Summary

The real world is full of problems. Pain. Filth. People like Deku know this well; people like him have to run and hide from the horrors that surround them. But then Deku learns how to disappear.

Todoroki Shouto knows there is beauty in the world, even if it's hard to see. Sometimes, though, he wishes all the bad would just go away. When he meets a boy with curly green hair, he finds himself in just such a place. The two boys find themselves drawn together, but while Shouto wants to change the world, Izuku wants to leave it behind.

Can Todoroki, Aizawa, and class 1-A convince Izuku the world is worth saving, or will he disappear forever?

Notes

Hey everyone! Welcome to Escapist, where life is pain but maybe that's okay! This is my first work, so feedback would be appreciated. This is the "Deku's home life sucks" chapter in case you were wondering. I have no formal
education in mental health, and am lucky enough to have a loving family, so I don't claim any expertise or accuracy when it comes to how Deku behaves in this fic; I simply find his actions and thought processes make sense given the situation I've put him in...
Anyway, on with the show!

See the end of the work for more notes.
“If you could run away from all your problems, would you?”

Most 7-year-olds would tell you that the world is a pretty great place to live. It's not perfect, sure, but it has a lot going for it! The world has sunshine on your skin, candy in your mouth, friends by your side. The world has parents who welcome you home, ask you about school, feed you dinner, then give you a hug and kiss goodnight. The world has 7-year-olds with big dreams who grow up and become amazing heroes for future 7-year-olds to admire.

Deku is not one of those 7-year-olds.

If you asked him, he might say the world is great for all those other kids, but not for him. For kids like him, all the good is covered up and blocked by all the terrible, like a beautiful shoreline obscured by piles of garbage. Every time you think you see something nice, you look slightly to the side and all there is is miles and miles of ugliness.

He turned away from the Dagobah beach park and continued his walk home. He really should stop philosophizing like this.

Deku trudged through the streets automatically – left, left, straight, right – as his body followed a path it knew instinctively and left his mind to continue it's musings. Why was he going home? How was the route so ingrained in his muscles he couldn't possibly stray from it? Should he even call that place home if it doesn't feel like one? That last thought lingered in his mind as he snapped back to reality. His feet had stopped in front of the apartment door. A deep breath in, a deep breath out; he grabbed the string around his neck and slowly pulled the key from it's resting place against his chest. He steeled his nerves. He's not home yet, he thought, won't be home for another few hours at least. Not like it makes much difference whether he's here or not. The key slid into the lock, and with one twist to the right the door opened.

Empty. Silence was the only greeting he received as he stepped into the dark apartment and removed his shoes. Instead of leaving them in the entryway, he picked them up and tip-toed to his room. His steps were silent as always, and not even the darkness could impede him as he made his way with practiced ease. The shoes were laid in the closet while his black backpack was emptied before being set next to the shoes; if there was one thing he had learned in the last two years, it was the less evidence you leave of your existence, the better. Who knew what his fa- Hisashi would do if he was reminded of Deku's presence. This way, he'd be more likely to just ignore him, or even better, forget him. Now if only I could get Kacchan to forget me... He found a clear spot in the cluttered room and sat on the floor to do his homework with the contents of his bag next to him - his schoolbooks, a pencil that was left in the classroom last month, a beat-up notebook he bought on sale last year, a small flashlight he'd found in a drawer downstairs, and a sandwich he swiped from the cafeteria when no one was looking. He leaned to the side where his mother's stuff was stacked high on metal shelves, and moved a vase and some old books off a plain cardboard box. Opening the lid, he pulled out an armful of dusty clothes and eyed his stash before adding the plastic-wrapped sandwich. He was still doing okay on snacks, but running low on meals; he'd have to hit the cafeteria harder tomorrow. Or maybe he could go to that one convenience store down the road, the one without any cameras and a few blind corners where he would be unseen from the register.

He used to not like stealing. It used to scare him and make him feel bad. But stores and other
people have a lot of stuff - they'll be fine if a little bit goes missing, and probably won't even notice. It's better than stealing from Hisashi.

Once the box was put away and everything replaced on top, Deku began on his homework in the dark room. His night vision had improved drastically over the last two years, and he could use the flashlight if he really needed it. The light in the room hadn't been turned on since Hisashi moved all of Inko's stuff into what used to be his bedroom, declaring he never wanted to see any of it ever again (while Deku was in the room, of course), and if he did he would burn it to ash.

His old nameplate was still in here somewhere, with All Might's colors and signature hair and Deku written on it (or did it say Izuku? He couldn't remember. Only his mom ever called him that).

Afternoon turned to evening and evening to night before Hisashi returned. The front door had been slammed shut and footsteps echoed down the hall, making Deku wince with their volume. *He doesn't have to hide from anyone*, his brain supplied, *so he doesn't care how loud he is.* Deku liked the quiet, as quiet meant safe, so he made sure to always be as quiet as possible. When the footsteps neared the door of the room, he held his breath. If Hisashi were to come in the room (he only ever did when he'd been drinking), there would be no evidence Deku had ever been there. All his things had been put in the closet, and Deku himself was well hidden under what used to be his bed. He supposed it still kind of was, seeing as he slept under it now instead of on it. Sleeping on it would make him easier to see, so everything that had been under the bed he had moved on top; now the hero-themed sheets hid him and his old stuff joined his mother's out in the open. Better all that get burned to ash than him. Hisashi's feet thankfully didn't stop, and instead continued on, allowing Deku to slowly, softly exhale. Seems tonight he was in the clear! He pulled his blanket over himself and fell asleep, dreaming of a kind woman with dark green hair and eyes much like his own, a smile on her face. He dreamed of a red-eyed blond who was his friend, laughing as he declared that they would play heroes and rescue the civilians while beating up the bad guys.

Deku got to play the hero.
Alright, time for more pain aka Bakugou Katsuki to make his entrance!
Disclaimer: I'm not a cusser personally, or an angry person in general, so writing Bakugou was hard. I did learn one thing though! Apparently writing curse words is just as awkward for me as saying them, so y'all are gonna have to deal with censorship and probably terrible/sparse use of Kacchan's favorite language. I tried.
This is also where the suicidal themes start to come into play, so warning for that. No one actually tells Deku to die (I'm debating on including that scene later, though leaning away from it at the moment), and Deku doesn't want to die, but there are definitely "shouldn't be here" vibes.
I'll shut up now. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Deku never looked forward to school.

He loved learning. His two favorite activities were reading and thinking (quiet, always be quiet), so naturally he liked to learn. School was not something he liked. School was always loud, so loud, it's too loud! Kacchan yelling. Classmates laughing. Kacchan exploding. Teachers lecturing. Kacchan threatening. Bells ringing. Kacchan attacking.

Kacchan was always loud. It made Deku's ears ring.

Maybe the noise wasn't the problem. He could survive with Hisashi's loudness, so the school should be fine too... Maybe it's because he can't hide at school like he does at the apartment! If only the teachers didn't have to take roll, he could listen to class from the cabinet in the back, once more in the dark surrounded by stuff nobody wanted (he belongs in places like that. He should hide at that beach sometime). That would probably make school a lot better, but it still wouldn't be great. What was the problem then?

"Look, it's Deku!" "The quirkless freak is still alive?" "Why does he even come to school?" "Don't touch him, you might catch his quirklessness!" "Did you know? He wants to be a hero." "Really? Him, a hero? As if!" "Useless." "Worthless." "Deku."

Deku.

Deku.

Why am I a Deku?

A resounding BANG (it's loud, too loud...) went off behind him, making him jump and skitter around to face familiar red eyes. Kacchan.

The blond scoffed. "Stop shaking you d*** nerd! You're in the way! Now MOVE before I blast
Deku scrambled away as Bakugou Katsuki shoved past him, all the other students in the hall laughing at the short, skinny boy. They all filed away to their classrooms, a few going out of their way to push Deku until he fell to the floor. He fell quietly (always quiet) and curled into a ball, a smaller target with his head protected. Only once silence returned to the hall did he stand up and shuffle into class. The teacher berated him for being late. The class laughed. He mouthed the words “I’m sorry” and slid into his desk.

He couldn't hide at school, but he sure could run. He always made sure his black bag (black is easier to hide in the dark) was packed before the lunch or final bell rang so he could dash out the classroom as soon as it did. Then he would sprint through the halls hoping to lose his bullies. If it was lunchtime, he would run to the cafeteria, since they can't do any real harm to him if there's too many others around, and he can hopefully lose them in the crowd. If he did, he could go in line for food, pretend he was pulling his money out of his bag, then stuff the food inside and leave when no one was paying attention. He had been caught before, but the last time he had been caught was over a year ago. He was getting really good at stealing.

When the final bell rang, he would run straight to the school gate, hoping to get to a public street before Kacchan reached him. Sometimes he made it, and would run all the way to the apartment; sometimes he didn't, and he wouldn't be running for the rest of the day. It seemed like this was a no-more-running day, as Deku had just been tackled to the ground mere meters from the street.

“Where do you think you're going, s***ty Deku!?”

Hot hands wrenched him to his feet and dragged him around the corner, away from prying eyes. “I asked, WHERE.” A punch. “DO YOU.” A kick. “THINK.” Punch again. “YOU’RE GOING!?”

An explosion. Loud, so loud, stop being loud! Pain wracked his body, and he knew if he didn't speak it would only get worse. He opened his mouth and bid himself speak!

But the words died in his throat.

If you speak, he'll hear you; you must never be heard, lest you be burned to ash.

“Come on man, you know he won't answer you. Freak hasn't spoken all year!” “Yeah, the teachers don't even ask him any questions anymore 'cus he just stands there gaping like a fish. Ha! What a stupid Deku.” Bakugou's 'friends' (he calls them extras) continue to jeer at the bruised and burned boy while the blond glared in ever-increasing rage. Even still, Deku dared not talk, dared not even whimper. Even as tears streamed down his face, his body shook with silent sobs. Kacchan only got angrier.

“Since when are you a mute, hah!? Can't even answer a simple question you stupid, quirkless b****! You really are worthless. Why don't you do everyone a favor and just disappear! No one would miss you. Right now you're just taking up space.”

A few hits and blasts later, Bakugou and his lackeys finally left. Deku laid on the ground, slowly bleeding, silently breathing. His tears had stopped a few minutes ago, and now everything was quiet (nice and quiet). His brain told him to move, to hobble to the apartment and use those stolen bandages and finish his homework so he can hide before Hisashi returns. His body told him to lie there, let it rest, why do you even want to go there when you can stay here and bleed out alone?

With himself at a stalemate, Deku thought about what Kacchan had said. Disappear. It sounded so nice. He didn't even have to die. If he could disappear, he wouldn't have to run. He wouldn't have to hide. He wouldn't have to stay quiet always quiet because he would simply be gone. He closed
his eyes.

*I wish I could disappear.*

And Deku disappeared.

Chapter End Notes

Oh my, what's this? Our little protagonist is in for a surprise!
Kudos to anyone who already figured out what I'm doing with the names in this fic; I'm being very intentional with the names of people and places, especially concerning Deku. Maybe it's obvious. If it isn't it'll become more clear starting next chapter. I've already got it finished, and I'll probably work on chapter 4 today too!
Next chapter is when things really start to get going, so look forward to that.
Here we go for chapter 3! Bit of a shorter chapter, but necessarily so. Time for our poor protagonist to get a little happiness, but he better be careful...
He wanted to disappear, but is that really what he needed? We'll find out eventually!

I wish I could disappear.

The moment Deku thought that, he felt a strange sensation. It started as an itch on his foot, then a tingling like his legs were asleep. Next was pins and needles up his back, goosebumps down his arms, and a brain freeze at the top of his head. Finally a full-body shiver melted into pleasant warmth, like a hot bath on a cold day. The whole thing lasted no more than a second, though the warmth lingered a bit longer before fading away. He thought it was the most peculiar thing he had ever experienced.

Until he opened his eyes.

Gone was the school, the street, and even the cold concrete he had just been pummeled into. Instead, he found himself in a vast, white void that shimmered like crystal in the noonday sun. He wasn't even on the ground anymore – not that he had risen up, but rather the ground had vanished and left him behind. Or, perhaps, he is the one who vanished, and left all the world behind. He found it an interesting thought, so he continued to ponder it until he thought something else.

It would be nice if I could find the ground and get my bearings.

Suddenly he was standing on an invisible plane, and felt the familiar pull of gravity. Odd. But now that he was no longer concerned about the absence of ground, endless questions came to his mind. Where was he? How did he get here? Why was there no ground then suddenly an invisible one? What was this strange, crystalline void with distant edges that seemed to roll and twirl, fractals shining like triangular stars?

Was this his quirk?

Izuku had gone to the doctor with his mother when he was 5, just a few months before she... and the doctor had said he had a quirk factor but no signs of activation; it was possible, though unlikely, that he had a quirk. He tried telling Kacchan and the other kids that he might have a quirk, but they called him quirkless anyways. He became Deku not long after that.

This is confusing. If only there was someone who would explain everything to me, like mom used to.

His attention was caught by a group of fractals that had faded into existence in front of him, shining brightly as they grew and morphed into a nostalgic shape. He watched as a female silhouette was formed, slender and petite with long green hair tied up in a bun. The features became more and more detailed - just like he remembered – and once they were perfect, the familiar face turned up into a smile he had sorely missed.
“Hi, sweetie. It's good to see you.”

“Am I really? I'm right here in front of you honey.”

Deku had been told that mom was gone and never coming back; that was why all her things were piled up on shelves in the room (it's not his room anymore, it belongs more to old stuff than it does to him). So if she was gone, then who was this? An impostor? A fake?

This smile was more reserved, and almost sad. “Am I a fake? Don't you want me to be real? What would make me real to you?” A real mom would be at home. The familiar scenery of the apartment appeared around him. A real mom would give me a big hug. The woman kneeled down and embraced him. But most of all, a real mom would...

Teachers called him Midoriya. Other kids called him Deku. Hisashi called him good-for-nothing s***stain. But there was one name he wanted to hear above all others, the one that he was called the most before two years ago.

A real mom would call me -

“Izuku.”

Chapter End Notes

What is this strange place Deku has found himself in? Anyone think they know? If you're unsure, that's fine! He wanted someone to explain what was happening, and this maybe-mom is going to do just that. Kinda. But oh, you have no idea how happy I was to write that last scene!! I need to give the poor boy some love to make up for what he's been going through. Hopefully I'm not being too obvious with the names or the deal with his mom, and if it is obvious I hope it's still enjoyable! I'll try and get the next chapter up today or tomorrow. So long till then!
Learn

Chapter Notes

I'm apparently really motivated to write right now, as this and chapter 5 are done. Great news for you guys, not so much for my schoolwork... Anyhoo, glad y'all are liking this so far. We get to learn a bit more about his quirk for the next few chapters, and see how things change for our little hero. Now that he's found his quirk, how will he use it? You'll have to wait a couple more chapters to find out.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Izuku.”

The maybe-mom pulled away from him and looked in his teary eyes. “I've missed you, baby. Things have been hard since I left, huh? I'm sorry. I didn't mean to leave you alone.” Moisture gathered in her green orbs as it began pouring down his cheeks. Could this really be his mom? She looked and acted just as he remembered her. She called him Izuku. Am I even still Izuku anymore?

If this was really his mom, then she knows best who he is.

He looked around at the apartment, but it seemed different. For one thing, the lights were on, and he hadn't seen the apartment like that in a year at least, but that wasn't all. What was it? Over on the mantle was his mother's favorite vase, filled with flowers. On the shelf were all her books. There was the old couch, the one that was now pushed up against the wall and covered with stuff in the room that used to be his and - oh.

This is the apartment two years ago. Just before she went away. Back when it was home.

Just how he remembered it.

No wonder it didn't feel out of place to see her here again! This was where she always belonged, back before she left and it all changed. Did I travel through time? He walked into the bathroom, mom following patiently behind him, and looked in the mirror. He was still wearing his elementary school uniform (she had wanted to take pictures of him on his first day, but never got the chance), and he could see the bruises and burns Kacchan had given him. He should probably treat—“Why don't we treat those wounds?”

He snapped out of his haze to see his mom walk around to the cabinet where he knew the medical supplies were kept. He understood what was needed, and his mom did too it seemed, as she pulled out everything they needed without asking what injuries he had. Burn cream and bandages, as well as ice packs from the freezer. She set down the burn cream and bandages, before turning to him, saying “One moment sweetie, I need to get the ice packs from the freezer for those bruises.” She caressed his injured cheek and left for the kitchen.

If he was still injured from his bullies, and his mom knew about it, he must not have time-traveled. He also couldn't see Hisashi anywhere, though he was fine with that; he wasn't very nice even when mom was there, so he didn't care if he was gone. And what was the deal with that strange,
crystalline void? He didn't want his mom to go away, and he needed to treat his wounds, but he wouldn't mind exploring that place more to find some answers.

He watched in awe as the bathroom melted away, revealing the wide, shining expanse he was in earlier. Except this time, the first-aid supplies were there next to him, and his mother walked up with ice packs in hand and began tending his wounds. She seemed completely comfortable with the fact that their home was gone. At least there was still the invisible ground.

Once he was bandaged up, the first-aid supplies vanished as well, leaving a confused boy and his calm mother; he suddenly remembered why he had wanted to see her in the first place (besides missing her, **always missing her**). She had always been good at explaining things, so maybe she could explain this place?

“You're curious about all this? That's my baby, always ready to learn. What do you know about this place?”

She had sat down next to him on the invisible ground, and they watched the shimmering fractals in the distance as he thought. *It's not a dream. It's too realistic, and I just had real wounds treated.*

“You're not dreaming.” *It wasn't time travel, though she's here and the apartment was how it used to be; she knew about my injuries, and wasn't surprised I was in elementary school. Plus, Hisashi's not here.*  “You didn't time travel either; I know what's happened in the last two years, and Hisashi isn't here. Do you want him here?” His mom had turned to him with a raised brow, asking him the question though she seemed to know the answer. He shook his head anyways. She smiled and turned back to the void. “Let's try something else. What happened when you first got here?” *I wanted to disappear. Then there was the strange feeling, and everything was gone – even the ground. I wanted there to be ground, and there was. I wanted mom to explain, and she appeared. So far everything has happened because...*

“Because you wanted it to, Izuku.”

The pieces clicked together in his head. Everything happened when he wished it to happen. No, perhaps not even that. He had a hypothesis, but he needed to test it. He looked down at the invisible ground they were sitting on and thought *the ground is no longer there.*

The moment he thought it they were no longer sitting, rather floating. The ground was gone. He kept thinking.

*We are standing on a hardwood floor,* and shimmering fractals formed beams of wood beneath their feet, supporting their weight. *Now it is a sandy beach,* and the wood glowed and dissolved into fine grains of sand, while from the void an ocean bubbled up, waves lapping at their feet. *I didn't even have to purposely think of an ocean, just a passing thought was enough.* He looked to his mom only to see her beaming at him, eyes full of love and pride for her brilliant son.

He couldn't help but smile back.

Chapter End Notes
Ahh, we're getting to the good stuff! I'm so excited for Izuku to explore this new ability! If you think his quirk is OP, it probably is a little bit. But we'll play with it some more in the next chapter, and after that he'll do some experimentation and learn that it's not all-powerful.

Feel free to tell me what you think in the comments! Also, should I add some romance down the road? It would probably be tododeku (since Todoroki will have a major role later on), but I've never dated and only had a handful of crushes. So if I do write romance, it may be as bad as Kacchan's cussing in chapter 2! The horror!
So I was totally going to wait to post chapters 4 and 5 until tomorrow, but I couldn't wait! I love the ending of this chapter, and the 'new' friend we get to meet here too! I should probably do some school. I'm just having way too much fun with this.
Welp, enjoy!

It must have been hours since he first entered the void. There was so much to learn and discover, and he could do it all with his mom at his side! He could have spent all day changing the scenery with nothing but the thought of *It should be this now*, going from the beach to a city street to a grassy field to the top of a skyscraper. He was enjoying it so much, he went through location after location until he stopped. *What else can I do?* “What would you like to do?” his mother asked.

He remembered his dream from the night before. *I want to play heroes*.

His imagination sprang to life, given form by the crystals around him, shimmering and shining before becoming buildings, pedestrians, cars, streetlights. He and his mother were standing before an opulent bank, tellers and customers visible through the windows as they flitted about. Then, a massive explosion – *loud, too loud* – a much quieter explosion ripped through the building, sending everyone around him into a panic. A bank heist.

It was a little too realistic.

Once all the people had been turned into cartoons, and all the objects had a hand-drawn look to them, he felt much better. He saw the dastardly villains (one was a cow and the other a duck, like his old stuffed animals) moving people into the corner while they showed off their quirks and weapons; this was now a hostage situation, perfect for a hero. “Oh no! What are we going to do honey?” I need a costume. No sooner than the thought crossed his mind and his uniform was overlaid with his old All Might onesie, complete with upright bangs. *There's still something missing, or rather, someone*.

“There you are!”

Kacchan was running up to him. He flinched, but then realized – there had been no anger in his voice. His crimson eyes held no malice, no promises of pain, just like they did before he got his quirk. This was not the Kacchan he knew. If this void only gave him what he wanted, then maybe this was a different Katsuki; one who was his friend, who didn't use his scary quirk to hurt him.

Who didn't call him Deku.

“Izu, I'm so glad you're here! We gotta beat the villains and save the hostages! We're the best heroes around, after all!” The smile on his friend's face was emphasized by a *pop pop pop* in his hands, as opposed to the *BANG* and *BOOM* of real Kacchan. This Katsuki's quirk was more akin to party poppers, complete with bits of confetti coming out every time he used it. Oh yeah. This was way better. *It's not too loud!*
This Katsuki was so different from the real one (less cursing, no pain, more quiet), he supposed he couldn't call them both Kacchan; that felt like an insult to this new, better Katsuki if he had to share a name with the other one. Maybe he'd like Katsu.

“Katsu, dear, are you going to help Izuku? My, you're both so brave! But you're missing your costume!” Mom had a good point, so once Katsu was dressed up in a Power Loader costume, they told her to wait where it was safe while they go save the day. Then they ran across the street and into the bank. “Halt, villains! Izu and I are here to stop you!” Katsu jumped over to the duck villain and began to fight, every punch accompanied by a pop and a flurry of colored paper. The cow villain turned to him, “The great hero Izu! You may be the best hero ever, but we won't let you stop us! Hahahaha!” We'll see about that. Wait, how will I fight?! “You're wearing All Might's outfit, why not use his power?” Katsu shouted (softly) to him, before blasting confetti in the duck villain's face. All Might's power, huh? I can work with that. He looked up to the cow in front of him, pulled his fist back, and SMASH!

Once the villains were defeated and everyone cheered for Izu and Katsu, he let the scene fade away, leaving the two boys and his mother in the void once more. He had never had that much fun in his short life! All the thrill of being a hero without any of the scariness, and the whole time he knew he could change it if he wanted, and he would never ever lose. The civilians were all safe, he and Katsu were uninjured (barring the ones he had before), and everything was back to normal with a simple thought.

This was the best quirk ever!

He brought back the beach from earlier, this time with a purple and orange sunset over the horizon. He sat down, followed by his companions, and felt the sand beneath his fingers. Katsu was the first to speak. “You certainly got a sweet quirk Izu. I bet all those other kids would be jealous. Who else can go to a world they have complete control over?” His mother laughed. “That's true. But what should we call your quirk? Something like 'void' won't do it justice. A void is empty, but this place has endless potential.” Endless potential, huh? A memory surfaced in his mind.

“Mommy, is there something wrong with me? Everyone else at daycare has theirs already. What if mine never comes?”

“Well, I think it's great that yours hasn't come yet. You know why?”

“Why?”

“Because those other kids already know what their quirks are, but yours is a secret. At this point, it could be anything! Right now, you are boundless.”

“Boundless? What does that mean?”

“It means you have an endless potential. There's nothing your quirk couldn't be, so there's nothing you couldn't do. There are no limits to the possibilities open to you. That's what boundless means.”

“......I think it's okay I don't have my quirk yet. What do you think it might be?”

“Well, let's see...”

“Did you think of a name, Izuku?” “Yeah, you gotta tell us! I bet it's a great name! Come on, tell us
Izuku!

And for the first time in a long time, Izuku spoke.

“It's Boundless.”

Chapter End Notes

That ending makes me wanna cry! We're 5 chapters in and Izuku finally spoke!! Huzzah! What did you guys think of Katsu? I feel like his intro scene with the hero game could be better, but I love him and his party popper quirk, so I agree with Izuku on this one. Muuuch better than that angry disaster. But if his ooc-ness is driving you nuts, just remember: this isn't the real Katsuki. This is the manifestation of the friend Izuku always wanted him to be; the real one is still out there, and we'll see him again soon. Next chapter is back to the real world. How will Deku cope with his return from paradise? What has changed? Or will everything be the same? We'll just have to wait and see.
So I just realized that in chapter 2, I had Deku stutter out Kacchan's name, then made a big deal about him being mute a few paragraphs later. Whoops. Well, that's fixed now! Let's try to not have any more continuity errors, shall we? Anyways, I got some more angst for you lot (pretty much every time he's out of Boundless it will probs be angst for a while). Izuku is about to learn that running from your problems doesn't make them go away. In fact, there may be a new problem on the horizon, one he can't run from at all...

Izuku had never felt so alive. He was talking and laughing with his mom and Katsu in a way he hadn't for the last two years. The boy who was always either harassed or ignored found himself lavished with attention; everything he did was praised, every word listened to attentively. For once, he didn't feel the need to be quiet. Why should he be quiet if no one was going to burn him? Mom and Katsu seemed so happy he was talking, he talked with them until, long after the crystal sun had sunk below the sparkling ocean, he gave a massive yawn. It was his mom who suggested he get some sleep.

“Where should I sleep?–”

“-You can sleep here if you like sweetie.-”

“-Yeah, but he left his backpack in the real world. He's gonna have to get it for school tomorrow anyways.-”

“-That's true. I have some things to drop off in my stash as well.-”

“-Of course. There's also lots of things we need to test about Boundless and how it interacts with reality.-”

“-Well duh. Why don't you go back for the night then? This is your quirk, so you should be able to come back whenever you want.-”

“-Yeah, that's true! I'll do that then.”

He bid them goodnight, then wondered how exactly to leave. Well, I got here by thinking I wanted to disappear, so do I just think I want to reappear and I will? At that thought, the strange feeling he had before returned. Itchy foot, tingly legs, needle-y back, goose-bumpy arms, frozen brain, shiver then warmth. But this time, he opened his eyes to the school, where he could see his backpack lay forgotten. So it worked! Though, strangely, it seemed to be early evening now, when he could have sworn he'd been in Boundless for so long it should be night. Hm. Maybe it wasn't as long as he thought. Ah well; at least this way, if he rushed, he should still be home before Hisashi. He snagged his backpack and ran all the way home.

He made it back ho – no, not home, she's not here – to the apartment and into the room with only a few minutes to spare. He had barely put his food, new ruler, and backpack away when he heard the
telltale sound of the door and heavy footfalls. He quickly grabbed his homework supplies and flashlight before pulling them under the bed with him. He hated doing his homework laying down, especially since under the bed was too dark without the flashlight. That meant he'd have to use it a lot and wear out the batteries faster. Fresh batteries were hard to come by! He really needed to hit that one store again.

Once his homework was done, he thought of his quirk.

*What do I know about Boundless? It seems to be a place where every aspect is controlled with thought. Is it just my thoughts, or would anyone else be able to control it? Can I even bring other people there? Where exactly is it? Is it another dimension, or inside my own consciousness maybe? It didn't behave like any place on earth I know of, but we haven't done much geography in school yet, so I could be wrong. When I reappear, can I choose where I am? When I came back I was a little ways off from where I left. Did I really leave though? It certainly seemed like it; I'll have to test that later. And what about the bandages? I had my uniform with me in Boundless, so I suppose I can take objects from the real world there. But when I returned, the bandages were gone, though my wounds still looked like they'd been tended and felt a lot better. So objects from the real world can come and go with me, but anything formed in Boundless has to stay there, though the effects on my body remained. What would happen if I ate there? Would I be hungry when I returned? Would my body still be nourished? Can I even taste anything in Boundless?*

He thought himself to sleep that night.

He saw Katsu on his way to school the next morning. He was about to go up and say hi, when burning red eyes spotted him.

“What's got you so d*** happy today, f***in' Deku?! Was yesterday not enough of a beating for you?”

The words died in his throat.

This wasn't Katsu. This wasn't Boundless. No one called him Izuku here. Here he was useless. Worthless. Quirkless. He was Deku.

Once more the jeers of his peers drowned out his quiet (*always quiet*) steps. Everything was the same as it was all those days before, yet why did it feel so different? Was it because he had a quirk now? When they called him quirkless (as they did every day), he could tell them about Boundless. But even if he gained the courage to speak, would they believe him? *No, they'd just think I made it up.* Besides, what would that accomplish? Kacchan would still hate him, maybe even more so, and Hisashi would still pretend he didn't exist. Everything was different, and yet nothing had changed.

Or perhaps he was the one who changed.

Once again, at the final bell he was already packed and sprinting out the door. This time, he did make it to the street in time, a wildly cursing Kacchan hot on his heels. He could tell the moment it was too populated for Kacchan to risk attacking him, as he heard an impressive string of swears for a 7-year-old before one last promise of death, a scoff, and a turn away. Deku let out a silent sigh of relief, before he too walked away, though his destination was not the apartment.

He was running low on supplies (*he's always low, it's never enough)*.

The small greenet hit three different stores that day, and made quite a haul. From the grocery store, two bags of chips, six candy bars, and three individually-wrapped rice balls. The electronics store yielded new batteries and a watch (*he wanted to test his time theory from last night*); and finally
from the department store came a new shirt and shorts. He knew he was pushing his luck then, and was ready to call it a day, when he saw them. Bright red sneakers. He didn't have any other shoes than the ones on his feet, and they were getting small... but those were expensive, and there were a lot of people around. There was no way he could get them and escape unseen.

He really, really wanted them.

He told himself he'd be fine without them. He told himself he could come back another time when it was less crowded. He told himself he had a huge haul already, and if he got caught it would all be taken away. But something else told him he had to take them. He couldn't resist.

“Hey kid, what're ya doin'?! Stop!”

And of course he was spotted. They were going to arrest him, he would go to jail, they'll take all my stuff! He needed to disappear!

Todoroki Shouto was tired of shopping. His old man said he needed a new training outfit ( gee, wonder who's fault that is ), and they were currently in the shoes section when commotion broke out. Another shopper was yelling at some kid, a shoplifter apparently, and Shouto turned to see startled green eyes staring back. The once veridian eyes became a glistening emerald, fractals scattering the light into a spectrum of color.

And then they vanished.

Chapter End Notes

Well, hope that was fun! Deku's new problem is minor right now, but with his problem-solving track record, that won't be the case for long~

Seriously though, kleptomaniac Izuku is now a thing. You're welcome. I can't wait to play around with that aspect of himself!

We also got introduced to everyone's favorite heterochromic, but we won't see him again for a while. I wasn't even planning on bringing him in yet, but then I was writing the shoe scene and thought "wouldn't it be cool if Shouto was there?" and Boundless made it so.

Next chapter is 'learning more about the quirk' fluff with a touch of angst. Enjoy!
I'm so glad everyone's enjoying this so far! Just a little bit longer before we're ready for a time skip (I'm NOT writing 7 years' worth of 'Izuku runs from his problems'), and then things start to get even more interesting (I hope). Izuku is busy learning the ins and outs of his quirk. It's been a while since he discovered it, and he's starting to get the hang of how it works. Who knows what he'll be able to accomplish with some practice...

Deku was even better at stealing now.

After the fiasco with the sneakers, Deku had learned that Boundless *can* be used as some form of teleportation. He could enter it from anywhere, and exit it wherever he liked (as long as he knew where it was). His new shoes also confirmed that real objects can come and go freely. Now anytime he got the urge to take something, he could just walk up to it, check no one was looking, grab it and disappear.

He should start wearing a disguise. Employees were starting to recognize him.

Why couldn't they ignore him like everyone else?

Izuku had also discovered by accident that Boundless can store real objects too. He had returned to the real world without his backpack one time, and nearly had a heart attack. All his stuff was in there! He had immediately gone back to Boundless, but it wasn't there. However, the moment he wished he had it, it was brought back, and he was able to take it out of Boundless with him.

He's learned that if you look closely, the fractals of a Boundless object are faintly visible. Real things don't have them.

Currently, Deku was sitting in the corner of the school cafeteria at lunchtime (wearing his bright red sneakers), thinking about his next experiment. *I should figure out how events in Boundless affect my real body. That first time, though the bandages weren't real, their presence did help heal my injuries. What exactly are the properties of a Boundless object? I should give those a name, Boundless object is too long. I guess I can just call them fractals, since that's what they're made of... but how exactly do they function? How do I find out?* Deku looked around him. No one was sitting anywhere near him (*why would they*?), but he could still see them huddled in their friend groups, laughing, chatting, eating.

Hm. *I wonder*...

At the end of class Bakugou Katsuki was ready to go. The d*** nerd was up to something, he just knew it, and he was going to find out what it was. F***er had somehow managed to escape him *every day* for the past *two weeks* – way too long since his last beatdown. That means s***ty Deku was *definitely* up to something, and Katsuki was gonna put him in his place.
Useless Deku probably thought he was better than him. Why else would he never bother to talk to Katsuki or any of the extras?

When the bell rang Deku was up and out like a shot, but Katsuki was too. B**** wouldn't get away that easily. Both boys raced down the hall when Deku took a turn. Ha! Stupid. That hall led to a dead end. Katsuki smirked and followed, expecting to see the nerd terrified as he approached.

The hallway was empty.

“What the - ?! D***it! F***!! WHERE'D HE GO?!!”

Izuku and Katsu were laughing up a storm.

“Man, I wish you could've seen his face! I bet Kacchan took personal offense to you disappearing like that!-”

“-Hehehe, yeah! It's even funnier since it was his idea in the first place. But oh! You and mom need to help me run another test.-” Said mother appeared.

“-The food test, correct? Should we make it instantly, or do you want me to cook like old times?-”

“-Hmmmm... why don't we try both? There might not be a difference, but it's worth checking.-”

“-Good idea! You're so smart Izu. What should we eat?-”

“-Well, I'm thinking we should have something I'm familiar with, and something I've never tried. Since the fractals seem to base themselves on my memories unless I specify unrealistic properties, that might affect the taste.-”

“-That would make sense sweetie. So how about katsudon and hamburgers? Katsudon was your favorite when you were younger, and you've always wanted to try a hamburger.-”

“-That's perfect mom!”

And that's how Izuku ended up seated at the table at home with mom, Katsu, two bowls of katsudon (ha! Katsudon with Katsu), one Izuku summoned and one his mom made, and a plate full of American-style hamburgers. With a quick “Thanks for the food!” he dived in. Both bowls of katsudon tasted just like his mother used to make, but when he bit into a hamburger, there was nothing. No taste, no texture, nothing. “So I was right. I didn't have any expectations for taste, and no memories of it, so the fractals were unable to create those qualities. But what if I eat it expecting to taste like something else?” He thought of the sandwiches he often stole from the cafeteria, and took another bite. Though it still looked like a hamburger, the taste of the sandwiches met his tongue. Interesting...

After their makeshift dinner, Izuku felt stuffed. It'd been a long time since he had his mom's katsudon. But he knew that as soon as he left Boundless, though he might still feel full, his stomach would be empty. He'd have to keep stealing food to stay nourished; he couldn't actually live off his mother's cooking.

And that thought hurt.

The three of them were at the beach again (his favorite scenery aside from home), but this time Izuku had sat them on the pier, his bare toes dipping in the water as he mindlessly changed the
ocean's properties, from cold to thick like oil to warm to bubbly and back again. It only served to
remind him why he was so down in the first place. No matter how amazing Boundless was, how
much fun he had, how great his mom and Katsu were, the moment he left it was all gone.

None of it was real.

“Is that really true though? Are we definitely unreal? -”

“-Of course. You vanish as soon as I leave. You're made up of my memories, thoughts, and desires.
I'm technically talking to myself right now. Sometimes I can't even tell who's speaking.-”

“-But is that really such a problem, Izu? You might subconsciously be telling us what to say, but
we're still saying it.-”

“-Well, yeah...-”

“-And you can still interact with everything here. I give you a hug and a kiss every time you see
me.-”

“-Yeah! And it shouldn't matter I'm not the 'real' Katsuki because I'm waaay better!-”

“-Haha, you definitely are!-”

“-So what's the problem then, dear? Does it really matter if we don't exist outside Boundless, when
in here we do? Is it that important that we're real to everyone else, when we're real enough to you?”

Izuku looked to his companions, nearly invisible fractals lining their form. The friend he never had,
and the mother who never went away. Constructs of his mind – thoughts, emotions, and memories.
But those existed, didn't they? Isn't his desire for Kacchan to be nice just as real as Kacchan? Aren't
his memories of his mother as true, observable, and tangible as she had once been?

Everything in Boundless was thoughts made real. And maybe, Izuku decided, that's real enough
for me.

Chapter End Notes

Pretty much this whole chapter has been floating around, ready to be written since I
started this fic. I know that was only a couple days ago, but still - I'm glad it finally
materialized! If you look closely, you can see the fractals...
Oh wait. Those are pixels.
We also get some insight into why I've intentionally made it vague who's speaking
while conversing in Boundless (you can tell who's speaking if you read carefully).
Izuku is basically mumbling with three different mouths. Since he doesn't talk in
reality, but his brain still runs at 500mph, he mumbles in his thoughts, and his
thoughts become real.
By the way, what do you guys think of Boundless? Give your thoughts form in the
comments! I'd love the feedback!
The end of the sort-of-prologue is nigh (likely next chapter), so buckle up! I'm just
getting started.
Whoop Whoop! All aboard the angst train! Next stop: pain, suffering, and existential crises! Seriously though, over 1000 hits already?! I'm so glad everyone's enjoying my little story.

It's been some time since Izuku discovered his quirk, and he's putting it to good use. The real world pales in comparison to Boundless, but it's not all bad... right?

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It's been three months since Deku discovered his quirk. Three months of trudging through life in the real world – go to school, run from Kacchan, steal stuff, hide from Hisashi – until he gets a chance to go to Boundless. Then he'll spend hours upon hours playing heroes with Katsu or reading with his mom, eating her cooking (and some real food to stay healthy), and generally having the time of his life. He loves Boundless!

The real world is pretty lame.

Reality *does* have a few things going for it though; mostly, new things. The fractals can only create things from his memory or imagination, so it's not very good with things he hasn't experienced and doesn't want to make up. Like when he wanted to watch some All Might movies with Katsu: the ones Izuku had seen before played on their tv with no issue, even if it'd been years since he'd watched them (thank you, subconscious recall). But when he tried to watch the new one that just came out, it was nothing but static, so he watched a made-up movie and told himself to pick up a copy when he got the chance.

Reality's good for that kind of stuff. Not much else.

Deku didn't even bother to roll out from under the bed this morning before he disappeared. He found it so much easier and better to get ready for school in Boundless; he could take a shower, brush his teeth, tame his hair, and get dressed all without worrying if Hisashi was still in the apartment! He even started eating breakfast! As long as he had his watch to keep track of reality time (turns out time did flow differently here, usually around half as fast), he could do whatever he wanted until right before school started.

While other kids were walking to school, Izuku had ridden a roller-coaster with as many loops as he wanted. Which was eight.

His watch alarm beeped, telling him he had five minutes before class starts. With one final wave to Katsu and mom, he thought *I will appear in the second floor boy's bathroom of my school, third stall,* before walking out of the empty restroom and into the hall towards his class.

The early July sun was warm on his skin, though he could only think how much *better* it would be if he could make it a little warmer, a little stronger, without the window in the way, *on an open field with a cold drink and mom's homemade cookies and* - “Midoriya! Pay attention!” Deku flushed in embarrassment as the class laughed at him *as always*. Why did the teacher even call him out? Other kids get distracted all the time, and they often end up talking with each other! At least
when he zones out, he doesn't disrupt anyone else.

Then again, the teacher probably likes tormenting him. He's a useless, quirkless Deku after all. *Except my quirk is way cooler than even Kacchan's.*

Katsuki was absolutely *livid*. He was always angry, but today he was out for blood. The old hag had told him yesterday he should start looking for a birthday present for the nerd. AS IF! Just the thought had his rage boiling over, ready to blow at any minor offense. D*** Deku had somehow gotten really good at escaping him too, but not today. He'd already told a couple extras to block the door as soon as school was out so Deku would have nowhere to run. Ha! The hag wants him to give Deku a present? *Oh I'll give him a present all right.*

Sure enough, the moment the bell rang the nerd had bolted for the door, only to be stopped by the extras. Katsuki took his time packing his things, waiting for the teach to leave the classroom so they could have it all to themselves. Once everyone else had cleared out, he had the extras wait by the door so it was just him and Deku. Perfect. He was gonna enjoy this.

Deku knew he was in trouble when Kacchan's lackeys stopped him at the door. He could see the blond preparing for what could only be pain and misery for him. Escape plans ran through his head like a marathon. *I can't push past them, they're too strong. I can't go through the window, this is the second floor. Besides, Kacchan would stop me before I made it. I could disappear, but that would only make things worse since he would know I have a cool quirk now. Fight my way out? No, I'd get beaten easily, and with my luck I'd be the only one to get in trouble too... I'm screwed, aren't I?*

He was indeed.

Soon the class was empty save for him, his tormentor, and the backup by the door. Kacchan grinned sadistically and began warming up his quirk, every blast sending waves of fear down his spine (*too loud, hot, fire, burning to ash!!*). “So, Deku, you must think you're sooo clever to get away all the time, huh? You think you can escape me? You think you can actually *accomplish* something?” A burning hand seared his shoulder (*too hot*). “Well, newsflash ya d***'nerd! You are worth *nothing*. You'll never amount to anything more than a pile of s***. You can try and try, but you'll always be a useless f***in' Deku for the rest of your s*** life.” And he led with a right hook. Every blow burned his body, while every word branded his heart. Each punch (*it burns*), every kick (*make it stop*), each explosion (*he sees me, he hears me*) hit it's mark (*but I was quiet!* with deadly precision. Deku could do nothing (*useless*) but lie down and take it (*why do I deserve this?*). His left eye was swelling shut (*why won't it stop?*) and he could taste the copper of his blood (*why does nobody like me?*). His uniform was in tatters (*why can't I be happy?*), with holes burnt through straight to the skin (*burn me to ash*); one more harsh kick to his side and a sickening *crack* resounded in the room (*too... loud.....*).

A barely conscious Deku thought he saw a brief flash of guilt and fear on Kacchan's face, until it schooled itself into malice once more. “That should teach you to know your place, f***in' Deku. Nobody likes you, we all hate your guts. Nobody in the world would care if we never saw you again. S***, we'd probably throw a party! A 'No More Deku' party. Doesn't that sound nice?” *Maybe he's right. This isn't worth it.* “Oh yeah, the old hag wanted me to get you a present for your birthday next week, so here.” Kacchan spit on his blistering cheek. “Happy early birthday, you waste of space. I hope you die.”
The sound of the classroom door slamming shut barely registered in his haze. Every inch of him hurt, pain radiating through his body with every shallow breath. Even still, he thought. Who would care if I just left? The teachers wouldn't. The other kids wouldn't. Heck, Kacchan would be over the moon, and I doubt Hisashi would even notice. I could just take whatever I needed from reality and live in Boundless; I wouldn't get hurt anymore, wouldn't have to run and hide anymore, and wouldn't take up space anymore – everyone wins if only I disappear ...

It was now July 15th, and Hisashi couldn't care less. It was that d*** brat's birthday, but he hadn't even seen the s***stain in months, maybe even a year. For all he knew, the kid was rotting away with all of Inko's trash. Serves him right for being so d*** worthless. Couldn't even manifest a quirk. What a waste.

He came home a bit early, and went to grab the first-aid kit from the bathroom (he had gotten scratched by a f***in' stray), only to find it missing. So the brat was alive. It's been a while since anything's gone missing from the house; at least this would make a good excuse to beat the living s*** outta him. He'd have to actually go in that room though to get him. But then he could let all his frustrations out, and maybe this time the kid really will die! A knock on the door interrupted his excitement and brought back the irritation. He pulled his hand down his face with a heavy sigh, and answered the door to an unfamiliar man.

“What do you want?”

