being. She’s coming with Natsuo to be reunited with the rest of her kids.

She seems pretty overwhelmed as they ride the train together. She hasn’t been out of the hospital in a decade, after all. Natsuo holds her hand tight, like he’s still a child of nine needing her comfort,
not the one towering over her, protecting her like none of them ever could in the past, even if just from pushy commuters. She holds his hand tight right back, fidgeting with the straps of her bag, containing all of her possessions from the hospital.

He probably shouldn’t make this a surprise. The last time she saw Shouto, she hurt him, and Natsuo doesn’t know how Shouto will react to seeing her unexpectedly, or Fuyumi, or Touya. Natsuo’s been visiting her secretly for months, assessing, *assessing*, sick to his stomach but judging the threat she poses, anyway. She’s his *mother*, but she hurt Shouto.

She’s no threat to anybody now, though, in her own mind and at the same time almost out of it with guilt and regret. She thinks she doesn’t deserve to see her own children safe and happy, and Natsuo’s sick of it, of all of them being *like this*. Touya thinking he deserves to be in pain. Fuyumi thinking she doesn’t deserve to go to a good school. Shouto thinking he doesn’t deserve to be with his friends.

Endeavor thinking *he* deserves some recompense for the humiliation of his abused children running away from him. All of them have their thinking on backwards, and he’s *done* with it.

So if anybody’s going to be freaked out, he wants to get over it all at once, at a safe place, where Shouto’s surrounded by friends and Fuyumi and Touya and they’re all *together* again.

And Rei is scared too. Her hand is trembling in Natsuo’s, chilly and sweating anxiously at the same time. The last time she saw any of her children, the last time she saw Shouto, she *hurt* him, and she still hasn’t forgiven herself.

If *any* of them are going to heal, they need to be *together*. Natsuo believes this with his whole heart.

And there’s Fuyumi standing by the gates to UA, talking to Midoriya, and there’s Shouto, tightly hugging Touya, who’s *free*, who’s wearing his own clothes instead of prison scrubs, and Natsuo can’t contain the absolute *joy* as he calls out his brother’s name and they turn and they see Natsuo and they see—

Their smiles fade, but they don’t look sad, or scared, just… everything, maybe, too much to know what to express first. It’s their mother who speaks first, *sobs* the start of an apology—

They’re all running and it’s Shouto, with all of his athletic hero training, who reaches them first, stopping short with his hands hovering in front of him, like their mother is something fragile that he doesn’t know how to touch. Then Fuyumi hits, tackling Natsuo and Rei at once in a tight hug, sobbing her own eyes out about how much she missed her mother, about how much they *all* missed her, and then Touya’s there too, giving Natsuo something halfway between a hair-tousle and an affectionate noogie as he curses Natsuo out for keeping this a secret and upstaging Touya’s release date, all while grinning ear to ear, then pulling in Shouto with one arm while getting his other around Rei.

And Shouto is *smiling*, too, crying but smiling, unafraid as he reaches in to hug his mother and sister and brothers and they are a goddamn heap of mess and tears and arms pinned in awkward places while they all try to reach each other

And they are *together*. They are here, and they are free, and they are safe. They can start again, without lies or fear.

Wherever they are, they are *home*.
This is Shouto, aged sixteen.

He is in class 2-A at UA High School. His hero name is Mercury, though there’s still time to change it. He’s going to go for his provisional hero license this fall, since he’s the only member of class who doesn’t have his yet. Now that Touya’s been released, he might be getting a license at the same time. Maybe that’s what he’s talking to Aizawa-sensei about right now, quiet voices lost amongst all the chatter. Though apparently they know each other already. When did that happen?

Shouto has two older brothers, and an older sister, and a mother. He can’t remember ever having all of those things at once before. And they are here, with all of his friends, who are very loud and friendly and somehow, today, right now, that’s not intimidating. They’re all crammed on the couches in their new common area, Shouto sitting on one end of a couch with his mother pressed against his left side and Izuku perched on the couch arm on his right, pressed up against his right arm, which also feels extremely warm as a result. Natsuo is sitting on the ground, one shoulder pressed against Shouto’s legs and the other against their mother’s, and Fuyumi is on her other side. Touya is sitting on the other couch arm, one arm draped over the back of the couch. They are all here.

His mother is here. He hasn’t seen her in ten years, not since—the thing, with the kettle. She’s so much smaller, shorter than he is now, slight and pale, like a ghost who could blow away any moment except she’s solid and real and sitting next to him and gripping his hand with a smile on her face, like she feels it too, like this is too good to be true. She keeps looking from him to Natsuo to Fuyumi to Touya with so much love, with none of the pain that was raging in her eyes on that last day.

Natsuo is here, and going back to university this semester. He hasn’t worn hair dye in month, his hair snow-white and fluffy. He’s smiling, and he brought their mother back to him, the gentle and loving mother that his mind had forgotten but his heart always knew existed, and he’s here in Shouto’s school not to fight anybody but instead to steal snacks and argue about some J-pop band with Jirou.

Fuyumi is here, and she’s Shouto’s guardian now, which is a legal term but is also perfect for her because she’s always been his guardian. She isn’t dying her hair anymore either, but she actually looks brighter without the contrast of the dark hair, or maybe that’s her smile. She isn’t going to be a teacher anymore, but that’s fine because she’s doing a job she wants to do, a job where she can save more people who are in the same situation that all of them have been in. She’s amazing.

Izuku is here, carrying the legacy of the greatest hero in the world, and Shouto can’t wait to see him become the world’s greatest himself. He can’t think of anybody stronger, kinder, better. It warms him to his core that there are no more lies between them, that once Shouto has his license they can be heroes together, that he can fight alongside somebody as incredible as Midoriya Izuku.

That’s why Shouto wants to be a hero. To save people, to protect them, to make them feel safe. All of his classmates, his amazing, inspiring, driven classmates, want to help people one way or another, and Shouto knows how lucky he is to have so many wonderful heroes in his life.

There’s still the League of Villains, of course. Other criminals have been rising ever since the retirement of All Might, and the arrest of Endeavor has emboldened yet more, the exposure of his crimes driving others to Stain’s cause. There will be much for them to fight in the future, but that’s what heroes do. There is nobody Shouto would rather fight alongside, no future he’d rather fight for than this one.
Shouto feels no fear, because they are here together.

Chapter End Notes

Holy shit, thank you so much for reading and leaving so many wonderful comments! I am WEAK for siblings, WEAK AS A KITTEN, so when I couldn't find this fic to read I knew I had to write it. I'm so glad you've all felt so strongly about taking this ride with me, and that for all the heartbreak you've all come to love these runaway Todosibs as much as I do and as much as they love each other. They deserve a future to call their own, and now they have it!

There are a LOT of scenes that I thought of that couldn't really be detailed in this fic due to the format, but I might make a collection and add some oneshots in a more conventional style later. But for now, thank you to everybody who's read, left kudos, and commented on this fic! I love you too <3

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!