“Ah, Midoriya Hisashi, I presume?”

“What's it to you?”

“My name is Tsukasa Shinkuro and I'm the principal at your son's elementary school. It's come to my attention that Midoriya hasn't been at school in over a week, yet we've been given no reason for his absence. Might I inquire as to why that is?”

So now the brat was skipping school. He didn't really care, but he could get in trouble if the kid was a truant. Besides, this is just another reason to 'vent' his frustrations later.

“I thought he was still going to school. I'll talk to him. If he doesn't show up tomorrow, just give a call and I'll set him straight.”

“That would be wonderful. Thank you for your time.”

Once the portly man was well out of earshot, Hisashi closed the door and made his rage known. “OI! You d*** brat! Get your a** down here before I burn the house down!!” When there was no reply, he proceeded to storm up the stairs. “HEY! That means NOW, you insufferable b****!” Still nothing. When he reached the door of that room, he hesitated for only a moment before kicking it open, only to stop in surprise at what he saw.

Or rather, what he didn't see.

The room was completely empty.

Midoriya Izuku was officially declared missing on July 18th.

He wouldn't be found for the next six years.
That Kacchan scene was sooo hard to write and not just because I can't cuss T.T
I'm sorry Deku, but it had to happen sooner or later. If you're as heartbroken as I am, take comfort knowing things will start looking up for him soon.
And in case you were wondering, he had a wonderful birthday with mom and Katsu <3
Anyways, this marks the end of the sorta-prologue! Next chapter will pick up around the start of the canon timeline, so get hyped for that!
Thanks for reading this far and I'll see you next chapter.
Encounter

Chapter Notes

Here we go! Time to get the main plot chugging along. Bit of a shorter chapter, especially after the last one, but there wasn't anymore that was needed for this. It serves the purpose, and I've always been fairly succinct in my writing; I hate padding things out with useless filler for length. Anyways, guess who's back this chapter!

Izuku is about to discover that even if you hide from life, it will always find you eventually. A chance encounter is about to change the course of the future, but is it destiny or merely happenstance? (It's neither. It's the whims of the author.)

Todoroki Shouto did not like to shop.

It was great to get out of the house, and served as an excuse to miss training, but that was it. It didn't help that the only thing he ever shopped for was supplies for said training – and his old man always came with him, to ensure only the best quality for his 'legacy'.

That legacy could go die in a hole for all Shouto cared.

Yet here he was, pretending to peruse the exercise pants while his father was angrily ranting to a terrified employee, demanding to see the higher quality goods. The number 2 hero Endeavor terrorizing a poor part-timer – what a great example of heroism. Not. He turned back to the pants only to nearly jump out of his skin. The extensively trained teenager had not noticed the other teen walk up beside him, looking in the smaller sizes. His footsteps must be almost inaudible for me to miss them. The other was wearing a plain t-shirt, shorts, and a baseball hat over fluffy green curls; in other words, he was completely unremarkable. But for some unknown reason, Shouto felt something was off about this boy. He seemed to be simply shopping, like he was, but he had been forced to hone his instincts for years, so Shouto wasn't about to ignore them.

He put back the pants in his hands and sauntered over a couple racks; close enough to observe, far enough to be discrete. The strange boy seemed to hold up the tag to his right, checking the price, before then looking at a sign to his left. He's acting like a regular shopper, but he's actually checking his surroundings. Pretty good. Shouto watched as carefully as he could without giving himself away, which was why he didn't believe it at first when the pair of pants in the other boy's hands vanished.

Did he see that right?

It wasn't until the third article of clothing disappeared without a trace that Shouto accepted what he'd seen. This kid was a shoplifter, apparently with a quirk very suited to stealing. He needed to stop him, but the teen didn't seem bad enough to sick a hero on (especially one like my father. Poor kid would get burned to ash), so he decided to try and apprehend him himself and bring him to the police. That sounded good.

He waited until the shoplifter had walked a ways away from the service desk (where his father was
still laying into that employee) before approaching. “Excuse me.” The boy flinched noticeably and turned to him, keeping his head down. “Is there a reason why I've watched a pair of pants and two shirts vanish into thin air while you were 'shopping'?”. The greenet's head whipped up at that, giving Shouto a sight of vivid (familiar) green eyes that proceeded to dart left and right. They were alone, yet still the other made no move to speak. “If you don't want to tell me, I'll just have to take you to the -”

“SHOOOUUTOO!!!”

Now it was his turn to flinch. Why couldn't his father just leave him alone? “Tch. My father's looking for me. Come on, if I don't hurry he'll throw a fit and make everything worse.” He grabbed the boy's wrist and turned to walk away, only to feel a light tug. He stopped, and looked to his companion with a raised brow. The silent teen glanced around them again, before smirking and raising a finger to his mouth. “A secret?” The boy nodded, and looked to Shouto in expectation. “.....Sure, I can keep a secret.” A bright smile took the place of the smirk, before Shouto's other hand was grabbed. Then a strange feeling that started as an itchy foot and ended with a shiver melting into warmth washed over his body.

Shouto and the mysterious boy disappeared.

Chapter End Notes

Everyone give a warm welcome back to my boy #2, Todoroki Shouto!! Things are about to get real interesting for you my friend...
Thanks to everyone who has read this far, commented, bookmarked, and kudos'ed! I'm glad my little pet project (read:break from schoolwork) is keeping you all entertained. I might be posting a poll in the comments next chapter with some of my other story ideas. I don't want to start posting another story until this one is at least almost done, but it'd be nice to get started on something I can do a little at a time (and then maybe my brain will shut up about them).
Chapter Notes

Aaand second chapter of the day! I swear I've been doing schoolwork too, I just write quickly okay?
I've totally never struggled with escapism myself... mmmmm totally....... For the first time ever, someone other than Izuku is in Boundless! How will our guest react to this wondrous world, and the odd boy who reigns over it?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Izuku had no idea what he'd been thinking.

He'd gone to reality to do some 'shopping' (stealing) to sate his itch more than restock supplies. He didn't need clothes; he could wear fractals just fine since his thought control was so much better now (he had kept accidentally erasing them when he was younger). But the thing is, every now and then he would get this urge, a strong desire to take something, and it would drive him mad until he did! He really didn't want to visit reality if he didn't have to, but he'd tried simulating theft in Boundless and it just didn't satisfy him like he wanted.

It's not as exciting when there's no risk of failure, and the things you took disappear with a passing thought.

That's why he'd been in the exercise section, next to a bi-colored teen, looking at pants. He didn't need sweatpants, but he definitely wanted them. When the other boy had left, he continued the innocent shopper charade, picking up a couple shirts as well. But the boy found him out, and was about to take him to the police – or try to, at least; Deku would have vanished long before they reached the station. But then an angry shout carried through the store, and the look on the other boy's face.

Deku knew that look, the look of a cornered animal facing it's predator. He used to wear it. So he helped him escape.

Izuku didn't know what emotion possessed him to the point where he brought someone else – a real person – to Boundless. Sympathy? Camaraderie, maybe? Haven't felt either of those in a long time. Whatever the case, there the red-and-white teen was, looking completely gobsmacked at the crystalline void. He considered immediately dropping the other off at some random location, before realizing the risk he's just taken was giving him a delicious rush of adrenalin! Maybe he could entertain his guest for a little while...

Shouto figured the stranger had some kind of teleportation quirk, but this was not what he'd been expecting at all. His eyes had open to a shimmering expanse, like the sky was a broken mirror, and he was falling through it. Or maybe he was floating? There wasn't any gravity from what he could tell, so floating seemed the proper term. He turned to the one who brought him here (wherever here is), only to see the strangest expression. He seemed, scared, and excited, and utterly amused. Great, he's making fun of me, I just know it. The scar over his left eye itched, but he resisted the
urge to scratch.

He decided to gather some intel instead.

“Ummm... Excuse me, but... what just happened?”

The other boy watched him a moment before proceeding to burst out into laughter.

“Hahahaha! Sorry, sorry it's just *snort* your face! Hehehe, I've never brought anyone else here, so...”

“And where exactly is here?” The boy stopped laughing finally, though he seemed even more excited than before.

“Oh! This is my quirk! My name's Izuku by the way, well in here it is, you met me as Deku, but you can call me Izuku while you're here. It's been so long since I met someone new! What's your name?”

It took Shouto a moment to process the high-speed words of the other – Izuku, he thinks? “I'm Todoroki Shouto. This is your quirk?” Izuku nodded at his introduction, before plowing on with his monologue.

“Shouto, huh? Can I call you Shouchan? Gosh, mom and Katsu will be so happy I made a new friend! I can't wait to introduce you. Oh! I should do that right now!”

Shouto could only watch in awe as the shards around him formed into a cozy apartment living room with all the furnishings, and two people appeared in front of him, before gravity returned and he immediately toppled over.

“Oh dear, are you alright?”

“-I guess Izu should've warned ya about the incoming ground-”

“-But how was I supposed to know he'd lose his balance like that?-”

“-Well, it makes sense that he would be disoriented. He's likely unused to the feeling of weightlessness like you used to be, and to suddenly feel weight again without warning-”

The rapid-fire conversation was making his head spin almost as much as the change in scenery had.

“Sorry to interrupt, 'mom' and 'Katsu' I presume,” he pointed to each in turn, “but I am still incredibly confused as to how me apprehending a simple shoplifter turned into this.”

All three turned to him simultaneously, before sporting an eerily similar smile.

“Of course! Allow me to explain. I can't tell you exactly why I chose to bring you here, but I can tell you this: my quirk is the world, scrubbed of all the bad and with the good amplified tenfold, where thoughts become reality and the only limits are your own imagination. Welcome to Boundless.”
Oh boy, how exciting! Next chapter we get to see a bit more of what Boundless is capable of! Izuku has had 6 years spent almost entirely using his quirk, so he's got some mad skills with it now. Skills that would be very useful in heroics *wink wink* I think I will post that poll I talked about last chapter, of only so I can start getting an idea of my next project. I'll include a brief description of the premise and some details I might include (note that none of these have even started yet, so everything is variable), like potential relationships or general tone. Again, my next project probably won't be posted till Escapist is almost done, I just want to get your input. If you're interested, leave a comment!
Finally, another chapter! Not gonna lie, I was stuck on this one for a little while, hence why I wasn't able to update yesterday.
Plus I was sick, and didn't feel like doing anything even remotely productive, so there's that.
But I'm back!
Shouto doesn't know a lot about what's 'normal', but even he could tell you Izuku is strange. What led this boy to be so irregular that even Mr. Socially Oblivious can tell?
Disclaimer: I'm not a physicist, any science mentioned in this fic is used under artistic license. The author is not responsible for any bad grades due to quotes or concepts present in this fic being used in an academic setting.

Having Shouchan around was... interesting.

It had been a long time since Izuku talked with someone other than mom or Katsu, and it was quite strange. Since mom and Katsu are fractals, they already know what he's thinking and he knows how he'll respond (if only subconsciously); but Shouchan was real. They'd been conversing for a while now, and already there have been several times he expected a certain response from his new friend, only to hear something completely different! He sometimes forgot real people can be unpredictable. I know I used to live in the real world, but now this feels like a brand new experience! Shouchan was so curious about Boundless, he would ask question after question and Izuku would answer, then Shouchan would get this look of wonder and amazement, before it would return to curiosity and he'd ask another question.
Suffice it to say, Izuku was having fun.

“So, you can send things here whenever you want? And store them? And pull them out again later?”

“Yep. It only works if I'm touching them though. I act as the gateway between Boundless and reality; objects can only come and go through me. As far as I can tell, Boundless functions as a pocket dimension anchored to my mind; it exists in an intersection between the infinite planes of space and time, which explains why I can manipulate the spacetime in here to my liking.”

“...I have no idea what any of that means.”

“Really? Um, basically Boundless is a dimension of infinite size where I control both space and time. It's simple higher-dimensional physics and mathematics.”

“Oh. Wait, how do you know higher-dimensional physics but don't know a thing about World War 3? I thought that was standard for middle school history.”

“.........”
Shouto thought it was a valid question. He couldn't remember how the topic had come up (how long had they been talking? His old man would be furious), but it seemed that Izuku was an unparalleled genius in some areas, while completely clueless in others – like history. He had seemed so happy talking to Shouto about incredibly confusing physics, but the moment school came up, he immediately shut down. Izuku seemed, to ponder a bit, twiddling his thumbs and biting his lip, before he answered.

“I, um, haven't been to school in a long time.”

……..What?

This boy knows math and science far beyond his years, and he doesn't go to school?! Calm down Shouto, or you'll scare him off. Just like your father. He took a deep breath. “Okay. Then how did you learn about inter-dimensional physics if you don't go to school?”

Izuku seemed to warm up at his acceptance. “Well, I don't go to school but I like to learn! Sometimes when I go to reality I pick up a few books in subjects that interest me. I've always been interested in my quirk, so I tend to hit the maths and sciences pretty hard. History is... not really my thing, so I kinda skipped it.”

That would explain the unbalanced intellect of his new acquaintance, if he only studied subjects he liked.

“Enough about that though, I'm getting hungry! Let's have a picnic, Shouchan!” Shouto decided to follow the obvious change in topic, much to Izuku's apparent delight, and nodded in agreement. “Great! What should we have? I always pick -" of course he does, his only companions are manifestations of his quirk, “- so you can pick this time! You can choose the location too, and I'll make it happen, to celebrate my new friend!”

Were they friends? Shouto never asked for a friend, but he supposed it couldn't hurt to humor him.

“Can we have cold soba then? It's my favorite. I don't really care where.”

Izuku scratched the back of his head, looking sheepish. “Hehe, sorry, I've never had that. I could make it appear since I know what it looks like, but it would be tasteless since I have no memories of it's taste. Is there something else you want?”

That actually made a lot of sense from what Shouto knew of his quirk (he'd have to bring some for Izuku to try next time. Wait, next time?). He nodded, and continued “Then how about takoyaki? It's been a long time since I've had that.”

Izuku lit up like a Christmas tree in glee. “Perfect! And we can have it in my favorite scene too!”

Shouto didn't think he could ever get used to watching the world morph around him – it always made him incredibly disoriented, and slightly dizzy. He would admit, though, it was quite fascinating to be on a living room couch one moment, then have his feet dangling off a pier without even getting up. The artificial ocean glistened beautifully under the faux sunset, and the nonexistent takoyaki smelled delicious.

Yeah, this was weird. It broke every law of physics Shouto had ever learned, but he guessed Izuku was the expert on that around here, so maybe this was normal in those infinite planes he'd been talking about?
Either way, the takoyaki tasted just as good it smelled.

Izuku had his suddenly bare feet immersed in the water that kept changing colors. He was significantly shorter than Shouto, but his still-shoed feet were dry – the water level was almost to his knees, but there was an unnatural dip right where his feet were. It was strange to see, but quite considerate really.

“How's the takoyaki?”

“It's good.”

“Great! I'll bring out some real food too. Make sure you have some of that so you stay nourished. Oh! But I can bring out the supplements too if you'd rather have those.”

Real food? Supplements? “What do you mean?”

Izuku's smile dimmed slightly. “Well, since I don't inherently know how food nourishes us, I'd have to specify for the fractals to provide every single nutrient for them to actually sustain us, which would be near impossible and a pain to deal with. But as long as you eat real food or take supplements every now and then, you'll be fine!”

The price stickers on the food and pill bottles reminded him how he met Izuku – that's right, he's a shoplifter. A criminal. A villain.

He doesn't seem much like a villain.

Chapter End Notes

So I wasn't gonna end this here, but there's still a lot of conversation that needs to happen before the original cutoff, so this'll have to do. I'll try and get the next chapter written and posted today, but I got a lot I need to do tonight so you may have to wait. Kinda forgot about the stealing, didn't you Shouto? >:D Is that an existential crisis I see on the crystalline horizon?

Anyways, don't forget to take part in my poll in the comments of last chapter! You can help decide what I'll write once Escapist is nearing/at completion!

So far #4 is winning, so cast your vote if you want something else!
Shouto had a problem.

He was thoroughly enjoying talking with Izuku in this little infinitely-sized pocket dimension; he honestly hadn't conversed this much with anyone in a long time. Izuku didn't seem to mind his awkwardness – or didn't notice – and had a lot of interesting things to say when he wasn't off on a tangent about the science of his quirk (which would be interesting, he supposed, if he could understand any of it). But then he remembered how they met.

This strange, cheerful teen with a mind-boggling quirk was a shoplifter.

According to his father, that made him a villain.

The old man was wrong about a lot of things, but stealing was still a crime. Izuku didn't seem like a criminal, so why was he breaking the law like one?

“Hey, Izuku?”

“Yes, Shouchan?”

“Why were you stealing when I met you?”

Izuku almost couldn't find the words to reply. Why would Shouchan ask something like that? They were just starting to get along, so why risk ruining it? He won't understand, he just wants to arrest you – but what if he's just curious? What if he's trying to learn more about me and Boundless? What if he wants to...

“........Are you gonna have me arrested if I answer?”

“That depends on what you say.”

I should tell him. If he doesn't like it, I can just kick him out. It's not like he can come back here
without me. “Fine. It started as necessity – I couldn't get things like food and school supplies from where I lived, and the man I lived with wouldn't get them for me. That's when I started. I knew it was wrong, but I needed those things and had no other way to get them! I mean, I was just a little kid at the time! But then...”

“But then?”

Where did that lump in his throat come from? It was suddenly getting quite difficult talking to Shouchan.

“It changed. I used to hate stealing, absolutely despised it! But then it was exciting, thrilling, giving me a rush I couldn't find anywhere else. I realized I could have nice things, not just necessary things; and then I started getting this urge to steal. It's an overwhelming desire for the danger, the risk, the reward! I go out into reality, face all those people who would never understand or never care, find something I want, and come back with the prize! It feels so good, I can't help it! ...I know it's 'wrong' and 'illegal', but that doesn't matter to me anymore. Hasn't in a long time.”

Shouto wasn't sure what he was expecting, but it certainly wasn't that.

Apparently, this had been going on years, and started because the man he was living with (his father, perhaps?) apparently couldn't deign to give his kid any food. Wow, I'm not sure even my father would stoop that low, he at least feeds me and my siblings. If that was the case, he supposed it couldn't be helped; there's little chance a young child would know where a food bank is or how to file a claim of child neglect. In that regard, he really couldn't blame Izuku for his theft – it was for survival.

It was the next part he had issue with. Strong urges to steal? Taking things for the rush? That was certainly concerning (as if the first part wasn't).

He finally meets someone his age, and they're probably a kleptomaniac. Great. Good job, Shouto.

In any case, Izuku was clearly not entirely right in the head. All the things he'd said over the course of the afternoon made more sense in the light of this new information. He felt like there was more to the story, but that would have to wait for another time – Izuku looked ready to disappear again with how long Shouto was taking to respond.

He should probably do that.

“I see.”

“Are you gonna try and turn me in now? Can we at least stop talking about my past?”

“No, I won't have you arrested -“ - Izuku perked up - “on one condition.” and then deflated.

“What d'you want?” He mumbled.

Shouto had to stop for a moment; he hadn't fully thought through his condition yet. Prison was definitely not something Izuku needed – he needed help. He wanted to help, but didn't know how.

But he wanted to be a hero, and heroes help people.

“I want a way to contact you again. I'd like to talk some more, but I need to go home for today.”
“Go... home?”

“Yes, back to the real world.”

“But... your father will be looking for you, and I can tell you don't want to be found. I don't mind if you stay here for a while.”

Ah, his father. Now that was an unpleasant thought. “It's already bad enough, but if I don't go back it'll just get worse. I appreciate the offer, but I need to go once I know how to contact you.”

“......Okay. Do you have a phone?”

Shouto pulled out his cell, only to stare in shock at the time. He could've sworn they'd been talking all afternoon; yet according to his phone, he hasn't been gone for longer than two hours. Izuku started laughing at him (what is with his crazy mood swings?), clutching his right side.

“Hehehe, I bet you're surprised at the time, huh? I told you, I control all of spacetime in Boundless – that's space and time. It usually runs at about half the speed of reality, though I can change that if I want to. Anyways, stop staring at it and give it here.” He passed him the cell.

“There's no service here.”

“That's understandable, and not an issue. Or at least, not one I can't fix!” Izuku swiped through his phone for a bit, before handing it back.

No sooner had it touched his hand, than the notification tone startled him.

He had full bars now, and a text message from – what in the?!

New Message From (- - -) - - - - - - -

How's this? You surprised?

“Izuku, what did you do?”

He looked like a cat with a canary when he replied “Yep! I just sent you a text with my mind! I had a feeling I could do something like this – all my research pointed to the possibility of creating my own network and-

“Izuku, I'm not going to understand the science behind it. Summarize, please.”

“Oh, right. Basically, I told Boundless to automatically send and receive cell signals to devices I recognize – which admittedly is only you right now – with my thoughts functioning as my 'device'. So now not only will you have signal in here, but you can call and text my brain! Go on, try it! I wanna see what it's like.”

That had to be one of the strangest things he's heard all day, and this was the weirdest day of his life. Oh well.

He typed a simple 'hello' and hit send. Boundless seemed to vibrate a moment, before Izuku visibly shivered. “Whoa! That feels cool! It's like the letters just flashed in my mind! But seriously, 'hello'? You just texted someone's brain and all you can say is 'hello'? You gotta be more creative than that, Shouchan.”

He shrugged. “So, Boundless is an inter-dimensional cell phone now? Will this work outside of Boundless?”
“It should, at least from your end. I'm unsure about if I'm outside Boundless, it could work or it could not. But you should be able to connect to Boundless, and by extension me, anytime. Oh! And don't share the contact. It won't work if I don't recognize the device anyways, subconscious recall and all that.”

“I'll take your word for it. Thanks.”

Izuku didn't know where his house was, so he dropped Shouto off on a nearby street and he walked home. Sure enough, the old man was ticked, but Shouto didn't really care. When asked where he was, he said he went for a walk and got lost (not completely a lie, for a while there he truly didn't know where he was). Todoroki Enji spouted some stuff Shouto couldn't be bothered to listen to, before he stormed out to go on patrol. After reassuring his sister Fuyumi, he went to his room and turned on his computer.

He spent the next few hours searching the web for 'how to help a friend with kleptomania'.

Chapter End Notes

Yeesh, finally done with this plot point! That went a lot longer than I was expecting. Another disclaimer here that my knowledge of cell phones and connectivity is minimal; this is purely a work of fiction, so let's all just agree that it works. If you don't like my sciencey mumbo jumbo just call it quirk magic! Hopefully it's not too weird, but there needed to be some way for the two to communicate, and this felt the least weird believe it or not. I'm gonna shamelessly plug my poll again here. Poll details and votes are in the comments of chapter 10!
See you in the next chapter! <3
Preparations

Chapter Notes

If anyone's confused about timing, this is several months before the entrance exam, and one month before the recommendation exam (whenever that is). It's been a couple weeks since our boys met. Shouto has learned a lot about communication in his quest to help Izuku, as well as unhealthy mindsets. How will this affect him in the future? And it seems Izuku is on a quest of his own...

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Izuku's brain buzzed.

'Can we meet up? I'm in my room.'

Text to Shouchan's phone: 'sure thing! Be there in a sec.' Now, I want to appear in Shouchan's room!

Shouchan was still reading the message when he popped into existence. After a few weeks of friendship, Shouchan had finally stopped jumping in surprise whenever Izuku showed up! His face had been so funny every time, but it was good his friend wasn't startled by him anymore.

Maybe he should try harder. He was starting to realize his quirk had incredible prank potential.

That train of thought derailed as soon as he saw Shouchan. He was covered in bruises and burns (burnt to ash...), as well as a thick layer of sweat making his clothes cling to him. Another beating disguised as training, huh? Why was a 'hero' allowed to do this to someone like Shouchan?

Because the real world sucks, that's why.

He had no words to offer. He never did in reality – for some reason, just the thought of speaking here made his throat seize up and tongue stick to the roof of his mouth. But no words were needed when he silently offered his friend a hand and brought him to Boundless.

Shouchan was quiet as mom applied the real bandages before dissipating. Shouchan said it was odd talking to Izuku as three different people, so they usually talked one-on-one. That was fine though – this conversation was best held that way anyways.

“Shouchan, why do you let him do this to you?”

“...I don't have a choice.”

“Of course you do! You can stay here with me! You know he can't possibly find you in Boundless.”

He sighed. “I know Izuku, but it's not just me that's in danger. There's my siblings, Natsuo and Fuyumi, and my mother too. If I just up and left like Touya did, they'd be the ones to pay the price.”
Izuku paused. The risk he took bringing Shouchan here that first time paid off, but he wasn't so sure if it would for someone else. For Shouchan though...

“I can bring them here too if you like. They don't even have to stay if they don't want to! I can drop them off somewhere far away from Enji.” He really hoped they didn't want to stay. One real friend was enough for him.

It didn't matter anyways, because once again Shouchan declined. “I appreciate that Izuku, really I do, but no. I want to be a hero, a real hero, and I can't do that if I stay here. I'm sure my family feels the same.”

“Shouchan...” Izuku frowned. At this rate, his friend would just keep getting hurt; living out there only leads to pain. He put a hand to his side.

He learned that the hard way.

A small smile graced Shouchan's face (how can you still smile when you live out there?). “It's okay. Once I get into UA, he should back off. I'd need to be in good shape to do well in the heroics course, after all. He just wants me to be ready for the recommendation exam next month, so it won't be so bad after that.”

That's right, Shouchan was going to go to UA. He had wanted to go there a long time ago, but he'd need to leave Boundless for extended periods of time to do so. Maybe once Shouchan started going – if he still hadn't accepted his offer by then – he could tell him all about it! Then he could make a fractal UA and go there! Maybe Shouchan would like that too!

He wondered if Kacchan still wanted attend UA. He'd definitely make it in in he tried.

His faded burns itched.

“Fine. You'll be a shoe-in for sure. Your ice is so powerful you won't even need fire! But when you get in, make sure you watch out for Kacchan. I don't know if he'll apply, but I wouldn't be surprised. He should look pretty close to Katsu, only scarier. I haven't seen him in years, but I had Katsu age with me so he shouldn't be too different.”

It would've been weird to be friends with a seven-year-old now that he's grown.

Shouchan nodded. “I'll keep my eyes out. Thank you for the warning. But who knows? Maybe he's changed for the better since you last saw him.”

He hadn't told his friend the whole story, but he knew enough. Kacchan was a terrible person, like Enji and Hisashi. He doubted he's changed.

They talked for a long time like that. Then Izuku wanted Shouchan to have some fun today to make up for the 'training', so he made a massive amusement park full of rides and games just for them! They were on the ferris wheel, fireworks lighting up the shimmering sky, when Shouchan mentioned an ad for a park in reality he saw.

He wanted to go there together sometime.

Once they'd ridden everything they wanted, Izuku made a massive pool with water slides and a diving board and water that wouldn't get Shouchan's bandages wet. They swam and played to their heart's content.

Shouchan asked if he thought UA had a pool, and if they'd ever get to swim in it.
Then Shouchan said he had to go home, and that he'd text him later. Izuku sent him back to his room with a wave.

“Shou.”

A perfect replica of Shouchan materialized. “Hi Izu.”

“I wanted to have some more fun with Shouchan today, but you'll have to do for now – especially if he starts going to UA. If he does, he'll be too busy to for me. So you're just gonna have to be my friend instead! Once I get a better understanding of Shouchan's personality, you'll be the perfect substitute; then it won't matter if Shouchan wants to stay in the real world, because you'll be here!”

They both smiled. “You're so smart, Izu. If Shouchan wants to leave, that's fine. I won't ever leave you.”

“Yeah. Now, let's go to the arcade!”

*evil laughs* Mwahaha! A chapter full of fluff, and then bam! Plot progression! Anyone see that coming? Shouto's being much more careful and deliberate with his words, don't ya think? I wonder what that's about... ;)

Another plug for my poll in the comments of chapter 10! How long will I promote this poll? Who knows! Vote if you haven't already! If this seems to be going too fast, don't worry! It should slow down soon. I just gotta get these months before the entrance exam out of the way.

Till next time!
Test

Chapter Notes

Are you ready for some serious canon deviation? I am!
It's time for the recommendation entrance exam! How will Shouto's friendship with
Izuku affect what happens today? Can our bicolored boy overcome his nerves and
social awkwardness? Read on to find out!
A single step forward is still progress, and Shouto's definitely a step ahead of where he
used to be. But will that one step be enough to change the future?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was almost time.

Shouto was already changed into his workout gear, ready for the physical part of the
recommendation entrance exam. The knowledge test was fairly straightforward. He'd been
studying for weeks, so he was quite confident in his scores, especially math and science – Izuku
had tutored him in those. Compared to the doctorate-level stuff he kept trying to teach him, the
topics on the test were beyond simple. It also helped that time ran slower in Boundless (where he
naturally did most of his studying with Izuku), so even though he'd really started preparing a few
weeks ago, he had a couple month's worth of studying under his belt. Suffice it to say, he'd pass no
problem.

But now it was time for the physical exam.

He knew he shouldn't be nervous. His skill with his ice was admirable, and he was in good
physical shape. When he wasn't trying to teach Shouto multi-variable calculus, Izuku would help
him train his body too. Endurance runs along an endless beach, lifting weights that would get
progressively heavier, target practice against 'real' villains. But now, he would be facing off against
real people with real quirks; would his skill be enough?

It'd have to be. For Izuku.

He listened intently as the test was explained – an obstacle course race. He'd be grouped with five
other applicants, and they'd be scored on criteria like power, creativity, and time to complete the
course; Seems all that endurance running would come in handy. He looked at all the other
applicants, and noticed one staring at him. That's a lot like how Izuku looks when he wants to say
something, but he's too nervous. Maybe he is too? I should help him out a bit. Mind made up, he
turned to the taller male (he looks so imposing, and he's nervous to talk to me?) and gave a small
wave. The other's face went from nervousness, to shock, to excitement as he waved back and began
to approach. It was then that his group was called.

Seems he's in my group. Oh well, guess we can talk after.

His father was giving him his favorite 'don't disappoint me' face, but Shouto honestly didn't care.
Enji's opinion didn't matter, as long as he could help people. People like Izuku.

Shouto lost to the other boy by a slim margin.
That just meant he’d have to work harder in the future. And probably avoid his old man like the plague until he calmed down, if his angry grimace was any indicator. He should probably text Izuku ASAP to pick him up after the test. But that would have to wait, because the other boy was approaching him again.

“Hey!!! That was a really good race! You're Endeavor's kid, aren't you?”

Now that stung a little. Shouto wanted to lash out in anger, and he probably would have – if this boy hadn’t reminded him a bit of his friend. Ever since they met, Shouto had been researching all kinds of things religiously, anything to help him help Izuku. He's studied compulsion disorders (like kleptomania), unhealthy coping mechanisms (Izuku is the king of those), and lots of communication tips and tricks. Turns out, there's not much he can do without a psychology degree aside from talking with him. He calmed himself down, and recalled all the things he’d learned.

*Stay calm. Speak the truth gently, without sugarcoating it. Be polite. Do not be accusatory. Know when to stand firm, and when to compromise. Speak clearly with concrete terms to avoid ambiguity. Be considerate of their point of view before presenting your own. You can do this.*

“Hello. Congratulations on your win, I'll have to work even harder to try and win next time. My name is Todoroki Shouto, and I'd appreciate it if you wouldn't compare me to my father please.”

The other boy seemed stunned for a moment, before replying. “Oh yeah sure thing!! I'm Yoarashi Inasa!! Good to meet you Todoroki!! I hope we become classmates!!!”

Shouto gave him a small smile. “Nice to meet you too Yoarashi.”

“Call me Inasa!!! I insist!!!!”

*That went well.*

His father seemed to be raging even harder (**if that was possible**) with Shouto's ignoring him, but he could yell at him later, as they were being led back inside for the interview.

This made him very nervous.

He may be better at communicating than he used to be, but he still had a ways to go. *Plus I only really practice with one person, and he's not the best example of the average conversation partner.* If they were just asking questions and judging answers, he'd likely do okay – but if they were testing for charisma, he can kiss his admission goodbye.

All the examinees were seated in rows along either side of a hallway, next to the two rooms where interviews were being conducted. Once a student left the room, the next in line would walk in. One by one the hallway emptied out, until finally Shouto was a bundle of nerves at the front of his line.

The girl in front of him left the room and he stood up. *It's now or never.*

When he walked in the office, he was greeted by a scruffy-looking man who gestured to the empty seat in front of the desk. Shouto stated his name and examinee number when asked and sat down.

Gosh he was nervous. Then the man spoke again.

“My name is Aizawa Shota and I'll be conducting your interview.”
WOOOO AIZAWA is HERE!!!! And he's said exactly one sentence!! And I think I'm stuck in exclamation point mode after writing Inasa!!! Send help!!!!!!!!!!!!
Seriously though, it's time for our resident grump with a big heart to take the stage. If you're disappointed with his entrance, no worries! We get to listen in on the interview next chapter, so he'll get lots of time to shine as he and Shouto have a very interesting conversation :)
Take the poll in the comments of chapter 10 if you haven't!
Have a wonderful day <3
Questions

Chapter Notes

I might not be able to update tomorrow, so here! Have another chapter!
Can I just say I really enjoy writing this fic? It makes for a good break from schoolwork. I'm glad you all are enjoying it too!
I have a feeling y'all are gonna both love and hate this interview...
Aizawa meets problem child #1. What information will come to light in this totally normal interview? Will Shouto break under the pressure? Can Aizawa figure out what's going on? Will he ever get a break?
(Spoiler: probably not)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“My name is Aizawa Shota and I'll be conducting your interview.”

Okay, calm down Shouto. You are completely ready for this.

....... 

I’m not ready at all for this!


“I'm just asking you a few predetermined questions then you can go. Wish I could too. I wasn't supposed to do these, but some meddlesome rodent decided I should 'meet my potentially new students'.” The scraggly man – Aizawa – said this while glaring hard at a corner of the ceiling, where Shouto could see a camera. Oh, so this is being recorded. Wonderful. Fabulous. Now everyone can see my awkwardness.

Aizawa sighed. “Let's get this over with. Why do you want to go to UA?”

That was a surprisingly easy question. “UA has the best-rated heroics course in the country, extensive amenities for student use, and it's close to home.” And his father would never let him go anywhere else, but that was better left unsaid.

A nod. “Why do you think you should be admitted to the heroics course?”

Another easy one. “I believe I am capable of handling the rigor of this course, physically and academically. I consistently score within the top three students of my year, and have been training my body and quirk extensively for many years.” Again, because his father made him, but this, again, went unsaid.

“Tell me about your quirk.”

“It's called Half-Hot, Half-Cold. I can produce fire from my left side and ice from my right, but in practice I really only use my ice.”
Aizawa looked up at that, with a wary gaze. “I noticed. But if you think you can skate through this course using only half of your power, you're dead wrong.” His sharp, black eyes bored into Shouto, who immediately felt both cowed and ashamed.

The other seemed to notice, as he dropped his gaze and heaved another sigh. “Why don't you use the fire side?” Shouto's head shot up in shock.

He's really going to ask that!?

He was met with a raised eyebrow, and no sign of yielding. Oh no, he really is. Crap.

“In my... experience, fire... only brings pain. And fear. I don't want to hurt people or for people to be afraid of me.” Horrifying memories came to him unbidden. His father's burning fist on his skin, his mentally ill mother pouring boiling water on his face, and...

“Hey Shouchan, what's your quirk? Can I see?”

He produced a few small ice shards in his right hand, as Izuku watched in awe.

“I can also make fire.”

A small flame appeared in his other hand.

And Boundless screamed.

The shining crystals of purple and blue were replaced with the reds and oranges of burning embers, as a thousand voices cried out. Shrieks of 'fire!', 'too hot!', 'it hurts!' echoed through his skull, until the voices united.

'BURNING TO ASH BURNING TO ASH BURNING TO ASH!!!!!!'

Izuku was curled up on the floor, sobbing.

Shouto had never hated his fire more.

Aizawa was frowning, but didn't say anything, thank goodness. Instead, he glanced down at the paper in his hands. “One last question: why do you want to be a hero?”

That was complicated, but he did his best to explain.

“When I was little, I wanted to be a hero because I thought they were cool and inspiring – I wanted to be like that. After my quirk came in, I... lost sight of that. Heroics seemed like the only path open to me, but my heart wasn't in it. That changed a few months ago. I have this friend, and he needs help, even if he thinks he doesn't. I want to help him, and I want to help others like him. That's why I want to be a hero. So I can save my friend from himself.”

He couldn't tell what expression Aizawa had – surprise, maybe? It was only there for a moment, before the familiar don't-give-a-crap look returned. “That's all. You can leave now. We'll contact you with the results in a couple weeks.”

“Thank you for your time.” Shouto bowed politely and left. It's finally over.

I need to text Izuku before my old man finds me.

He first texted his father, saying he was going for a run and wouldn't be home till late. He didn't
even read the reply.

Me:

Hey Izuku, I just finished. Can you pick me up outside the gates?

Izuku:

Be there in 0.5 seconds! :D

Sure enough, as soon as he left the school grounds, his green-headed friend was ready and waiting. When he heard Shouto approaching, he turned and waved, a small smile on his face.

Shouto knew that smile would turn big and brilliant the moment they were in Boundless.

He wished he could see it in reality too.

“So, what did you think of Todoroki Shouto?”

“He'll definitely be a problem child.”

“Good! I'll be sure to put him in your class then.”

“You can't just – ugh. Fine. But did you hear his interview?”

“Of course! He seems a very polite and earnest boy.”

“Not that. Some of his answers were... concerning.”

“Ah, you mean about his quirk and mysterious 'friend'? We should definitely look into that. And by 'we', I of course mean 'you'.”

“*sigh* I figured you'd say that. This is going to be a long year. I'm exhausted already.”

Chapter End Notes

Man, I just can't write a chapter a pure fluff, can I? Gotta have that angst!
Poor, poor Shouchan. You didn't think saving Izuku would be easy, did you?
Especially not when you have your own problems...
And as for all you lovely readers: did you really think a pyrophobe would encourage fire? Not in this fic! Someone else is gonna have to step up to fan Shouto's flame.
Aizawa's onto something, but it'll take some effort on his part to really make some headway on the problem children.
See you next chapter!
Who's up for a double update today? I am!
This is a more transitional chapter to prepare for the next big plot point. But we do get some insight into our main characters' thought processes, so that should be fun!
Izuku, Shouto, and Aizawa are all struggling with the current state of affairs. Little do they know, a major turning point in their lives is quickly approaching! Will they all be able to stay ahead of the curve, or will someone get left behind?

Izuku really didn't like time right now.

In Boundless, he can bend time to suit his needs, though he doesn't need to that often. But lately he's been slowing down the days when Shouchan visits (which is almost everyday to be honest) so he can enjoy his company. That's not what bothers him. The thing about time, especially in reality, is that it's always moving forward; you can't stop it or reverse it or reroute it at all. No matter how much you beg and cry and plead, time marches on without a care. No matter how much Izuku wants Shouchan to stay with him, in a few months he'll be attending UA. Shouchan says it's not set in stone yet, but he just knows his friend made it in – how could he not? He's smart and strong and kind and so cool, UA would be foolish not to admit him!

Doesn't stop Izuku from wishing they were fools.

Shouchan was the first new friend Izuku made since before his mother went away; he's also the only real person he's talked to since he left reality. Hanging out with Shouchan is so different from being with mom or Katsu, but he likes it a lot! With mom and Katsu, they are either told directly what to do, or they act based on his subconscious understanding of their 'personalities'. When he isn't directing them, mom is sweet and gentle while Katsu is fun and energetic.

Shouchan, though, is a mystery.

Sometimes Shouchan will laugh when it's not funny. Sometimes he'll frown when it's not sad. Sometimes he'll smile when it's not happy. Sometimes they'll be having so much fun in Boundless, and Shouchan will mention the real world. He's always saying things like 'we should go there sometime' or 'I'd like to show you this' or 'you'd make a great hero'.

That one confuses him the most. Him, a hero? The world never cared about him before, so why should he care what happens in it?

He had stopped playing heroes a long time ago.

But there was no stopping Shouchan.

He'd tried to convince him that it wasn't worth it, that he should just stay in Boundless with him! He wouldn't have to see his father, wouldn't have to be hurt, and wouldn't have to deal with all the
terrible people out there! He even offered to set up a fractal city full of fractal civilians to save and fractal villains to fight if Shouchan wanted to be a hero so bad! But he just gave Izuku that same sad smile whenever he brought it up and said it wouldn't be the same!

It would be *exactly* the same, just with less danger and no chance of failure!

Suffice it to say, Izuku was getting frustrated.

He'll just have to make sure Shou is ready before the new school year starts.

Shouto was getting frustrated.

He'd read online that helping those like Izuku would take a while. For some it was a lifelong battle, and Shouto was ready for that if that's what it took. He would've been fine to buckle down for the long haul.

But there seemed to be no progress at all!

Izuku kept asking him to stay in Boundless with him, and he kept declining. He knew he had to show his friend that reality was good too, but every time he brought it up Izuku would frown and change the subject. Their conversations kept devolving into this same cycle, each of them twirling around the other's offers in a strange dance. It seemed Izuku was just as stubborn as Shouto.

It's hard to keep trying when nothing was visibly working. He was starting to relate quite a bit to the mythical Greek Sisyphus, pushing the boulder up a hill only for it to come rolling back down. Shouto could really sympathize with the guy now.

But Shouto would keep trying. For Izuku. But gosh, was he frustrated.

He was likely just stressed out from everything lately – he was getting paranoid. He'd never seen anything, and it was probably nothing, but he kept feeling like he was being followed.

Aizawa had been following the Todoroki boy for a few days now.

Nedzu had said he should look into the teen, but apparently couldn't bother to lend a hand—er, paw, and left the matter entirely up to him. As if he didn't have enough work to do. All this was cutting into his naptime.

Which is only part of the reason he was so frustrated.

Every time Todoroki left the house, which was surprisingly little (*seriously, did this kid have a social life? He was homeschooled, sure, but even homeschoolers go out once in a while!*), he was covered in new injuries that had been carefully bandaged. That in and of itself was concerning. The problem child had said he trained on a regular basis, but he shouldn't be getting *this* *injured* on a regular basis.

What was really concerning was that Todoroki seemed to disappear for hours at a time.

This usually happened when the kid left home.

He'd be wearing a tracksuit and running shoes, presumably to go for a jog, and he would— just outside the front gate of his home. Then he'd pull out his phone to send a text, wait for a reply, and
jog around the corner.

When Shota would follow around the corner, nobody was there.

But today would be different. He'd make sure.

This time, when the kid left the house and sent his text, Shota immediately went around the corner; this time, he was definitely going to find out where the problem child was going.

A short, scrawny boy with a baseball cap was waiting there.

He watched as Todoroki waved and happily greeted the stranger. He got closer.

“The old man's going to be out of town for a few days, so we can meet up earlier if you like. That also means I won't have to worry about his terrible training.” The other boy smiled and nodded, while Todoroki continued. “That said, I want to be in peak condition at the start of school if I get in, so do you mind if we work out together?” His phone buzzed, and he pulled it out. The other boy didn't seem to mind. Once Todoroki had read the message, he looked back to his friend (Is this the friend he mentioned? The one that needed saving?). “Yeah, and more effective too. Plus, I get to hang out with you. Shall we?” At that Todoroki held out his hand, the friend grasped it, and...

They vanished.

“....... Dang it!”

Chapter End Notes

Aw, so close Aizawa! Sadly, close only counts in horseshoes, hand grenades, and nuclear war. Better luck next time!
Things are about to get real (ha, real) interesting, as if they weren't already. How will Aizawa deal with this near miss? Will Shouto manage to calm his nerves? We're gonna find out!
Also, here's the current standings for the poll (in the comments of ch. 10 if you're curious or want to participate): #4 is currently in the lead with 4 votes, followed by #1 with 2 votes, and #3 with one vote! Keep those votes coming!
Oooh, I'm getting excited! The tension is building, and if it gets much higher Shouto and I will both probably explode! Hopefully it'll be a Katsu explosion, and we'll at least get confetti out of it.

Aizawa might seem lazy - and yeah, okay, he'll do just about anything to get out of paperwork duty - but he's incredibly diligent when he needs to be and never gives up when it counts. Nedzu, on the other hand, is far too interested in this mess for anyone's good. Can they find out what Todoroki is hiding?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“So, how is your investigation going?”

Shota quirked his eyebrow, giving the principal his best are-you-kidding-me glare. It was his fault he had to stake out a kid in the first place. They couldn't launch a full investigation on the flimsy reason of “he said some weird stuff” without further evidence. Hence, why Nedzu had set the underground hero on this unofficial case. Alone.

Nedzu sipped his tea, completely unbothered by Shota's nonverbal complaints. He sighed - he seemed to be doing that a lot lately – and resigned himself to his fate.

“I finally made some progress yesterday. I was about to follow him on his 'jog', to see what he was really up to.”

“Oh?”

“As I thought, he wasn't actually jogging. He was meeting up with who I can only assume is his mysterious 'friend'.”

That seemed to catch Nedzu's attention, as he set his tea down and leaned forward in his chair.

“Really? Do you know who it is?”

He shook his head. “No. I couldn't get a good look at his face, and he never spoke. He seemed to be around Todoroki's age, and was unbelievably nondescript. No visible mutations, plain clothes, features obscured by a hat; the best I could get was he's short and scrawny with dark green hair. He would seem totally ordinary to anyone else, but I could tell: this kid was like that on purpose, and his ability to blend in was impressive.”

The principal nodded, clearly thinking through the possibilities. “I see. And what happened when they met up?”

“Todoroki was happy to see him, and they had an interesting conversation.”

“Interesting how?”

The conversation played in his head again, as it had been since he'd heard it. “Lots of ways. First, they both seemed rather excited about Endeavor being gone on a mission. Todoroki mentioned he
wouldn't have to endure his father's, quote, 'terrible training'.” Shota couldn't help but frown at that.

“Ah, further potential evidence for your hypothesis, I see?”

He nodded again. “He was asking his friend to train with him, so it's not as if he simply dislikes working out. There's something different about training with his father rather than his friend, and I suspect it has to do with the injuries he always gets at home, and never from his supposed jog.”

Nedzu pondered this a moment, before agreeing it was a concerning revelation, one that would require further investigation.

“And? What else was odd?”

“I say conversation, but audibly it was entirely one-sided. The other kid never spoke a word.”

“Hmmm, interesting.” It was, judging by that glint in the animal's eye – he was enjoying this. If only Shota could say the same. “Was it a form of telepathy quirk?”

“Not exactly. Todoroki got a text during their 'chat', and responded to his friend like he had said something. I suspect the kid was communicating through text, though he never pulled out a phone.”

Shota could tell Nedzu was buzzing with ideas and theories, but he cut him off. “I know what you're thinking, but that can't be his quirk.”

He didn't think Nedzu could be more intrigued. He was apparently wrong. “What makes you say that?”

“Because once the kid took Todoroki's hand, they both vanished into thin air.”

The principal had stars in his eyes; that probably wasn't a good sign. The scheming rodent was up to something, and Shota had a sinking feeling he wasn't going to like it.

“Shouchan, I'm sure it's fine! I bet they just want to tell you in person that you got in, and go over your class schedule or something.”

“Izuku, they called me, not my father, asking to talk in person about the results. What if they think I cheated, or my recommendation got revoked, or they want to tell me how spectacularly I failed to my face?”

Izuku just gave him a quirked brow. Yeah, okay, so maybe he was overreacting. Sue him.

“I highly doubt you failed. You studied for weeks before the exam, came in a very close second on the obstacle course, and by your own admission the interview was just a standard questionnaire!”

“Yes, but he specifically asked why I don't use my fire! What if that's enough reason to reject my application?!”

It went back and forth like this for a while. Eventually, Izuku declared they were going to have a picnic in space to take his mind off the impending meeting. The swirling galaxies and colorful nebulae made an excellent backdrop for their piping hot taiyaki, shaped like stars, planets, and meteors instead of fish. Rather nontraditional, but it did help him relax.

The next day came too soon.
He once more stood outside the gates of UA, this time unaccompanied. He hadn't received a visitor's pass or anything, so was he just supposed to wait here, or...?

The gates open to reveal the man who had interviewed him – Aizawa, he remembered – who somehow looked more tired than before. He didn't say anything, only jerked his head towards the school in a silent 'follow me'. Shouto obliged. They walked down the empty halls (it was Sunday, so no school), Shouto trailing behind as he looked around. Aizawa stopped and entered a lounge-type room, complete with a couch and coffee table; a white-furred... something that he recognized as principal Nedzu was sipping tea in the corner, waiting for them. Shouto took the couch while Aizawa pulled up a chair across from him.

“We called you here firstly to inform you of your examination results. Congrats, you passed. Welcome to the hero course.”

Shouto let out the breath he hadn't realized he was holding.

“Now tell us about your father and your friend.”

And immediately sucked it back in.

Crap.

Chapter End Notes

Keep breathing Shouto! You can do this! It's just the smartest animal and most awesome underground hero on the planet asking about your deepest secrets! You guys think Shouto will open up about Enji and Izuku? Maybe one but not the other? Maybe neither? Because I have an idea on what's going to happen! Which is probably good, seeing as I'm the author... ah well. See you next time!
Answers

Chapter Notes

Got another chapter for ya! But man, over 5000 hits?! Crazy. I'll see if I can get another chapter up today, but I do have homework and responsibilities to take care of, so no promises. I'll try though! Shouto's communication practice has really been helping him out, but he's just been asked about the two biggest secrets he has ever known. Aizawa and Nedzu just want to help, though they can't do anything if Todoroki won't tell them what's going on. Will anyone find the answers they seek?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Now tell us about your father and your friend.”

Shouto's eyes darted around the room in his panic, from the tired-looking man in front of him, to the windows letting in the morning light, to the far-too-relaxed principal, to the tantalizing door he knew he would never reach in time.

He was trapped, and these two seemed much too calm for having cornered him. Did they really have to ask about both of his biggest secrets at the same time?

“No need to worry! This conversation will not be recorded, nor will it affect your enrollment,” Nedzu began to try and placate him, while Aizawa picked up where he left off.

“We just want to make sure you're not into something dangerous.”

Does an abusive father and a mentally troubled friend count as 'dangerous'?

Shouto ran through his options. He could simply not tell them anything, it's not like they can force him to talk. Since his father was the #2 hero, he figured if he told about that they either wouldn't believe him or would be unable to do anything about it, so best keep that to himself for now. But as for Izuku... He thought about the lack of progress. These are pro-heroes, so they might have a better idea on what to do.

He steeled his nerves. Though Izuku had never outright asked not to speak of him, this still felt like a betrayal of trust. But if this could help him in any way, well – Shouto supposed even heroes have to be the bad guys from time to time.

“.......Okay.” Nedzu visibly perked up, while Aizawa's eyebrows rose almost imperceptibly. “I can't tell you anything about my father – at least, not yet – but...” You can do this, Shouto, “I could... use your help. With my friend.”

So the problem child was actually gonna talk to them. Huh.

Not sharing about his father was unfortunate, but at this point, Shota'll take what he can get. He would never admit it, but ever since he saw that deliberately unremarkable kid, he was overcome with curiosity. Maybe now he can finally get some answers. “Alright then. Fill us in.”
Todoroki breathed deep, closed his eyes, and began. “His name is Izuku. I met him several months ago at a clothing store. He was... stealing, and he was very good at it. I barely noticed, anyone else would have missed it, but he'd casually glance around, and when no one was looking the item in his hands would disappear.”

This caught Shota's attention – so it was a warping quirk, or something similar. A very useful quirk for a thief, bad news for any law enforcement. He considered asking about it, but decided to let the kid continue.

“Once I'd confirmed that yes, he was shoplifting, I went to apprehend him and bring him to the police. But he... the reason why isn't important, but he decided to trust me and showed me his quirk.”

“And what is his quirk?” Apparently the principal had decided to not save questions for the end. Good thing Todoroki answered anyways.

“It's the most versatile, unbelievable quirk I've ever seen – it's called Boundless. I think he said it was like a pocket dimension linked to his subconscious or something.” Nedzu's eyes widened considerably “and it's basically an endless void that he can control with his mind. He takes me there all the time.”

So that's where he disappears to. It seemed a little far-fetched, but definitely not impossible. He nodded at him to continue.

“He can do all kinds of things with it. As long as he has some understanding of an object, he can manifest it in there. He's made entire theme parks with games and rides, city blocks filled with cars and pedestrians, and a beautiful shoreline with an ocean he likes to change the texture of. He can even make replicas of people of he knows, and they're so realistic you almost can't tell they're not.”

“That seems like an amazing quirk, and it sounds like he's quite skilled with it.”

Todoroki nodded at the principal. “He is, but... not for good reasons.”

Shota's eyes narrowed. “Explain.”

“He hasn't told me everything, but from he has and what I've gathered, he... didn't have a very good life. He was a late bloomer, and so was assumed quirkless for a long time. He's told me that the man he lived with ignored him, and the kids at school bullied him. I assume he was neglected at home, because I asked him about his stealing, and he said he had to start at a young age just to get food to eat.”

This story was sounding worse by the second. From what he could tell, the world turned against this kid at a young age, before he discovered what basically amounted to a wish-granting quirk. Geez, if Shota had been in that situation, he probably would've... oh no.

His intuition was, unfortunately, spot on. “Izuku said that, after a while, he decided reality wasn't worth it, and he now lives inside his quirk.”

The concerned look the principal had was matched with his own. That is not healthy behavior for a kid – for anyone, really. “And that's what you need help with.”

A nod. “I've done some research, and he has a lot of... problems. To name a few, I believe he suffers from severe social anxiety, selective mutism, pyrophobia, and impulse control disorders like kleptomania.” Well gee. What a lovely stew of issues. Nedzu seemed to share the sentiment.
“I can see why you're concerned. This Izuku is clearly not in a good mental state, and has been avoiding the issue entirely, likely worsening it. How long has he been living in this other dimension?”

“He never told me, just that he was in elementary school when he moved to Boundless. I want to help him, he needs it, but I don't know how.”

Shota looked to the principal and had a silent conversation; Nedzu nodded, and with his approval, he turned to Todoroki. “It must have been hard, but you made the right choice telling us this. We're heroes, so trust me when I say this: we will do everything in our power to help save your friend.”

Todoroki looked to them, with a small smile and pained eyes, and whispered “Thank you.”

“Did you find anything on problem child #2?”

“Yes! It took some digging in the police files, but once I traced back the -”

“Results, Nedzu.”

“Ah, right. I believe our mysterious youth is none other than Midoriya Izuku, who was reported missing seven years ago. Green hair, green eyes, freckles, ”


“His father is one Midoriya Hisashi, who was under suspicion for child neglect seeing as he didn't even realize his son was missing until Izuku had been absent from school for over a week.”

“Wow.”

“Wow indeed. Though, with Izuku missing, they were unable to build a solid case to convict him; the police believe he then fled to America.”

“Bastard. Anyone else?”

“No one in the record, no.”

“Really? What about his mother?”

“That's just the thing - his mother, Midoriya Inko, was hit by a drunk driver who ran a red light as she pushed Izuku out of the way. He watched his mom die protecting him when he was only five.”

Chapter End Notes

Anyone call Inko being dead? Or was I pretty obvious about it? I tried to be purposely vague when it came to her sudden disappearance so I could have this big reveal here, though I wouldn't be surprised if that didn't work. But hey, at least this'll be the first time a character verbalized it :D
On a side note, OMG a character that isn't Bakugou or Hisashi almost cussed! I hope the lack of swearing isn't too ooc for Aizawa, but... one secondary character with a potty mouth is enough for me, thanks.

How do you think Izuku will react to Shouchan sharing his existence? I'm... not entirely sure at this point myself, so I guess we'll all find out!

Take my poll in the comments of chapter 10 if you haven't!
Trust

Chapter Notes

I know I just said 'unsure of another chapter', but I figured eh, I got an early start today, I can do some writing. Then once I got started, the chapter almost wrote itself. So here you go! I'm gonna do some schoolwork now. In order to get his friend the help he needs, Shouto's gonna need to get Aizawa and Nedzu connected to Izuku. How will he convince his friend to trust him when he just broke his promise not to tell?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“YOU did WHAT?!!”

It’d been a while since Izuku was this mad. Boundless was thrumming from his anger, and he knew Shouchan could feel it too. He made sure of it.

“Please calm down, Izuku. I understand you're mad, and you have every right to be. I did something that you feel is a betrayal of trust, and I'm sorry you feel that way. I don't want to hurt you. I just did what I believed was the best course of action given the situation.”

HOW is telling a bunch of PRO-HEROES about me the 'best course of action'?! He was still seething, but he reined in his temper a little and leveled Shouchan with his best you-better-have-a-good-explanation glare.

At his stare, Shouchan sheepishly turned away and laid out his reasoning. “They had me in a tight spot, Izuku. They asked about both you and my father, and I can't just say 'the #2 hero is a domestic abuser' without a plan and probably some evidence to back it up! No one would believe it, and if they did they couldn't do anything about it; the man's got the public and the government on his side. One kid's word isn't going to be enough.”

“So you told them about me to get them off your case?” The words left a bitter taste in his mouth. How could he betray him like that?

Shouchan looked surprised and vigorously shook his head. “It's not like that! I didn't use you as an out! You mean so much more than that to me!”

“If that's the case, then why did you tell them?”

“I... wanted them to help me be a good hero.”

That caught him off-guard. “What does that have to do with this?”

Shouchan sighed, and took his hands in his own. “I first mentioned you in the interview, honestly. They asked why I wanted to be a hero, and I told them it was because of a friend.”

His eyes widened in shock. “What?” Shouchan won't stay because he wants to be a hero. But if I'm
why he wants to be one, then... Shouchan won't stay, because of... me?

He nodded. “Reality was cruel to you, and you didn't deserve any of the pain it gave you. That's why I want to be a hero – I want to make the world safer for people like you. I want to make the world a better place for you.”

Oh. “It's too late for that. Too far gone.”

Shouchan looked at their joined hands and smiled gently. “I won't know unless I try.”

Izuku had no words for that.

They stayed like that for a while, even as he brought back the pier and dipped his feet in the fractal ocean. This time Shouchan removed his shoes and socks, dipping his feet too. The water kept changing it's viscosity. Izuku did that with little thought spared for it.

The water changed temperature too. Izuku was not doing that.

“They want to meet you, you know.”

“They do? Too bad for them, I'm not interested.”

“Why don't you give it a shot? I think you'll like Aizawa, he's very different from me, mom, and Katsu; he seems gruff and abrasive, but he's actually pretty nice, and very understanding. And I've heard Nedzu is incredibly smart, so you two can talk about higher-dimensional physics together probably.”

“I don't know...”

“You'd get to see UA too - I don't think my descriptions can do it justice.”

“That would be cool, but...”

“They promised not to arrest you or anything, you won't have to talk, and you can leave at any time if you're not comfortable. I'll stay with you the whole time.”

It sounded good, but...

“I know I wounded your trust by telling them, but please Izuku. Would you trust me one more time?”

He looked to his friend – his first real friend, who was so different from him and confusing and interesting, as he pleaded for his trust. He'd hurt his feelings, though with good intentions, and even apologized to him for it. He wanted him to try something new, do something he was afraid to and promised to support him through it. He'd never experienced anything like this before. Is this what a real friend is like?

Shouchan looked so hopeful, so desperate. I really can't figure you out, but...

“...Okay, Shouchan. I trust you.”
Aahh, I felt so happy writing Izuku calling Shouchan a real friend!! It made me want to cry! <3
Good job Shouto convincing Izuku! And good job Izuku trusting Shouchan! You're about to take a huuuge step outta your comfort zone, but you know what they say: nothing ventured, nothing gained!
But if you think this is the end of Izuku's journey, well... keep in mind that healing is a slow process, and one false move can tear all that progress down >:D mwahaha!
Foreshadowing! Or is it? I won't tell! But yes, this fic is far from over, so buckle your seatbelts - we're in for quite a ride.
Hey, I got a chapter up!
Updates might be spotty for the next few days/week. My grandparents are moving, so I'll be busy with that in addition to my normal school and stuff. I'll try to stay semi-consistent, but you know how it goes.
Anyways, I know you all were hyped for the meeting, but it's sadly gonna have to wait for next chapter! There was too much I wanted to get in before it, the chapter was getting long, and I want the actual meeting to have a full chapter (maybe two) dedicated to it. It's very important to the plot, and y'all seem very excited for it, so I want to do it justice!
It's almost time for Izuku's first major foray into reality in seven years, but there's a lot Shouto needs to do before then. He wants everything to go well; will everyone be prepared for the fateful encounter?

Shouto arrived at UA once again about an hour before the scheduled meeting with Izuku. There were a few things he wanted to go over with Aizawa and Nedzu beforehand, and he figured it might take a while to actually get Izuku out of Boundless – hence, the early arrival.

Izuku had put a lot of faith in him for this, so Shouto naturally wanted it to go perfectly.

It also didn't help that one false move could send his friend scurrying back to his metaphorical den.

Aizawa greeted him at the gate again, and led him to the room he had been in just a few days prior. When he saw the principal sitting in the same chair drinking tea, Shouto almost laughed at the thought of has he even moved since I was last here? Once everyone settled, the preparatory strategy meeting commenced.

Nedzu set down his cup. “So, you wanted to discuss with us before your friend arrives?”

A nod. “Yes. Izuku will probably be rather skittish, and I'd prefer to not scare him off. To prevent that, I'd like to tell you a bit more about him and what he's like.”

“A good call. Start with things we should avoid.” Aizawa crossed his arms and leaned back in his chair, but Shouto could tell he had the man's full attention.

“All right. First of all, avoid bringing up his old school, family, or kleptomania; if he's not comfortable with you, any of those topics will shut him down immediately. He's terrified of fire, sudden movement, and loud noises. He doesn't take surprises well. But if you approach him slowly, calmly, and quietly, he should be okay.”

“So basically, approach him like one would a small animal.”

“Ahem. I'm right here.”
“Oh hush, you don't count.”

Nedzu, still slightly ruffled from his employee's comment, eagerly returned to the topic. “Very well. Now, how about things that may calm him down or peak his interest?”

“Calming him down will probably work best if I do it; if he gets riled up, he'll probably want to return to Boundless, even if only for a bit, since that's the only place he feels safe. I think he may end up really liking your demeanor, Aizawa-san – you're very different from... the people who hurt him. As for gaining his attention, Principal Nedzu will likely have the best luck.”

“Nedzu will? How's that?”

Shouto put a hand to his chin in thought. “He loves learning, but only in certain areas. I bet he'll find your status as a quirked animal fascinating. And even if that doesn't work, you could mention anything about math or science – he excels in those fields. He once tried explaining Boundless to me, and started going into doctorate-level physics I believe.”

“Ah, a young genius then? I'm even more excited to meet him.”

Aizawa huffed at the principal's clear interest, while Shouto laughed. “Only in math and science; ask him anything about history or English, and he's utterly clueless.” His laughter stopped, and a melancholic feeling settled over him. “He said he only wanted to study things he liked, since all those other subjects would be pointless. He doesn't plan on ever living in reality again.”

The meeting finished in the somber mood he unintentionally brought.

Boundless was humming with the nervous energy of it's resident as Shouto helped him prepare.

“What if I mess up? What if I make them mad? What if they don't like me?”

This had been going on since Izuku had brought him to Boundless from the school gate. “It's going to be just fine, Izuku. You're going to do great, and they're going to like you. I guarantee it. They can't wait to meet you.”

Izuku was pacing around like a madman. How can he pace when there's no gravity? Shouto could only float and watch as his best friend stepped through the air, even going upside down at one point (is there an upside down without gravity?). “Oh my gosh, I'm so nervous! What do I say? What do I do? What do I wear?!!”

“Just be yourself. I'll be with you the entire time, and you don't have to tell them anything you don't want to. And as for your outfit, I think as long as you're dressed in clothes that won't disappear the moment you enter reality, you'll be fine.”

With his t-shirt, shorts, baseball hat (he likes the anonymity it provides), and red high-tops on, Izuku was physically ready. Now, to get his mind ready. Shouto gently grasped his shoulders, and looked him in the eye as he spoke. “Okay Izuku, we're all set. I want you to repeat after me: I can do this.”

“I-I can do this.”

“Again.”

“I can do this.”
“With feeling!”

“I can do this!”

“Good. Now, take us to the gates of UA.”

Shouto could see awe behind all the nerves in Izuku's eyes as they walked through the halls of the school. He seemed to be cataloging every minute detail as Shouto led him to the lounge; but once they arrived, the awe vanished, and pure anxiety was all that remained. He gently took his hand and grasped it tight to remind him of his support. “Ready?” A hesitant nod, and Shouto opened the door.

“We're here.”

Chapter End Notes

I hate to leave you all so close to such an important event, but... well, if you're reading this, you probably read my beginning notes too. I'll try and get the next chapter up tomorrow.
I had no plans for the scene with Izuku, it just kinda happened. I'm glad it did though! "I can do this!" made me very happy. Yes you can, Izuku! We all believe in you!
See you all tomorrow (hopefully)! Unless you're reading this after the next chapter is posted. In which case, hello from the past! See you next page, I guess?
Meetings

Chapter Notes

Thank you all for your patience. Here is a nice, long chapter with important plot progression.
But UGH I hate moving! Especially since it only ever happens when it's hot out! I don't do well when the temperature gets above 75 degrees (Fahrenheit, 'cus I'm American and we're weird); it's been in the low 80's the last few days, and I'm DYING. Someone please save me by sending your cooler weather my way.
It's time for the big introduction! Shouto may have found some allies in his quest to save Izuku from himself, but will they be enough to change the course of his life?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“We're here.”

Deku held his breath as Shouchan opened the door. He'd been trying to distract himself the whole way here, taking in every detail of UA so he could recreate it in Boundless if he (and Shouchan) wanted to; he knew he didn't have to look so closely, since his subconscious recall would fill in any details, but he was trying to ignore his nerves in the hopes they'd go away.

They didn't.

Shouchan led him into a cozy little lounge with a couch, a coffee table, and cushioned chairs. A plush rug was spread over the center of the room, and it squished under his shoes—it would look better if the color was a little bit brighter. Oh! And it should be round, instead of square, and be softer, and have shorter fibers, and -

“Hello! You must be Izuku. It's a pleasure to meet you!”

Deku's head shot up from where he'd been staring at the carpet. He'd been spoken to by a... what was it exactly? It wasn't a mouse, or a dog, or anything Deku had seen before. There was also a dark-haired man with strange scarves around his neck and completely relaxed posture. The animal seemed very cheery, while the man had a calm, tired look about him. They're not like anyone I've ever met before; I have no idea how they're going to act!

The white-furred creature spoke again.

“My name is Nedzu, and I am the principal of this fine establishment. This is one of the homeroom teachers for the hero course, and a trusted ally of mine: Aizawa Shota, pro-hero name Eraserhead.”

The man gave a nod in his direction, and Deku cautiously nodded back, showing he understood. Nedzu smiled before continuing. “Would you like to have a seat? We'd very much like to get to know you. Todoroki-kun is welcome to stay of course.”

He didn't realize he was clutching Shouchan's hand in a death grip until his friend gently squeezed it again, before leading him to the couch. He never let go, even when they were seated side by side and Deku had leaned in close to the other. It helped a lot.

Once everyone was settled, Aizawa was the first to speak. “Todoroki has told us a little bit about
you, but is there anything you want to ask of us? It's only fair we give you a chance to learn about us too.”

Deku pondered for a moment, then mentally connected to Boundless and thought text to Shouchan's phone: Ask them what their quirks are. And what type of animal Nedzu is. Shouchan was prepared and already had his phone out when it buzzed. He took a moment to read the message, then relayed it to the others who seemed fine with him not talking. Huh. “He would like to know your quirks, and what type of animal you are, principal Nedzu.”

“My quirk is called 'Erasure', and it means I can prevent quirk activation in anyone within my field of view. I won't use it in this meeting unless you want to see it.”

“Mine is High-Spec, and is an intelligence augmentation quirk that makes me far smarter than almost all humans. And as for your other question, not even I am fully sure what animal I am!”

Those seemed like cool enough quirks (not as cool as Boundless though). He was about to text Shouchan again when the principal addressed him once more. “Now that you know our quirks, would you mind sharing about yours? I must admit I am quite interested in it.”

The hesitation must have been noticeable, since Shouchan turned to him and said “It's alright Izuku. You don't have to tell them, but I know they'd appreciate it if you did.” He nodded, and after a moment, the phone buzzed again.

“He says 'My quirk is called Boundless, and it's a pocket dimension fixed to my brain that I can control with my thoughts'.”

Nedzu's grin grew wider. “Fascinating. Are the planes that form it finite or infinite? Is it anchored to your conscious or subconscious?”

Deku didn't notice Aizawa look at Shouchan in confusion, who then shrugged, because he was staring at the principal with his jaw hanging open. The repeatedly vibrating phone was enough to snap his friend back to attention.

“Uh, wow, that's a lot. He says it's formed at the intersection of infinite planes of time and space... um... it's attached to his subconscious, but he can access the connection with conscious thought as well... he'd also like to know which text you learned from, and whether you agree with Ivankov or Loughton. Whoever they are.”

Shota wouldn't deny that he checked out a bit when the greenet and the principal started talking about highly advanced physics. He would deny that he felt a bit sorry for the Todoroki boy, who looked just as lost as him, but was stuck reading out Izuku's replies. He didn't pity the kid at all! (He totally did.) After several long minutes, he decided to spare the kid further misery. “This is great and all, but how about you two discuss this another time? There's two of us here being completely left behind.” The kid blushed, while Nedzu cleared his throat.

“Yes, of course, please excuse me. It is just rare that I can hold such educated discourse with someone! Anyways, your quirk sounds incredibly versatile, and you seem to have excellent control. Have you ever considered becoming a hero?”

They, of course, already knew the answer. Todoroki had informed them his friend wanted to be a hero when he was little, but lost that desire when he left the world behind.

“He says he has, but doesn't think he's suited for saving people.” The 'since nobody saved me' was
left unsaid.

Shota decided this was his time to speak up.

“If you could help someone who was being hurt by someone else, or living in fear, for reasons beyond their control, would you?” A pause, then a slow nod.

“Then you would make an excellent hero.”

The lack of a buzz from the phone showed that the kid was as dumbfounded as he looked.

Nedzu clapped his paws together. “Yes indeed. Now, you’re aware that your friend Todoroki-kun will be entering our first-rate hero course at the start of the school year, correct?” The kid looked sad as he nodded; the principal continued regardless. “We have decided that we would very much like for you to join him.”

Well, that wasn't part of the plan.

All eyes whipped to Nedzu in surprise.

“You, of course, are free to decline young Izuku. And if you accepted, there would be some work to do to ensure you're ready for the rigor of the course. However, I believe it would be very doable for you, and that you would find it quite fulfilling and worthwhile. I can also guarantee that you would be placed in Todoroki-kun's class.”

So Nedzu was gonna foist another problem child on him. He really should've seen that coming.

The Todoroki boy was looking back and forth from his friend to the principal, clearly wanting him to accept, but respectful enough to let Izuku 'speak' for himself. Izuku appeared understandably pensive. Shota stepped in again to alleviate the situation.

“We understand that this is a lot to take in so suddenly. If you need some time to think it over, that's fine – we won't change our minds anytime soon. Take a few days, think about it, and let us know one way or the other. Sound good?”

Both boys relaxed greatly at that, then Todoroki read the next text. “He says he'll consider it.”

“That's all we ask.”

Once they were safely back in Boundless, Izuku finally released Shouchan's hand. His friend turned to him with a proud smile, and said “You did great Izuku! How do you feel?”

“Exhausted. Relieved. Glad it's over.”

He laughed. “Yeah, I understand. I felt the same way after the interview. I wasn't expecting them to offer enrollment like that though!”

“I know! I can't fathom what made them believe I could survive attending UA.” Him, at a school? And a hero school, no less? He'd never make the cut.

“I think I understand what they saw in you. You're stronger than you think, Izuku. Yes, you'd need a little help and a lot of hard work, but so does everyone else; that's why we're going to UA in the first place – to learn and grow and improve. I think – no, I know you can do it too.”
“I'm not so sure. I'm...” *Weak. Useless. Worthless.*

“Perfectly capable of anything you put your mind to. The decision is yours, but in my opinion, it'd be amazing to have you as a classmate – all those other kids and teachers wouldn't know what hit them!”

“...You really think so?” *Could I really be so strong?*

Shouchan put a hand on his shoulder. “Of course. After all -

you're the best friend I've ever had.”

Chapter End Notes

Oh my! Nedzu, what are you planning, you sly dog/mouse/bear?
I hope this chapter lived up to the hype it was given! Now to figure out what to write for next time...

Also, I realized I might be spelling some names wrong (e.g. Shouto vs. Shoto or Nedzu vs. Nezu) because I'm an unemployed college student who doesn't want to spend her money on manga so I'm anime only! I'm debating fixing it, but I'm not sure what the correct spelling is, and I'm over twenty chapters in, so... we'll see. But if you're a manga reader and know the spelling, let me know and I'll probably fix it. I like the spellings I have, but I'd prefer to be accurate.

See ya next chapter! Whenever that is.
Hello all you lovely readers! Happy Mother's Day!
I'm kinda iffy on this chapter. I wasn't sure where I wanted to go with it, and was tired while writing, so sorry if it's subpar.
I probably won't be able to post tomorrow, since I'm taking my sister on a birthday day trip! We're gonna have a picnic, go to a reptile zoo (she looooves snakes), and hopefully have a grand ole time. Because of that, I'm gonna post this today, which wasn't the plan - I was considering rewriting this chapter and posting later, but then that'd be several days in a row without updating. Nothing wrong with that, but considering I accidentally established myself as an 'updates almost every day' writer... welp.
It's been a few days since the meeting, and Izuku has yet to give his answer. Nedzu is scheming, Shouto is hoping, and Aizawa just wants a break. A turning point in history may be on the horizon, but will history turn for the better? Or worse?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shota was dreading the next few months.

There were now five months until the entrance exam, where he'd have to spend several days slaving away as a scorer; then he'd have two months before the end of the school year. His class (though it was down to half its original size) was already getting antsy, excited to start their second year at UA. Once that mess was over, there would be a blessed two weeks before the start of the next year where he'd be doing absolutely nothing outside his regular patrols. And oh, was he going to do some impressive nothing.

He was fantasizing all that nothing when his phone went off.

Nedzu:

I need to speak with you. Please drop by my office at your earliest convenience.

Shoot. There goes his afternoon.

He finished getting ready for the school day and left for UA with nary a pause in his irritated grumbling. I'm gonna have to put off grading those essays – though I already know they'll be barely passing at best. Why does that rodent always give me the troublemakers and the idiots? The oh-so-helpful part of his brain that replied because you're good at whipping them into shape clearly didn't get the memo that this was brooding time.

The day dragged on, only adding to his irritation and exhaustion. By the final bell, everyone was avoiding him due to his aura of exasperation as he trudged through the halls. He slammed open the door to the principal's office. Nedzu was, unfortunately, unperturbed.
“Ah, Aizawa-san, right on time. Tea?”

Shota dropped into the waiting chair and pointedly ignored the waiting cup of tea set in front of him. He huffed. “I'm here. Get on with it.” His cats were waiting for him, after all.

“Of course. One moment please.” The mammal pulled out a small remote and punched in a numerical code. A short beep indicated that the code was accepted, and command executed.

He recognized it as the remote Nedzu used to turn off all the cameras and microphones in his office, there for security and evidence in – difficult situations. If they were turned off, this was clearly a very important and highly confidential matter.

“I called you here to discuss the Izuku project.”

……Problem Child #2 was a highly confidential matter? Moreover, a project? A Nedzu project? That can't be good.

He wisely decided not to mention that. “And this warrants disabling surveillance?”

A serious look and a nod. “Yes. A socially-stunted child with a powerful quirk who has already broken the law on numerous occasions. This is a very precarious situation, one which requires delicate proceedings. I trust you have not told anyone about him?”

“I see your point – and no. Anyone who’s asked about our meetings with Todoroki was told there were issues regarding his admission we were addressing. I’ve never mentioned the other kid.”

“Good. We’ll need to keep him under wraps as long as we can; we can’t hide his existence forever, though he's done a good job at that so far – we just need to make sure he's firmly on the path of heroism before then.”

“You say that, but we don't even know if he'll agree to enroll.”

Nedzu grinned. “Oh he will. I'll make sure of that.”

That kid better be careful, or he'll end up wrapped around the principal's paw pad.

He pretended he wasn't slightly terrified, and continued. “So what's the plan for this...'project'? Assuming he agrees. Kid's got enough issues to fill a barge.”

The jovial demeanor returned, and Shota could once again see that glimmer of amusement in those beady black eyes. “That's why there's a lot to do between his acceptance and the start of the new term. I've separated the necessary preparations into three categories: physical fitness, intellectual proficiency, and social essentials. Physical fitness is obvious – he needs to be in decent shape for the hero course; I'd like you to oversee his training, and Todoroki-kun will be welcome to join as well to keep him motivated.”

Shota nodded. Figures he'd give me another job to do; goodbye, two weeks of nothing. The principal continued, unaware of his silent mourning.

“The intellectual proficiency plan is my domain. According to the information we have, young Izuku is highly advanced in some areas, and completely remedial in others; he'll be studying with me in his weaker subjects to catch up with his peers, and will continue his lessons with me through the school year. He'll need to take a placement test, and I'll finalize his schedule based on the results.”
Fair enough. Nedzu took a sip of his tea before continuing.

“Lastly is his social essentials training, and this is the most important – hence, this will be a joint effort with you, me, and young Todoroki. We need to prepare him to interact with his peers, and begin helping him with his mental... affairs. I'd like him to undergo regular and mandatory therapy sessions throughout his enrollment, but it will take time and effort on our part before he'll willingly discuss sensitive topics with anyone, let alone a therapist.”

This all sounded good, but... “How are we supposed to accomplish that? It's a miracle he agreed to meet us in the first place, and when he did he was glued to Todoroki's side and never spoke a word. That was fine for then, but he won't connect with his classmates like that.”

“Naturally. That's why I'm hashing out a step-by-step plan to acclimate him to social interaction. He'll also be going through behavioral coaching to help him with his phobias and impulse control.”

“You've put a lot of thought into this.”

The principal folded his paws on the desk in front of him, and lowered his head in contemplation.

“I had to. Izuku-kun has unknowingly given us quite the ultimatum. If we succeed, we gain a powerful ally. But if we fail, best-case scenario he gives up on reality and continues as he was; worst-case he turns to villainy, and we go up against a child with a highly versatile quirk who hates the entire world.”

No pressure. Seems failure isn't an option.

Shota was snapped out of his musings by a knock on the door.

“Perfect timing! Would you let Todoroki-kun in please?”

“What's he doing here?”

“He should be here to inform us of Izuku's agreement.”

He gave the principal his best side-eye, before opening the door to reveal Problem Child #1. How did Nedzu- he planned this, didn't he?

“Hello Principal Nedzu, Aizawa-san. Thank you for your help.”

“Of course! I presume those incentives and talking points for Izuku I sent you helped?”

So he was bribing the kid to attend? No wonder he was so sure he'd accept.

Todoroki's voice was full of awe as he said “Yes. I don't know how you did it, and I can't thank you enough, but yesterday he finally said yes. He wants to come to UA.”
overreacting and it was fine? I honestly wouldn't be surprised. Let me know if my disappointment is warranted or not! If enough people say "Yeah, that was pretty bad", I'll likely rewrite it. Otherwise, chapters should be better than that from here on. Can't guarantee I won't have another off day, but I'll do my best to keep them to a minimum. Izuku said yes!!! There's quite a bit of work that needs to be done before school starts though. I won't spend a lot of time detailing the next few months (maybe one or two chapters), so everyone get hyped for first day of school very soon! Whoop Whoop!
Training

Chapter Notes

Man, did I somehow stumble across one of the nicest corners of the internet? You guys are so kind and supportive! I thought this was the internet!!
Anyway, my sister and I had a blast yesterday! We got home earlier than expected, so I have 2 chapters for you today! Huzzah!
Nedzu's plan is coming to fruition, but this is just the beginning. There's no telling how this will turn out, but one thing's for sure: Aizawa, Shouto, and Izuku are in for a wild ride.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Deku stood outside the gates of UA once more, this time in exercise gear. Shouchan was similarly garbed next to him, as they waited for Aizawa to show up and let them in. He was about to begin his “Heroics Course Preparatory Regime” - Pre-Heroics for short - that Principal Nedzu had designed especially for him; apparently, if it went well, not only would Deku be admitted to the hero course, it might also become a special program at the school for people who need extra help getting into heroics. Nedzu seemed pretty excited for it.

Deku still could hardly believe he agreed.

All those incentives might've helped. Unlimited access to all facilities after school? A high-end apartment on school grounds to use at his leisure? All-you-can-eat gourmet food made by Lunch Rush, a famous hero-chef?

Still not as cool as Boundless, but pretty darn good for reality.

Don't misunderstand: Deku did not agree so he could become a hero – he stopped caring about that ages ago. He agreed for the new experiences this would give him, that he could then recreate in Boundless if he wanted.

More than that though, he'd miss Shouchan if he went to UA without him, and Shou just wasn't measuring up. Shou was good, but... he was missing something, and whatever that 'something' was, it made all the difference.

The gate opened to reveal the dead-eyed gaze of Aizawa. “You're both here. Good. Since it's a Sunday, we've got a full day ahead of us. Physical training in the morning, studying before and after lunch, then socializing practice this afternoon. Did you both eat breakfast?" Two nods. “Alright. Make sure you eat every day we have training; don't want you passing out. Come on, we're heading to gym Beta.”

Gym Beta was massive, with an indoor track, weight machines, floor mats, and every kind of gym equipment Deku knew existed, along with a few he didn't. He was taking in the sight before a gruff “Here” drew his eyes to Aizawa throwing something to him. He fumbled, but caught it nonetheless.
It was a whiteboard. Complete with marker and eraser.

“We understand you aren't comfortable with talking, but having Todoroki read your replies will be inconvenient. So, if you need to tell us something, you can use that. If you like, we can teach you sign language too. We won't make you talk if you don't want to.”

*Sign language?* Shouchan must have seen his confusion, because he leaned over and whispered

“It's a way to talk using hand gestures, commonly used by the deaf and the mute. Might be a good idea, and I can learn it too.” *Talking with my hands? Sounds...quiet.* He uncapped the marker and wrote a barely legible “I'd like that” (he hasn't written much of anything in years, so he's a bit shaky) and showed it to Aizawa, who nodded.

“Alright, I'll inform Nedzu. Now, let's do some stretches, then we're going to find out where you are physically.”

Stretches, laps, sprints, side-hops, long jump, ball throw, grip strength – test after test after test. By the end, Deku was exhausted. Shouchan had done well in each event, while Deku, well... Aizawa said he definitely needed work, but that's why he was here. He promised he'd get Deku's scores up considerably by the start of term. Then, he slowly put a hand on his shoulder.

“You did great, keep up the good work. Now both of you go get showered and changed then meet Nedzu in the lounge.”

The UA changing rooms were neat. The cool water of the showers chilled his heated body (or maybe it was Shouchan showering in the next stall) and relaxed his overworked muscles; he hadn't exercised like that in a long time.

Deku couldn't help but swipe the nice shampoo they had stocked. It smelled like the ocean.

The two boys meandered down the hall, gym bags over their shoulders and whiteboard in Deku's arms. When they reached the lounge, Shouchan went to knock on the door, only for it to swing open.

“Ah, here you are! Come in come in, both of you!”

The lounge had been transformed into a comfortable classroom, with two desks, shelves of textbooks and various classroom supplies, and a massive blackboard. The principal was standing on a podium so he could reach the board.

“If you would please sit here, Izuku-kun. I have a special learning inventory for you to complete so I can see how you're doing academically. Don't worry about doing good or bad, just answer each question to the best of your ability; Todoroki-kun, if you'd sit here you may work on any subject you so choose. In two hours, we'll break for lunch, and afterwards I'll begin teaching you boys sign language as requested.”

Having Shouchan next to him calmed his nerves considerably as he completed the learning inventory. He breezed through the math and science sections, but struggled on subjects like Japanese, English, history, government and politics... honestly pretty much everything that wasn't math or science. So he likes numbers, sue him.

Numbers never hurt anyone.

By the time lunch rolled around, Deku's brain was fried. Nedzu had left to bring them their food, so it was just him and Shouchan.
"How are you doing, Izuku?"

He scribbled on his board, and showed his friend, 'Tired. This is hard.'

Shouchan smiled. "Yeah, I bet. But you're doing great! We're halfway through the day, think you can hold out a bit longer?"

'Maybe. I'll try.'

"That's all I ask."

They had katsudon for lunch. It was almost as good as mom's.

As promised, after lunch principal Nedzu began teaching them sign language, and Deku actually liked it! It was nice and quiet, and he didn't have to write on the board or send a text to communicate. They'd only gone through letters and numbers, but it was a start. He figured this intellectual proficiency class could be fun, and the physical fitness course wasn't too bad either.

It was the next part he wasn't so ready for. His schedule (that Nedzu had oh-so-kindly given him) said the last course of the day was Social Essentials. Oh joy.

At that point, they were rejoined by Aizawa-sensei, as Nedzu explained what the course would be like.

"Social Essentials is the very first program of its kind, specifically designed to help those who struggle to fit in with society. I've structured it as a list of goals that, upon accomplishment, will bolster your confidence, teach you how to interact with your peers, and even overcome your fears! There is no deadline for any goal, though I would like you to have several completed before the start of school."

Aizawa-sensei picked up where he left off. "Each day we'll be attempting a certain task or goal. It's fine if you can't complete it, we'll just come back to it later. As long as you keep trying, and keep making progress – no matter how little – you'll pass the course. Same with the other classes in Pre-Heroics."

Nedzu nodded, "Yes, so no need to worry about failing as long as you give it your best effort. Now, Todoroki's task for the day is simple: write a list of the people in your life who've been hurt by fire, directly or indirectly. Then, write at least a paragraph on how fire can be used for the benefit of those same people. You have an hour."

Aizawa handed a pencil and paper to Shouchan, who nodded and immediately began writing, even as Nedzu addressed Deku.

"Izuku-kun, your first goal is to have a conversation with either Aizawa or myself – your choice – without Todoroki. We'll be going across the hall when you've made your decision. You may talk about any topic of your choice. We're trying for the whole hour Todoroki will be working, but if you can't make it we will return here and try again another time. Understand?"

AN HOUR TALKING WITHOUT SHOUCAN??!! Are they crazy??! I can't do that!

He was about to 'say' as such, when he turned to his friend. Shouchan was already hard at work in his assignment, but he still gave Deku a smile that said it all: 'You can do it. I believe in you.'

…..He'd be disappointed if I didn't even try.
He grabbed his board and uncapped his pen. He can do this. But who should he pick? *I could talk about physics with Nedzu, but I'm not good at writing the kanji for all those scientific terms. I don't know Aizawa-sensei very well, but he's calm and considerate.* He wrote 'Asawa' and showed it. Aizawa nodded, and guided him across the way.

No one chided him on his misspelling.

In the end, he only made it through 20 minutes of 'what's your favorite color' and 'how many cats do you have' before his nerves got the better of him and he asked for Shouchan.

Everyone said they couldn't be prouder of those 20 minutes.

Chapter End Notes

Welcome to Pre-Heroics everyone! It's kinda like Special Ed for hero school but better! And Shouto thought he was joining solely for Izuku, but Nedzu and Aizawa haven't forgotten our favorite heterochrome. He's gonna benefit from this just as much as his friend. Character development waits for no one! I'd like to ask everyone's opinions again, but the question involves a MINOR-IS SPOILER. IF YOU DO NOT WISH TO READ SAID SPOILER, SKIP TO THE ASTERISK LINE NOW. Okay, we all good? Here's the question.

Pre-Heroics is going to be announced as a full-fledged program soon, and other students will be allowed to apply for it. Who do you think should join? It can be a student from any class, as long as they're someone you feel would benefit from the specialized attention of Pre-Heroics; think of students that, if they were in the real world, they'd either be in special ed, have an IEP, or regularly visit a therapist. The most likely candidates I have right now are Shinsou and Kouda. Leave me a name, their class, and a reason why! Shoot, send me an OC or something if you want! I might include them!

****************************************END SPOILER****************************************

Next chapter we get to see how Pre-Heroics is working out for our boys, a character makes a cameo appearance, and we check in on an old friend...

See you then!
Hello again! Here's the next chapter!
What do y'all think of Pre-Heroics? I certainly had no plans for this when I started, it just kinda happened. But I like it! I have some neat things in store regarding it, so look forward to that!
It's been five months since last chapter. How have Shouto and Izuku been progressing? Aizawa suspects the world (aka the author) is out to ruin his day - his trouble detector sense is going off. Will they make it through everything the author is about to throw at them?

The last five months have been going well. Too well.

The problem children were both progressing by leaps and bounds, and Shota was certainly proud. Todoroki was comfortable using a small flame (lighting candles and stoves mostly), and Izuku was fine without his friend for up to two hours now, and had even met a few other teachers! He hadn't met any students (thankfully, in his opinion), since on school days Pre-Heroics had IP (intellectual proficiency) first so he could teach. After school was PF (physical fitness) and SE (social essentials), and Izuku would use his quirk to teleport between rooms. That way no students were even aware that two middle-schoolers were attending the secret new course, which Nedzu decided would be announced at the start of the term. Basically, everything was peachy.

Yeah, definitely going too well.
The other shoe is gonna drop soon, I just know it.

His grievous prognosis was interrupted by a knock on the door to the teacher's lounge. He was the only one in there right now, so he grudgingly got up from his chair and opened the door. There stood one of the second-years, Togata Mirio. The goofy blond still had his hand up to knock when he registered Shota's tired stare.

"Ah, Aizawa-sensei! Long time no see!"

"Togata. Why are you here?"

A look of confusion passed his face, before he smiled again. Gah, too bright and cheery. “Oh right, I forgot for a moment! I was passing by the lounge on the third floor when I noticed it's sign has been changed from 'Lounge' to 'Pre-Heroics', and even has a code lock and says 'No Unauthorized Entry'! I was curious what changed!"

I suppose it was only a matter of time before someone noticed. He sighed. “Think of it as the principal's new pet project. He'll be announcing it at the start of the next year.” Togata nodded in understanding, and was about to speak when Shota cut him off with a warning. “What's going on in there is currently top-secret, even among most of the staff, so DO. NOT. ENTER. THAT. ROOM. Even accidentally. No one is allowed in there without the express permission of either Nedzu or myself. Got it?”
Togata, having the fear of his wrath put in him, responded with a “Y-yes sir! I won't tell a soul!”

Good. The problem children have enough problems already – they don't need any meddlesome upperclassmen.

I really hope that was the other shoe.

It wasn't.

Shouto was thoroughly enjoying Pre-Heroics.

His father was all-too-happy for his legacy to be accepted into a special, secret new program at UA and readily agreed to it. Naturally, Shouto never told him what the course was called or what it entailed. What his father didn't know wouldn't hurt him.

He loved spending the days out of the house, training and studying with his best friend. Seeing Izuku make so much progress was well worth the effort, even going through SE; SE was the most difficult part of Pre-Heroics, but also the most fulfilling. Each goal he accomplished felt like a major success, and with each one he could feel the weight on his heart (which he hadn't known was there) easing. He hasn't told principal Nedzu or Aizawa-sensei about his father's abuse, but he had let them know of his distaste and distrust towards the man. He might tell them one day. When he was ready.

Right now they were in IP, Izuku practicing his kanji and Shouto studying math (he only occasionally asked Izuku for assistance). Aizawa-sensei was with them, watching the live feed of the entrance exam practical. The volume was turned down low, since Izuku still had issues with loud noises, but every now and then a boom could be heard. Izuku flinched a little each time, but continued with his work nonetheless. I wonder if this counts as part of SE for him, he's doing really well. It was when he heard a long series of explosions and a soft “showoff” from his teacher that he looked up.

A blond kid with red eyes was blowing up robots left and right in an impressive display of raw power. Showoff is right. Though I gotta say, he looks very familiar, almost like Katsu -

.....SHOOT!

He whipped his eyes to his friend, who thank the stars was immersed in his writing practice and hadn't noticed. Yet.

He had to do something fast.

“Aizawa-sensei, may I go get a drink of water?” Once his teacher turned around, he signed 'I need talk with you. U-R-G-E-N-T. TV off. Outside.' He nodded. “Alright, I'm coming with you in case another teacher spots you. Izuku, keep writing.” He turned off the live feed and followed Shouto into the hall. Izuku kept working.

Once they were in the hall, and away from the Pre-Heroics classroom (so Izuku couldn't eavesdrop), Aizawa was the first to speak. “What's this about?”

Shouto looked around to confirm they were alone before filling in his teacher. “It's about that explosive blond in the exam. His name wouldn't happen to be Bakugou Katsuki, would it?”

His teacher's eyebrows raised in surprise. “Yes. How do you know?”
“I feared as much. It's a good thing Izuku didn't notice him – he's the one who warned me about him.”

“Warned you? What do you mean?”

Shouto took a few deep breaths to calm himself, just like he'd learned in SE. “Has Izuku ever mentioned his bullying while he was in elementary school?”

He could tell by the look in his eyes he knew where this was going.

“Bakugou was the main offender.”

_Aaand there's the other shoe._

So Problem Child #2's old tormentor was taking the entrance exam, and by the looks of it would almost certainly get in if his academic scores were anything more than abysmal. There's no telling what would happen if the two crossed paths – let alone wind up as classmates. The kid may have changed since Izuku's disappearance seven years ago, or he may be even worse. There was simply no telling without meeting him. Either way, he didn't think Izuku was ready for a confrontation yet. Not for a while.

*I gotta tell Nedzu. The kid's fear of loud noises and explosions makes even more sense now. Scarily so.*

He pinched the bridge of his nose to alleviate his oncoming headache, and addressed Todoroki. “Okay. Good job spotting that; you handled that like a pro. I need you to go back to the classroom and keep Izuku occupied. I'm going to inform the principal of our... situation.”

“Yes sir. Thank you.”

Under any other circumstance, Shota would've been proud of how surprised Nedzu was when he slammed open his office door. There was a skeletal-looking blond man discussing something with him, though Shota could care less at the moment. “Nedzu, we have a major problem concerning the ‘project’.” Shota really didn't like that term, but until Pre-Heroics was announced, 'project' was the code word for anything concerning the Problem Children.

Thankfully Nedzu seemed to catch on to his 'we need to talk NOW’ tone, as he dismissed his guest. “I see. I'm dreadfully sorry Yagi-san, we'll have to continue another time. It appears I have a pressing issue I need to discuss with Eraserhead.”

Yagi nodded. “I understand, I'll let you handle this then. Just inform me of another time you're available so we can finish.”

“Yes of course! Have a good day.”

After the blond had showed himself out, Nedzu turned off his office surveillance and motioned for Shota to start.

“The principal just informed me that Izuku's bully is an applicant for the hero course.”

Nedzu's shock mirrored his own earlier surprise. “Oh dear, that _is_ quite a problem. Which applicant in particular?”
“#481, Bakugou Katsuki. It explains a lot of Izuku's fears.”

“I see.”

“We can't let him in the hero course with Izuku, especially if he has a history of bullying.”

“Unfortunately, I can only partially agree.”

WHAT?! What part of I-tortured-my-classmate-for-years-and-traumatized-him don't you get?

“I agree that he shouldn't be placed with Izuku; a confrontation is likely inevitable, but he's not ready for that yet, and especially not extended contact. However, for one there is no proof of his bullying – no mark on his record or anything.”

So Izuku wasn't lying when he said the teachers never did anything. Shota wanted to strangle them. “But still-”

“And two, if he is still as violent as he used to be, then I'd much rather he come here to UA where we can straighten him out, than at another school or worse – out in society causing further harm.”

“......I see your point. I still don't like this though. So what's your plan?”

A conniving smile stretched his lips, a surefire sign the principal was up to something. “Simple! This is a year of unprecedented events, so why not add one more? Since our Pre-Heroics students should stay with you, and Bakugou should not be with them, well... For the first time in UA's history, the top-scoring student on the heroics practical will not be placed in 1-A.”

Bakugou Katsuki was a teen who didn't ask for much. Just to be the number-one hero, beating up all the villains, and to be the only kid from his middle school to make it into the hero course at UA. Come to think of it, didn't Deku want to – nope, not finishing that thought. The quirkless nerd went missing years ago and hadn't been seen since. Katsuki had felt a little guilty at the time, but it wasn't my fault! D*** Deku did it on his own! He had nothing to do with it... right?

No one ever confronted him about it, so he must be right.

It was a few days after he rocked the entrance exam when his acceptance letter arrived. Katsuki knew he got in – that was a given – but he wanted to know exactly how awesome he did. He yelled to the hag that he was going to his room, before slamming the door shut and tearing open the envelope.

A little disk fell out, and a projection began.

“I am here as a projection!”

No way! All Might was doing his recording? The #1 hero (at least until Katsuki hits the scene) must've been impressed with his performance. He smirked.

“Young Bakugou, I will now present you with the results of your entrance exam! First, the academic portion! You scored well, with a 95%! Easily Passing!! Now for your practical score! Take a look at this!!”

A graphic of a chalkboard appeared behind All Might, with names and point values.

“With a grand total of 77 villain points, you took first place!!”
He knew it. That means he definitely got into the A-class!

“Normally, that would place you in class 1-A.”

Yeah yeah, he – wait. Normally?!

“However, I've been informed that due to certain... circumstances...”

He barely heard the rest of the recording.

“What the F***!! I'm in 1-B??!!”

Chapter End Notes

Mwahahaha! As if Nedzu and Aizawa would let Bakugou anywhere near Izuku! It's gonna take some outside factor to bring about that fated confrontation... good thing I have a few 'factors' in mind >:D

I love you Izuku baby, but it's gonna have to happen. It's for your own good. Maybe. I'll admit it took me a while to figure out what to do with Bakugou. More's gonna come, but hopefully this is a good start. Now the question is, who's taking his place in 1-A? I'm not entirely sure yet honestly. I'll get back to you on that.

FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL HYPE!!! WOOO!!! HERE WE COME!!!
Thanks for all the suggestions for PH students and Bakugou's replacement. The PH roster is still being figured out, but I have decided on who's taking Bakugou's place in 1-A. As for Mineta, well... I have plans for him ;)
And just so you know, I'm prolly gonna spoil the heck out of these PH students. Is it unfair to everyone else? Probably. Am I gonna do it anyways? Definitely. They’ve been through enough crap, so I'll throw them a bone (and some more crap too, 'cus I love me some angst and character development!).
The time has come for school to start. Will Deku be able to keep it together? And how will the school receive Nedzu's new program?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Me:
Hey Izuku. Wanna meet up and study?

Izuku:
Sure! I'm trying out the dorm Nedzu set up for me tonight. It'll be more fun if you join me! Especially since you have a dorm too.

Me:
I do? Really?

Izuku:
Yeah! There's a whole bunch of bedrooms here, but only two have names on them. Guess whose names!

Me:
Well huh. I was not expecting that. Are they for Pre-Heroics students? That's nice of them.

Izuku:
Yeah!! Now you can live away from your father!

Now are you gonna come study or not? I could
use your help with this history assignment I got.

Me:

Be there soon. Unless you can warp me? I'm in my room.

One quick trip in-and-out of Boundless later, Shouto was in front of a large building with a massive sign that labeled it “P-H Alliance”; so it was exclusively for Pre-Heroics students (just him and Izuku right now). Would the other classes be getting dorms too? Or was it just for this new program?

Ah well, he could ponder that later. Apparently his historical knowledge was needed.

Izuku tugged his hand and nearly ran inside. Shouto noticed, on their way in, a notice was plastered on the door: “This dormitory is for Pre-Heroics course students ONLY. NO OTHER ENTRY WITHOUT PERMISSION. Violators will be punished.” Nedzu is really serious about this. They pressed on.

The first floor was a lavish common area, with a kitchen, laundry room, lounge area, entertainment center - the works. It was not as luxurious as some of the things at home (his father was rich, after all), but it was all nice and quite inviting. After receiving the grand tour, narrated by a flurry of signs, they moved up to the second floor, where it seems the dorm rooms began. Sure enough, the first door by the elevator had “Izuku” engraved on a nameplate on the door. “Shouto” was on the next door over. Izuku tapped his arm, and signed 'Me show you my room', before once more dragging him to his door.

The room was spacious, and included a bed, large closet, bathroom, and even it's own fridge. I see Izuku has already moved some of his mother's things. He remembered seeing that vase and those picture frames in the fractal apartment he'd become familiar with. He'd asked Izuku about them one time, since he noticed they weren't fractals, and he said those were real possessions of his mom's. He'd instructed Boundless to put the real items in their places anytime he brought up the apartment. Now, it seems, those mementos had found a new home.

"It's very nice Izuku. I'll have to get my old man to agree to me staying here too; it looks quite comfortable here. But I believe you said you needed history help?"

Izuku nodded fiercely, and the next few hours were spent writing up a one-page essay on the Second Industrial Revolution.

Deku woke up to Shouchan shaking his back.

“C'mon, Izuku. It's time to get up. It's the first day of school, and we of all people shouldn't be late.”

Oh yeah, Shouchan stayed the night with him in the dorm. He wasn't used to sleeping outside Boundless, but he'll admit it was nice to not wake up to a manifestation of his dream (or nightmare). And today was the first day of school too, right...

He shot up out of bed. It's the first day. I'm going to actual school for the first time in years. I'm meeting people my age aside from Shouchan. Oh man I'm not ready for – Shouchan must have understood his panic. “You are ready. I'll be with you the whole time, Aizawa-sensei is our
homeroom teacher, the other teachers are aware of our situation, and Bakugou's not in our class. You're going to do great.”

Oh yeah, Kacchan made it in UA. That had been an unpleasant revelation, but he had been assured that they were not in the same class, and would never be put together, and if Kacchan showed any signs of aggression towards him or any other student he would take mandatory anger management classes. Good. If I ever see him again, it'll be too soon.

Once his panic was suitably abated, the two boys took turns getting ready in the en suite bathroom. Within the hour, they were dressed in their uniforms, and Shouchan was fixing his dark green tie. He signed to his friend, careful to not get in his way. 'Me think U-A tie color red not green'. He chuckled. “Yeah, you’re right. They usually are, but apparently Pre-Heroics students get slightly different uniforms to distinguish them and allow easier access to the PH dorms, classroom, and gym. Principal Nedzu said there's a chip in the tie that unlocks the doors; he made them green in homage to the very first Pre-Heroics student.” He smiled fondly. “Any idea who that is?”

Thankfully Deku had stopped blushing by the time they made it to the classroom. The massive door to 1-A loomed over him, filling him with the fear he'd been trying so desperately to leave behind – but then a warm hand took his, and it wasn't so scary anymore. They slid open the door and walked in, side by side.

They were not the first ones there – in fact, they purposely arrived only two minutes before the bell rang. Shouchan had said he was taking a big enough step as it was, no need to add unnecessary time to stress out. Deku looked around in fear and awe. So many new people at once! There was a blond with a black lightning bolt in his hair, a boy with a raven head, a girl with headphone jacks on her ears, so many! When the anxiety started to take hold, he closed his eyes and followed the steps Aizawa had taught him: spell your name backwards to rein in your brain, then circular breathing to rein in your body. Inhale through the nose for 5 seconds, hold for 5 seconds, exhale through an o-shaped mouth for 10 seconds. Repeat. By the time Shouchan had led him to their seats (next to each other of course, and seated towards the back thank the stars), his heart rate had slowed and he was back to normal.

The girl next to them with the large black ponytail had barely waved hello before the door opened again and Aizawa-sensei rolled into class. Everyone else was murmuring confusedly as he stood up and peeled off his signature yellow sleeping bag. “It took you all 8 seconds to quiet down. That's 8 seconds you wasted – not very logical, if you ask me. I'm your homeroom teacher, Aizawa Shota. Now come with me. There's a schoolwide assembly this morning, and I unfortunately have to attend.” Aizawa-sensei didn't even wait for the students to follow before walking down the hall, the class scrambling after; the two green-tied friends loitered behind to avoid the rush. When they entered the hall, they could see it was packed with first-years, all heading to the assembly hall. Deku turned to grin at his friend.

'Want skip this? Me quirk go?'

The returned grin was answer enough.

The surprise on his classmates’ faces when they saw the two already seated was priceless. Aizawa-sensei just raised a brow, and sent a discreet 'both-you o-k?', then nodded when he received two thumbs-up. Once everyone was seated, all classes and years, Aizawa-sensei left their class and principal Nedzu walked on-stage. He hopped up on the podium and adjusted the mic before beginning the assembly.

“Welcome students, both new and returning, to this exciting new year at UA! We're proud to raise such fine members of society year after year, and sincerely hope that you all succeed, wherever
you go in life. Now with the pleasantries out of the way, I can inform you of the purpose of this assembly. We, the staff of this fine establishment, have gathered you here for a wonderful announcement! Starting this year, I am honored to present to you a brand-new program, designed as a joint-effort between myself and Aizawa-sensei!"

At his name, their homeroom teacher trudged onto the stage, clearly displeased by being there, but understanding the importance. With his arrival, the principal continued.

“This new program is called the Heroics Course Preparatory Regime, or Pre-Heroics, and is the first of its kind. Aizawa-sensei, if you will.”

The perpetually-tired man stepped up to the podium as Nedzu stepped away. “Pre-Heroics is a program designed for students who want to become the best heroes they can be, but need a little assistance getting there. Each student in the program receives an individualized plan and instruction in three major areas: Physical Fitness, Intellectual Proficiency, and Social Essentials. In other words, we train students physically, mentally, and emotionally to maximize their potential when they become pros. This doesn't mean they're weak, or unsuited to Heroics – it means they've encountered setbacks, realized their shortcomings, even just been dealt a bad hand in life, but they're strong enough to see their faults and seek to improve them with the help of their teachers.” He leveled the entire auditorium with a glare. “Anyone caught antagonizing a student because of their enrollment in Pre-Heroics will not only show themselves to be unheroic cowards – they will have to deal with me.” He walked off the stage to complete silence.

Once all the students could breathe again, Nedzu returned to the podium. “Thank you, Aizawa-sensei. Now, if any of you believe you would benefit from this program, come see either myself or Aizawa-sensei. We will gladly discuss the program with you to determine if it suits your needs. We have two students who have been in Pre-Heroics for several months now, and both have benefited greatly and continue to show progress! That could be you too, so talk with us soon for enrollment! As for everyone else, this new program will not affect your education much, if at all, though there are a few ground rules I will quickly go over now. First: students enrolled in Pre-Heroics will be wearing green ties with their uniform; as previously stated, bullying or harassment of these students is considered discrimination and will be severely punished. Second: there are a few facilities that are reserved for these students. They are clearly marked, and no entry is allowed for students not in the program without permission to enter. These facilities include the new dorm building, the former third-floor lounge, and gym previously known as Gym Beta. And lastly: Pre-Heroics students have their own schedules separate from the rest of their classmates – they will spend homeroom, as well as a handful of other periods, with their class, but the other periods are reserved for the Pre-Heroics courses. We ask that you be welcoming to them in your class, and understand when they separate from you.”

Nedzu looked around the hall, locking eyes with the student body. “Our hope for this program is to aid those who need that extra push to become wonderful heroes. We humbly ask for your cooperation in making UA the best place to get an education, for students of all walks of life.” He bowed, and slowly but surely applause filled the auditorium. “Thank you. First-years, we will begin the matriculation ceremony shortly. All others, you are dismissed back to your classes.”

The room was soon filled with the shuffling of feet and murmuring of upperclassmen, but Deku hardly noticed.

He could only sense the questioning looks of his classmates who eyed his and Shouchan's dark green ties, marking them as the students Nedzu had mentioned. What do they think about us? Are they judging us? Think we're useless? Or maybe they're jealous of the extra attention? What if-
His mental ramblings were interrupted by Aizawa-sensei. “Come on, we're leaving.”

“Eh?! But what about the ceremony and orientation?” A brown-haired girl called out.

“Indeed! To leave now would be unbecoming of UA students!” Agreed a boy with glasses, waving his hands up and down.

Their teacher remained stoic. “UA is known for it's freelance teaching, meaning teachers can teach as we see fit. Matriculation is a waste of time, so we're going back to class. Once there, I'm passing out gym uniforms and we're heading to the field.”

A sadistic smirk grew on his unshaven face.

“We're having a quirk assessment.”

Chapter End Notes

Oh boy, quirk assessment time! Time to show off how much our boys have improved! Plus, you'll find out who replaced McSplodey in 1-A.

Nedzu and Aizawa are serious about caring for the PH class, and anyone who doesn't see it yet will find out soon...

As for the signing, I took sign language for three years in high school, so I wrote those sentences like how they're signed - i.e. a lot of the rules and conventions for spoken English don't apply to ASL (words like 'the' for example). If you're having trouble understanding those conversations, let me know and I'll gladly translate for you.

Fun fact: ASL is actually closer to French than English, because it was developed by a Frenchman named Laurent Clerc, who originally taught his American deaf students in old French signs.

Anyways, I gotta do school and write the next chapter.

Have a lovely day!
Alright, quirk assessment time! Y'all ready for this? We're about to see how 1-A reacts to our boys, and who took Bakugou's spot. We'll also begin seeing some of the differences between the PH and standard courses. Shouto just wants to support his friend. Aizawa just wants to love on his kids. 1-A just want to know what the heck is going on. Implementing a new system never goes without a hitch - making waves also rocks boats, after all.

WARNING: This chapter contains gratuitous amounts of Dadzawa and platonic TodoDeku fluff. Reader discretion is advised.

It seemed everything was different for Pre-Heroics students.

In the changing room, there was a small section of lockers apart from the others that, once again, had engraved nameplates on them, instead of numbers like the others. Next to the lockers was a couple of private changing stalls with dark green curtains and a sign labeling them as “Reserved for Pre-Heroics”. Izuku seemed quite happy with the inclusion; I guess he's still nervous about changing in front of strangers. Nedzu was apparently really pushing dark green as PH's color - even their uniforms had green accents instead of red.

Shouto would've been concerned if he wanted to keep his enrollment in Pre-Heroics a secret. But what if someone doesn't want their peers to know? I should ask Aizawa-sensei or principal Nedzu. Izuku certainly appeared nervous about it.

“Yo, you guys get your own changing rooms? That's so cool!”

Shouto heard Izuku stop moving behind the curtain for a moment. He turned to see a classmate with black hair and... oddly bulky elbows approaching their corner of the locker room, as the other boys looked on.

“It would appear so. Is that a problem?” He asked cautiously, unsure of the other's intentions.

He shook his head vehemently. “Nah man, not at all! I think it's neat!”

A boy with spiky red hair joined in. “Yeah! It's like you guys are in this super elite club. I'm honestly a little jealous, unmanly as that is.”

That caught him off guard, and Izuku slowly slid out of the changing room in his gym clothes.

The questions and comments kept coming.

“How did you guys get into the program before it was announced?”

“Why are your uniforms different?”
“Is it true you have your own dorms?”

“You two are quite the enigmas, shrouded in a cloak of mysteries and—”

“What're your special classes like?”

Okay, now he was feeling overwhelmed – and if he was stressing out, Izuku must be totally overwhelmed. Time to step in.

“We can answer your questions later, but if we're not on the field in the next minute, we'll have to face Aizawa-sensei's wrath.”

All the boys scrambled out at his warning.

Once everyone was on the field, he could tell they all had questions, but their teacher spoke up before they could ask any.

“Ten minutes. That's how long it took you all to change and meet me here. I expect that to be down to three minutes by the end of term. Now, time for the quirk assessment. In junior high, all your fitness tests were done without quirks; this is illogical. Kendo.”

A ginger-headed girl stepped forward. “Yes sir?”

He tossed her a softball. “What was your score for softball throw in junior high?”

“49 meters, sir.”

“Not bad. Now try it with your quirk.”

Kendo stepped into the chalk circle, and several students were audibly surprised when her hand grew to giant size, completely dwarfing the ball within. She reared the massive appendage back, sending a gust of wind into the class behind her, and pitched. Shouto noticed she threw in such a way that her hand would push air behind the ball; **good technique for a quirk like that.** The ball sailed in the air, and when Aizawa showed the class her score, their jaws dropped.

“362 meters?!!”

“Wow, that looks like fun!”

Their teacher smirked in a fashion that, by now, was very familiar to Izuku and Shouto – Aizawa's signature slightly-sadistic, I'm-about-to-give-you-grief-because-I-can smile. **They're in for it now.**

“Fun', you say? Fine. Whoever takes last place overall will face expulsion.”

“What?!”

“Expulsion?! It's the first day!!”

Aizawa relished in the despair for a moment, before turning to the two Pre-Heroics students. “Shouto, Izuku – this will be just like PF. Do your best and you pass.” They both nodded, Izuku clearly glad for the lessened pressure, before another classmate spoke up.

“What?! The special ed kids just have to 'do their best' and won't be expelled? How's that fair?”
Izuku's cheerfulness faded, and their teacher's eyebrow visibly ticked. He whirled around to face the kid who spoke – a really short boy with purple balls on his head. Shouto already didn't like him; he'd been looking for something in the locker room with a creepy smile, kept eyeing his female classmates like meat, and now insulted both him and Izuku. It seemed Aizawa-sensei was of a similar mind.

“Life isn't fair, and these two know that better than most – that's what Pre-Heroics is for. I already know they have potential, and they've already shown me their willingness to develop it. You all haven't. So either suck it up and show me what you've got, or get your stuff and leave.”

The kid mumbled something about 'spoiled' and 'acting out for attention' before their teacher's glare shut him up. “Anyone else have something to say about how I teach the Pre-Heroics kids? No? Good. First up is Aoyama, Ashido, and Asui for the 50-meter dash.”

Aizawa-sensei had them all do the dash in groups of three, called in alphabetical order, except for Shouto and Izuku. “Last for the dash is PH. Shouto, Izuku. Give it your all.” They lined up side by side, gave a fist bump (their way of silently promising to do their best), and at the call of “Go”, took off. Shouto skated on his ice, while Izuku simply sprinted. “Shouto, 3.6 seconds. Izuku, 5.1. You've improved a lot.” Their teacher smiled, and ruffled Izuku's hair – who absolutely beamed at the attention. That was one thing they'd learned early on: Izuku was starved for affection, and blossomed with positive reinforcement.

Shouto thought he heard a cry of “he acts so different for them!” from his classmates in regards to their homeroom teacher.

The tests continued much like this, with Shouto excelling in quite a few tests with his ice (he wasn't quite ready to use his fire for something like this yet), and Izuku completing the tests normally with average scores. He could hear mutterings of 'what's his quirk?' and 'why hasn't he used it?', confused as to Izuku's lack of an obvious quirk. *We gotta fix that, before someone accuses him of being quirkless.* After all, that was what led Izuku to be bullied in the first place, and Shouto was not going to let that happen again.

When it was time for Izuku's ball throw, he signed 'You want show quirk? Me think your quirk help throw. Ball gone.' Izuku's eyes lit up, and he nodded before stepping in the circle. He missed Aizawa's secret thumbs-up to Shouto.

Everyone watched as Izuku held the softball in his hand, before it simply vanished. Shouto and Aizawa both smirked at the astounded gasps of the class.

“Wait, when did he throw it?”

“Where'd it go?”

“What's his score?”

Their teacher turned the screen around to show ERROR. “Considering it's now on a separate plane of existence, I'll count that as infinity.”

“What?!!”

Izuku smiled and brought the ball back, tossing it to their teacher.

Shouto was pretty sure his classmates were going into hysterics.

It was pretty hilarious.
When Aizawa-sensei revealed the results, Shouto had come in second while Izuku was last – and clearly upset about it. He could see that grape-headed kid (Mineta, if he remembered correctly) was preparing to say something, and Shouto was about to step in, when his teacher squatted down next to Izuku.

“It's okay that you came in last, Izuku.” He put a hand on his shoulder, as Izuku sniffed, about to cry. “These kids have had a lot more practice than you have. It just means you need to keep working hard. Do you remember the scores you got the first time we did this?” A sniffle and nod. “And you've improved in every test. Heck, I bet if we compared how much improvement everyone's made in the last year, you'd have them all beat! Either way, I can tell you gave it your all, and I couldn't be prouder of you.” Izuku, openly crying at this point, wrapped his arms around the first teacher who had ever believed in him, and mouthed a silent “thank you”.

Everyone could only stare in shock as the teacher who had just threatened expulsion hugged the crying boy back.

Chapter End Notes

Aaahhh the Dadzawa is too strong! It's overpowering my ability to wreak havoc!! That last scene gave me so many warm-fuzzies. My American self is not super familiar with the metric system or these fitness tests (we do different ones here), so if there's a number here where you think "wow, that's not realistic at all", please let me know. I don't want to ruin your immersion because of my ignorance. Mineta, I know in canon you're improving, but I really don't want to write too much of you. Plus, like Bakugou, it kinda drives me nuts when you're an absolute jerk and nothing comes of it - everyone just moves on and pretends it didn't happen. I'm a big proponent of forgiveness, but forgiveness and reconciliation are two different things, as is pretending it never happened. So, be ready for consequences. P.S. When did my chapters start getting so long? I started at each being 2-3 pages, and now I'm running 4 pages all the time. P.P.S I might get another chapter up today! It depends on how quickly I can write it. Either way, see you then!
I'm back! I wanted to update yesterday, but ended up moving stuff for my grandparents, watching my sister finally beat Persona 5, and going to a wedding, so double update, anyone?

Another chapter of fluff coming your way! Seriously, this PH thing is making it really hard to write any angst. It'll come back eventually, once I get this fic back under control; until then, fluff for days.

How will class 1-A react to the differences between them and the Pre-Heroes? Will they be understanding, or judgemental? Can Shouto and Izuku keep it together? And what is this interesting conversation Aizawa's about to have?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

This kid was going to ruin his reputation.

When he'd first met Izuku, Shota was skeptical. The kid was a shoplifter who'd given up on the world; not the sort of person you really want to hang out with. But then he learned more about him, and realized he hadn't given up on the world – the world had given up on him. Shota got to know him more (whether by choice or not is up for debate), and saw a side of Izuku he hadn't before. Peeking through that scared, closed-off front was a bright, intelligent, endearing child, just waiting to astound the world that tried to snuff him out. He watched the kid learn and grow and fight back against his fears, working hard for his future. Suffice it to say, he'd grown attached.

It was a similar story for the Todoroki boy (who was now called Shouto by all the staff to help him feel distinguished from his father); he'd more or less stumbled into Shota's life, wanting to save his dear friend. Then of course Shota noticed the kid had his own problems. The boy was originally solely focused on Izuku, but with the Pre-Heroics program, he was paying attention to his own emotional needs too. He knew Shouto'd been living a life not his own for many years, so to see him becoming his own person was a beautiful thing.

All this meant he couldn't help but spoil the two problem children. At this rate, he could kiss his hard-earned reputation goodbye.

*I'll just have to change it from 'don't mess with me' to 'don't mess with me or my PH kids'.*

Once Izuku released him, eyes still moist, he stood up and turned to the gobsmacked class. “No one's getting expelled today. But be warned: if at any point I think you're not giving it your all, or have lost your potential, I won't hesitate to boot you out of the hero course. There's plenty of capable students in Gen. Ed who'd love to take your spot, so guard it well. The next three years are going to be grueling, pushing you to your limit again and again; if you can take it, then by graduation you'll be capable pros. If not, you can show yourself out.” He summoned his best fear-inducing smirk. “Welcome to the hero course. Go change, grab a syllabus, and head home. Shouto, Izuku.” The two looked up at him. “We'll be doing Physical Fitness later today, so don't worry about showering. Once you're changed, meet me in the Pre-Heroics classroom.”
A “Yes sir” from Shouto and a nod from Izuku, and Shota left for the school. **Now, what does Nedzu have planned for Intellectual Proficiency today?**

Once their teacher was out of sight, the class erupted.

“Dude, you sent the ball to another dimension?! So manly!”

“Awww, it was so cute when he hugged you!”

“Are you feeling okay? Here, let me make you some tissues.”

“Everyone! Sensei said to get changed! As UA students, we must not loiter about!”

“It's okay Iida-kun! School's done for today, so it's fine to socialize a bit.”

“So what is your quirk exactly?”

*They need to calm down before Izuku gets overwhelmed.*

Shouto put his hands up in a placating gesture, and addressed the class. “I understand you all are curious, but we would appreciate it if you calmed down. We'll be glad to answer your questions, but not if you're overbearing.” That seemed to snap them out of it, as the flood of words died down. Several even had a sheepish expression. He turned to Izuku. 'You ready meet them? Not ready o-k, meet future.'

'Me ready, if you stay.'

'Yes. Me need interpret.' He smiled.

Izuku smiled back. 'True, true. Me happy you here.'

Shouto blushed. 'Same.'

He turned back to the class, who seemed completely lost at their silent conversation (except for a large, quiet boy in the back, who was smiling and blushing). “First, I'll introduce us. My name is Todoroki Shouto, though I prefer to go by my given name. This is my close friend Izuku; he doesn't like to talk, so don't ask him to. He communicates through sign, writing, or text. If you need an interpreter, I can, and Aizawa-sensei can as well. We'll take some questions now, though we won't answer anything we're uncomfortable with.”

“Oh! Oh! I have one!” A pink-skinned girl had her hand in the air, jumping up and down. “What's your quirks?”

“Mine is called Half-Cold, Half-Hot. I can produce ice from my right side and fire from my left, though I'm still working on controlling my fire, so I don't use it much.” He looked to Izuku for permission, and with his nod, continued. “Izuku's is called Boundless. He has access to a pocket dimension he controls with his thoughts. When the ball disappeared, that was him sending it to Boundless.”

His explanation was met with oohs and aahs.

The Kendo girl was next to speak up. “How long have you two known Aizawa-sensei?”

“I met him at the recommendation exam, Izuku met him a few weeks later. He's one of the teachers
for Pre-Heroics. He leads Physical Fitness, or PF, and helps with Social Essentials, SE. He also fills in for principal Nedzu, who teaches Intellectual Proficiency, or IP, when he's busy. Basically, by this point we both know him rather well.”

The bulky boy was next, though he signed rather than spoke. ‘p-h, like what?’

*So he knows sign too, and might be a selective mute like Izuku.*

“Pre-Heroics is certainly not for everyone, but it's been a huge help for me and Izuku. As they said in the assembly, it's designed to help prepare you for hero work when a regular heroics course isn't enough. When we started several months ago, I had been suppressing my fire, vowing to never use it. Now, I'm slowly learning to accept it as a part of myself, and training to use it effectively to save people; I don't know who I would've become if I hadn't joined, but I don't think I'd like him very much. As for Izuku, it's helped him a lot too, likely even more than myself, but that's his story to tell when he's ready. Feel free to ask us about stuff later, but right now we should go change. Izuku and I still have class, after all.”

By the end of his speech, quite a few classmates were in tears, including most of the girls and a handful of boys.

It was a beautiful moment, until Mineta ruined it.

“Are you two really so weak and stupid you need to be babied? Or are you just pretending so you can be pampered and hog all the teachers' attention?”

A stunned silence passed over the class, before cries of indignation rang out.

“Hey man, not cool!”

“Yeah, lay off!”

“What's your deal, dude?!”

“There must be great darkness within you. Have you no sympathy?”

Shouto was very glad for the things he'd learned from the internet and SE, as it prevented him from encasing the boy in a glacier. He steepled his hands together in front of his face and closed his eyes. *Deep breaths. You are better than your father. You are allowed to feel angry, but express your anger in healthy ways. Do not let your heart take over your mind.* Once he was sure he wouldn't yell the moment he opened his mouth, he turned to his friend. “Izuku.” It showed how much he had grown as well, when Shouto saw no tears on Izuku's face – though his hands, clenched in fists, were shaking. *His first day back at school, and he's already being picked on. I hope this won't discourage him.* “It's okay. You and I and Nedzu and Aizawa all know that's not true. You go ahead, get changed, and head to class. I'll handle this.” Izuku nodded, and disappeared.

With his shaken friend out of the situation, Shouto returned his attention to the sneering Mineta.

The rest of the class was once again silent, waiting to see his reaction.

“I don't know what makes you think you can say that when you don't know a thing about us. You don't know what we've been through, what we've had to overcome. You don't know that the old me would've snapped and attacked you for saying that. You don't know how brave Izuku is for even *being here*, when the last time he went to school he was endlessly *tormented by everyone around him*, including someone who used to be his friend. So we have flaws. Last I checked, everyone
does. Pre-Heroics isn't for people who need help because they're weak. It's for people who need help because they're strong enough to see those flaws and brave enough to admit they can't fix them alone. I don't need you to like us. I need you to stop talking like you understand us, when clearly you don't. And if something that comes out of your mouth causes my best friend to pull away from the help he needs...” He stepped closer to the other, and glared into his eyes. “I will do everything in my power to hold you responsible.”

With that, he stormed off, hoping to be changed and out of the locker room before anyone else arrived.

This was definitely going to be a long year.

Principal Nedzu had arrived to lead IP a few minutes ago, so Shota had just been relieved to do some necessary paperwork – but not before Shouto had arrived, several minutes late, and informed him that Mineta had once again insulted him and Izuku, which Izuku confirmed.

Shota had noticed his lecherous gaze towards the female students too, so he was already on thin ice.

I should ask the other teachers how their students reacted to the Pre-Heroics announcement tomorrow.

He was just thinking about how best to ask, when a hesitant knock caught his attention. He opened the door to find a purple-haired kid with dark eyebags he recognized from the entrance exam. Zero points, and no signs of quirk usage; must be non-physical. A shame. “Can I help you?”

The kid rubbed the back of his neck nervously. “Are you Aizawa-sensei?”

“Yes. Why?”

He looked to the floor, and shuffled his feet. “I'm... Shinsou Hitoshi, in class 1-C, and...”

“Well?”

“...And I'm interested in joining Pre-Heroics.”

Chapter End Notes

Aaaand the first new applicant for PH is.... *drumroll* Shinsou Hitoshi! Geez kid, you work fast. Good thing I can write fast.
Gah, too much fluff! I need to get back to the angst, but at this rate it won't happen for several more chapters! Maybe I'll just have to save it up, give you tons of fluff, then BAM! Mega-angst!!
Next chapter is Shinsou's introduction to our boys, so get ready for that!
“I'm interested in joining Pre-Heroics.”

To say Shota was surprised would be a bit of an understatement.

He hadn't expected someone to come up to him about PH the day it was announced. He figured it would take some time for people to think it over, and even then most of the first few applicants would likely be 1-A kids, since they'd be interacting with Shouto and Izuku the most. But Shinsou was here already, a 1-C student who's probably never met either of the PH boys.

He should probably stop standing there gawking and see what the kid has to say.

“...Alright. Follow me.”

He led Shinsou down the hall to the guidance counselor's office. “Hound Dog, we're borrowing your office.” Said hero/counselor made a gruff sound of approval as the two walked past him and into the private office. When the staff had been informed of the Pre-Heroics program, it was agreed that Hound Dog's office would be available for these discussions because of it's privacy (assuming he wasn't with a student himself).

Shinsou, whose tired gaze rivaled his own, slumped into a free chair across from the desk while Shota sat next to him. I am not getting dog fur all over my hero costume by sitting in his chair. Once they were both settled, he began the process he designed.

“Okay kid. This may be hard, but I need you to tell me why you believe you should enroll in Pre-Heroics.”

Shinsou nodded, and with a little hesitation laid out his story.

“I’ve wanted to be a hero pretty much my whole life. I still do. I even tried for the hero course exam, but I'm useless against robots. My quirk is... villainous. Ever since it manifested I've been told time after time that my quirk makes me a villain, that I could never be a hero. I want to help people, and I want to prove to them that I can be a hero, despite my quirk. You said this morning that Pre-Heroics is for people who want to be heroes but need some extra help; the entrance exam
made me realize I need that help.”

There was clearly a lot of emotional baggage here. He seemed to have a decent reason to seek him out, too. *Now to see if PH is what he needs.* “I see. And what is your quirk?”

A look of fear flashed across his face, before he returned to his blank facade (this did not go unnoticed). “......Brainwashing. I can control people who verbally respond to me.” Shota could tell he expected to be shot down, or vilified, or pointedly ignored. *Too bad I'm not gonna do any of that.*

“That sounds incredibly useful for heroics, and not at all villainous.”

“Yeah yeah, I know... wait what?”

“Over the span of my career, I've had a lot of cases that would've been a lot easier if I could just tell the villain to surrender, or release the hostage, or even take out his accomplices. You could end fights before they began, with absolutely no collateral damage; trust me kid, your quirk has great potential.”

Shinsou looked at him like he'd hung the stars in the sky, before shaking his head and frowning. “You don't understand! I could tell people to commit crimes! To kill each other! I could tell heroes to help the villains!”

“Have you?”

“No. I would never.”

“Then you're not a villain. Simple as that.”

Yep, lots of emotional baggage. Shinsou looked like he needed to beef up a bit too – he was too scrawny to be fit enough for hero work. So far, it seemed Shinsou had come to the right place. He was checking all of Shota's mental boxes for PH qualifications: *severe mental, physical, and/or emotional needs* – check. *Willingness to join* – check.

“One more question: how far are you willing to go to become a hero? If we give you the chance, will you be able to put in the effort?”

Shinsou looked him dead in the eye. “I'll gladly do whatever it takes.”

*Strong work ethic* – check. *And lastly, compatibility with the program and it's members – one way to find out.*

“Good. Come on.”

His serious face morphed into confusion. “Uh, where are we going?”

“There's one last thing I need to see before I decide to enroll you or not. We're going to the Pre-Heroics classroom.”

*Izuku and Shouto should be in here, doing IP right now. Time to see how Shinsou acts around them, and what he thinks of their schedules.*

With Shinsou behind him, he knocked on the door to the Pre-Heroics classroom. “Boys, it's Aizawa. I've got a potential pre-hero I'd like you to meet. Mind if we come in?” A moment of quiet
(Shouto probably waiting for Izuku's approval), before Shouto called out “We're open.”

He opened the door (his staff ID was recognized by the electronic lock just like the dark green ties) to see his two Problem Children hard at work, and Nedzu grading yesterday’s assignments. They all turned to the new face, who was shifting nervously again.

“Oh, Aizawa! A prospective pre-hero already? You certainly work fast.”

“Can it, Nedzu. He came to me. Boys, this is Shinsou Hitoshi.”

The problem children waved. “Nice to meet you. I'm Shouto, and this is Izuku.”

“Nice to meet you too. If you don't mind me asking, why did you say you were ‘open’? I thought the door was electronically locked at all times.”

Shota was about to answer, but Nedzu beat him to it. “That's one of our code words we established! We want the Pre-Heroics facilities to be safe places for our Pre-Heroics students, who have special needs that must be accommodated. Hence, we recently established a list of code words and regulations. One regulation is to always announce oneself before entering this room, and if someone is in here, do not enter without their permission. Young Shouto, would you mind explaining the code words to our guest?”

The bi-colored boy nodded. “Of course. Sometimes our needs can be hard to put into words, so we came up with a bunch of code words to quickly and easily explain how we're feeling. For instance, 'open' is short for 'I'm open to you', meaning I'm okay with your presence, or you're welcome to come in. If I wasn't, I'd say I'm ‘closed’.”

Shota wished he could get away with that all the time. I need to tell Hizashi that one, so when he's about to burst my eardrum or I need a nap I can just say 'closed' and leave it at that.

The awestruck look on Shinsou's face showed he felt similarly. “That's cool. So you can just say that you're closed, and people will leave you alone? Just like that?”

“That's the idea. It's still pretty new, so no one outside this room knows it yet.”

Shota nodded. “We'll be teaching the code words to everyone involved with Pre-Heroics and it's members, so they can be used throughout the school. Nedzu, do you mind if they take a break to talk with Shinsou about the course?”

By the time they were done telling Shinsou about PH, both he and Nedzu were convinced he should join, and the principal was already writing up curriculum for him. The boys all got along too, especially Shinsou and Izuku (it made sense, since their stories shared certain factors – they clearly sympathized with each other a lot). The purple-haired boy left UA with a smile on his face, and a promise that he'd receive his new green tie within the week.

Now it was time for him to go back to paperwork – as much as he didn't want to – but before he left, one hand ruffled dark green hair and the other red-and-white hair. “You both did really good today. Izuku, you met a lot of new people, and didn't let your fear take over. Shouto, you did a great job communicating, and handled your anger well. I'd definitely call that a 'pass' for SE for both of you. How're you feeling?”

“I'm still a bit angry at Mineta, but as long as he doesn't insult us again I think I can forgive him. Other than that, our class seems nice and I'd like to get to know them better.”
'Tired. Scared past. Many many new person. Shouchan with me, feel better.'

Shota smiled at the name sign Izuku had come up with – an S he tapped on each side of his chest, to symbolize his friend's half-and-half quirk and appearance. Shota's was an A for Aizawa that swept in an arc by the neck for his capture gear; Nedzu was the sign for 'mouse' with an N. Izuku's was an I moved in a circle over the heart. That had been a fun day for the boys, coming up with name signs for all sorts of things. The memory of their excitement warmed his heart.

These two were making him go soft.

“I'm glad. Now finish your assignments – I won't have you two slacking behind, and we've still got training to do. Your scores today were certainly improvements, but there's still lots to do. Once Nedzu relieves you, get changed and start your warm-ups. I'll meet you at the gym.”

“Yes sir!”

*thumbs up*

Definitely going soft.

Chapter End Notes

Welcome to Pre-Heroics Hitoshi! I wonder who else is going to join... ;)
Man, Shouto's getting pretty good at the whole 'communication' thing. I'm so proud!
And Izuku met so many people today and didn't run away (yet)! I wonder what could possibly ruin this success streak of theirs... Oh wait! The author can.
Brace yourselves. I don't know when it's gonna happen, but it's coming.
So my brain won't stop thinking up ideas. The other day I was thinking about one of my favorite animes/graphic novel series, Mahouka Koukou No Rettosei (The Irregular at Magic High School) and thought "Oh man, what if Izuku was basically Shiba Tatsuya?" Can my brain please just focus on the fic at hand?
TTFN!
Greetings everyone!
So this chapter was supposed to cover up to, if not including, the battle trial at the end of the day. It barely made it to lunch, because every time my brain says "let's progress the plot!" my hands go "Sure, but first we're gonna put in a ton of extra characterization and whoops! This chapter's super long now. Better save that plot progression for next time ;)".
Next chapter's about halfway done, but I probably won't get the chance to update again today. I'll try and give you all a double tomorrow.
Second day of school! This time we get to see into Izuku's point of view, and how he's feeling. Shouchan and Social Essentials are bringing him out of his shell, but will a chance encounter change that?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It took Dek – Izuku, his name is Izuku – a moment to realize that annoying sound was his alarm and he was supposed to get up for school.

Yesterday was absolutely exhausting. There were so many kids in his class, so energetic and outgoing and loud (it's okay to be loud); he was almost overwhelmed, and very glad it was only a half-day because of the matriculation ceremony. Then he met Hitochan, who was joining Pre-Heroics! He seemed nice, if a bit grumpy (like Aizawa-sensei), and his quirk was so cool! Why anyone thought it was villainous was beyond him.

No one ever needed to brainwash him to hurt him before.

As tiring as yesterday was, today would be even longer. It was their first normal day, after all. Dek-Izuku would have to be with his class most of the morning, if he remembered correctly. I should probably make sure. Once he was clad in his uniform and dark green tie (as well as he could tie it, at least), he pulled out his individualized schedule Nedzu had given him. I'm with 1-A all morning except for English, in P-H after lunch, then back with 1-A for Foundational Hero Studies.

In other words, it was going to be a long day.

D-Izuku warped to Shouchan's room once he was ready for school. His friend was packing his supplies in his bag, but he stopped when he saw his tie; Shouchan sighed fondly as he fixed it. With the tie corrected, they conversed in sign (so Enji wouldn't hear them) as Shouchan finished getting ready.

'You need learn tie tie.'

'Me learn why? You tie.'

He playfully smacked his head.
‘O-k o-k, you teach me?’

‘Yes, future.’

‘Thank-you!’

‘Me father ask live d-o-r-m-s yesterday. He yes!’

Shouchan’s father agreed to let him stay in the dorms?! That was great! He was so lonely when he woke up this morning, but if Shouchan was his neighbor... He did the sign for applause and hugged his friend, a massive smile on his face.

Shouchan would be safe in the dorms, and they’d be with each other all the time.

Once they were both ready, he took Shouchan’s hand and popped into Boundless. He began materializing breakfast for them (neither of them knew how to cook, so it was fractal omelets and real protein bars), and when they sat down at his fractal home’s table, Shouchan began the conversation.

“How are you feeling about today, Izuku?”

_That sounds like something Aizawa-sensei would ask._ “A little nervous, but nothing too bad. Everyone seemed nice yesterday – I mean, everyone except Mineta – but they were a little overwhelming.”

“I understand that. It was a lot to take in all at once; even I was feeling overwhelmed.”

“You were? You handled it so well, talking with them like that.”

He laughed. “Yeah, thanks to SE. They’ve had me working on my communication skills along with my fire.”

“Cool! You’re getting so much stronger, Shouchan.”

“You are too, Izuku.” He blushed, as his friend smiled fondly at him. “I mean, when we first met Aizawa-sensei and the principal, you wouldn’t do anything in reality without me. Don’t get me wrong, I love your company! But seeing you manage on your own makes me happy.”

He’s... happy? Why would he be happy?

“...Why?”

Shouchan stopped for a moment, bite of omelet halfway to his open mouth. He seemed to think about his words carefully, before answering “You’re my friend. I want to see you get stronger, braver. I want us to be able to hang out, then when we have to do something else, we can leave while knowing we’ll both be okay on our own.”

_What does that mean?_ “So you...still want to be my friend, and will keep being my friend?”

A look of shock crossed heterochromatic eyes. “Of course I want to keep being friends! It’s _because_ we’re friends that I want you to succeed, to live your own life apart from mine!”

_I don’t understand. Everyone I’ve ever cared for either left me behind, or are always there, ready to be reformed out of fractals. How can someone care for me and leave me at the same time?_
He must have noticed his lack of comprehension, because he tried to clarify his point. “It's like...” He looked at their breakfast. “Eating! It's kinda like eating. You need to eat, and you like to eat, but you don't eat all the time. There are other things you need to do, or want to do, but that doesn't make food any less filling or delicious. If you ate all the time, you'd be overfull, food wouldn't be as good anymore, and you couldn't, say... go swimming! Or sleep! Or anything you can't do while eating.”

“Oookaaaaay...”

Shouchan nodded resolutely. “Relationships are like that. They're great, and good for you, but if you spend all your time with one person, it's not good anymore. You can spend a lot of time together, just not all of it. If you aren't willing to be apart for a while, you lose your own life to the relationship; it's not as great anymore, it's unhealthy for both of you, and you miss out on all the things you can only do without them. There's things you can only do alone, and things you can only do with someone else. Always being together, or always being alone – either way means you miss out on a lot of what life has to offer. You can only have the best experience by having company and alone time.”

“Oh. I think I get it.” But I better keep working on Shou, just in case.

With breakfast finished, Izuku and Shouchan appeared right in the 1-A classroom, three minutes to the bell.

“Eeeeek! When did you two get here?” They had apparently hopped into existence right next to a brunette girl talking with a blue-haired, bespectacled boy.

“Just now. Izuku's quirk is really good for fast travel.”

“You should refrain from scaring your classmates like that! Plus, you are barely on time! As UA students we should strive to all be in class at least ten minutes beforehand!”

The loud twosome startled him a bit, but he supposed he did startle them first. He gave an apologetic smile, and signed 'Sorry. Me appear, don't-know people where.'

“Uhhhh...”

Thankfully, Shouchan interpreted for him. “He said he's sorry. When he uses his quirk to teleport, he only knows where he will appear, not where people are in that area. We didn't mean to scare you – we just weren't aware we'd show up right next to you.”

“Ah, I see! Please excuse my rudeness. I am Iida Tenya.”

“And I'm Uraraka Ochako! Nice to meet you. Shouto and Izuku, right?”

Izuku used the introduction he'd been practicing. 'Hello, my name I-Z-U-K-U, Izuku. Nice meet you.'

“He just introduced himself, and said it's nice to meet you. That's his name sign.” Shouchan did the I in a circle over his heart “It's a sign we came up with so we don't have to fingerspell his name every time. Feel free to use it.” They'd agreed beforehand that other people were allowed to use their name signs. “I'm Shouto, and this is my name sign.” He tapped an S on the left then right of his chest.
“Uwooh, that's so cool!”

Apparently their conversation had been overheard, and now several students were practicing the name signs.

“Come on Izuku, let's get to our seats. Aizawa-sensei should be here any minute.”

Homeroom was over, and next was English. Izuku looked at his schedule – he wasn't ready for high-school level English yet, so he was going to Pre-Heroics for his Beginners English with Nedzu. Shouchan was staying with the class.

He tapped his friend's shoulder. 'Me go-to P-H. English with Nedzu. You stay?'

'Yes. Me want go-to with you, but need stay. You enjoy. See-you later.'

*Shouchan will be okay. I guess a break from class would be nice. He waved and got up, remembering to bring his whiteboard.*

Their neighbor – Yaoyorozu, he remembered – seemed surprised. “Oh! Izuku, correct? Where are you going?”

He took off the cap of his marker, and wrote 'I'm in Pre-Heroics for this class.'

An orange-haired boy read the board as well. “Ehh, you get to skip English Izuku? Gotta say, I'm a bit jealous.”

Well now the whole class was paying attention to him. Great.

He flustered about a bit, before erasing his board and writing 'Not skipyng! I'm not very good at Eenglich, far behind. So Nedzu teaches me.'

“Not very good at Japanese either apparently.” De- Izuku flushed in shame at Mineta's comment. *He doesn't understand. Shouchan said to not let his words stop me. He said I should stand up for myself.*

'I'm still learning, getting better. Are you?'

“.........Ooooooh snap!”

“What a manly comeback!”

“Nice.”

With words of encouragement from his classmates, Izuku walked to Pre-Heroics with a small smile on his face.

They'd just finished math (Ectoplasm-sensei said he could be his assistant!) when the lunch bell rang.

Suddenly, Izuku found himself surrounded by classmates. “Hey, can we eat lunch with you guys?”

He stopped breathing for a second, before he felt a familiar shoulder tap. Blue and gray eyes
watched him with concern, as hot and cold hands began to sign.

'They want eat with you-and-me. Me stay. Open? Closed?'

He took deep breaths and steeled his nerves. 'Open.'

Shouchan beamed at him, before turning to their classmates and saying “Okay. Should we eat here, or the cafeteria?”

A few of the more situationally-aware students looked hesitant; Kendo finally spoke what was on their mind. “Would the cafeteria be okay? We understand if that's too much right now.”

*They care about how we feel?*

“Thanks for the concern, but it's fine. There's a special table blocked off from the others specifically for Pre-Heroes and their friends. It's nice and private, so we'd be comfortable there.”

That's how several students from 1-A found themselves walking down a little-used staircase to the back of the cafeteria, where a secluded table labeled 'Reserved for Pre-Heroics' waited.

Izuku was excited to see Hitochan already there as they approached. He looked up and waved, but paused when he saw the group of kids behind him and Shouchan, who broke the stalemate. “Hello, Hitoshi. We had some classmates who want to get to know us better. Are you open?”

The group behind him waved, but thankfully didn't approach. They hadn't been told of the code words or policies put in place for Pre-Heroes yet, but they seemed to be following Shouchan's lead.

*Thank goodness. I don't want to make Hitochan uncomfortable when he just joined.*

“Ummm, sure.”

Before they could sit down, an incredibly loud voice called out.

“Heeeey, Todoroki!!! I found you!!”

**Chapter End Notes**

Teeheehee, anyone think I was referring to Bakugou in the opening note? I totally wasn't teasing that on purpose...(I totally was. It's coming. Soon.)

Those of you who called Inasa staying at UA, you are correct! Winners winners chicken dinners! In the story, he's in 1-B because he was only average on the knowledge test. The real reasons are because 1. I wanted Yaomomo in 1-A 2. I didn't want three recommendation students in one class 3. I don't want to write that many exclamation points all the time 4. He and Izuku... well, you'll see a bit of that in the next chapter. So yeah, 1-B. I feel sorry for Blood King - Bakugou, Inasa, and Monoma? That's one tough class.
Next chapter we see our first Foundational Heroics class! Some of you are excited to see how Izuku reacts to All Might. I wonder how that's gonna go down >:D
Have a wonderful day! Or night! Or whichever unit of time you prefer!
Trial

Chapter Notes

Watashi wa...KITA!
I tried to update this morning, but it's been established that I'm the resident expert when it comes to interpreting visual instructions, so I got to put together two IKEA shelving units. Then I read a book, and took a nap. So here we are.
I just really want to get through the battle trial already. I'm writing it right now, so it should be done soon, but I wanted to get it done two chapters ago! Gah!
Well, enjoy this chapter, I guess.
This chapter started on the 100th page of the document I'm writing this in. I've never written 100 pages of ANYTHING in my life before.
Izuku is about to meet Inasa, a literal whirlwind of a person. How will he react to Shouchan's other friend? How about his introduction to All Might? The Battle Trial? The author's failure to stick to her own mental plans?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Heeeey, Todoroki!!! I found you!!”

There was a sudden gust of wind, and Shouchan was being hugged by someone Izuku had never seen before. Who is that? And why does he know Shouchan?

“It's been so long!! I'm glad you made it in!!! Who am I kidding, I knew you'd make it in!!”

Shouchan's brain restarted, and he finally responded to the boy who had lifted him up and was swinging him side to side in the hug. “Oh, we met at the recommendation exam, correct? It was... Inasa?”

“Correct!! I'm so glad you remembered me! What are you doing all the way back here?”

“This is the Pre-Heroics table. It's secluded, which makes it more comfortable and emotionally safe for us.”

“Pre-Heroics? Oh yeah, they talked about that yesterday morning! Why are we sitting here though?!!”

Izuku, Shouchan, and Hitochan all looked to each other, getting the silent permission to share their mutual situation.

Hitochan was the one to voice it. “Because we're Pre-Heroics students.”

Everyone looked to the insomniac. While the 1-A students were busy interrogating him (“You're a Pre-Hero too?” “Where's your tie?” “I just joined yesterday. I'll get mine in a few days.”), Inasa stared at Shouchan's dark green tie, stunned.

“You're...a Pre-Heroics student? I thought you were in 1-A?”
“I'm in both. 1-A is my homeroom, and I spend most of the day with them; I just have a few periods and supplemental courses that are PH only.”

Everyone left the duo standing there as they sat down and continued talking to Hitochan. Izuku sat down as well, but he kept his ear on the suddenly quiet conversation behind him. *I don't really like him. I need to make sure he doesn't hurt Shouchan's feelings.*

“Why are you in Pre-Heroics? You seemed so strong at the exam.”

“I'm strong physically, but there are parts of me that I need help to strengthen. As Aizawa-sensei said yesterday, Pre-Heroics isn't for people who are weak; it's for people like me who need specialized care and attention to overcome our hardships. The hero I want to be is someone I can't become without a little outside assistance.”

A moment of silence. *Inasa must be processing what Shouchan said. You better not insult him again.*

“Oh! I see!! That's so cool!! You're working hard to be a great hero, huh?!!”

“Yes. Can I eat my lunch now? I'll have to ask my fellow Pre-Heroes if you can join us, but I'm sure they'll say yes.”

“That's okay!! I'm going to sit with my 1-B classmates and get to know them better!! I just wanted to say hi!!! BYE!!!!!!”

And with that, Inasa almost (or perhaps, literally) flew out of the PH nook and into the crowded cafeteria. Izuku brought his focus back to the table, only to find half of his class with bentos out, and the other half standing up, no doubt to go get their own lunch. Once Shouchan sat down, he addressed his coursemates.

“I'll place the order for Lunch Rush. What would you two like?”

“Curry.”

'B-U-R-G-E-R please'

Shouchan pulled over a small console, that lit up when it was in front of him. He typed in their orders; a short chime sounded, before a digital voice spoke from the console “Your order has been placed, and will be delivered to you in five to ten minutes. Thank you.”

Hitochan laughed at the astounded expression of the 1-A students still at the table, chopsticks in the air and jaws hanging open.

The invisible girl was the first to get over her shock. “You guys get to order your food and have it delivered? That's so cool! I'm jealous!”

Izuku pulled out his board and wrote ' *Nedzu and Lunch Rosh know lots of pepple is scary. We can ordur so we don't have to go in lyne.* '

He showed the table, and a girl with long green hair spoke. “That's understandable, kero. It's only natural you'd want to avoid crowds if they make you nervous.”

Uraraka continued for her. “Yeah! That's super considerate of UA. It seems they're doing all sorts of things to help you guys out.”
Hitochan smiled. “That is the point of PH, after all.”

Izuku and Shouchan were heading back to 1-A. They'd just finished an IP period together (1-A had modern literature, and neither of them were very good at that), and now it was time for 1-A's last class: Foundational Heroics. When they entered the classroom, quite a few students greeted them.

“Welcome back!”

“You guys joinin' us for Heroics?”

“How was IP?”

They had barely sat down when... “I am...”

All Might burst through the door. “coming through the door like a normal person!”

_I don't think that's normal._

Everyone else, even Shouchan, seemed awfully excited to have All Might teaching Foundational Heroics. Izuku had been obsessed with the hero when he was little, before his mom died and... _life_ just kinda stopped being great.

He supposed it was kinda cool to have the #1 hero teaching him.

All Might-sensei told them to change into their hero costumes, before hitting a button that opened a panel on the wall, revealing a rack full of suitcases. Two of them were a dark green.

When they had grabbed their cases and made it to the changing room, they saw that the locker next to Shouchan's had 'Hitoshi' engraved on it now. _Nedzu sure works quick_. Izuku went into a changing stall, and opened his case.

His costume was pretty simple (he hadn't thought about a hero costume until only a few weeks ago), but it would serve it's purpose well enough, he supposed. It was a lavender jumpsuit, with pearlescent highlights down his arms and legs, as well as around the logo on his chest; the logo he'd designed was a mass of triangles in a spiral, colored in pale greens, bright blues, and deep purples – it reminded him of the fractals of Boundless. He had a silver belt (he didn't need pockets when Boundless held everything he needed) with matching boots and gloves. Topping it all off was a lavender visor and metal mouthguard, complete with respirator, that hung around his neck.

He had been assured that the entire costume was fireproof.

“Ooohh, you're costume is so colorful! I love it! Why those colors though?”

Uraraka approached him as soon as he made it to the training grounds. Shouchan, whose costume was a dark blue shirt and pants, with white boots and a brown belt, was behind him. It was simple, but suitable. _Maybe I should help him come up with something a little more distinct._ Izuku was about to answer Uraraka when Shouchan beat him to it.

“It's based off the natural colors and patterns of Boundless, right?”

'Correct!'
"Boundless...that's your quirk right? That other dimension you control, or something?"

He nodded. 'Me like your clothes. Pretty pretty. Like space person.'

"He likes your costume too, says it's very pretty and looks like an astronaut."

She beamed at both of them. "Thanks!" She's nice.

Before they could continue their conversation, All Might-sensei called for everyone's attention, and next to him was...

"Eh, Aizawa-sensei? Are you teaching Foundational Heroics too?"

Said man glared at his class, irritation evident on his face. "NO. I've got enough on my plate. I'm only here today because somebody missed the staff-wide briefing on teaching the Pre-Heroics students; Nedzu told me to come make sure that somebody doesn't mess up egregiously, and fill him in on what he missed."

All Might coughed into his fist, obviously embarrassed at being called out like that. "I told you, there was a robbery! I couldn't just leave it!"

"There were several pros on the scene already, and they had the situation handled. And cough into your elbow, not your hand. It's unsanitary."

Izuku silently chuckled at the unfortunate target of Aizawa's ire.

Thoroughly admonished, All Might finally gathered himself and began class. "Greetings, future heroes! You all look wonderful in your costumes! Today, we'll be doing indoor team battles!"

Aizawa-sensei's glare was enough to silence the class that was on the verge of asking a million questions. All Might nodded in thanks to his coworker, and continued the explanation. Teams of two, one villain and one hero, battle it out over possession of a nuclear weapon. Heroes must capture both villains or touch the weapon within the time limit to win, while villains must either capture both heroes or keep control of the weapon until time runs out. Teams would be decided by lot.

Sounds fun. I wonder who my partner will be.

"On team A, we have Kirishima and Ashido! Team B, Iida and Sero! Team C, Hagakure and Tokoyami! Team D, Midori-""

"Pre-Heroes are called by their given name unless otherwise specified," Aizawa cut in.

"Oh, sorry. Ahem. As I was saying, team D, Izuku and Mineta."

"Nope, vetoed."

Shouchan spoke up as well. "I second that veto."

"I...see. Very well, let's try again. Team D, Izuku and Kendo."

Phew, that was close.

Seems he wasn't the only one relieved, as he overheard Mineta quietly say "At least I won't be paired with a sissy."
That stung a little. *At least I'm not paired with a jerk. Why does he have to say those mean things about us?* Before the thoughtless words could injure him more, Kendo, who apparently overheard as well, moved over to him and placed a clearly telegraphed hand on his shoulder before whispering “He doesn't know what he's talking about. We'll be a great team, and I look forward to working with you.”

He wiped his now misty eyes, and gave her a wobbly smile and a nod.

“Team E, Mineta and Sato! Team F, Jiro and Yaoyorozu! Team G, Asui and To- I mean Shouto! Team H, Kaminari and Koda! Team I, Shoji and Uraraka! And team J, Ojiro and Aoyama! Everyone meet up with your partners!”

He was glad to be with Kendo, and to see Shouchan with Asui. They both seemed really nice and cooperative, so he supposed this exercise shouldn't be too bad. *Well, I guess it also depends on who we're up against.*

With everyone in their teams, All Might – under Aizawa-sensei’s watchful gaze – began to draw the lots for match ups. First match was...

“First match is team B as villains versus the heroes, team D!”

Chapter End Notes

Alright, here we go! And as previously stated, I'm still writing the actual trial, so sadly no double update today. As for the teams, I was pretty specific with Izuku's and Shouto's, but the others weren't super thought out. I probably won't write all the battles (ain't nobody got time for that (yes I know that's an outdated meme but it's true)), maybe just a few highlights; so if you were really looking forward to a certain team, uh....use your imagination?

I'm considering starting another fic. I'm not anywhere close to done with this (heavens no), and I wouldn't abandon it (I love it quite a lot), but it might be nice to have something else to work on. Problem is, I don't want to be one of those writers that rarely updates the one fic you're reading. Any thoughts? It'd probably be #4 from the poll.

See you on the flip side!
Good morning/afternoon/evening/night! I finally finished the battle trial! On a slightly related note, I've been reading all your comments (which are great, btw) and some of them - particularly the ones regarding Mineta - are...concerning. I mean I don't like him, and you all have the right to your own fantasies, but if he gets beat within an inch of his life and ends up wheelchair-bound, I take no responsibility. Rest assured, his comeuppance is fast approaching. As is USJ...

Izuku is about to participate in his first heroics class! He may have an advantage quirk-wise, but he's rather handicapped socially - not a good thing in a team exercise. How will he and his partner cope? Who will Shouchan be fighting? Will they succeed in proving that Pre-Heroes are just as capable as anyone else?

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“First match is team B as villains versus the heroes, team D!”

Oh. He's going first. Great.

Iida and Sero headed into the building to prepare, while Kendo turned to Izuku. “We have ten minutes to strategize before the exercise starts. Do you have any thoughts?”

He pulled out his whiteboard. 'I think Ida will place the bom, while Sero will set tape traps.'

“I agree. They may stick together by the weapon, or they may separate. We should come up with plans for both scenarios just in case.”

'Both are good at moblitie. Either would make good gards.'

“True. Hmmm... Maybe we'll be able to come up with an idea if we discuss our quirks. Mine is Big Fist, which allows me to grow my hands to giant size, increasing their power. You?”

'Bowndles. I have a poket dimenshen I control with my mind. It lets me tellport pepple and objects, store things, and make anything within it, but stuff I make isn't real outside it.'

“Whoa, that's so cool! So you can do just about anything as long as you're inside it? Even teleport?”

He nodded, and wrote 'only to places Ive been', before he stopped. He wrote again. 'I have an idya. Need to ask sensay.'

He looked over to where the teachers were, and clapped his hands to get their attention.

Aizawa's smirk when he signed his idea sent shivers down his classmate's spines. Shouchan looked surprised, and proud.
When prep time was up, Kendo and Izuku were standing outside the building for the exercise. They walked over to the door, but did not enter. With a nod from Kendo, Izuku disappeared.

It felt good to be in Boundless, even if only for a moment.

He appeared next to Aizawa-sensei in the observation room, to the shock of his classmates. “Wha?! Izuku, what're you doing here?” He ignored the electric blond, focusing on the screens. Realization dawned on a few faces, even more when Kendo was seen speaking into her comm.

“Okay Izuku. What floor is the bomb on?”

He turned his own comm on, and tapped the mic three times.

“Third floor, tap once to confirm.”

One tap.

“Got it. Now who's with it? one tap for Iida, two for Sero, three for both, four for neither.”

Three taps again.

“Both are with the bomb. Tap once to confirm.”

One tap.

“Great. Proceeding with the plan.”

He reappeared next to Kendo with two pairs of scissors and a bucket of soapy water he'd prepared during prep time. “Good work. Do you mind keeping the bucket in Boundless until we reach the third floor?” He nodded, and the bucket vanished.

They went inside, easily snipping through the tape traps Sero had set to slow them down. They went straight to the third floor, quickly finding the room where they were guarding the bomb. As they approached the hallway he’d seen in the observation room, he motioned to Kendo to be quiet.

When they sneaked over to the room, they could hear Iida attempting to monologue as a villain while Sero laughed hysterically. They waited for when Iida had his back to the door, chastising Sero for laughing at him, to jump through the doorway.

“Surrender, villains!”

Sero shot his tape at them, which Kendo caught in her now massive hands; Iida attempted to run at Izuku, who grinned. I'm ready for ya. He materialized the bucket in his hold, and dumped the contents on the floor in front of him. Surprise!

All his traction lost, Iida tried to skid to a stop, but was carried forward as he slipped – about to hit Izuku. “Look out!” Crap. His speeding classmate slammed right into him, knocking them both to the floor.

“Izuku! Are you alright?!” Kendo shouted, fists full of tape. Their brawl had stopped briefly to check on their respective teammates, though it soon continued; Dek- Izuku sat up, holding his right side that twinged in pain. Iida was recovering too, and was about to wrap him in capture tape – but Izuku vanished before he could. That was too close. I need to be more careful.

Fortunately, he'd seen where the bomb was and was thus familiar with it's location. He smiled at the swirling fractals of Boundless that matched his costume. I want to appear right next to the
weapon.

He stuck his hand out to the side before he had even finished materializing.

His classmates hadn't even turned around before All Might called out across their comms. “CLEAR! HEROES WIN!!!”

He walked with his classmates back to the observation room. “Izuku, that was great! Your plan worked so well! Well, until the point Iida slammed into you.” He picked up his whiteboard (which he'd stowed at the starting area they were now passing).

'Yes, I learned my lesson. Don’t trip an enmie when hes' running toards you.’

“An astute lesson, though your spelling still needs work. Did I injure you at all when we collided?”

He shook his head no, though his hand subconsciously found it's way to his side again.

“I see. That is good to hear – er, see.”

Sero spoke up next. “But man, you really got us when you warped to the weapon like that! Though, I'm curious. Why didn't you do that at the start of the exercise?”

At this point, they'd returned to the observation room, and everyone tuned their ears to the question a lot of them had (except Shouchan and Aizawa-sensei, who knew the answer). That's gonna take a lot of space to write. Luckily, when he turned to his friend, he understood the silent plea, and explained for him.

“Izuku's not really teleporting. He's going in and out of Boundless. Since it works using his subconscious, he has to have a really clear idea of where he wants to appear, preferably having been there. He didn't know where you were at first, but he knew where this room was, so he came here first. Even then, he knew where you were but wasn't familiar enough with the building to get a precise location like that. So, he played it safe until he saw the weapon, had you both distracted, and could easily slip away before you discerned his destination.”

Everyone's heads turned to him, and he nodded with a smile as if to say 'yep, he's completely right'.

Yaoyorozu was the first to respond. “That makes sense. After all, I can't make something unless I know what it's made of. If your makeshift teleportation relies on your thoughts, it's only natural you need to know quite a bit about where you're going.”

There were murmurs of agreement, until All Might regained control of the class. “Thank you young Shouto and Yaoyorozu for the explanation! Now, who was the MVP of this match?”

Izuku raised his hand. “Yes, Izuku?” He set down his board and signed.

‘K-E-N-D-O. She work with me, work hard. O-K me not talk. Fight fight! Good team person.’

Aizawa-sensei interpreted for him. “He says Kendo was MVP. She worked with Izuku, even if it was difficult. She didn't mind him not speaking. She did the fighting, and was a good teammate.”

Said teammate blushed, as All Might agreed. “Great observation, young Izuku! Young Kendo did indeed do an excellent job of working with her partner! Now, time for the next pair!”

Izuku didn't pay much attention to the next battle (he remembers seeing Kaminari shock Kirishima, then get captured by Ashido when his brain was shot. Turns out her acid worked as a decent
insulator), because he was approached by Aizawa-sensei and Shouchan, who came to congratulate him on his win.

“Nice work Izuku. That was a solid plan, and clever thinking asking me if you could return to the observation room during the exercise. Just make sure you time your trip hazards better. It was also quite mature of you to point out Kendo as MVP.”

'Her M-V-P true.'

“Yes, your reasoning was solid; but I bet a lot of these blockheads would've said you were.”

“You did a great job! And don't worry about your literal slip-up. I did the same thing first time I tried a move like that.” Shouchan smiled and chuckled softly at that.

“I'm pretty sure every pro's done that at least once in their career. At least you got it out of the way already.”

They chatted like that for a few more rounds, until All Might called out the next match up. “Next up is villain team G versus hero team E!”

*Shouchan's going against Mineta?!* He waved frantically to his teacher.

“I know. Shouto, I can call a veto again if you'd like.”

“I appreciate the concern, but there's no need.” His smile turned mischievous (*he's been spending too much time with Aizawa-sensei...*). “I'd like the chance to prove his prejudices are completely unfounded.”

Izuku put his hand on his best friend's shoulder, with concern in his eyes.

Shouchan's smile turned fond once more, as he replied “Don't worry; I'll be doing my best, so he won't beat me easily. I'm not going down without a fight.”

They had ten minutes before the 'heroes' entered the building. Shouto was paired with Asui, a strange-looking girl with long green hair. He chose to put the bomb in the center of the fourth floor, one below the highest floor. That way, should they come in from the bottom, there was plenty of time to capture them or prepare themselves, and if they climbed the building to go top-down (he supposed it was possible with Mineta's quirk), they'd still have a chance to get ready or stop them.

“Asui-san, can you explain your quirk to me?”

“Call me Tsu, kero.”

He nodded. “Tsu, then.”

“My quirk is Frog. I can do just about anything a frog can, like climbing walls or having a long tongue.”

*That's really useful.* "Nice. I have a plan, but I'm not sure if you'll like it.”
When their ten minutes were up, Shouto was in the room with the weapon, listening to the comm.

“Sato is entering the building from the ground, while Mineta is climbing up the wall, kero.”

“Great. You still out of sight?”

“I'm around the corner of the building like you suggested, so they haven't spotted me. It looks like Mineta is going all the way to the top, he just passed the fifth floor.”

“Good work. Come back inside, and I'll commence phase two.”

Once As- Tsu crawled in through the open window, he motioned her closer to him.

“I know this is our best defense, but you're right – I don't like it, kero.”

“Sorry.” He thought for a second, recalling all the work he'd done in SE and PF in regards to his quirk. “If you...stay close to me, I can help you keep warm.”

She gave him a questioning look, but obliged him.

He froze the entire building, including a massive wall in the doorway, with only a small circle around them spared from the ice. Inside that circle, he placed his left hand on Tsu's shivering back, spreading a carefully controlled warmth through their circle. From there, it was a simple waiting game.

He knew from yesterday that Sato had some kind of strengthening quirk, and would probably be able to break out of his ice; Mineta would have no such luck, unless he somehow avoided being frozen in the first place (not very likely in his opinion). Now he was waiting to see if Sato would go release his teammate, or try to get to the weapon – he'd be almost out of time either way.

“How are you holding up, Tsu? Are you warm enough?”

“I'm alright, kero. When do you think they're going to show up?”

They heard the crunch of a fist against the ice wall.

“I'd say right about now.”

They looked to each other, nodded, and sneaked over to either side of the door, capture tape at the ready.

The rhythmic crunching of punch after punch did not drown out the soft “How much longer till you break it? We gotta beat that wuss and show the chicks how strong we are.” and the strained “Almost *crunch* there, but I'm *crunch* running low on sugar.” of their opponents.

The moment the ice wall broke, Shouto wrapped his tape around the receding fist, and Tsu leapt through the opening to tackle Mineta. They rolled on the floor, Mineta trying to stick Tsu with his balls. With the confirmation of “Sato has been captured!” from All Might, Shouto ran to support his teammate.

“Tsu! Back up!”

She jumped off the boy on the icy floor, sticking to the wall of the hallway. He slammed his right foot down, and encased Mineta's limbs in ice. Tsu walked over and stuck a piece of tape over the captured boy's mouth. “Mineta has been captured! Villains win!”
He walked over and thawed Mineta (he may not like him, but he was going to be the bigger man). “Stop underestimating us Pre-Heroes. Keep being prejudiced, and you're gonna get the rug pulled from under you.” He mumbled a reply, but the tape made it indiscernible.

Tsu held up her hand, and Shouto high-fived her as they walked back to the class.

Chapter End Notes

I'm so proud of my boys TwT And I'm so glad I can move on from this story arc, finally. I've noticed some of you are curious as to who the class representative of 1-A will be. Well, I'm happy to report that I had a brilliant idea about that last night, and I think you're gonna like it! It actually sort of started in this chapter, so look forward to that. I hope this was a satisfactory battle trial arc. I didn't have a whole lot of ideas going into it, but I think the results were satisfactory. Not exceptional, but passable. I gotta save a lot of excitement and tension for the upcoming plot points anyways. Don't know when the next chapter will be posted; I'll hopefully have it up by tomorrow. Don't hold your breath though - breathing is a necessary life function, and as an asthmatic I can attest to suffocation being incredibly unpleasant.
Hey everyone! I'm sorry to report that I need to slow down on the updates for a week or so :( 
This is for two reasons. 1. It's crunch time for school; there's a couple big assignments I'd like to have finished by the end of the month 2. As the resident I'm-good-at-interpreting-visual-instructions-and-happen-to-be-unemployed of my family, I've been tasked with building two massive, complex dressers/clothes racks for my grandparents. I spent several hours on it yesterday and am not even halfway done with one. Of two. So yeah, not much time for writing for a while. I may get in a double today, but that's just because the next chapter is almost done already. Thanks for understanding!

It's time to decide on a class rep! But with so many good candidates, who will get the position? Also, Shouto and Izuku have progressed by leaps and bounds - though they're about to learn that old habits die hard.

It had been a few days since the battle trial, and everyone seemed to be adjusting to Izuku and Shouchan's Pre-Heroics status. They no longer questioned when Izuku would leave after homeroom, or practice his kanji during science, or read 4th grade-level books between classes. They never batted an eye when Shouchan left during modern literature, or would occasionally light a small flame in his hand while taking deep breaths, or say his positive self-talk lines ('I am not my father', 'I can use my quirk as I see fit', 'Fire is a tool that can help instead of hurt', etc.) in the mirrors of the boy's bathroom or locker room. It helped that Kendo had apparently taken a shine to them, accompanying them around school. She answered questions about them, helped them, even fended off people with rude comments.

All three Pre-Heroes appreciated her presence, and when Koda joined PH he was inducted quickly into the squad and under her protection as well.

She was sorta like a big sister to the entire PH course.

Now it was the end of the week, and Aizawa-sensei rolled into class with an announcement.

"Alright class. Today we have something very important to discuss."

The entire class was on edge.

"You need to pick a class rep."

'It's something normal?!' Izuku could almost hear the relieved cry of his classmates.

He raised his hand.

"Yes, Izuku?"
'Class R-E-P what?'

“A class representative is like the leader of the class, making sure everything goes smoothly and everyone is getting along in school.”

The ensuing murmurs of his classmates, intrigued by his confusion, were quickly silenced by Aizawa using his quirk. When his eyes no longer glowed red and his hair dropped down, he resumed.

“I don't care how you do it, as long as it gets done. Also, Kendo. I need to speak with you for a moment.”

He walked out of the room, Kendo right behind him, as the class erupted into verbal chaos.

Izuku was just glad to have his quirk back. The first time it'd been erased, he panicked at losing his connection to Boundless. It left no lasting effects on the quirk thankfully, just prevented him from accessing it; it still made him anxious every time it went away though. Aizawa-sensei said that soon he’d have him practice staying calm with his quirk erased, so if something like that happened in battle he wouldn't freak out.

He wasn't looking forward to that lesson, as important as he knew it was.

By the time Aizawa and Kendo returned, Iida had convinced everyone to vote, with the only people to receive multiple votes being Yaoyorozu, Iida, Kendo, and Shouchan.

Their teacher looked at the tally.

“Sorry Shouto, but you and Izuku aren't eligible for this, seeing as you're only in this class half the time.”

Shouchan sighed in relief. “That's fine. I was thinking I have enough to deal with already, and was about to withdraw anyways.”

Aizawa nodded. “True. And as for Kendo – well, why don't you explain why you're no longer in the race either?”

She walked up to the front of the room, looking somewhat embarrassed and happy at the same time.

“I, um...I will not be acting as class representative because I've just been offered a different position. From now on, I am the Pre-Heroics Inter-Class Ambassador and Relations Specialist.”

An...ambassador? That's so cool! Wait, wasn't she already sort of doing that?

The class 'ooh'ed and 'aah'ed at her impressive title as Aizawa went on to explain.

“She'll be acting as a liaison, a go-between for the Pre-Heroics and regular courses. She'll be aiding PH's integration into the school, helping Pre-Heroes succeed in and out of class, and fostering positive relations between the courses and students. It's a tough job, but I'm sure she can handle it.”

“That's so cool!”

“Good luck, Ambassador-san!”

“It really suits you!”
“What a waste, for such a pretty girl to spend her time with those losers.” It wasn't as loud as the others, but Mineta's comment still resounded through the room.

“...Kendo, I forgot to mention but your job starts now; the ambassador is permitted to use force when dealing with particularly unruly students.”

“Thank you sir.” She walked up to the grape-head and whacked him with her giant fist. “As ambassador, I kindly ask that you refrain from making rude comments about the Pre-Heroics course and it's students.”

She sent a huge smile to Shouchan and Izuku. “I look forward to working with you!”

By the time lunch rolled around, Kendo was joining the four Pre-Heroes at their reserved table with a dark green armband that read “Ambassador”. Nedzu sure does work fast. Once their food had been ordered, Shouchan filled in Hitochan on the morning's happenings.

“Inter-class Ambassador, huh? Cool.”

Kendo beamed. “Yes! I can hardly believe Aizawa-sensei trusted me with such an important task! I'll have to do my best to live up to his expectations.”

“I'm sure you'll do great. I mean, you're already friends with the entire Pre-Heroics course, so that part's done.”

Izuku waved to Shouchan to get his attention (Hitochan was just starting his sign language lessons, and Koda Koji simply prefers not to speak, so Shouchan was the only one who could interpret).

'K-E-N-D-O give name, name sign?'

“Oh! Right. Kendo, as you already know, part of our established code of conduct is to call each other by our given names unless told otherwise; as our ambassador, this'll go for you too. We need to get you a name sign as well.”

A look of realization came over her. “That's right! Well then, you all have permission to call me Itsuka. I have no idea about a name sign, though. I suppose I need to start sign language too.”

Izuku thought for a moment, then waved again. He put his hand in an I shape, and brought it next to the top of his head before pulling down, representing her signature hairstyle. 'Itsuka, like hair.'

Koji nodded furiously in agreement, while Shouchan asked Itsuka. “What about that? It signifies your ponytail.”

“I like it! It's nice and simple, and easy enough to recognize.”

Everyone practiced the new name sign for a bit, before Hitochan spoke up. “Wait. I don't have one, and we don't know Koji's either.”

Duh! How could he forget Hitochan and Kochan?

Koji signed 'Me have name sign' before placing both hands, in a K hand shape, on his shoulders, moving them in and out like the sign for 'animal'. The rest of the table mimed him.

“Now, what to do about Hitoshi-kun...”
Shouchan put his hand to his chin in thought. “Hm. You like cats, right?”

“Cats are better than most people, so yes. Aside from you all, they are my best friends. I have three.”

“How about the sign for ‘cat’ with an H hand shape?” He demonstrated, brushing his first two fingers against his cheek twice.

“You mean my identity will be forever associated with cats? Yes please.”

They were enjoying their food, and teaching Itsuka the sign alphabet, when an alarm went off.

*It's too loud! I gotta – no, calm down. CALM DOWN!!*

Everyone was panicking, crowding together to reach the exits, shouting about an intruder. *Too loud, too many people, it's TOO LOUD TOO LOUD TOO -*

He could vaguely hear someone calling for him, but his mind wouldn't register the familiar voice. *I NEED TO GET OUT OF HERE!!!!*

When the alarm went off, the entire cafeteria broke out into pandemonium. Everyone else was preoccupied with evacuating and a possible intruder, but Shouto's thoughts immediately turned to Izuku.

He could see the panic and fear in those vibrant green eyes.

Shouto had learned about dealing with panic attacks in his online research all those months ago, but he was hoping he'd never need that information again (he'd accidentally sent Izuku into a panic that first time he showed him his fire). *Izuku's been making so much progress, I forgot how easy it might be for him to relapse.* He approached his friend – Izuku was sweating profusely, heart pounding, breath shallow, eyes darting back and forth, hands squeezed against his ears and gripping his hair. Shouto made sure not to touch him lest he make it worse, and began speaking. “Izuku, can you hear me? You're okay, just breath with me, in...and out...”

Izuku was too far gone. He made no indication he'd even heard Shouto, let alone follow his instructions.

Before Shouto could try something else, Izuku vanished to Boundless.

Chapter End Notes

Ahhh, finally. I was able to sneak in some more angst! This fic really wants to become pure fluff, but I won't let it :) This has over 12000 hits?! I'm still trying to grasp the concept it reached quintuple
I hope you all like what I decided to do with Itsuka. I was thinking hard on the class rep situation, and thought "She'd be really good with the PH students, she's already shown how well she works with Izuku...what if she was kinda like a class rep for PH?". And thus the Ambassador position was born. I think it suits her.
Okay, I got work to do. If I make satisfactory progress, I'll try and get the next chapter up. I love leaving chapters on a cliffhanger, but I don't want you guys hanging for too long.
Memorial

Chapter Notes

Hi everyone! Here's the next chapter!
I've been powering through my work and got some help on that IKEA furniture (first one's done!), so I let myself have some writing time. I just finished the next chapter too (it just about wrote itself), though I haven't decided if I'll make this a double update or save it for tomorrow. Ah well. Thank you everyone for your patience! NGL, I love this chapter. Lots of platonic Tododeku fluff incoming! Brace for impact! Izuku has fallen into his old ways, running away from his problems yet again. Will Shouto be able to pull him out of it? How does Izuku feel about this backsliding? And what is the significance of his favorite locale?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When the alarm stopped and the students calmed down, Shouto was rejoined by his coursemates who'd been swept away in the chaos.

Hitoshi was the first to notice their missing member. “Where's Izuku?”

“He's in Boundless. He was panicking and I tried to help him, but...I couldn't. I couldn't do anything.” *I failed my first friend.*

Itsuka placed her hand on his shoulder, smiling sadly. “At least you tried. You were the first one to notice and respond to his fear. He was too far gone into his own head to realize it, but I know some part of him recognized your presence and appreciated it. We can't always stop a panic attack, but we *can* be there for him when it's over.”

He took a deep breath, exhaling it as a sigh. “You're right. I need to tell him the coast is clear.”

The others looked confused, though Hitoshi was the only one to voice it. “But he's in Boundless. How are you supposed to contact him when he's in another dimension?”

He grinned at his new friends. “You really think Izuku and I could've become such good friends if we hadn't figured that out already?”

“You can? How?”

He pulled out his phone. “Simple. I text him.”

Me:

Izuku, it's okay. The danger is gone.

Take a deep breath, in...

Me:
And out. One more time. In...

Me:
And out. Keep it up, I know you can do it.

“Are you sure he'll check his phone? What if he's still panicking?”

Itsuka's concern was valid, but unneeded.

“He doesn't have a phone – he set Boundless to send and receive cell signals; any calls or texts to his 'number' are sent directly into his brain. Only if he recognizes your phone, though.”

Shouto only got to enjoy his friends' awed expressions for a second before his phone finally buzzed.

Izuku:

Is it over?

Me:

Yeah, everything's okay, and everyone's calmed down.

Class will start soon. Time in, or time out?

Izuku:

Time out, at least for a little bit.

Me:

Gotcha. Can you text Aizawa and Nedzu? I'll tell the other teachers. Unless you need some company?

Izuku:

...That'd be nice.

Me:

Alright, pick me up in the cafeteria in 2 minutes.

He put his phone back, and addressed the lingering group. They were the last ones in the cafeteria.

“He's calmed down now, but still pretty shaken. Itsuka, please tell our teachers that Izuku's taking a time out, and I'm his support. Hitoshi, Koji, go ahead to class – he'll be alright.”

“Time out means...he just needs a break from everything, right? So he should be back soon?”

He nodded. “That's right. He's texting Aizawa and Nedzu, but I'm counting on you to inform everyone else.”

Itsuka's expression went from concerned to determined nearly instantaneously. “Got it! This is a perfect first job for the Pre-Heroics Ambassador!”
As soon as the others were gone, Shouto felt a tense hand grasp his, and the familiar sensation of entering Boundless.

His feet hit the multi-colored sand of Izuku's favorite scene: the glistening shoreline; he looked to his friend. Izuku was noticeably paler than usual, and his hands were trembling slightly. That alarm really spooked him. He took the shaking hand and slowly led Izuku over to the pier, gently tugging him to sit down. Shouto took off Izuku's shoes and his own, then slowly lowered their feet to the water.

“You doing okay?”

Izuku breathed deeply. “...Yeah. I just...need some time.”

“That's understandable, you had a pretty serious panic attack. Can we talk about it?”

“In a minute.”

“Take your time.”

Izuku was looking at the ocean, focus split between it and whatever was running through his head. The ocean turned purple, then fizzy, then warm, then clear, then ice cold. He finally settled on a bubble-bath ocean before he spoke.

“I almost handled it. I think if it was just the alarm, I would've been okay. It was sudden and loud, and certainly scared me, but I'd almost calmed myself down. But then everyone else started running, and screaming, and – all I could think is 'too loud, too loud, I need to go' and wound up here.”

“That was a tough situation. I thought UA students would know to evacuate calmly, but I guess we're all still kids prone to high emotions and bad judgment. I tried to snap you out of your panic, but couldn't before you left. Were you still panicking when you got here?”

Izuku sighed, as he kicked his feet in the gentle suds that now smelled like lavender. “A little. Just being in Boundless helped, since it was quiet. The tingling feeling of entering Boundless was enough to kinda snap me out of it, at least enough so Boundless didn't freak out – I hate it when that happens.”

Memories of 'FIRE, TOO HOT, BURN ME TO ASH' came unbidden to his mind; he shuddered. “I agree. That's gotta be the one downside to a pocket dimension controlled with your mind.”

If Izuku's brain was out of control, so was Boundless.

“Do...do you still think I can be a hero? Even if an alarm is enough send me into a panic?”

Oh geez, this really unsettled him. He must think he's a failure.

“Let me ask you this: do you think I can be a hero?”

“Of course! Shouchan, you're gonna be an amazing hero!”

“Even though I'm still afraid of my fire?”

“Well, yeah. You won't use your fire all the time anyways, and you've been working so hard to get over your fear.”
“Gotcha. He looked Izuku in the eyes to make sure he had his full attention. “And how is your situation any different? How are your struggles that different from Aizawa working despite his dry eye? Or Hitoshi fighting back against quirk discrimination? Or Nedzu being judged because he’s an animal?”

“I mean, I...” Izuku looked away, but Shouto wasn't done.

“Before I met you, I’d been trained to believe that a hero cannot show any weakness; that in order to be a hero, you have to be strong enough to not have problems. But you and Aizawa-sensei and principal Nedzu and everyone at school has taught me the truth. Just having your own problems doesn't make you less heroic - it only does if you let them stop you, if you let them convince you to give up. But if you keep going despite the obstacles, work hard to overcome the issues you can fix and accept the ones you can't – that's what makes a true hero.”

His friend was silent. He let the silence hang for a moment, allowing what he said to sink in.

“Do you remember our first day at Pre-Heroics?”

“Yeah.”

“Do you remember what my first Social Essentials assignments was?”

“You were...writing about how fire can be good, I think. I heard Hitochan had to do something similar with his Brainwash quirk.”

It seemed so long ago, and yet like it was yesterday. “Close. I first wrote a list of people in my life who'd been hurt by fire. Then I wrote a paragraph of ways fire could be used to help those same people. Nedzu asked me to do it again the other day.”


He chuckled softly. “I was wondering the same thing until after I did it. Nedzu pulled out that first one I wrote and had me compare them.”

“And?”

He smiled at the now fond memory, as he continued his story. “The list of people hurt stayed the same. But for the second part, the first time I only had a handful of sentences, one short paragraph. The second time, I almost filled the page.”

“Waah! That's so impressive Shouchan!” Izuku's eyes were alight with joy, watching him in awe. *I'm glad he's not thinking about his panic attack anymore.*

“Thanks. Do you remember your first assignment?”

He rubbed the back of his head, an embarrassed blush on his cheeks; “I was, uh, supposed to talk with Aizawa-sensei for an hour without you and only made it twenty minutes.” once he'd finished recalling, his hand left his head and fell in his lap. Izuku looked down and twiddled his thumbs, his feet kicking in the now-rose-scented-and-colored ocean.

“And the last time you did that, what was your record?”

“T-three hours...”
Shouto put his warm left hand on Izuku's lap, stopping his twining fingers. “And that was what, a month ago?” He did the mental math. “That's like, a 900% increase.”

“Actually, it's 800% - you divide the difference by the starting number, not the ending number.”

“Fine, fine, okay Mr. Math-and-Science Whiz, 800% increase. But still, that's an incredible achievement. You say I've been working hard, but you've been working harder than anyone I've ever known; the only thing that can prevent you from becoming the person you want to be is yourself. So stop letting yourself stop you.”

The silence returned. Izuku was mulling over Shouto's words, and he didn't want to interrupt. He noticed, but didn't comment, when the pier beneath them seamlessly became the sandy beach. Shouto dug his toes in, while his friend let it run through his fingers.

Izuku was the one to break the quiet this time. “You know why I like this beach so much?”


“When I was little, there was this beach near our apartment that my mom would take me to when the weather was nice. I loved it there, the warm golden sand, the cold blue ocean... It was our own little paradise. But then, trash started washing up on the shore in large amounts, and people used that as cover for illegal dumping.”

“Really? That's not cool.”

He sighed despondently. “Yeah. After my mom died, I went to go visit it again, hoping to find that somehow, something would go my way for once and our paradise would be back; of course, by that point the beach was covered in junk – so much so you couldn't even see the shoreline.”

He didn't say a word, only put a hand on Izuku's shoulder in wordless comfort.

“I kept thinking how badly I wanted to see it again, and that somebody should clean it up, but no one ever did. I guess it was only natural that one of the first things I did when I got my quirk was have that beach remade from my memory. Every time I see it, I think of how that beach, though cluttered and obscured now, will always be beautiful here in my memory.”

The vibrant blues and purples faded from the sand, leaving only gold. The ocean stopped bubbling, and turned a dark blue. The bright crystallized sun gained a warmer, softer glow as it sank down to the horizon. He realized this was the paradise just as his friend remembers it.

When they finally returned to class, no one said anything about their absence, though Itsuka sent them an understanding smile. Shouto moved his desk right next to Izuku's, continuing to provide support. Class continued as normal, though Shouto couldn't focus. He kept thinking of that memorial beach.

It had been a perfectly ordinary scene, yet somehow all the more beautiful.

Chapter End Notes
Ahh, that felt good. Now, who's ready for the next arc? Say it with me now: USJ! USJ! USJ!
Let's do this.
As for the next chapter, I don't think I've ever written the word 'bus' so much is such a short time span. You'll see why. Poor Izuku, I'm sorry (I'm really not). But don't you worry - it's not bad. Yet.
I'm almost done with the school crunch: just one more big assignment and I'm in the clear (for now)! I'm hoping to have it done by Monday, and once that's done I can spend more time on this fic again.
Till next time!
Behold the bus chapter!
I'm probably about 7/12 of the way through USJ (for those of you who struggle with fractions, that's between 1/2 and 2/3). I'm hoping to get it done tonight, so I can double-update it either tomorrow or Monday. Either way, enjoy the prelude.
For anyone who's unfamiliar with the phrase "throw under the bus", it's an idiom here in America that basically means to betray someone, or have them take the fall in an uncomfortable situation. For example, if a kid breaks something, then when the parent sees it they point to a sibling and say "they did it", that kid has "thrown them under the bus".
Izuku and Shouto are about to get an interesting text. What will the ramifications be? Will Izuku get over his embarrassment? Why did the author feel the need to use the same phrase three times in a single chapter?

Izuku was laying in bed when a text message flashed through his head. 'Aizawa-sensei: Just a heads up you'll be staying with your class after lunch – Foundational Heroics is going on a field trip that will take all afternoon, so stick with 1-A. '

A field trip? Huh. Interesting. I wonder where we're going... He mentally texted Shouchan.

'Hey Shouchan. Did Aizawa-sensei text you?'

'About the field trip? Yeah.'

'Where do you think we're going?'

'I bet it's somewhere on campus. We just started school after all, and there's not a lot of places we can do heroics training without a provisional license.'

'That's true. I wonder what we're doing...'

'I guess we'll find out'

The four Pre-Heroes walked to the school together from the dorms; Kochan had just moved in, and Itsu-nee would be soon. For now, she met them on their way to class every day. Speaking of...

“Hey everyone! Good morning!”

“Yo, Itsu-nee.” Hitochan smirked when she choked in surprise.

“I-Itsu-nee?! Where'd that come from?!”

Hitochan decided to throw him under the proverbial bus. “Izuku. He said yesterday that you were like a big sister, and as such has started calling you Itsu-nee – as have the rest of us.”
Shouchan stepped in to try and save Itsu-nee from dying of embarrassment. “Not all of us – really just Izuku and Hitoshi. You do act quite sisterly though.”

It didn't work. Itsu-nee's face was red all the way to class.

The morning passed normal enough, though it was tough for the Pre-Heroes (and ambassador, who'd been informed during their walk) to keep quiet about the impending field trip; they figured since it hadn't been announced to 1-A, it was supposed to be a secret. They'd only been told to prevent schedule conflicts.

By the time lunch came to an end, Izuku was practically vibrating in his seat – whether in excitement or nerves, he couldn't tell. Probably both. He silently snickered at his classmates' bewildered expressions as he walked back into 1-A instead of PH. At Yaoyorozu's questioning gaze, he wrote a simple ‘skedule change’ on his whiteboard, and showed it to anyone who looked like they wanted to ask.

“Hey doofus, you spelled 'schedule' wrong and your kanji looks like crap. Why don't you just talk like a normal person? At least then we can tell you to shut up when you say something stupid.”

He's just being a jerk, I'm not gonna cry, I'm not gonna... a tear rolled down his cheek. Gosh darn it I'm crying.

He didn't hear what his friends were saying, but they were interrupted by Aizawa-sensei. “Alright everyone, we have a special class for Foundational Heroics today – rescue training.” Excited whispers rippled through the students, until they felt their quirks being erased. Everyone quieted again, he continued. “As I was saying. You can wear either your costume or gym uniform, since some costumes may not be suited for this. Once you're changed, meet me in the parking lot; we're taking a bus.”

The changing room was filled with chatter as all the boys changed – but one voice sounded out through the others. “I found it!” He turned to see Mineta...staring at the wall? No, more like looking through it.

Why? The only thing on the other side of that wall is the girl's... oh.

He tapped Shouchan's shoulder, halfway into his hero costume, and pointed to the grape-head. He watched as confusion, then comprehension bloomed on his scarred face, and ice encased their peeping classmate. Mineta's protests went ignored as Shouchan walked over and knocked on the wall. “Hey, can you ladies hear me?”

“Yeah?” Came the muffled reply.

“You should know that there's a peephole in the wall here. I've stopped the offending peeper, but you should find something to plug the hole until Power-Loader can fix it.”

“Wha- really?! Thanks for telling us!”

When they were all decked out in their costumes, they rejoined the girls outside the locker rooms and made their way over towards the bus. The conversation, perhaps inevitably, turned to what happened only a few minutes prior.

“Who was the one who told us about the hole?” Uraraka was the one to start it.

“It was Shouto, wasn't it? I heard the crackling of his ice, and it sounded like his voice through the wall.” Yaoyorozu chimed in. The girls immediately began crowding around the bicolored boy,
voicing their thanks and praising his chivalrous actions.

Then Izuku got thrown under the proverbial bus again, this time by a flustered Shouchan, traitor. “A-actually, Izuku was the first to notice what was going on – he alerted me to the situation so I could stop it.”

“Waa, really?! Thank you sooo much!” Hagakure shouted as the girls swarmed him.

“Yeah! Who knows how long he would've been watching if you hadn't spotted him!” The first was Ashido, but Izuku was soon being hugged by the entire female population of class 1-A.

Shouchan had the nerve to grin at him.

He tried to glare back, but it was nearly impossible with the ferocious blush that took over his face and spread to his ears.

They only stopped gushing over him when they reached the bus. Iida urged everyone to make two lines for boarding, but the class rep's (he and Yaoyorozu had tied in the end, so they were co-reps) instructions proved moot when the bus was discovered to be of a different layout. He pouted the entire drive.

“I generally say what's on my mind, kero. Izuku?”

He turned his attention to Asui, and tried to ignore how everyone's attention had turned to him. Again. He nodded, to show he was listening.

“Why does it seem like you've never gone to school?”

He froze. Kaminari jumped in.

“Eh? Why do you say that?”

“Just a thought I had. He didn't know what a class rep was, he's surprised by the bell, and is far behind in a lot of subjects, kero.” Kirishima was next to join the conversation Izuku wished would just end.

“But wait, he's super far ahead in math and science – he helps Ectoplasm-sensei grade our math homework, and apparently Nedzu gives him physics problems that are doctorate-level.”

“Yeah yeah, you're right! It's still weird though.” And now Ashido's in. Soon the whole bus (excluding Shouchan who knew why, and Kochan and Itsu-nee who were respectful enough to not ask) was buzzing with discussion.

“That's enough. You're asking questions that are likely quite personal – if Izuku wants you to know, he’ll tell you. Otherwise, it's rude to pry into this sort of thing.” That got everyone to finally stop. Thank you, Aizawa-sensei!

His classmates had stopped asking, but he could still see the curiosity shining in their eyes. If I don't tell them something, they'll just jump to their own conclusions. He pulled out his board, hesitated a moment, and began writing.

'Ahsooi is right. I stopped going to school in elmentery. It wasnt nice, I was bulyed a lot and the teechers didnt care. So I stopped going. Im good at math and siense becus I like them, and studied
all the time. Things like kanji and mystery I didn't like, so didn't study.

Shouchan smiled at him proudly. Fortunately, before the rest of his classmates could respond, Aizawa-sensei called out “We're here.”

That was good timing.

Shota thanked the stars the bus arrived when it did; he was so proud of Izuku for sharing a bit of his past with the class, but he didn't look quite ready for all the possible reactions. Shota couldn't blame him – he wasn't ready for that either. But before the class could finish processing what they'd read, the bus had pulled up outside the USJ. Thirteen was waiting there for them. But no All Might...

Sure enough, as soon as he stepped off the bus, his silent question was answered when Thirteen held up three fingers. For real? I'm gonna strangle that skeleton man next time I see him, #1 hero notwithstanding. This wasn't the first time Yagi had missed an important engagement because he couldn't keep focused and wasted his time. He doubted this would be the last offense, either.

He didn't pay much attention to Thirteen's speech as they introduced his class to the Unseen Simulation Joint, instead watching to make sure his students were listening. Their reactions were about what he'd expected, until Izuku's shifted.

He'd been listening, though clearly looking around the place, thoroughly scoping it out – the kid had impressive attention to detail – when his eyes locked on something behind Shota. He looked curious, then concerned, then frightened as he waved frantically to Shota and pointed behind him. He turned around.

A swirling purple mist had appeared in the center plaza, and people were walking out of it. Well crap.

A swarm of villains was infiltrating the building. While students were here. And one of them had a warp quirk.

Luckily, so did they.

Sorry Izuku. Looks like I need to throw you under the bus.

Chapter End Notes

Poor Izuku. It's going to get worse before it gets better.
Can I stop typing the word 'bus' now?
I could use a few ideas for MINOR SPOILER LOOK AWAY NOW Mineta. Here's where I'm at: I haven't decided whether Mineta should be expelled or moved to gen ed. Either way, he won't be in the hero course much longer. I also need to figure out how it'll happen; I was originally planning on having him out before USJ, but it just...didn't happen, so now I need to somehow escalate his misbehavior enough to force Aizawa's
hand. If you have an idea, make a case for it in the comments!

END MINOR SPOILER WARNING

As stated earlier, I'd like to have the USJ arc completed and uploaded by Monday. It's still crunch time, but I'm powering through my work (it's also nice that I got some help with that IKEA furniture, so it's almost done) so if I can't finish USJ tonight, I can probably finish by then.

TTFN!
Instincts

Chapter Notes

USJ! USJ! USJ!
Thanks for brainstorming session last chapter! I have an idea of how I want to do it (whether it actually happens like that or not is yet to be seen) now, so that's good. This chapter's pretty long, since there wasn't a good place to cut it and I wanted the actual event to last no more than two chapters - excluding the aftermath, which I'll be writing next. I'll be uploading USJ part 2 today as well, so get hype for that! Villains are attacking 1-A! How will Izuku's quirk change the outcome? Can he overcome his fears to save his classmates? Will the author even attempt to write an action scene when she hates writing descriptive prose and is not very good at it? Is her refusal to write in other POVs a stylistic choice, or out of laziness (i.e., not wanting to work out all the details the POV character is unaware of)? Or maybe it's a bit of both?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Izuku had been paying attention to Thirteen, really. He was just also paying attention to his surroundings.

The facility they'd gone to for the field trip – USJ, he believed – was certainly impressive, and Izuku was determined to take in every detail. He supposed he didn't need to pay so much attention (he probably wouldn't need to recreate this place, and even if he did the fact Boundless can use subconscious memories was always nice), but situational awareness isn't a habit he feels the need to break. Aizawa-sensei and principal Nedzu seemed impressed with his attention to detail, and even said it'd be quite useful in hero work, so he figured he'd let himself continue.

Naturally, that also meant he was the first to notice the strange black particles down in the plaza.

One thing Aizawa-sensei had taught him was that people, especially heroes, need a balance between logic and instinct; logic was important for understanding dangers, working out solutions, and keeping one's instincts in check. But instinct was there for a reason – namely getting oneself out of danger before logic has even registered it as dangerous.

His instincts were shouting at him 'DANGER! DANGER!', and by the time he was waving frantically at his teacher, his logic had caught up and said 'Yeah, this probably isn't good'.

Aizawa-sensei's look when he saw it only confirmed his suspicions.

Villains (they were dressed weird and several had weapons, so he assumed they were villains) were streaming through the now-confirmed-to-be-a-portal, menacing jeers on their faces. Great. Fantastic. We're barely a week into school and already there's a villain attack.

"Um, sensei, is the exercise starting already?"

He really wanted to smack whoever just said that for being an idiot.
“Everyone stay close! Those are villains.”

A villain with pale blue hair and -oh gosh, are those hands?- covering his body stepped out of the portal and began saying something about All Might; Izuku wasn't paying attention since his teacher was now crouching in front of him.

“Izuku, do you remember when we were discussing ways to use your quirk for heroics?” He nodded. “And one of those ways was the transportation of people, whether for evacuation or reinforcements?”

*Oh, I see where this is going.* He signed 'Class leave, teach-person arrive.'

“Exactly. Can you do it?”

'Don't-know, many many people.'

“Hm. Alright then.” He stood up and addressed the class. “Everyone listen up – Kaminari, try and contact the school. Izuku, text Nedzu. Everyone else, gather up around him. He needs to be in contact with you. He may need to do multiple trips; if that's the case, non-combatant quirks go first. Thirteen and I will cover your retreat and wait for reinforcements. Let's get you out of here.”

“You really think we'd let you?”

The black particles appeared behind them and formed a man, blocking the door. “Greetings. We are the League of Villains, and we have come to end the life of the Symbol of Peace, All Might; he was scheduled to be here as well, yet he seems to be absent. Ah well. My job is to separate and torture you to death, and I will do just that.”

Aizawa-sensei activated his quirk, stopping the mist-man. “You really think *I'd* let you? Izuku, go now!”

He felt various hands fall on his person, but tried not to let it bother him as he thought *Me and everyone touching me will appear in Boundless!* The familiar sensation washed over him, though for some reason, much more intense than usual. He opened his eyes to see five classmates around him, gaping in awe at the crystalline void.

Thankfully none of them had removed their hands, so with another thought (and another bout of extra strong tingles) Aoyama, Kaminari, Hagakure (she was wearing her gym uniform, so he knew it was her), Jirou, and Kochan were unceremoniously deposited in the 1-A classroom. Izuku returned to USJ.

When he arrived, he was the only one by the entrance. Aizawa-sensei was down in the plaza, knocking out villains left and right, Thirteen incapacitated behind him. The students were nowhere to be seen, though he could hear sounds of fighting all throughout the building. *First things first, help any injured parties,* he recalled the words of advice from his teacher. Izuku ran down the steps into the plaza, catching Aizawa-sensei's attention.

“Good job Izuku! Now get Thirteen into Boundless and go find your classmates!”

He nodded in acknowledgment, though he doubted his teacher saw with his ferocious fighting. He ran over to Thirteen, put a hand on their helmet, and sent them to Boundless. Next priority: his classmates. *Where are they?*

While he was wondering where to start, he saw a massive iceberg erupt out of the landslide zone. *Shouchan!*
Guess he knew where he was going first.

He sprinted as fast as he could around the perimeter of the plaza, panting for breath but not daring to stop – that is, until a man jumped in front of him, pointing a finger at his head. “Sorry kid, but no escap–”

The man was interrupted by white scarves wrapping around his face and pulling into his teacher's raised knee.

“Keep going! I've got you covered!”

Shouchan met up with him just outside the landslide zone.

“Izuku! You're here!”

Aizawa-sensei knocked out the villain in his capture gear, before turning to Shouchan. “Shouto, I need you to escort Izuku and find the other students so he can get them to safety.” He looked Shouchan in the eye. “I'm relying on you to protect him so he can focus on evacuation. Got it?”

He'd never seen his friend so serious as he was in that moment. “Yes sir. I'll keep him safe.”

“Good. I'm going back into the fray. You two get moving!”

Shouchan took his hand and ran towards the conflagration zone. “I'm pretty sure I was the only one in the landslide zone, so let's go in a circle around the facility. Were you able to text Nedzu?”

He huffed a few times, thoroughly exhausted from all the running, before nodding his head. *It certainly seemed like it went through, and even if it didn't I'm sure the classmates I dropped off at the school will alert everyone.*

Izuku was already sweating by the time they reached their destination – the fact that destination was a burning mock city didn't help. He gulped down air, and closed his eyes. *I-I'm okay, it's just fire, just fire...* His sweaty hand was squeezed by a cool one. “You okay?”

Before he could answer, he heard a voice call out. “Ojiro, over here! We've got backup!”

He opened his eyes to see Shoji jogging up to them and Ojiro drop down from...somewhere.

His friend put his right hand on his forehead, and it was *blessedly* cold on his heated skin. “Are you two alright? We're going around so Izuku can evacuate everyone.”

“We're fine. Shoji and I have been holding our own.”

“We can help with the evacuation. I can find the others with my quirk, and Ojiro's a good fighter.”

*I need to find someone good with first aid to help Thirteen.* He tapped Shouchan's arm, and signed 'Me have hero T-H-I-R-T-E-E-N. Hurt. Need help.' He nodded.

“Do either of you know first aid?”

Their classmates looked at each other, then shook their heads.

“Guess we'll have to keep looking then. Is there anyone else here?”

“No, just us two.”
“Alright then, let's keep moving.”

The group took off once more, heading to the flood zone; by this point, his legs felt like jelly and he was on the verge of hyperventilating. *Man, I need to work on my endurance; at this rate I'm just gonna slow everyone down -* his thoughts were interrupted by Shoji picking him up and strapping him to his back with his arms. Shouchan smiled at him, and patted his head.

“Get some rest, Izuku. You're doing great, but we need you to have the energy for your quirk. Think you can do that for me?”

He still didn't like it, but he supposed it was better than holding everyone back, so he relented.

They found Asui, Yaoyorozu, and Mineta on a sinking ship surrounded by villains in the flood zone. One iced-over lake later and the stranded classmates were sliding past angry popsicles to the evacuation squad.

“Thanks for the assist, kero.”

“Yes, we're very glad to see you.”

“We're gathering up all the students so Izuku can warp them out, but we need someone with first aid training to help Thirteen,” Ojiro explained.

Yaoyorozu spoke up. “I'm trained in first aid, I'll help them and anyone else who's injured.”

Shouchan pointed to Izuku; “They're in Boundless. Izuku can take you there, and provide any supplies you need – though anything he makes in Boundless can't come back to reality, it'll work as a stop-gap.”

“How do I ask for supplies?”

“Izuku's been training his remote access to his quirk, so just say what you need out loud and he can make it form.”

“Understood.” With that, Izuku reached out a hand from his spot on Shoji's back; Yaoyorozu took it and vanished into Boundless.

Shouchan then turned to the others. “I think we should start splitting up. Shoji, how many students are in each area?”

Said boy had turned his free arms into ears. “There's two in Squall, two in Ruins, and four in Mountain zone.”

“Alright. Izuku's running out of stamina,” there was a derisive snort from Mineta, “so I'm taking him to the entrance. You guys split into teams of two and hit the other zones, then rendezvous at the entrance for evacuation; if anyone is injured, send them our way.”

“I'll go to the Squall zone, kero. I perform well in the rain.”

Shoji spoke as he released Izuku into Shouchan's waiting arms. “I'll go with you, the rain and wind won't stop me from finding our friends.”

“Mineta and I will head to the ruins, I guess.”
“And why do we have to listen to your dumb plan?’”

Heterochromic eyes rolled. “There’s no time for this! Just watch each other’s backs and make sure everyone gets to the entrance!”

“Got it!”

“Good luck, kero.”

“How you feeling, Izuku?”

*Quite terrible, to be perfectly honest.* ‘Bad’ is what he weakly signed from Shouchan’s arms. He heard Yaoyorozu call for more supplies from Boundless, and willed them into formation. As he did, the tingling sensation that had settled into his nerves worsened. *What’s going on?*

“Hold on just a bit longer. We’re at the entrance now, so get some rest before the others come.”

He was set down gently, as Shouchan looked out into the plaza.

“That’s not good. Aizawa-sensei’s getting tired.”

Izuku followed his friend’s gaze just in time to see the hand-man rush forward and grab Aizawa-sensei’s arm.

He watched his teacher’s elbow crumble away into dust.

Aizawa-sensei quickly reactivated his quirk and kicked the villain away.

“Heh, so cool Eraserhead. Unfortunately, I’m not the final boss.” Izuku’s eyes landed on a hulking beast with an exposed brain and bird beak. “He is. Behold our anti-symbol of peace! Noumu: get him.”

*No...* The massive creature raced forward and punched his teacher. *No. It grabbed his head and slammed it into the concrete. NO!!!!*

“Izuku!!”

His instincts were driving him forward, his exhausted body dashing into the plaza. *I won’t let you kill him.*

*He’s gonna teach me how to be a hero.*

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**Chapter End Notes**

Yeah sorry, no thrilling action scenes here. Seriously, I had enough trouble describing Izuku’s new costume! There’s a reason Shouto’s is just his post-sports-festival costume; if I could’ve gotten away with using Izuku’s canon costume, I would have. So if descriptive prose is your jam, uhh...sorry. Use your imagination. I’ve always been clear and concise in my writing (I hated page-minimums in school. Like, if I can get
my point across well and effectively in less than 3 pages, isn't that better than stuffing my paper with useless words that just muddle the message or are repetitive?), which apparently has become an aversion to lengthy and detailed descriptions.

Anyways, now that I'm done with that tangent, Izuku's really shaken things up, huh? He better be careful though - he's never used his quirk to this extent before, and it seems to be having an affect on his body...

See you next chapter! Which is going up right after this one!
Here's part two!
But man, some chapters are so hard for me to name. I may or may not have taken several minutes just trying to title this chapter...*sigh* oh well. Here it is. It's on the shorter side, but if I didn't end it where I did it'd likely end up waaaay too long.
How will Izuku deal with the noumu? How will Shigaraki react to our intrepid pre-hero? Will the pros show up in time? What about All Might?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

If you asked Izuku when he instructed his body to move, he couldn't tell you.
If you asked Izuku why he jumped up and sprinted into the plaza, he'd tell you it was simple: I couldn't let him die.

Aizawa-sensei was the first teacher he'd ever had who actually cared about him. He was the first one to step in to defend him, the first one to say he was proud of him! And he told him that nearly every day! He was one of the first adults aside from his mother who saw potential in him, and he pushed Izuku to achieve that potential, without pushing too hard. Suffice it to say, he was Izuku's favorite teacher.

So when he saw that long black hair matted with blood and sticking to the concrete, he couldn't not rush in to save him.

His adrenaline-filled body had forgotten about the aches, exhaustion, and tingles that prickled his nerves. He barely registered Shouchan shouting after him. He paid no attention to the glowering villain or giant monster – he was solely focused on Aizawa-sensei's battered profile.

“Ehh, a student running to protect his teacher? How cute. Sadly, there's nothing you can do.”

He ignored the hand-man and knelt next Aizawa-sensei. Come on sensei, you have to live...Yaoyorozu, I hope you know what you're doing. He instructed Boundless to warn her 'Sensei incoming', before gently brushing his hand through bloody hair and willing him to disappear. The tingles got worse.

Hand-man was certainly surprised. “What?! He's gone?! You cheater! Hack!” He began scratching furiously at his neck, drawing blood, as the particle-man appeared next to him.

“Shigaraki, this must be the child with a warping quirk I told you about. It could be problematic for us if he continues the path of heroism.”

Oh no, I don't like where this conversation is going... Izuku forced his legs to stand beneath him.

“I know, I know! We'll just have to kill him now. Noumu!”

The noumu turned to it's master, and Izuku mentally prepared himself. This thing is fast, too fast. I
have to time it just right. Wait for it...

“Kill this -” Now!

The noumu was right in front of him by the time he vanished into Boundless.

The tingles were getting more painful than annoying now. He saw Yaoyorozu patching up Aizawa-sensei to the best of her ability. He sighed in relief when he saw both teachers were breathing. Izuku walked over to her.

“I'm going to send you to the nurse's office – it's about to get dangerous in here. Think you can keep treating them there? You'll have to reapply the bandages and stuff.”

Yaoyorozu was taken aback at hearing him speak, though she didn't comment on it. “Ah, yes! Of course!”

He said nothing more, only placing a hand Yaoyorozu and sending her to Recovery Girl's office, then each of the teachers as well. Alright, time to do something incredibly stupid.

He thought back to the exact point he disappeared from, and made himself appear right next to it, arm outstretched.

Izuku blinked back into reality, saw the angry villain across the way, felt the hulking muscles beneath his fingers, and ignored the pain filling his body as he willed the monster away.

It was only after the noumu was harmlessly floating in the void that Izuku's legs collapsed.

Shigaraki screamed in rage. “My noumu!! It's supposed to be the anti-symbol of peace!!! Where did you take it?!? You definitely cheated!! Uurgh, fine! I'll kill you myself!”

Shigaraki charged at him, moving surprisingly quick. Shoot! I don't think I can make it in time!

He didn't have to. A wall of ice rose up in front of him, separating him from the man's outstretched fingers.

“Izuku! You're okay!” Hot-and-cold arms embraced him. “Please don't ever do that again.”

'Sorry.'

But their reverie was short-lived, as the ice was was quickly decayed away.

“Another kid? Get out of my so I can kill that brat in the girly costume.”

Come on, my costume's not that girly, right?

Shouchan stepped in front of him protectively, ice and fire flowing from his body. “I'm not gonna let you touch him.”

Shigaraki scratched his neck again, before glaring at the boy in his way. “Fine. Guess I'll just kill you too!”

Izuku struggled to his feet again, watching his friend fend off the fiend. Shouchan sent wave after wave of ice and fire; Shigaraki dodged the flames and dissolved the ice that came his way. It was a stalemate – until Izuku noticed black particles gathering in front of Shigaraki's fist and next to
Shouchan's turned head. **SHOUCHAN!!!!!**

He once more pushed his protesting body forward, grabbing the wrist extending from the portal; the painful pinpricks flared as he thought *Shigaraki and I will appear in a section of Boundless separated from the noumu*.

His body gave out the moment they arrived, Izuku falling to the ground and panting heavily as waves of pain crashed over him. Shigaraki's red eyes whipped around quickly in confusion.

“Y-you...where'd you take me?!”

“Somewhere... *huff* you can't hurt anyone else.”

Shigaraki stared at him, before standing up into a battle stance. “I can hurt you.” He ran towards him, but with a passing thought he was stopped in his tracks. Izuku had commanded the fractals of Boundless to crystallize around his opponent's legs, rendering him immobile.

“Don't think this trick will work against me!” Five dry-skinned fingers closed around the fractals - And nothing happened.

“What?! Why won't it turn to dust?!”

Izuku heaved a sigh. “Because I told them not to.”

Shigaraki scratched his neck again, and narrowed his eyes. “What do you mean?”

“This is my quirk. You're currently in a pocket dimension where I am in complete control. I told the fractals to trap you, and I told them to resist your quirk.”

Shigaraki looked at him in surprise; Izuku sighed once more and laid back, the ground becoming soft and warm beneath him. “Don't bother trying to get out by force either. I'm the only way in or out of this place, so you’ll be here as long as I want you to be.”

“Huh. Interesting. And how long is that?”

“Well, I figure the teachers are gonna show up soon. Shouchan will text me when that happens, and I'll turn you and your...noumu over to them.”

“The noumu's here?”

He turned the crystalline void into his favorite beach, now laying in the warm sand that matched his costume. “Yeah. I put it in a separate area though, so it won't hear you.”

“And you just...control this place? With your mind?”

Yep.” *I probably shouldn't be telling a villain this...oh well.*

Both were silent for a while, Izuku enjoying the sand and ignoring the pain, and Shigaraki pondering.

A few minutes later, Izuku's brain buzzed with a text.
“And there's Shouchan's text; the pros arrived. I need to touch you to send you back – don't use your quirk on me or I'll send you to an empty void.”

“Fine.”

The pain flared again (okay, this is getting ridiculous) as he and his charge appeared in reality once more. He saw the pros rush to him, Shouchan's relieved smile, and Shigaraki's look of...

Is that...admiration?

Before the world went black.

Chapter End Notes

Oh Shigaraki, what's going through that twisted little mind of yours? We'll get more insight into what happened next chapter, but until then, I'd like to do some more opinion fishing. I don't think this counts as a spoiler? But if you're really particular about it, um... look away now.

On a scale of 1 to 10, how creepy should I make Shigaraki? 1 is 'not creepy at all, normal villain', 3-5 is around canon creepiness, and 10 is 'author needs to add some tags'. I won't do anything above non-consensual kissing; to say my experience with romance is lacking would be an understatement, so coupled with my aversion to descriptive prose, I'll spare you from what would surely be a hot mess (and not hot in the romantic way). That said, I can certainly appreciate a little yandere, so if you want mega-creep Shigaraki, get those votes in now!

I'm gonna do some homework now.
Geez, your votes were all over the place. I'd get a comment of 'No creep plz' followed immediately by 'full-on creep!'. I have a tendency to be a people-pleaser so it's hard to accept, but I know I can't please everyone...
But I sure as heck can try! So how about this: this fic will have little/no creep Shigaraki (and possible redemption, I'm not sure - jury's still out on that one).
HOWEVER, for those of you who want that yandere action, I'll write a spin-off of this fic where everything is the same, except yandere!Shigaraki. That way, those of you who'd rather not have Plus-Ultra-creep can just...not read it. That work for everyone?
Good. Yay compromise!
Time to finish off this arc, with the aftershocks of Izuku's actions.
Enjoy!

Shouto sat by the bed in the nurse's office, waiting for those green eyes to open.

The whole event had been harrowing, and Shouto hoped nothing like that ever happened again – though, he supposed he was going into a career field where high-stakes, life-or-death situations were common, even expected. But maybe those can wait until after we become pros?

His train of thought was derailed when he heard shuffling from the bed. Blearily, Izuku opened his eyes, finally awake.

"Welcome back, Izuku."

His mouth opened to speak – yes, yes! Come on, it's okay to use your voice – before it snapped shut and a hand came up to sign. Darn it, so close! So close. Don't get him wrong, he didn't mind Izuku being mute if he wanted to; he just knew that Izuku wanted to talk, but fear had taught him a long time ago to keep his mouth shut in reality. To Shouto, Izuku speaking out loud outside of Boundless was a sign of overcoming his past. It just wasn't happening today, apparently.

"Where?"

"You're in Recovery Girl's office. How are you feeling?"

'Head hurt. Body hurt. Much much hurt. Tired.'

He gave his friend a small smile and quiet huff of a laugh. "I bet. Recovery Girl said you're going through severe quirk exhaustion; you've been out for about 18 hours, and should avoid using your quirk for the rest of the day. She said quirk overuse can be dangerous, especially for mental-types like Boundless, so you need to give your body and mind plenty of time to rest."

Izuku looked down to the sheet pulled up over his body, then up to the ceiling – likely processing the news Shouto just gave him.
Recovery Girl walked into the office then. “Ah good, you're awake. How are you, dearie?”

“He said he's in a lot of pain, mind and body, and very tired. I told him what you told me.”

“A lot of pain, hm? Tell me, Izuku: have you ever had quirk exhaustion before?”

Green curls rubbed against the pillow as he shook his head. First time, huh? Must be rough.

She handed him a pen and paper. “Could you describe what it feels like?”

Izuku poked his cheek with the pen in thought, then began writing his sloppy (though much better than it used to be) kanji.

'I have a really bad headache, like a hammer in my skull. I also feel like lots of needles are stabbing me all over, and my bowed feel sore.'

Yeesh, that sounds bad.

Recovery Girl wrote on a clipboard, likely notating what Izuku wrote. “I see. I suppose it makes sense, given that your quirk is an interesting cross between mental and physical.”

Shouto put his hand to his chin, pondering something. “That needle sensation – is it like the feeling we get whenever we enter or leave Boundless? Only worse?”

Izuku nodded fervently, apparently glad he made the connection.

Recovery Girl wrote on her clipboard again. “Alright. As I'm sure your friend has told you, you're suffering from severe quirk exhaustion – the only cure is plenty of rest for your mind, body, and quirk. I'll release you this afternoon, but you must go straight to your dorm building. No exercise, no hard thinking, and absolutely NO using your quirk. I want you back in my office first thing in the morning for a checkup. Understood?”

More fervent nodding.

“Good. Shouto, I want you to keep an eye on him and make sure he rests. Also, the police would like to get your statement on the events of yesterday. They'll be here soon, but if you're not up to it we can postpone.”

With that, and one final warning to rest, she left the two alone.

'Class o-k? Teach-person? Aizawa?'

Oh yeah, I should probably tell him what happened after he passed out.

“Everyone's fine, thanks to you. None of our classmates were seriously injured, and both Aizawa-sensei and Thirteen are on their way to a full recovery. If you hadn't contacted the school so soon, or got the teachers out of there that quickly, there's a good chance we'd have suffered some casualties. You saved all of us, Izuku. You're a hero.”

A quiet sigh of relief was followed by a small blush on freckled cheeks.

“Here, I'll fill you in on what happened after you disappeared with the hand villain.”
Shouto watched his friend vanish along with the villain who'd almost killed him. “Izuku!”

“Tomura!” The foggy villain was apparently just as surprised as he was, calling out for the blue-haired man. Yellow-slit eyes narrowed at him. “Where did your friend take him?”

He took a battle stance facing the other, though his opponent seemed hesitant to fight. “Even if I told you, I doubt you could reach him – warp quirk or not. You'll just have to wait till Izuku brings him back, which will probably be once I tell him reinforcements are here.” He sent a wave of ice at him, though as expected, he warped out of the way. He tsked, looking at the now empty plaza.

“Shouto! You're alright! Where's Izuku?” He turned to see Itsuka, along with Kirishima, Tsu, and Shoji, running up to him from the Squall zone. Before he could answer, Ojiro and Mineta returned with Uraraka and Sato in tow, asking the same question.

“He took the leader of the villains to Boundless.”

Gaspsof shock arose from the group. Uraraka shouted “Then what are we standing around here for?! We need to help him!!”

Mineta, legs shaking, crossed his arms and shouted back. “No way! If you want to get yourself killed, be my guest – but I'm not putting my life on the line for that freak! I say good riddance!”

How...how could he say that?! What did Izuku ever do to him?! He clenched his fists in rage. He knew this probably wasn't the time to lash out against a classmate, but he'd gone too far.

“...You... Do you even realize he probably just saved all of our lives?!! He not only evacuated a number of less combat-oriented students, not only rescued our teachers who likely would have died without him, not only took on the leader with a terrifying quirk, but also moments before removed a giant monster apparently designed to kill All Might?! He stalked forward, ice and fire creeping up his arms. He grabbed the front of Mineta's costume with an icy hand, not even realizing the rest of the students still in the USJ had joined their group. “Do you really think any of us could beat something like that?! But Izuku just took it out of play like it was nothing! And now he's alone with the two biggest threats and there's nothing we can do about it, yet you have the nerve to say 'Good riddance'?!?”

Itsuka placed a hand on his shoulder, drawing him out of his rage. “Calm down Shouto. You said Izuku's in Boundless, right? Can he defend himself in there?”

He took a deep breath, releasing Mineta's collar and getting his quirk back under control. “I-yeah. As long as he can think, he'll have the upper hand. And as long as that Shigaraki guy isn't an idiot, he'll realize Izuku is the only way out and won't attack him. He'll probably come back and release Shigaraki once I text him the pros are here.”

“Then let's trust that he's okay, and wait for the pros.”

A few minutes later, the teachers arrived. He informed them of the situation with Izuku, and told them to be ready to apprehend the villain. Then he pulled out his phone and, with a silent prayer for his friend to be okay, sent him a text.

A second after he hit 'send', the stress lifted from his shoulders as Izuku appeared next to a quickly apprehended Shigaraki; the stress came back when his best friend crumpled to the floor, then lessened somewhat when he saw that he was only unconscious, and visibly uninjured.

His attention was returned to the pros when he heard them shout in surprise, only to see Shigaraki swallowed up by a black-and-purple portal. Oh yeah, they forgot about that guy. As the villain
disappeared once more, Shouto got the dreadful feeling that this was just the beginning — a prelude to something much bigger than anyone had anticipated.

Oh well, he'll cross that bridge when he gets to it. For now, he just needed to support his best friend.

Izuku listened carefully to his story; he was noticeably upset at Mineta's harsh remark, and disappointed that Shigaraki had gotten away in the end, but after some encouragement from Shouto seemed to accept that he'd done all he could. The whole thing was a nasty situation, but honestly? Shouto didn't think it could've ended much better than it had. The only ones with significant injuries were Aizawa-sensei, Thirteen, and Izuku, and all three would be alright within a few days. No hero careers were ended short yesterday.

Though there would be lasting scars for quite a few of them.

Two hours after Izuku woke up, there was a knock on the door. With Izuku's approval, Shouto gave permission to enter. A heavily-bandaged Aizawa-sensei and a stranger in a trench coat walked into the nurse's office.

“Aizawa-sensei? Are you alright to be walking around?”

His reply was muffled by the bandages. “I'm fine. This is detective Naomasa Tsukauchi.” Said man nodded in greeting. “He's here to take your statements. I'm here to hear them as well, and for emotional support. You boys open?”

I guess it's that time, huh. “I am. Izuku?”

'Shouchan, Aizawa, stay?'

“Yes, we can stay.”

'...open.'

Shouto helped Izuku sit up in the bed and held his hand as the adults sat in the available chairs across from them.

“As Aizawa said, I'm detective Naomasa. My quirk is called Human Lie Detector, which, as the name implies, informs me if someone is lying. I don't think you boys would lie about the villain attack, but I want you to know my quirk as a courtesy. Thank you for agreeing to talk with me about what happened. Now, if you could start from the beginning.”

And so the two boys told the detective what happened, with Shouto telling most of it, and Izuku writing down the details only he knew, as well as what went on in Boundless. Shouto and Aizawa-sensei were both relieved to hear- er, read — that Izuku had detained Shigaraki immediately, and the noumu was separated from them. That relief vanished from his teacher when Shouto told him what was going on outside at the time (namely, Mineta's traitorous, cowardly actions). The detective stayed professionally neutral through the entire story, and only spoke once they were done.

“So this 'noumu', is it still inside your quirk?”

The room was quiet, except for the scratching of pen on paper.
Yes. I don't think it's moved. I think it only takes ordurs from Shigaracky. Do you need me to bring it out?

Shouto spoke up as soon as he read that last sentence. “Oh no you don't. You've got severe quirk exhaustion, remember? You used Boundless in a lot of ways you're not used to for extended periods of time. I mean, teleporting so many people, even multiple at a time? Remote usage? Creating and maintaining separate zones in Boundless? Even now, holding a living creature in there for almost an entire day? I understand you want it out, but if you do it now you'll just make yourself worse. Have you been monitoring it through remote access this entire time?”

Izuku shook his head. Aizawa-sensei jumped in the conversation.

“You better not be. You said so yourself it only takes orders, so just leave it alone and rest your quirk. The detective can wait until you're better to apprehend it, right?”

“Of course. No need to push yourself even farther for us.”

With statements taken, and a promise to come back and apprehend the noumu later, the detective bid them farewell and left. Izuku looked about ready to pass out again, so Aizawa-sensei gave him an “I'm proud of you, kid” and a hair ruffle, before he and Shouto left the room to let him sleep.

Once the door was closed, Shouto spoke. “Sensei, I'm sorry.”

Aizawa-sensei didn't look surprised (though it was hard to tell under all those bandages), but he asked anyways. “What for?”

Is this a tactic for emotional growth, or is he genuinely curious?

“...I wished it was him stuck with Shigaraki, and not Izuku.”

Aizawa-sensei crossed his arms as well as he could with the massive casts. “Like what?”

Oh geez. Come on Shouto, it's just like Social Essentials. He took a deep breath. “For a moment, I...I wished it was him stuck with Shigaraki, and not Izuku.”

“Would you have gone to save him if that was the case?”

“Right now, I believe I would. But in that moment, I'm...not so sure.”

Would I have left him to die?

A cast gently smacked down on his shoulder. “Thank you for telling me. You've certainly come a long way; the 'you' from six months ago probably wouldn't have told me about this. Yes, you lost your cool. Yes, you had some less than honorable thoughts. Yes, you should've been focused on the situation at hand. But everyone, even the best heroes, get angry. What Mineta said crossed the line, and you have every right to be angry at him for suggesting your friend should be killed.”

He looked up, into the one eye he could see through the white bandages.

“I think, given the situation, your reaction was understandable – not excusable, but understandable. You were stressed out, worried about your friend, and that wasn't the first time you two have butted heads. I know a lot of people who would've reacted even worse in those circumstances –
heck, even I would probably be pretty mad. What's important now is that you've realized your mistake, admitted it, and are wanting to do better next time. In that regard, you've already surpassed many heroes, including your father; and you're just going to keep getting better. I know it."

He brushed a tear from his eye, and gazed in adoration at the best teacher he'd ever had.

“Thank you.”

It was time to meet with Sensei.

When that kid – Izuku, he thinks he heard that other brat call him – had brought him back into the waiting arms of the pros, he hadn't been worried; either Kurogiri would get him out, or Sensei would eventually. But now? Sensei had called for a debriefing of the mission.

*Now* he was worried.

The mission had been a *colossal* failure: nearly all their 'associates' (nothing more than pawns) had been defeated, the special-made noumu was captured, and All Might hadn't even showed up. He just had to hope Sensei wasn't too mad, and maybe he'd like Tomura's...discovery.

Yeah, he'll like that.

He walked into the bar, Father in his pocket, and turned to face the TV in the corner while Kurogiri cleaned glasses behind him. After a moment, the TV turned on, with a message that said 'Audio Only'.

“Ah Tomura, it's good to see you uninjured and away from those pesky heroes.” The gravelly voice of his mentor practically spat out the word that represented their enemies.

“I'm sorry Sensei, we failed miserably.”

“Failure happens, Tomura. You must simply learn from this failure and grow past it so you won't make the same mistake again. How is our standing after this loss?”

He scratched his neck idly. “First off, All Might wasn't even there. Never showed, even when the other pros arrived.”

Sensei hummed. “Not very hero-like. Continue.”

“The pawns we brought were useless – easily defeated by Eraserhead and a bunch of brats.”

“Not surprising, as we went for quantity over quality. And the noumu?”

“It knocked Eraserhead out of the game quick enough,” He smirked at the memory of crushing bones. “But it was captured in the end, and quite easily.”

That caught Sensei's attention. “Oh? Easily, you say? And why's that?”

He thought back to that curly-haired kid, and the fascinating quirk he possessed.

“Turns out, that school's got their hands on a legendary weapon: a kid with the most versatile and potentially powerful quirk I've ever seen aside from yours. If we want to win against the heroes...”

He smiled at the black screen, schemes and plans already forming in his mind.
“...we need this Izuku in the League.”

Chapter End Notes

Oh Tomura, just what are you planning? If you want to make a villain out of Izuku, you're going to need some persuasive ammunition, which means learning more about him...

Whew, another long chapter. I wanted to get all the aftermath done in one chapter, and a few extra things snuck in there (that entire conversation between Shouto and Aizawa was unplanned). Anyways, I'm satisfied with how the USJ arc turned out, and I'm glad you all seemed to like it as well.

I don't know when I'll start that yandere spin-off. It should be soon, since I want it to more or less keep up with this fic, but since this is the main it'll remain my focus. I'm kinda excited to try my hand at yandere! It's either gonna be great or terrible! Fun fact: several months ago, I actually wrote a "Yandere Survival Guide" just for fun. If y'all are interested, I'll upload it (you may have to tell me how/where to upload something without a specific fandom - unless "Manga/Anime Tropes" is a fandom...).

Next chapter is...well I'm not entirely sure yet, but we'll find out! See you then!
Rest

Chapter Notes

I'm alive!
My school crunch is almost done! I'm hoping to have this last assignment finished today, so starting tomorrow I should have more time to write again. Until then, enjoy this not-quite-filler-but-pretty-close. We've got a few chapters before the sports festival, though I may have something big happen before that... we'll see. I'm on the fence about it.
Not a lot to say about this chapter, mostly just tying up a few loose ends from USJ and announcing the festival. But hey, next chapter we'll get to see some more reactions to Boundless (probably)!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was time to go back to school.

Due to the... unforeseen circumstances, the students of 1-A were given a few days off to recuperate. Izuku especially had been practically bedridden since he woke up – not because he couldn't move, but because Shouchan was watching him like a hawk, and refused to let him do anything even remotely strenuous. He'd finally let him use his quirk yesterday to turn over the noumu, but not until after countless reassurances that his headache was gone, and he was fine, really, and bringing the noumu out wasn't going to land him in the hospital. I appreciate the concern Shouchan, but calm down.

Even telling him that quirk exhaustion, according to Aizawa-sensei, was “something all heroes in training go through” and “nothing to worry about, as long as you don't let it get too bad or do it too often” didn't work; if anything, it just made it harder to argue with Shouchan, who'd countered with “I've suffered through quirk exhaustion numerous times, but never had anyone there to care for me. My father didn't care if I needed rest. I'm more susceptible to frostbite now, because I wasn't properly cared for all those times I overused my ice; I don't want you to go through the same thing, so I'm going to be the person I needed all those times for you.”

Oh come on! How was he supposed to argue against that? Now anytime he so much as thought about not properly resting, he felt bad! Playing the tragic backstory card is cheating, Shouchan!

Thankfully, he was now walking out of Recovery Girl's office with the all-clear. The painful tingles had finally gone away two days ago, and the migraine not too long after. He was so ready to go back into Boundless! He really needed a visit to the beach after all that.

As he approached the door to 1-A, his nerves made him pause. How would his classmates react to him now? They saw how weak he was, totally spent with just a bit of running, quirk exhaustion from just a few teleportations and remote access. Gosh, he'd spent the last three days lazing around! What if they don't like me anymore?

Before his thoughts could spiral further down into the dark, he heard familiar voices calling out to him.
“Izuku! There you are!”
“Sup.”
“G-good...m-morning...”

He turned to see the entirety of the Pre-Heroics course walking towards him: Shouchan, Hitochan, Kochan, Itsu-nee, even Ama-senpai (Tamaki Amajiki, a senior and one of the top 3 students at UA, had joined PH at the behest of his friends this weekend; Izuku’d met him when he moved into the dorms). It was apparently now a tradition for Pre-Heroics students to walk to school together, although Izuku left ahead of them to see Recovery Girl today; it warmed his heart that they all came to see him.

“What did Recovery Girl say?” Shouchan got right down to business.
'Tell-me healthy. Body, quirk ready!’

He sighed in relief. “Good. I'm glad you're all better. Please don't ever overexert yourself like that again.”

Izuku smiled sheepishly, rubbing the back of his head, while Hitochan chuckled. “Yeah, for real. Welp, me and Amajiki-senpai are goin' to class. See you all at lunch.”

Ama-senpai gave a shy wave, still not used to the friendliness of his new coursemates, and slinked away along the wall, Hitochan right behind him.

The rest of them stepped into 1-A.

“Ah, Izuku! You're back!”
“I'm so glad you're alright! You had us all worried!”

“You were so cool at USJ! Taking on the biggest, baddest villains there all by yourself...so manly...”

“Your bravery shined through into our hearts, banishing the darkness of fear with it's blinding light...”

“Your quirk is almost as sparkly as I am.”

Izuku was bombarded. At first, everyone was inquiring to his health or praising his heroism, but with Aoyama's remark the conversation was quickly directed to those who'd seen Boundless.

“Oh yeah, you guys got to go in Boundless, right? What was it like?” Sero asked.

Yaoyorozu was the first to answer. “Absolutely fascinating! It was so pretty in there, and anything I needed just...appeared! It was similar to my quirk in that regard, but all the bandages made in there went away when the teachers were brought back out. Although, where they had been bandaged the bleeding was still slowed or even stopped, which leads me to believe that physical objects made in Boundless cannot exist in reality, but the effects they have on real persons or objects remains...”

Well. That's pretty spot-on. He nodded at her, to show she was correct in her assumptions.

Before even more questions or comments could come, a mummified Aizawa-sensei slammed open the door. “Get to your seats, class is starting.”
“Aizawa-sensei?! Are you okay to be teaching?!”

He glared through the bandages at the offending student. “I’m fine enough to teach you brats. Now, I have a couple announcements to make.”

That caught everyone's attention.

“First of all, Izuku has informed me that he'd like to further train certain aspects of his quirk that require the presence of others. If any of you have spare time after school for the next few days, drop by the Pre-Heroics gym to help him out.”

A few murmurs could be heard, but were soon silenced as Aizawa-sensei continued.

“Second, as you may have noticed Mineta is not here today. That's because he's been suspended.”

Aizawa-sensei actually had to use his quirk this time to get the class under control.

“Not only has he repeatedly been rude and disrespectful to his classmates, it's come to my attention that some of his actions during the villain attack were...unheroic. As such, the school has given him an ultimatum: if he cooperates, he'll be placed in Gen Ed and take required diversity and inclusion classes, as well as have regular visits to our guidance counselor, Hound Dog; should he abide by these rules, he may be permitted to rejoin the Heroics course next year. If he refuses these terms, however, he will be expelled.”

He wasn't going to lie – Izuku was kinda glad Mineta wouldn't be in his class anymore. He'd done nothing but antagonize him and his friends, and cause trouble for the girls. I hope he learns from this.

But that wasn't all, it seemed. “Lastly, you all may have just survived a villain attack, but your trials aren't over yet.”

The tension in the air was palpable, as every student was on the edge of their seats.

“The Sports Festival is coming up.”

Izuku was in the PH gym, waiting for his help to arrive; while his body was stationary, his thoughts were running full-speed through his brain.

First of all, when he'd been going to lunch from the Pre-Heroics classroom, he'd apparently missed a bunch of students from other classes scooping out 1-A. Shouchan had told him they wanted a look at their competition for the festival; the interlopers consisted of mostly 1-B, though some Gen Ed students appeared to be there as well. He said it was quite a messy situation, with people thinking 1-A was arrogant or even lucky to have beaten villains already. We could have died, and we're lucky?! Apparently a lot of them were looking for Izuku specifically, rumors having gotten out that one student in particular managed to take out the strongest villains alone – that's not exactly how I remember it going, but okay I guess. Izuku was just glad he'd lucked out and avoided the whole thing.

Especially since Shouchan said Kacchan was there. He really dodged a bullet (or explosion, rather).

Then there was the matter of the upcoming Sports Festival. Aizawa-sensei said it would be a bit different considering the new course, and he'd be ramping up their Physical Fitness work
accordingly, including training them as a group. Izuku would be lying if he said he wasn't a little bit excited at the prospect.

The problem was this was a *nationally televised event*. If he was participating – which, the imagined disappointment of all his favorite people made it almost certain he would – it wouldn't just be the whole school watching. The whole country would be watching. Him. The once supposedly quirkless boy with a history of theft (he was working on it, thank you very much – Aizawa-sensei checked in with him at least once a week to see if he'd stolen anything, and was teaching him ways to control the impulse) who went missing over seven years ago. Alive, well, and using his secret quirk.

*Yeah, there's a lot of ways this could go horribly wrong.*

Before he could continue to worry about it though, he heard a knock on the gym door.

“Izuku, we're here. You open?”

He walked over to open the door, only to see Shouchan, Aizawa-sensei, and...a lot more people than he'd been expecting, honestly. He saw the entirety of 1-A and PH, in a crowd by the door. Aizawa-sensei was pinching the bridge of his nose in irritation as he explained.

“*Apparently, everyone* was free this afternoon and wanted to help – though I suspect quite a few just want to see Boundless -*“ He turned his eyes to glare at the class, and sure enough several students looked away, embarrassed. “and of course, your fellow pre-heroes wanted to help. Take whoever you want to work with today, and everyone else can go to Gym Alpha and do their own training for the festival instead of crashing *yours.*” He glared at the gaggle of teenagers one more time before turning that familiar neutral face to Izuku.

Izuku held up a finger to indicate them to wait for a moment, before jogging over to the bench to grab his whiteboard. He walked back to the door, pondering who he should train with today. By the time he returned to everyone's view, he was scribbling furiously.

'I want everyone to be familiar with Boundless in case of emergency, so I'll work with different people each day. Today, I'd like to start with PH and Aizawa-sensei.'

His teacher nodded, before turning to the group. “Alright, you read the board; the Pre-Heroics kids and I will help Izuku today. The rest of you can use Gym Alpha for now, and will get your turn with Izuku another time.”

There were a few grumbles, but ultimately a grudging acceptance – by now, the students of 1-A had learned that Aizawa-sensei's word was law, and none of them wanted to incur his wrath; the majority of the group had left, leaving only Shouchan, Hitochan, Kochan, Ama-senpai, Itsu-nee, and Aizawa-sensei to enter into the PH gym.

“So, Aizawa-sensei said you wanted to train your quirk, right?” Hitochan began once the doors had closed behind them. Their teacher quickly took charge.

“Before that, we should make sure everyone has a good idea of what his quirk is and what it does. Shouto, you're the one who knows the most about it aside from Izuku, and less likely to go into the science behind it. Mind explaining? Just to make sure everyone's on the same page?”

Said boy nodded, then began his explanation. “Izuku's quirk, Boundless, is a pocket dimension he can access and control with his mind. Outside of it, he can use it for things like item storage and cellular communication; he can also teleport by going in, then out of Boundless, though he must
have a good idea of where he wants to go, preferably having been there. Inside Boundless, he can control everything, from materializing objects to changing the flow of time or even choosing whether or not there's gravity. Anything made in Boundless cannot exist outside it, and is based on Izuku's cognition, either conscious or subconscious, so he can't make something he's unfamiliar with. Any questions?"

Everyone aside from Aizawa-sensei, Shouchan, and Izuku himself was dumbstruck. Izuku saved them from their embarrassment with his somewhat legible kanji.

'It's probably easier to just experience it yourselves.'

And with that, the training began.

Chapter End Notes

So, I'm going to be padding out the PH roster soon. I'd like it to be slightly less dominated by boys and first years, but considering the vast majority of canon characters who'd fit in PH are first year boys...anyone wanna throw some OC's my way? They'll be incredibly minor, likely only mentioned once or twice; if you want to put in a character, give me at least a name; basic description, quirk, class, and reason to be in PH would also be nice if you want your character to appear in more than name only. Otherwise, PH is about to get an influx of nameless, faceless students.

Don't know when the next chapter is gonna be! Hopefully tomorrow, if I can get this assignment done quickly.

Until then, auf wiedersehen (hey, that rhymed)!
Hello again!

My school crunch is over, so I can write more often now! Thank you everyone for your patience.

Also, I've been all your OC's. It's been...a bit more than I was expecting, but I'll try to include each of them at least once. Remember that they won't have any kind of major role in the story (probably just a name drop and maybe a quick description - Izuku isn't going to be super close to everyone in PH); but when you read anything that involves PH, you can imagine your OC there with them.

As for this chapter, it took me a while to write, hence why I didn't update yesterday. Nonetheless, I hope you enjoy!

---

Izuku could hardly wait to see his friends' reactions to Boundless.

Once everyone had set down their things and met in the center of the gym, Izuku motioned everyone closer. Shouchan got the hint first, taking his hand; he elaborated for the rest of them.

“Everyone needs to be touching him. He's going to take us to Boundless.”

Aizawa-sensei, ever the voice of reason, butted in. “Hold on. Isn't teleporting this many people at once what led to your quirk exhaustion in the first place? I understand wanting to push yourself, but let's slow down a bit. Start with two people aside from yourself first.”

*That's...probably a good idea. Flashes of Recovery Girl's cautionary tirade came to his mind. I don't wanna have to go through that again.*

Itsu-nee agreed. “That sounds like a good plan. Who's going first?”

Shouchan hadn't dropped his hand, so he wasn't too surprised when he said “I'll go first. I'm already familiar with Boundless, so I can explain to everyone else. As for who goes with me...” He looked to their teacher.

“Oh no. I'm going last. I'm mostly here to make sure you don't overwork yourself again – I need to be on standby in case something happens, and you will tell me the moment you start feeling any strain. Got it?”

Izuku's head flew up and down to appease his teacher.

“Good. How about you take Amajiki? He already looks ready to melt into the floor; best to not make him wait much longer.”

Everyone turned to the senpai, who suddenly found the wall incredibly interesting. He'd only known the upperclassman for a few days, but already reacted to this with the thought of *that's so like you, Ama-senpai...* Izuku figured he'd help the poor, social anxiety-ridden teen and tugged
Shouchan along by the hand, jogging over to him and tapping his shoulder.

The dark-haired boy didn't move, except for turning one eye towards his juniors. Izuku smiled and held out his free hand in offering.

“I-if...you're sure...” A shaking hand met a steady one, and Izuku sent both him and Shouchan to Boundless.

Shouto let the familiar tingles wash over him before turning to check on Amajiki-senpai; he appeared to be surprised, and still anxious, but otherwise fine. They floated for a moment, before he called out. “Hey, Izuku? Can you hear me?”

Boundless thrummed with energy for a moment, before Izuku's voice rang throughout the void. “Loud and clear, Shouchan! Did Ama-senpai make it okay too?”

Ama-senpai? Cute. Said senpai covered his face in embarrassment, before the implications of what just happened registered in his mind. “Wait, was that...?”

He smiled and nodded, before responding to his friend. “We're both here. Though, a little gravity would be nice.”

“Hehe, whoops! One sec.”

Amajiki-senpai's worry was slowly being replaced with intrigue as their feet settled on the new ground.

“Thanks. How're you feeling? Any strain yet?”

“Hold on, sensei just asked the same thing.” I guess he's not good at multitasking yet. “Okay, I'm doing just fine; no lasting tingles or migraines yet, and the remote access is just taking a bit of my concentration. I'm about to send in Hitochan and Kochan, get ready to meet them.”

A few minutes later, Aizawa-sensei and Itsuka arrived with Izuku; once they were all settled, Aizawa-sensei checked in with their host.

“So this is Boundless, huh? Not bad, though a little colorful for my taste. How you holding up?”

Izuku sat down, and shocked everyone except Shouto when he spoke. “A little tired, but not bad. The tingles were definitely a bit stronger on that one, but still went away quickly. Having this many people here takes a bit of effort, but it's not uncomfortable. Hm...it seems the strain on my quirk is exponentially proportional to both the number of people I use it on and how long I use it on them, since when it's just me and Shouchan I can use Boundless for hours and be fine, but I already feel the effort needed for this many people after a few minutes-”

Shouto snapped his fingers in front of the freckled face that had furrowed in thought. “Izuku, you're rambling.”

His friend stopped, looked up, and blushed in embarrassment. Hitoshi was the first to recover mentally, and add to the conversation. “Well, now that we're all here, what's next?”

“Ummm...I suppose I can help you guys can train in here? The effects of what you do in here will carry over to reality, so Boundless is a great place to work out!”
Shouto agreed. “Yeah. I trained in here a lot for the recommendation exam. Time flows slower in here, so you can get more done in a day; Izuku can do all sorts of things to help too, like providing rough terrain for running, or an endless pool for swimming, even weights that gradually get heavier as you work.”

Itsuka jumped in next. “Oh, I see! That's a great idea! We can do all sorts of training in here, and it'll train Izuku's quirk at the same time.”

“I'll supervise. Izuku?” Aizawa-sensei grinned at the greenet. “Give us the works.”

Suddenly, the void shifted and morphed into a smorgasbord of training areas: a miniature replica of the PH gym, complete with equipment; a small pool with flowing current; an obstacle course with a massive rock wall at the end; a combat arena with moving shadow opponents; and, of course, the familiar beach that would never end no matter how long you ran.

Koji was the first one to 'voice' the awe of the newcomers. 'You make this?'

Izuku beamed at his fellow pre-hero. “Yep! It took quite a bit of imagination, since I've never been in a place quite like this before. But, I did use a lot of this while helping Shouchan! Just, not all at once.”

“Pretty impressive, kid. UA'd be hard-pressed to top this.”

He rubbed his head and blushed at the compliment from their teacher. “Hehe, thanks. You all can go anywhere you want, and if you need a modification just ask! I can do anything as long as I have some knowledge of it.”

With several more compliments from the group, everyone split off to do their own training. Itsuka was sparring with the shadows (who fought like Aizawa-sensei, since Izuku was familiar with his move set), Hitoshi was running the beach, Koji was attempting the obstacle course, and Shouto was lifting the increasing weights. Aizawa-sensei was watching them, giving out pointers and asking Izuku for adjustments for them. Amajiki and Izuku were...talking? Izuku had on his I've-got-an-idea face, which could only mean trouble. What are you up to?

“So your quirk lets you manifest traits of things you eat?”

“Y-yeah...like...eating octopus lets me grow tentacles...but only before it's finished digesting...”

“Interesting. I wonder...”

Izuku held out his hand, and a tray of fractal takoyaki appeared in it.

“Eat this.”

Ama-senpai gave him a curious glance, before eating one.

“Now try manifesting it.”

“Uhh...Izuku...”

He looked expectantly at his upperclassman. “Yes?”

“This...doesn't feel...like octopus...”
Well, of course not. “That's because it's made of fractals – it's a product of Boundless. What you just ate tasted like takoyaki, but it isn't. I just want to see if you can use your quirk on food with no nutritional value and no real counterpart and was never alive in the first place. Unless Boundless is considered 'alive', because it's a quirk...”

Before he could devolve into another ramble, Ama-senpai whispered “Okay...I'll try...”

Two pairs of eyes widened as the senior's extended arm sprouted massive fractals out of it, making it look almost like it were made of multi-colored rock candy.

“WHOA! It worked! Senpai, that's so cool!”

Ama-senpai flexed his crystallized hand, showing he maintained control of the limb. “It feels so weird... I've never manifested anything like this before.”

So he manifested a piece of my quirk. Does that mean...? “Y’know, since you just manifested a piece of Boundless – a quirk that responds to the thoughts of the user – can you morph that arm into something else? Try thinking of something you'd like to manifest, that isn't in your system already.”

He seemed to be on the same page, if his intrigued expression was anything to go by. He focused his gaze on his arm, and then...

The arm became the hoof of a cow.

“...It worked.”

“...It did! Oh! Try something you've never eaten before, but have a good understanding of it's traits.”

The hoof became the paw of a cat, complete with claws.

So he doesn't have to rely on prior experience, as long as he can imagine how it would manifest...

“Oh, now see if you can make it into something that isn't alive.”

“I don't know about this one, but okay...” The claws retracted, toes turned to fingers, and bright orange fur gave way to stone.

Ama-senpai seemed as surprised as Izuku was. “My. Arm. Is. Stone.”

Izuku's smile grew, excitement bubbling over. “It really is just like Boundless! That means you can manifest anything you can imagine! Come on, mix it up! Give it a go!”

After several minutes of Ama-senpai’s arm changing color, shape, size, and composition, the excitement finally waned a bit (it didn't help that Izuku was starting to feel the strain a bit more now).

“I still can hardly believe my quirk was capable of all that in conjunction with yours. I've never been able to pull off those kinds of manifestations.”

Izuku hummed in thought. “It's probably because I wanted it to work with your quirk; when I brought Shigaraki here, he couldn't dissolve the fractals because I told them to not be affected by his quirk. But when I gave you the takoyaki, I wanted it to work with your quirk. I think you were able to manifest anything you could think of because I subconsciously instructed it to obey your thoughts.”
“So...does that mean you could give other people control of Boundless if you wanted to?”

...Give someone else control? I've...never thought about that. “I don't know. It's a shame you can only do this inside Boundless, though. It'd be super useful in reality.”

Ama-senpai quirked his brow. “What do you mean?”

A couch appeared behind him as Izuku sat down. “Well, you said you can only manifest stuff in your digestive system, right? The fractals don't exist outside of Boundless. The moment you leave, the 'takoyaki' you ate will vanish from your stomach.”

“...Oh.” He sat down next to him.

Oh great job, Izuku. You had him talking with you like no tomorrow and you just had to bring the mood down. Come on, fix it!

“Buuut, now we know that if we're ever in a fight together, I can just send you and the villain into Boundless, give you some food, and you'll be unstoppable! Plus, this was super informative for me. Just as the fractals don't exist outside Boundless, I can't manipulate real objects like I can fractals.”

“Ummm...”

He answered the unasked question. “That means that...um...think of it like this. Let's say I have two apples: one I made out of fractals, and one I brought from reality. If I think 'the apples are cut in half', then the fractal apple would be cut while the real apple would not. But if I made a fractal knife, both apples would be cut. So the state of fractals can be changed directly or indirectly, while real objects can only be affected indirectly. Does that make sense?”

Ama-senpai thought for a minute. “I...guess.”

Izuku smiled. “Since I was able to make Boundless amplify your quirk, it's kinda like you're the first real thing to be directly affected by my quirk! You're super special, Ama-senpai!”

And then, Izuku saw something he didn't think he'd ever get to see.

Ama-senpai smiled.

Chapter End Notes

Oh my, what's this? Izuku and Ama-senpai fluff? That was unexpected. Sorry if Amajiki is OOC or just not written well; I'm way behind in the manga, so my experience with the character is minimal. I basically only know that he's anxious, likes to face the wall when anxious, and the basics of his quirk (which I got from reading the wiki, so...). I didn't want to write a lot of him yet for that reason, but that whole section at the end just kinda happened, so sorry if it's too far from canon.

Anyways, we'll see what my brain cooks up for next chapter.

Byeee!
I'm baaack!
Sorry this took so long. I know I was all "Hey, back to frequent updates!", but this chapter took a while to write. I didn't want to start the sports festival quite yet, but I had no idea what else to do, so...here! Sports festival time!
OC warning for this chapter! Only a few, and they each only get one line of dialogue. For those of you who hate OC's: sorry, but I needed to pad out the PH roster. I promise they'll be incredibly minor. For those of you who submitted OC's: thanks! And sorry their role is so minor, but I'll try and mention each one at least once at some point. For those of you who are in neither of the previously mentioned categories: sorry for no descriptive prose. Don't worry too much about the OC's, but if you're curious you can find their descriptions in the comments. Disclaimer: none of the OC's are mine. They are used with the permission of their creators. I highly doubt I will ever have an OC (I identify too much with Izuku for that to really happen), but if I ever get one (though I don't know why) I will let you know should you be interested.
We all good now? Good. Sports Festival!
It's time to show the world their moxie! But how will the new course shake things up? What about the unpleasant characters (haha, pun) that are bound (wait, double pun?!?) to be there? Can Shouto give Izuku the courage he needs - or is the courage he needs already within?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shouto was walking with the Pre- his friends, back to their dorms, sans Izuku. Said greenet was stopping by Recovery Girl first to get medicine for slight quirk exhaustion; he and Aizawa-sensei had made sure that as soon as Izuku mentioned a slight headache and tingles, the training was over. Then once everyone was back in reality, Aizawa-sensei had gone to check on the rest of 1-A.

In other words, Shouto was alone to handle his friends in the aftermath.

“I know you told us about it ahead of time, but Izuku talking still threw me off.”

Itsuka nodded along to Hitoshi's comment. “Totally! I'm glad you gave us the heads-up, otherwise I probably would've made a scene about it.”

“That's why I told you. If you all freaked out about him speaking, it wouldn't have helped him. I want him to know we're comfortable with him vocalizing without pressuring him to do so; that way, when he's ready, he'll talk to us.”

Amajiki-senpai surprisingly joined in. “S-still, you c-c-could've told us he was a r-rambler...”

Shouto blushed in second-hand embarrassment for his friend, while Hitoshi snorted. “Yeah, he certainly seemed to be talking your ear off for a while there.”

Koji turned around to face the group. 'B-O-U-N-D-L-E-S-S, Izuku brave.'
“He is. Boundless is...a safe haven of sorts for him; it's the only place where he leaves his past behind and acts truly like himself. He's much more comfortable in reality than he used to be, but...” Shouto left it at that, though he could see from the others' expressions no more needed to be said.

After all, they knew better than most that healing takes time, and some scars never fully fade away.

Things continued in that way for the next two weeks. Everyone would train after school, sometimes in Boundless, with Shouto warning them ahead of time to not make a big deal about Izuku speaking (though a few of them nearly blew it anyways). Everyone seemed to love the vibrant, versatile pocket dimension, some of the class even requesting to train there again and again – Izuku had confided in him that he liked people visiting, but sometimes it got a bit much and he wanted the place to himself. Which made sense, really; Boundless was like home to him, so naturally guests would overstay their welcome eventually. He'd told Izuku as much, and assured him the others would understand.

But now, it was the day of the sports festival, and Aizawa-sensei had asked everyone to meet in the Pre-Heroics common room.

Several more students had joined the program in the last few weeks, though Shouto hadn't spent much time with them. They had members in all three years, boys and girls alike – each with their own reasons for joining Pre-Heroics. So by the time everyone had arrived in the common room as asked, there was a wide variety of high-schoolers waiting for their teacher to speak.

Aizawa-sensei looked at the multiplying Pre-Heroes, verifying he had their attention, before he began.

“As you all know, today is the sports festival. You've all been working hard, and I couldn't be prouder of all of you. That being said, this may be a difficult experience for some of you.” He took a moment to lock eyes with certain students. “Just remember, you're here so we can help you. If it's too much for you, that's okay; but I know that each and every one of you has what it takes to go out there and show the world who you are, flaws and all, even if you don't feel it yet. So whatever happens, I want you to give it your best shot.” He waited, letting his words of encouragement sink in.

Aizawa-sensei was really good at the whole encouraging thing, Shouto could tell. I'm going to show the world that I am not Endeavor's second coming. And I'm going to show Izuku that we can be heroes – together.

With his words etched into their hearts, Aizawa-sensei continued. “Now, you all remember what we talked about last week? About the opening speeches?” Various heads bobbed up and down. “Well, I'll reiterate just in case. Usually the opening speech is done by that year's student representative – for first years, the kid who scores the highest on the entrance exam; for second and third years, the hero course student with the highest grade average. However, to promote the Pre-Heroics program, this year Nedzu wants you to do the speeches, together as a team. You'll be separated by year of course, but aside from that you'll all go up together. You kids figured out your plans right? Let me hear them.”

Their teacher turned to Amajiki-senpai first. “U-um...since I'm...the only third year...in Pre-Heroics...I asked N-Nedzu if...m-m-my friends could c-come up with me...for support...”

“Good, so you won't be alone. Second years?”
One of the new members, a blue-haired Gen Ed girl – Teiryu, I believe – answered him. “We worked together to write a speech, though haven't decided who'll say it yet.”

“Okay, make sure you figure that out. First years?”

Shouto was the one to speak up, eager to share his friend's brilliant idea. “Izuku thought we should all participate, so we're doing a collaborative speech; I'll be interpreting for those who prefer to sign since I'm the most familiar with it aside from Izuku and Koji.”

Everyone aside from the first year students looked puzzled. “Collaborative...speech?”

Shouto grinned at his best friend, who was practically vibrating in excitement. “Yep. And it's going to be great.”

The venue for the sports festival was...impressive, to say the least. A looming stadium with hundreds upon hundreds of seats, winding hallways that never seemed to end, numerous rooms for all sorts of purposes, and countless people from family members to hero enthusiasts to well-known pros. But no sign of my father yet, thankfully. Shouto was desperately hoping to go the whole festival without running into him; because of the blessing that was the dorms, he hadn't seen the old man in weeks, and he wanted to keep it that way as long as possible. He just knew if he did, the flame hero would spout some utter nonsense about “living up to my legacy” or “surpassing All Might”. Honestly, if the guy could just buzz off and let him go to school in peace, that would be fantastic.

Though as concerned as he was about Enji, he was doubly so about Izuku.

Shouto had learned a lot about Izuku's past over the months of knowing him – being bullied for his apparent quirklessness, the betrayal of his former friend, his mother's death, his father's neglect. Take into account that Izuku knew of his past and had a clearly expressed hatred of Enji, and Shouto's list of people to keep away from his friend at all costs totaled to three: Midoriya Hisashi, Todoroki Enji, and Bakugou Katsuki.

And two of them were practically guaranteed to be here today.

As such, he'd consulted Aizawa-sensei and principal Nedzu to come up with a battle plan in case things go south, and Shouto had sworn he'd follow it to the letter. 1. Keep tabs on Endeavor and Bakugou's whereabouts. 2. Keep Izuku in public areas, surrounded by his friends and classmates. 3. If Izuku does need to leave the presence of his friends and classmates, he will be accompanied by Shouto, who will serve as defense should anything happen.

Honestly, he'd rather just have Bakugou not participate, or on a different field; but Nedzu had said that wouldn't be fair to him, that Bakugou had mellowed out a bit (apparently Yoarashi had beaten him in their first battle exercise, and the blow to his pride had been good for him), and that this was a good chance for Izuku to face his fears. And Izuku agreed. If it wasn't for that, he'd have told the possibly-rodent “Absolutely not, either that jerk sits out or Izuku does”; but if Izuku was feeling brave enough to do it, then how could I refuse?

He'd just have to do everything he could to keep them apart.

Shouto was pulled from his thought by the announcement calling all students to make their way to the field. He stood up from his chair in the PH waiting room, the others following suit, ready to leave when he felt a nervous tap. Izuku was beside him, fidgeting anxiously, before he held out his
hand in a familiar fashion – the way that said “come with me”. He smiled reassuringly, taking the offered hand and letting the tingles wash over him as he entered Boundless.

“You okay, Izuku?”

He shuffled, wringing his hands. “N-not really. I was fine earlier, even excited! Aizawa-sensei was talking about showing off to the world, and I was like ‘Yeah, I can do this’! But now that it's happening, just thinking about all those people out there...” Green eyes, swirling with emotion and moist from oncoming tears, pierced his heart with their gaze. “Shouchan, I'm so scared.”

Before those tears could fall, Shouto pulled him into a tight hug. “I know. It's okay to be scared, this is a scary thing we're about to do. I'm sure a lot of us are massive bundles of nerves right now! But I bet that once we get started, once we're focused on the events and each other, the audience will fade away, and it won't be so scary anymore. We've been practicing for this. This is no different from all the things we've been working on with Aizawa-sensei.” He pulled from the hug, but kept his hands on Izuku's shoulders. “You've accomplished so much, Izuku. You don't know how much of an inspiration you are to me, to all our friends! Every time I struggle, every time I want to give up, I think of you. I think of you, who's been through so much but keeps going. You, who had the odds stacked against you but never gave up. You, who wakes up every day and shows me how you don't let fear control you anymore! So don't let it control you now. I'll be right beside you, cheering you on.”

One more tearful hug later, and the two returned to reality only a few seconds after they'd left it. With a nod to the other Pre-Heroes, and Izuku's hand in his, Shouto strode through the door and down the hall to the field. They waited at the opening for their course to be announced, listening to Present Mic and Aizawa-sensei commentate.

“- and the Management course, classes I, J, and K! Now, the particularly observant listeners out there may realize a few students are missing! Well, that's because they're part of UA's BRAND NEW COURSE!! Eraserhead, you're their teacher, right? Why don't you explain?”

A sigh (with a hint of fondness) came over the speakers. “Yeah, I am. These are kids who have the drive to become heroes, but need an extra hand to get there. They've realized there is something holding them back from reaching their potential – life circumstances, emotional trauma, mental illness, things like that. Things they won't let stop them, things this course is designed to help them with. We equip them with the tools they need to succeed, and support them as they strive to overcome adversity. Far from broken, you're about to meet some of the strongest kids at UA.”

“WELL SAID!! Now without further ado: ladies and gentlemen, I present to you the Heroics Course Preparatory Regime – PRE-HEROICS!!”

A reassuring squeeze to Izuku's hand, and the seven of them walked out. Eyes immediately turned to them and their unique gym uniforms with the green accents (Itsuka had a normal uniform, except for the word 'Ambassador' stitched in green on the sleeve). Shouto paid them no mind; whether they approved of him and his friends or not didn't matter. What mattered was they were here, and they were going to be heroes.

“And now, your referee for the first-year stage! The 18+ Only Hero: Midnight!!”

Hoots, hollers, and wolf-whistles accompanied their Modern Hero Art History teacher as she strode onto the stage. “Alright, I can feel the energy! Let's all have a good time~ But first, the sportsman's pledge. Usually we'd have the student representative do it, but this year we're mixing it up to promote our new course! So come on up, all you lovely little Pre-Heroes~!”
Just as they'd decided beforehand, all the first-year PH students lined up on the stage; Itsuka was the first to step up to the mic. “Hello everyone! My name is Kendo Itsuka, your Pre-Heroics ambassador. The students behind me have written this year’s pledge together, and will be presenting it together as well. I proudly introduce, in order of appearance: Todoroki Shouto, class 1-A, who will also be interpreting for some students; Layla Ballard, class 1-H; Koda Koji, class 1-A; Megumi Chiyoko, class 1-D; Shinsou Hitoshi, class 1-C; and Midoriya Izuku, class 1-A.” With that, Itsuka stepped back from the mic, and Shouto stepped forward.

“We pledge to better ourselves for the sake of our friends.”

He stepped to the side to allow the others to speak, while staying near the mic for when he needed to interpret.

“To extend a helping hand to those in need.”

He spoke while Koji signed. “To work hard and work together.”

He spoke for Chiyoko too. “To push through each challenge we face.”

“To not let the past define us.”

He began to speak for Izuku. “And to let ourselves be seen -”

But he stopped as Izuku dropped his hands and leaned forward into the microphone. *He's not...is he? Will he really?*

And for the first time in many years, Izuku's voice made it out into the world, as into the microphone two words were whispered.

“And heard.”

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Chapter End Notes

Izuku baby! I'm so proud of you!! <3
I've been waiting to write that speech for, let's see...maybe 10-15 chapters? I got a little emotional when the idea struck me. Hopefully I've done it justice.
I also hope you all are enjoying the fluff. Bask in it's comfort while you can - I can feel my muse turning dastardly, which can only mean angst is coming...
I'll try and get the next chapter up tomorrow.
Toodles!
Race

Chapter Notes

Oh man, you guys blew up the comment section on the last chapter so bad, I think I need a new inbox. Seriously though, I'm glad you all were just as emotional as I was with that speech! Enjoy your good feelings while you can - I sense a disturbance in the force- I mean fic. Totally meant fic.

Here we go, time to get into the games! I was torn over whether to follow the canon or not when selecting events, but I had no idea what other events I should do, so...canon it is. Enjoy the boring race. The other events should be a bit more interesting, though as we've discovered I'm not real adept at writing action scenes; I'm apparently all about that dialogue and character interactions. Who knew?

Try not to get whiplash on the switching POV's for the first half of this chapter. Sorry if it's disorienting.
The sports festival is now under way! How will Izuku hold up under the pressure? Will everything be okay when several highly toxic people are gathered here?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“And heard.”

The voice was quiet, even over the loudspeakers, but it was undeniably there. To Shouto, it felt like the entire world stopped for a moment, the whole universe silent in reverence.

The people in the stadium must have been cheering. However, Shouto's ears were ringing with those two words, two words that at any other time would have been inconsequential, but in this instance held so much meaning. Izuku, in the real world, had spoken.

He thought he saw a few teary eyes on the stage and in the crowd of his classmates, though he couldn't be sure – his eyes were too watery to tell.

Izuku had been planning his speech for days.

When they'd been informed that they were doing the pledge, he at first had no idea what he wanted to do; he'd pondered for days, before relenting and asking Aizawa-sensei for advice. What he received was “This speech is your chance to tell the world who you want to be, to show how far you've come and how far you're going to go. So Izuku, what are you going to tell the world?”, and it was just what he needed. Izuku had decided he wasn't going to run and hide anymore, wasn't going to let the world shut him up.

He almost didn't go through with it. When that announcement went off, it hit him what he was about to do; stand in front of thousands, no, millions of people and say “I am here!”? It may work for All Might, but not Izuku. He'd almost run off to Boundless and skipped the whole thing.
But he'd learned in Social Essentials that, when he's afraid, he should ask for help and face his fear instead of running from it. So he'd reached out to Shouchan, and Shouchan had encouraged him. He'd done so much for Izuku, it was about time for him to step up his game. He'd steeled his nerves, stepped up to the mic, prayed that his vocal chords wouldn't seize up again, and told the world that he would not be silenced.

It was terrifying, but also freeing.

There was only a brief moment for him to relish in the new-found sensation of presence, before his friends were swarmed around him in a massive hug. The audience was cheering and clapping, but his friends and classmates were roaring in acclamation. I did it!

“Shota, are you crying?”

Shota wiped his eye. “No! It's...it's liquid pride.”

“Oh SHOTA!” The loud blonde glomped onto him.

The liquid pride kept gathering, though it never fell. Great job Izuku – the world is listening now. Show them who you are.

It was a good thing the intercom was off.

Once the bundle of joyful students had shuffled off the stage, Midnight returned to the mic.

“Oh my, what a passionate speech! Let's hear it one more time for the Pre-Heroics course!” More applause filled the stadium, before dying down again. “Now it's time to announce the first event! First up iis...” The screen behind her lit up, showing a roulette of different events, before it stopped. Izuku was unconvinced. The staff already knows what the event is going to be, so what's the point of all this? But the heroine plowed on, unperturbed by his mental criticism. “An obstacle race! First one to the finish wins! Alright, everyone gather up by the archway!”

Izuku watched as all the other first-years bunched up together, with only a few hanging back like him. An obstacle race, huh? It would've been nice if they told us where the finish line is. But maybe... He grinned. If this works, I am so winning this.

Shota could see Problem Child #2 clearly, waiting at the back of the group, and seemingly unconcerned. What've you got up your sleeve this time, kid? He didn't have time to ponder it, however, as Nemuri shouted “GO!!” and students slammed into the first obstacle – the now overcrowded tunnel out of the arena. But surprisingly, instead of running forward into the crowd, Izuku turned around and ran back towards the stage.

Hizashi noticed as well. “Eehh?! What's he doing?! The course is that way!”

He saw Izuku wave to Midnight, and begin signing something; since sign was a recommended skill for pros, Nemuri was familiar with it as well, so she nodded along and said something to the smirking boy. I see...smart thinking once again, you devious little mastermind. He smirked to match the boy before answering his partner. “If I know Izuku – and at this point, I'd say I know him pretty well – then he's about to show us his specialty: bending the rules to reach an
unconventional solution.”

There was a collective gasp of surprise as the boy vanished.

“Whaa?! Where'd he go?!”

“Check the finish line.”

As soon as he said it, Izuku appeared right in front of the finish line, before calmly stepping over it.

“WHOA!!! AND JUST LIKE THAT MIDORIYA IZUKU TAKES FIRST PLACE!!! But if he can teleport then why was he talking to Midnight?”

“Because we never said where the finish is. He can only appear in familiar locations, so he asked Midnight where it was. Once he saw where it was, he could warp there no problem. Now hurry up and commentate on the rest of the race.”

“R-right.”

Izuku sat on the field, running his hands through the grass; maybe I shouldn't have finished that quickly, now everyone's going to – no, it doesn't matter what they think. I said I was going to show the world, right? Plus, now I'll have an edge over the other contestants in the next round; they'll be tired from the race, and I've barely moved. He leaned back, watching as the other students were just now making it to the massive pit. They still have a ways to go...great. Now I'm bored. He kept his eyes on the massive screens showing the race, idly listening to the commentary. Shouchan was contesting for the lead with that Inasa guy and... A loud BOOM resounded from the other side of the stadium, causing D-Izuku to flinch and his right side to ache. He could feel the anxiety and fear building, breath shallowing and heart racing. He closed his eyes and focused on the techniques he'd been taught, his fists gripping the grass to help ground him. First step: get his prefrontal cortex back in control of his brain instead of his amygdala. He did this by spelling backwards. My name is Midoriya Izuku, U-K-U-Z-I A-Y-I-R-O-D-I-M. My best friend is Todoroki Shouto, O-T-U-O-H-S I-K-O-R-O-D-O-T. My teacher is Aizawa Shota, A-T-O-H-S A-W-A-Z-I-A. Step two: slow his heart rate to get his body back into 'rest and digest' mode instead of 'fight, flight, or freeze'. Just breathe in...he inhaled through his nose for five counts; hold it...he held the breath for five counts; and release...he exhaled through his o-shaped mouth for ten counts. Now repeat until your heart rate's down.

By the time he'd completely calmed down, the rest of the contestants were reaching the finish; Shouchan came in third, losing by a hair to Inasa, but at least he beat K... Shouchan did really good! Third place is great!

Izuku waved to his friend, pointedly avoiding looking at the spikey blond head nearby. Shouchan saw him and, after congratulating Inasa on his second place, jogged over to him.

“I had a feeling you'd pull something like that. Congratulations on your win.”

'Thank-you. Same-as-you.'

He huffed a small laugh. “Thanks. My old man is probably disappointed, but as for me? I don't care what he thinks – I'm satisfied with third place. I gave it my best shot, after all. Can't ask for more than that.”

While everyone else was finishing the race (with Izuku praising and encouraging his friends, and
receiving the compliments of some other students), he tried to ignore the burning sensation of crimson eyes boring into his skull. Thankfully, Shouchan noticed his hidden distress and stuck fast to his side like glue, effectively warding off any attempts to antagonize him. So far, so good. Just a few more hours, and I'll be in the clear. I can do this. Moments later, Midnight stepped up to the mic once more.

“To the first 42 contestants who made it to the next round, congrats!! The rest of you, no worries! We'll have some recreational games this afternoon so you can still show off. As for now, it's time to announce the next event! Oooh, what will it be? It's filling me with excitement~!”

The roulette began on the screen again; Izuku just rolled his eyes, causing Hitochan to chuckle. The flashing on the screen came to a stop. Ca-val-ry battle? He turned to his fellow pre-heroes, doing one easily understood sign.

'What?'

Several eyebrows raised, some in confusion and others in comprehension. Hitochan was the one to answer him. “Oh yeah, you probably haven't done this before. A cavalry battle is where you work in teams of up to four. One person, the rider, is carried by the others, the horses. You have to collect the headbands of the other teams, but if the rider touches the ground your team is out. No one ever wanted me on their team, but it was pretty boring anyways if you ask me. Although, since we're using quirks this time...” His grin is starting to look a bit too much like sensei's. “This'll be interesting.”

He thanked Hitochan for the explanation, before tuning back into Midnight.

“- but if your rider hits the ground, everyone on the team is eliminated! Oh, and one more thing: we won't tell you how long the round will last! Will it be 20 minutes? Five? An hour?! It's. A. Se. Cret~. But if you're not on the field when we call time, you're disqualified!”

Well shoot. That's probably a countermeasure for me, isn't it?

Itsu-nee agreed, it seemed. “I see...that means Izuku's team can't just wait out the round in Boundless.”

Shouchan hummed in thought. “But it doesn't mean we can't go to Boundless at all. Did you hear it? She said 'not on the field when we call time'. That implies we're allowed to leave the field, as long as we're back at the end. You're right that we can't sit out the round – I'm willing to bet they're withholding the time limit to prevent that; but if we find ourselves in a tight spot, we can at least hop out of reality for a brief second.”

My thoughts exactly...and it sounds like Shouchan wants to be on my team, if all the 'we's is any indication.

“Now, for the points! Last place is at 10 points, with points increasing in increments of 10 until we get to first place. The winner of the first round is worth...”

Oh no...

“10 MILLION POINTS!!!”

Well crap.
Whoop whoop! Round one is done! Our little bby boi (nope, nevermind, too weird for me) - baby boy is showing off his cleverness... I think Aizawa's right when he says bending the rules for an unconventional solution is Izuku's specialty. I've apparently written him as 'incredibly adept at finding and exploiting loopholes'.

On a side note, what Izuku does to quell his anxiety? I got all that straight from my behavioral therapist, and have used those techniques myself to combat my own anxiety. If you find yourself having similar issues, try it! Though I do recommend seeking help; I was lucky enough to have gotten help while my anxiety was intermediate-level. As it was, those simple tricks were enough for me to get it under control, but if I had waited it would've only gotten worse. No matter what others may say, you shouldn't be ashamed for seeking therapy, so do it if you need it. When your body is really sick or injured, you go to the hospital - you'd be dumb not to. So when your mind is sick, please. Seek help. You'll thank yourself later.

Now it's time to find out what happens in the cavalry battle! I have no idea yet, so y'all are gonna find out not long after I do! I do have some plans for after this round though... I can't wait for your reactions to what's been circling in my head like a hawk, ready to strike.

See you in the next chapter!
Hey y'all! Guess who's back!
This chapter took a while to write. I was busy, and my muse was being stubborn. But it's done! Now to just write the next chapter...
I keep coming up with new ideas for stories and it won't stop (that Irregular at Magic High School one is the one currently stuck in my brain). I know I can't possibly write them all, and a lot of them are either gonna stay on the back burner for a long time, or just not get written. Thing is, I like all these ideas. And you guys already voted for the random quirk fic next, so if my muse could focus it's power on either Escapist or that next fic, that'd be fantastic.
Anyways, here's part 1 of round 2! Cavalry battle time!

If Shouto had any doubts about being on Izuku's team before, he certainly didn't now. After the revelation that literally everyone would be going after him (considering his headband guaranteed first place), Izuku was shaking like a leaf. His poor friend had been so brave all morning, from speaking in front of thousands of people to knowingly being in the same vicinity as his old tormentor – and now he had a huge target on his back (or rather, forehead)? Even Shouto would want to curl up and hide, and he wasn't nearly as anxiety-ridden as Izuku. He really has come a long way, but right now he needs his friends.

At Midnight's announcement that they had 10 minutes to form teams and strategize, Shouto immediately waved all the Pre-Heroes who'd made it through the first round to him (not too hard of a task, considering they tended to congregate together anyways). Koji didn't make it to this round unfortunately, and I'm not all that familiar with the new PH students, but... He grinned at Hitoshi and Itsuka. “I don't know about you guys, but I think it's about time we show everyone what Pre-Heroics is made of.” Comprehension dawned on their faces, and soon the three of them went up to Izuku. When Izuku saw their team, a weight visibly left his shoulders before his eyes turned mischievous, tactics and strategies no doubt already forming.

By the time the 10 minutes were up, Izuku was fastening his headband, supported by his friends; Shouchan was on his right (so he could use his ice easily – he didn't have the control needed to use his fire in an event like this yet), Itsu-nee was on the left (supporting most of Izuku's weight with her giant right hand and ready to defend with her left), and Hitochan was in front. He could feel the eyes of the other teams on his forehead, all vying for the 10 million and change it represented. He tried not to think about it.

“Well well! It seems we have some interesting teams down there! The desire for that 10 million is so thick and palpable I can feel it aaaall the way up here in the commentator's booth! I can only imagine how Midoriya Izuku must feel – though it seems he's teamed up with his fellow pre-heroes exclusively. Any insight there, Eraserhead?”
“It's only natural, and probably a smart move. Pre-Heroics is a pretty tight-knit group, and those four in particular are quite close and know each other well. They have strong bonds of trust between them, even this early in the year, so they can depend on each other; there's also the fact that in Pre-Heroics we do a lot of team-building and cooperative exercises. That familiarity and experience in working together will serve them well in this event. Anyone trying for their headband's got an uphill battle ahead of them – I have a feeling that team is a force to be reckoned with.”

Midnight cracked her whip (is she allowed to have that at a school event?), and announced into the microphone “All teams ready? Get set! GO!” - and everyone sprang into action. The only team to not immediately rush towards the ten million was Izuku's own team. Instead, Itsu-nee called out “Let's do this! Formation 2!”

“Roger that.”

“On it!”

Just as planned, Izuku slid onto Itsu-nee's back, held in place by her giant hands (for some reason the position felt really familiar, and not just because they'd done exercises like this in PF); Shouchan left his side, stomping down his foot to create a wall of ice all around them. Hitochan had already split off from the group as well, though he was outside the ice wall. They just said the rider couldn't touch the ground, not that the team couldn't disassemble. The outcry of frustration from the other teams was matched only by Present Mic's cry of surprise.

You could hear the smirk in his voice as Aizawa-sensei commented on their plan. “Told ya those kids were good at unorthodox thinking. The only way to be eliminated is if the rider hits the ground. They must've realized that and decided to take advantage of it.”

Shouchan was busily maintaining the ice wall from the barrage of attacks, though if all went well that shouldn't be the case much longer. Hitochan was running around, shouting at the other teams.

“What’s the square root of 84?”


“Give me your headbands then leave our team alone.”

The attacks lessened on that side of the ice wall. Then, from a short ways away, Hitochan yelled again.

“How much wood would a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood?”

Several confused responses later, he commanded again. “Start attacking the other teams.”

A couple minutes later, a rhythmic knock could be heard on the ice. Shouchan, looking a little frosty from the continued ice use, jogged over to that section of the wall. “Nice work Hitoshi. You ready?”

“Yep, all clear.”

Shouchan put his left hand to the wall, melting an entrance for Hitochan, before freezing it back behind his teammate and creating a roof over their heads, leaving them completely enclosed.

Now, with phase 1 complete, time was of the essence to transition into phase 2. Hitochan ran over to Izuku, who took the procured headbands. He pulled the one off his forehead, mixed it in with
the others, turned them all inside out, then tied one to his forehead and the rest around his neck, making it harder for someone to steal the 10 million. Hitochan took his position at his side, while Shouchan began warming the air within the soon-to-crumble wall. The boom of explosions could be heard, blasting into the ice that wouldn't hold much longer. Izuku tried not to flinch with each blast.

“The south of the field was pretty empty when I was out there, so I think over by the ref's platform is our best bet.”

Izuku nodded, and Itsu-nee confirmed. “Sounds good. How is it, Shouto?”

Shouchan had an open flame on his left side now (thankfully his gym uniform was specially made to be fireproof), as their sanctuary was becoming uncomfortably hot, water dripping from the walls. “Almost there. Get ready!”

Izuku reached out his hands, one taken by each of his teammates sans Itsu-nee, who tightened her grip on him.

“3!”

The quickly-thinning walls began to creak.

“2!”

More blasts sounded through the ice, though any hole was quickly filled again.

“1!”

Izuku squeezed the hands of his friends.

“NOW!”

Several things happened at once, so fast many people would probably be confused as to what happened.

Anyone watching in slow-motion would see this: 1. Shouchan released a massive wave of fire and heat. 2. Izuku and his team disappeared. 3. A blast from a blond with red eyes broke through the final layer of ice. 4. The dome of ice they'd been hiding in exploded from the expanding air, knocking back all the teams still attempting to breach it and 5. Izuku's team reappeared on the other side of the field, right next to the podium where Midnight stood stunned.

Present Mic's hyperactive yelling over the loudspeakers did not help the twinge of pain in Izuku's head after the teleport. All his practice had made him much better at transporting multiple people, but he still felt the strain with three passengers going in and out in quick succession like that. Though, in terms of looking rough and exhausted, Shouchan was taking the cake right now.

“As expected, I'm pretty drained – I need to rest my quirk. Time for phase 3.”

The team seamlessly moved into their third configuration, with Itsu-nee passing Izuku to Shouchan before taking up point defense with Hitochan.

Many of the other teams were still recovering from the blast, while others had given up on the well-guarded 10 million and were going for other teams.
Can't rest easy yet though.

Just as he thought it, a long, sticky tongue snatched the headband off his forehead. He watched it recede into the possession of Asui, hiding beneath Shoji's dupli-arms, who then retreated, likely to attack other teams.

“Sorry we missed that Izuku. Did she get the 10 mil?”

He shook his head to dissuade his teammates' worries, before selecting another band to go up around his head.

Itsu-nee was fending off attacks to one side, while Hitochan was brainwashing other teams on the other. Izuku was holding on for dear life as Shouchan bobbed and weaved any time someone got too close to them. Despite their efforts, a few more headbands were stolen (Tokoyami had swiped one with dark shadow, and Iida's secret recipro-burst surprised them), but Izuku didn't panic.

It just meant it was time for stage 4 of their master plan.

He subtly signaled this to Shouchan by placing his hand, thumb tucked and four fingers out, on his shoulder and tapping twice. A very slight nod – unnoticeable to anyone else – showed the message was received.

Within earshot of several teams, Shouchan spoke aloud. “They just keep coming! Izuku, do you still have the 10 million?”

As planned, and trying hard to keep the sly grin off his face, Izuku visibly shook his head no.

“Did you hear that? They lost the 10 million!”

“Who's got it now?”

“I saw that team over there take a headband from 'em!”

“Come on, let's go!”

It worked even better than expected.

Nearly all the teams around them dispersed and went after each other, looking for whoever had the illusive band. Izuku discreetly touched the winning headband, and sent it to Boundless. He looked to the screen showing point totals and placements and watched his team drop several spots with the supposed loss of over 10 million points; the smirk he'd been surpressing broke out for just a moment at how smoothly this was going. Now anyone checking the scoreboard won't know who has it. Their strategy was working without a hitch.

Of course, that was the moment things went wrong.

Izuku had been trying not to dwell on a certain presence on the field. He'd ignored the blasts while inside the dome, and only briefly glanced in his direction earlier. It seemed Ka- he was having some sort of dispute with another blond from 1-B. Aren't they classmates? Must be personal. Sure it was a competition, but whatever was happening over there was more than that. There was extensive yelling, outdone only by the numerous explosions. Izuku would've been fine if they stayed occupied by their little spat the whole time.
No such luck.

The quarrel was apparently over as K- his team was charging towards them at top speed, him leading them as the rider.

_I can't handle this, I've gotta- no, no. It's okay. Shouchan's here, Aizawa-sensei's watching, they won't let him hurt me. Besides, maybe I'll get lucky and he won't recognize me!_

Once again, no such luck.

“F***IN’ DEKU!!!”

Chapter End Notes

Why hello there, Bakugou! How not nice to see/hear you!
Don't worry, this isn't quite the confrontation you've all been dreading! That comes later.
How will Izuku and Shouto handle this little problem? Their clever, multi-step plan was working so well too...at least, until the author decided to mix things up ;)
Hopefully this is a satisfactory action sequence. I tried my best to make it clear and exciting.
Have a lovely day~!
Who's ready for part 2 of the cavalry battle?
This chapter's pretty short, but I didn't want to move on past the cavalry battle just yet.
I figure all that should have it's own chapter(s), so...yeah.
I hope this is a satisfactory conclusion to round 2, and to Bakugou's reintroduction. If it's not, no worries! We'll be seeing him again veeeery soon... >:D
Now, let's see how our boys manage this particular tribulation I've set up for them, shall we?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“F***IN’ DEKU!!!”

Oh joy, here comes Bakugou. If only I hadn't exhausted my quirk so much earlier, I could take care of this a lot quicker. Guess it's time to call for backup.

“Itsuka, Hitoshi! We've got a code red coming in hot!”

Shouto was incredibly glad he'd gone over the 'Keep Endeavor and Bakugou Away from Izuku' directive with his fellow pre-heroes; at his call his teammates immediately turned their focus on the approaching blond. They no longer cared about fending off other teams – Bakugou would get the full force of their combined efforts.

After all, winning wasn't as important as their friend's mental health.

Shouto tightened his grip on a trembling Izuku, keeping him secured to his back while he summoned up whatever dregs of ice and fire he could muster. With friends at his side and the weight of his conviction upon him, he prepared to engage his enemy.

“Stand down, Bakugou! You're distressing Izuku. I'm going to have to ask you to leave.”

His opponent, carried by his two teammates ever forward, merely scoffed. “Hah?! Distressing? What's distressing is having that s***stain finally leave you alone for years, before turning up at UA!! And I'm not leaving 'til I've got that 10 million and had a little chat with the d*** nerd!!”

Wow, rude and vulgar. Lovely. “Fine. Don't say I didn't warn you.”

Bakugou smirked sadistically. “Alright you s***ty half-n-half, it's on! Spikey Eyes, Bug Boy – let's go!!”

The green-haired boy on Bakugou's right produced a massive blade (with a blunted edge – this was a school event after all) from his right arm, while the other boy turned his skin to steel, and the three charged, explosions already popping from Bakugou's hands.

Shouto managed to produce a small ice wall in front of him, taking the force of an explosion and iron-fisted punch; Itsuka's massive hands had grabbed the blunt sword and, with her martial
prowess, twisted it and the kid attached to it away from his team. The fiery blond, left without a horse, sadly did not fall to the ground, whirling around and pointing a massive blast down and right, pushing him further onto his metal-skinned teammate and staying in the game.

Shouto tsked. Plan B then. “Hitoshi.”

His perpetually tired friend stepped forward. “What is the capitol of Iceland?”

The blond had an angry look on his face, clearly wanting to shout at Hitoshi, but didn't – and when the other boy was about to reply, he slammed his hand over his teammate's mouth.

Now it was Hitoshi's turn to tsk. They must've watched him use his quirk earlier; time to up the ante.

While continuing to defend against the onslaught, Shouto whispered conspiratorially to the purplet.

“Look, I know Aizawa-sensei was working with you on using your quirk using confusion instead of anger to garner a response, but I think at this point he's only gonna respond to an insult.”

“You sure?”

“Yeah. In fact, try this...”

Shota was not happy.

In fact, one might say he was downright livid. He'd had as many reservations about this festival as Shouto had, though he was less verbal about it. He'd heard from Sekijiro that Bakugou was still quite aggressive and hot-tempered, constantly insulting and egging on his other students. The blond seemed to be fighting for supremacy in his class (though he'd yet to beat Inasa, and Monoma was giving him trouble), and was loathe to admit any shortcomings. In his eyes, he was already the best, and everyone else was either a stepping stone for him or not worth the time of day. Shota thought that would be enough for the principal to push the boy into that anger management therapy he'd promised if he stepped out of line, but according to Nedzu he couldn't force a student into counseling without some kind of offense. I mean, I'm plenty offended, and Izuku, and Shouto, and probably a lot of 1-B as well, but whatever. Shota could live with that, even if he didn't like it.

Letting him and Izuku be in the same sports festival though? Bad idea.

And what he could see on the field below was enough proof of that.

Problem Child #1 (who was making huge strides in his own anger management) looked about ready to murder someone, and Problem Child #2 (who was overcoming his fears and anxieties every day) was quivering like a small, scared animal. They seemed to be pulling through, however barely, but he wasn't sure how much longer his two kid-students could hold out.

There was less than a minute left on the clock, but his students didn't know that. For all they knew, the round was far from over, and it probably felt that way. He wanted so desperately to call off the cavalry battle.

He was about to tell Nemuri to end it, when he heard Hitoshi shout at the top of his lungs.

“Hey Kacchan!!! YOUR EGO'S SO INFLATED IT FLOATS, YOU OVERGROWN PARTY POPPER!!!!”
Oh my.

*I know I've been teaching him not to rely on insults, but...gotta admit, that was a good one.*

By the sound of said party popper's unholy screeching, it hit close to home. Aizawa-sensei sighed in relief – hours of training Hitoshi's quirk meant he was aware that yes, *screaming counts as a response*. The blond (and his teammates too, apparently) gained a blank look to his face, and a moment later the team was walking robotically towards the other end of the field. And just in time too.

“Ten seconds remaining!! 10!”

Shouto tapped Izuku on the leg.

“9!”

The other teams scrambled to get any last-minute points they could.

“8!”

The 10 million was still hidden in Boundless.

“7!”

Shouto shook Izuku a little harder, trying to snap him out of his near-panic.

“6!”

Itsuka and Hitoshi went over to them, all the other teams nearby having been scared off by the earlier confrontation.

“5!”

They too began to try and reach Izuku in his haze.

“4!”

Still no 10 million.

“3!”

Clarity finally returned to Izuku's eyes.

“2!”

His friends very succinctly informed him of the situation.

“1!”

Realization dawned on him, and a headband quickly appeared in his hand before being thrown over his head.

“TIME'S UP! TEAM IZUKU WINS!!!”
Whoo, cutting it a little close there, weren't ya Izuku? But they won! Right in the nick of time.

Side note: the others on Bakugou's team are Togaru Kamakiri (Bug Boy) and Tetsutetsu Tetsutetsu (Spikey Eyes).

For any of you thinking "is PH always gonna win?", the answer is no! I already have an idea on how I want the sports festival to end, so for those of you who want a taste of what's to come, I'll tell you this: at least one PH student will make top 3, but not all top 3 will be PH. As for who makes the cut and who doesn't? You'll just have to wait and see.

Updates will probably continue to be slower than when I started. I'm still in school (no rest for the studious), and I've got other things going on as well (including a babysitting job twice a week), so I probably won't be able to update every day like I used to. So far, this whole 2-3 chapters a week thing is working fine for me - I'll try to stick to that.

See ya later, alligators!
Hello again! Who's ready for more sports festival? This didn't turn out the way I was originally planning. The part at the end I was actually gonna do next chapter, after a bit more stuff happened, but...the transition I wrote was too good. I didn't want to scrap it, and it'd just be awkward later. So, things are moving ahead of schedule a bit.

Hmmm, this chapter is called 'Prelude' despite it being after round 2 and in the middle of the sports festival. I wonder what it's a prelude to... ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“TIME'S UP! TEAM IZUKU WINS!!!”

The entire team sagged in relief, as the stress and adrenaline keeping them moving flushed out of them. Izuku was still mentally wound up, but he was glad he'd returned their golden-ticket-to-victory in time. I would've felt so bad if we lost because of me... but his friends had snapped him out of his daze in the nick of time, just enough for him to remember the last step of the plan.

And as far as the plan goes, he was absolutely satisfied in it's execution, and honestly surprised it worked so well. The brainstorm that had birthed it was not one he'd forget anytime soon.

He pulled his teammates into Boundless (one by one so he wouldn't strain his quirk) and set the scene: a war room he'd seen in a movie once, with a large, circular table in the center and various screens around them. On one screen he posted the rules of the event as explained by Midnight verbatim; on another, each member of their team was listed with their quirk, strengths, and weaknesses; a third featured a map of the field, complete with movable miniature icons that represented their team and their opponents. They each took a seat at the central table, and began to discuss.

“Thanks for letting us use Boundless for this, Izuku.”

“Sure! This way I can talk more freely, and no one can overhear us as well.”

“So, you all know we're going to be targeted the whole time, right? My quirk is useful, but not everyone will respond and I'm still working on my hand-to-hand.”

“Well, we've got me for that; I can handle close-quarters combat for us.”

While his friends were working on basic strategies, Izuku studied the transcript of Midnight explaining the event. Something was niggling at his brain, but he couldn't tell what it...there! There, too! Oh, and there! There's tons of loopholes in this!

“Guys, I found a workaround, several in fact.”
“Wait, really? Aizawa wasn’t kidding when he said you were good at that.”

“Great! What did you find?”

So he went on to explain: first, there was no penalty for teams splitting up, as long as the rider stayed off the ground. Second, no one said the headbands had to stay in one place, or have their points visible, as long as they were around the head or neck they were in play. Third, he might not be able to keep himself in Boundless (Shouchan wouldn't have his phone, so there'd be no way to tell him when the round was over, even if he left his teammates on the field), but he could keep objects in there.

“All we have to do is make people think we no longer have the 10 million – then they'll stop targeting us and look for who has it.”

Hitochan hummed. “That's great and all, but if we suddenly don't have it at the start of the round people will know we hid it.”

“That's why we won't do it right away. If we start with a strong defense that eventually breaks down, then allow a few other teams to at least get close or even steal a few headbands, we can send it Boundless without anyone knowing and bring it back right before the round ends. That'll keep it safe and keep the other teams off of us.”

A bit more discussion later, Itsu-nee put a hand to her chin. “I see...if we gather some headbands at the beginning, mix up the 10 million with them, put a lesser headband on your forehead while keeping point values hidden, let that one and some others be stolen, then send the big one to Boundless, we can perfectly mislead all the other teams into thinking we're out of the game.”

Their complex strategy decided upon, Hitochan ran a hand through his lilac hair. “It's certainly a bit of a long shot,” he grinned, “but it just might work.”

Izuku was pulled from his reminiscence by his classmates congratulating them, and complimenting their plan when Shouchan had explained it.

“Whoa, that's complicated; super cool though! You had us all goin'!” Kaminari laughed.

“For real! Finding all those loopholes and using them to win? So manly!” Kirishima clenched his fist, a tear in his eye.

Yaoyorozu chimed in as well. “It certainly was well thought out, though there were a lot of ways it could have failed. The fact it didn't in and of itself is incredible.”

Uraraka had a rather different take on the whole situation. “Man, I bet Aizawa-sensei is absolutely delighted with you guys!”

Shota was absolutely delighted with his kid- students' victory.

He grinned smugly at Hizashi. “Told ya they'd be a force to be reckoned with.”

His commentary partner was switching between gaping like a fish and stuttering out incomplete sentences. “I- what the- they did- how?!!”
He turned back to the still-on microphone, thoroughly enjoying how speechless Mic had become thanks to his students. “For those of you confused, first of all, if you're a pro you need to work on your attention to detail and critical thinking. Second, Izuku's team appears to have come up with a complex plan to confuse and mislead their opponents. By making everyone think their headband had been stolen, they were able to safely store it using Izuku's quirk until the end of round with no one the wiser.”

Hizashi finally managed to properly speak. “You mean that kid can teleport and store stuff?”

_Time to really hype him up; pros are gonna be clamoring for him to intern with them. Too bad._

“Oh yeah, lots of other things too. His quirk, Boundless, is incredibly versatile and useful. He's really good with it too, always coming up with new applications for it.”

He could practically hear the excited and intrigued murmurs of the pros below in the stands.

“Well, he and his teammates certainly showed their mettle today! But will they have what it takes to win in the next round? We'll be breaking for lunch, then have some recreational games, before it's time for what you've all been waiting for! The thrills! The action! The drama! A fierce battle for the top! I'm talking a one-on-one tournament!! So stay tuned!” Hizashi turned off the mic.

“Come on Shota, let's get some food.”

Now that his excitement was over, Shota shook his head. “Not right now. I'll join you in a few minutes – there's a couple things I need to do first.”

First was congratulating the pre-heroes on their victory.

He found them in their designated waiting room, already chowing down on the food Lunch Rush had delivered there earlier. When he had knocked and entered (with permission, of course), all the pre-heroes stopped chewing and waved at him, smiles on their faces.

At least they're not letting that encounter with Bakugou get to them too much.

The fact that Izuku was here, still interacting with his friends and not hiding away in Boundless, was a good sign.

“Great job out there kids. You all really showed 'em what you're made of. That plan of yours was a little bit crazy, a lot ingenious, and entirely what I'd expect from you lot. I can tell the pros watching were impressed.”

He let the praise sink in for a moment, before addressing the metaphorical exploding elephant in the room.

“Now, about how you dealt with Bakugou. Izuku?” The kid flinched slightly, but looked him in the eyes nonetheless. “I could tell you were pretty shaken up. You did good not running off, but you need to have more confidence in yourself. If you keep letting him get to you like that, you'll always be under his thumb. Shouto.” He turned to the heterochromiac. “You almost lost control. You kept it together in the end, but it was a close thing. Anger can be good, but only as long as you keep it moderated and direct it in a healthy manner.” The red-and-white head nodded, properly chastised.

“Itsuka, nice work staying focused on the task at hand, you handled that well. And Hitoshi?”

The purplet actually interrupted him. “I know, 'stop relying on insults to garner responses' and 'an angry opponent is often an unpredictable one' and 'being polite is better for the people you're trying to save' and all that. But he wasn't responding to anything else.” He slouched into his chair, arms crossed, and quietly muttered “Jerk had it coming too.”

Shota blinked in mild surprise. “Well yes, but I also distinctly remember saying the insults would be good in a pinch.”
As he turned to leave, he paused in the doorway. “By the way, nice job. That insult was totally spot-on.” With that he walked out, smirking at the flabbergasted expressions he left behind. Now, I need a word with a certain mammal.

He’d texted Nedzu as he was leaving the commentator's booth, so the principal was ready for him, already sipping tea, by the time Shota made it to the empty waiting room.

“Ah, Aizawa, there you are. How are things going with the first-years?”

He glowered at the white-furred creature. “Things would be better if Bakugou wasn't participating.”

Nedzu set down his cup, unperturbed. “So there has already been a squabble, then.”

Suddenly, a thought dawned on him. “You knew this was going to happen, didn't you?”

“Yes, of course. The chances of the festival ending without Bakugou and the pre-heroes clashing to some degree is practically nonexistent.”

Shota may have just lectured Problem Child #1 on his anger, but he was certainly feeling it himself right now. “So why are you letting it happen?!”

The principal took another sip of tea. “There are many reasons. One is similar to why young Bakugou has not been mandated to undergo counseling – while he hasn't been an angel by any means since enrollment, there has yet to be a major incident, meaning I have no grounds to prevent him from participating. As for another, Izuku's fear of him is stubborn, well-worn into his mind at this point; he'll never overcome it unless he faces the issue directly.”

“Yes, but couldn't that wait until he's more prepared to face it?! Poor kid was terrified!”

“If we wait too long, it won't happen, or will happen somewhere we have no control over it. At least here Izuku is surrounded by friends and teachers, in a controlled environment.”

Something's not adding up...

“And what about the tournament? If Bakugou ends up with Izuku as an opponent, you know he's going to take advantage of school-sanctioned violence, and traumatize him even more.”

“I'm aware. That's why I've instructed the staff to avoid matching them up, and if they can't to call off the fight due to 'health concerns'.”

There's gotta be more to this...

“Even so, this seems oddly negligent for you. What if they encounter each other off the field? It's not unlikely to happen.”

Nedzu grinned. “While I can't guarantee anything will or won't happen, in the event of a violent confrontation I'll be relying on you and young Shouto to help Izuku; and of course, such a confrontation would be grounds for Bakugou to receive mandatory counseling and anger management therapy.”

And then it clicked. All kinds of small details he hadn't thought much about all swarmed to his mind: Nedzu asking if his phone was connected to Boundless the other day; all of PH being
informed of as many details of Izuku's past as morally acceptable; Shota not being scheduled to commentate the second half of the festival; the backup tournament bracket he'd seen for 15 competitors instead of 16; the waiting room doors aside from PH's all being programmed to stay open during lunch; this room, the only empty waiting room, being on the other side of the stadium from the hero classes; the fact that Izuku was instructed to see Recovery Girl and get headache meds during lunch, and to get to the nurse's office from the Pre-Heroics room he'd have to walk right by class 1-B.

Shota shot up out of his chair, not even registering the mischievous call of “Good luck Aizawa-kun!” behind him as he raced down the hall in panic.

Izuku and Shouchan were walking the nurse’s office to get headache medicine; he’d been told he should go during lunch, since he’d probably need them later and Recovery Girl will be busy once the tournament starts. He was so wrapped up in his sign conversation with Shouchan, he didn’t even notice they were walking by 1-B’s waiting room.

He didn’t notice, that is, until a few moments later, when one short sentence froze him and Shouchan in their tracks.

“There you are, Deku.”

Chapter End Notes

Ooh Aizawa, you better hurry.
*Conversation between me and my muse several chapters ago*
Me: Okay muse, we need to do the Bakugou confrontation soon. But I can't decide if it should happen before or after the sports festival...
Muse: You know, there's a simple solution to that.
Me:...Muse no.
Muse: Muse YES!
Me: *already coming up with lots of ideas on how it would play out* ....... Crap.
Everybody buckle up, this has been a long time coming.
“There you are, Deku.”

Shouto froze as a wave of dread crashed over him. He strongly considered taking Izuku's hand and making a break for it, but he knew Bakugou would pursue them relentlessly. He looked to his friend. Izuku was stock still, eyes wide in terror; he clearly wasn't capable of running at the moment.

That meant the only way out of this confrontation was through it.

He slowly turned to face those crimson eyes that inspired so much fear in his best friend. “If I had even the slightest notion you'd be civil enough to listen, I'd ask you to let us continue on to the nurse's office.” He leveled the other with a distasteful look. “But since I have no such notions, I suppose I'll have to humor you for now.”

The blond scowled. “This has nothing to do with you, scarface. I just need to have a little chat with Deku over there.” The scowl morphed into a sadistic smile. “It's been so long since we've seen each other, after all. None of your business.”

Shouto didn't miss how Izuku flinched at the nickname. He grasped his hand, and stood his ground. “It is my business, actually. Izuku is my best friend, so anything you have to say to him can be said to me as well. I'm not leaving you alone with him for anything.”

Bakugou scoffed. “Fine, have it your way.”

The tension in the air was thick and cloying, pressing in on his lungs with each labored breath. Shouto squeezed Izuku's hand, to ground both his friend and himself; this was an event that, though perhaps inevitable, Shouto had been anxiously hoping to avoid. If I'm so worked up about it, I can only imagine how Izuku must feel right now. But despite his fervent wishes, Bakugou had them metaphorically cornered – this 'conversation' (if you could even call it that) was happening right now. The best Shouto could do was damage control, and try to get it over with quickly.

“So what's so important for you to say? We'd like to continue on our way.” The 'without your needless interference' went unsaid, but heavily implied.

That smirk Shouto already detested returned. “I just wanted to know where the d*** nerd's been all these years, and why he felt the need to come back.”

The hand that Izuku raised to his right side did not go unnoticed by Shouto, who frowned both at the harsh words and the subconscious reaction to them. He remembered that day, a couple weeks ago, when all those seemingly minor behaviors were cast in a new light.
It had been a rough training session that led up to it; Izuku had taken a hit to the side, and afterwards said it was aching pretty bad. They'd taken him to Recovery Girl who, after conducting an examination, called for an x-ray.

When she finished, and had given Izuku medicine for the pain, she motioned for Shouto and Aizawa-sensei to join her in her office.

“Have either of you noticed any odd behaviors concerning Izuku's right abdomen?”

He thought for a moment, before sharing his observations. “He tends to clutch at it when he's laughing, or talking about his past.”

“He favors it a lot in combat, trying not to strain it. Attacks to that side also seem to affect him more.” His teacher narrowed his eyes suspiciously. “Why?”

Recovery Girl sighed. “As I suspected. Take a look at this.”

She pulled up Izuku's x-ray, and even with his limited knowledge Shouto knew something was wrong. There weren't any breaks thankfully, but one of the ribs looked... crooked. His concerns were confirmed when the heroine pointed to the askew bone.

“This is a textbook case of a broken bone not healing correctly, and an old one too. I believe that, quite a few years ago, the poor boy broke this rib and never sought medical attention for it, likely unaware it was even broken.”

Aizawa-sensei crossed his arms and lowered his head. “As much as it pains me to admit, it makes sense. He was a little kid, tortured by his peers and ignored by his father; he probably never considered going to a hospital, and on one else was likely to suggest it either.”

“Then we’re certainly lucky he's alive, and the only apparent side effects are chronic soreness and phantom pains; a broken rib, left untreated in a small child? By my estimations, that broken bone could have been an inch from puncturing his lung.”

The next three words rocked Shouto to his core.

“He almost died.”

Shouto didn't want to imagine what his life would've been like if he'd never met Izuku. He was eternally grateful that his best friend made it out with an injury that was mostly psychosomatic, and hadn't died back when no one would've cared enough to even mourn him. After the examination results had been explained to Izuku, he'd told them about the day it likely happened – the day he left reality behind.

To hear the boy responsible for all of that imply he should've stayed gone made Shouto's blood boil like nothing else. He'd been mad before, but now he was seething with cold, hard rage.

He barely managed to grit out a response through clenched teeth. “You don't have the right to know what happened to him, not when you're the one who told him to disappear.” He could feel heat seeping through his left side, and frost creeping up his right.

“Like hell I don't! I've known that f***er way longer than you have, halfie! Though actually, I
don't give a s*** what hole he found to crawl into all those years ago. I just wanna know why he thought he could grace UA with his worthless presence, and take MY spot in 1-A!!" The blond shouted, even as explosions began popping in his hands. Izuku flinched at each one, and was once more shaking uncontrollably as he cowered behind Shouto. Shouto didn't register that he'd let go of his hand when it started icing over.

"Your spot in 1-A? Izuku's worked harder than anyone to be here. He earned his spot!" A part of his brain warned him to stop there, but he continued on regardless. He deserves to know. "In fact, you want to know the reason you got put in 1-B? Aizawa-sensei told me he wanted Izuku in his class, and didn't want you anywhere near him, but I bet it's also because he didn't want to deal with your s*** attitude."

Shouto rarely cussed, but he felt it was needed. Guess that's something Bakugou and the old man have in common: they bring out the worst in people.

"HAH?! If anyone has a s*** attitude, it's that sniveling little b**** behind you! I don't know why he thinks he can be a hero when he's such a f***in' coward."

"Izuku's not a coward. He's braver than you could ever know! In fact, the only coward I see is an arrogant a**hole who's too afraid to own up to his own faults!" The hot and cold climbed his arms a little higher.

"You're gonna eat those words when I'm the #1 hero!! You and that d*** Deku won't be anything more than pebbles in my shadow, not amounting to anything!!!" Blasts got bigger.

"We've accomplished more in the last year than you ever could! And you'll never be the #1 hero if you're always so unlikable!!" Ice grew colder.

"Did the burn that gave you that f***-ugly scar fry your brain too?!! Deku's the unlikable one! I bet you just hang out with him to make yourself feel better; after all, the best way for a useless nobody like you to pretend he's worth something is to find someone even more hopeless!! There's no way d*** worthless Deku could ever have any real friends!!!" A snarl deepened.

"Oh that's rich, coming from you!" Flames erupted from a clenched fist.

The tension that had been building boiled over as both boys tensed, ready to attack. An exploding open palm reached out as a frozen arm raised to block -

only for glowing red eyes to stop the battle before it could begin.

"That's enough, both of you!"

The fog of rage in his mind lifted just enough for Shouto to see several terrified students and an incredibly ticked off Aizawa-sensei.

"This is neither the time or place for you two to work out your differences, especially so violently. Bakugou.” Said blond was still visibly seething, though he refrained from interrupting the teacher. “This is exactly the kind of behavior you were warned against. I will be going to the principal with this. As for you, Shouto?” He flinched, before turning to meet a disappointed gaze. “You're better than this. Stop making the same mistakes and letting your anger take over.”

Aizawa-sensei sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose, before he froze. His head whipped up, hurriedly turned left and right, before locking eyes with Shouto.
“Where is Izuku?”

Shouto felt his heat drop into his stomach.

He slowly turned to look behind him, where his best friend had been moments before.

Izuku was gone.

Chapter End Notes

I've been waiting to write this for so long.
It's certainly a bit different from what I'd originally imagined (just like everything else in this fic), but I'm happy with the result.
I'll try and get the next chapter(s) up soon, so y'all don't have to hang on that cliff for too long.
Now if you'll excuse me, I need to prepare my inbox for the hurricane of comments sure to come after this chapter.
Runaway

Chapter Notes

Hello again!
I was on a roll last night, so I got a lot done! It probably helped that I've been wanting to write this part pretty much since I started this fic. So, I've got a double update for you and a surprise! :)
It seems the commenters are preparing for war again. I once again deny any involvement in any crimes committed.
I'm pretty proud of this chapter, especially the last half. I hope you all enjoy.
Now, let's see how everyone reacts to Izuku's latest disappearance, shall we?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When the revelation of what Nedzu had set up dawned on him, Shota had wasted no time in booking it down the hallway at top speed. He could only hope he made it before things got too bad. He ignored the confused looks of the students and faculty he passed as he sprinted down the corridor; he had more important things to do than care what other people thought about him.

The feeling of dread only worsened as he approached 1-B's waiting room and could hear yelling and quirk activation. Oh please, let me not be too late! As he got closer, he could hear the heated argument in progress.

“-way for a useless nobody like you to pretend he's worth something is to find someone even more hopeless!! There's no way d*** worthless Deku could ever have any real friends!!!”

“Oh that's rich, coming from you!”

That comment by Shouto was followed by the telltale sounds of two people about to go head-to-head with their quirks. It was worse than he thought. Several students, mostly from 1-B but a few from other classes as well, were gathered at the next corner, no doubt drawn by the shouting match.

He rounded the corner, eyes already blazing as he erased their quirks. “That's enough, both of you!”

After ensuring that the fight wouldn't continue, Shota reprimanded both boys and was about to further defuse the situation when he stopped. Bakugou was clearly still angry, and Shouto looked ashamed, but that was it.

Izuku wasn't there.

“Where is Izuku?”

The look on Shouto's face told him all he needed to know.

I'm too late.
I can't believe I let myself be blinded like that!

Shouto had never been more disappointed in himself. For months, he'd been working on controlling his temper, vowing to his teacher, his best friend, and himself that he would be better than his father. Yet here he was – so focused on unleashing his own wrath that he let the most important person to him slip through his fingers! He knew Izuku must have been incredibly distressed! But he was just...so aggravated at Bakugou that he ignored what he should've been doing – helping Izuku.

Now he had run off again, and it was Shouto's fault just as much as Bakugou's.

Aizawa-sensei didn't stop him as he pushed past, no doubt anticipating where he was going. He needed his phone.

He was almost to the Pre-Heroics waiting room when he came face-to-face with the only other person he really didn't want to talk to. Of course I'd run into the old man right now. Just my luck. Endeavor looked at him with scorn (nothing new there), before speaking in that authoritarian voice he loved so much.

“Shouto, what is all this nonsense I've heard about that program you're in? I thought you were in an advanced course, not some remedial class! And your performance during the first round was shameful! Losing to that kid with the teleportation quirk cannot be helped I suppose, but to lose to the same boy from the recommendation exam? Shameful! As my creation, while your acceptance of my fire is good, you are severely lacking in it's control. I have half a mind to-”

Shouto cut him off. “Shut your yapping. First off, Pre-Heroics is not remedial, and if you have a problem with it you can talk to Aizawa-sensei or principal Nedzu. Second, I don't care about your opinion on how well I did. I did my best and that's what matters. Finally, I'm not your creation, it's my fire, not yours, and I need you to move out of my way. My best friend needs me, and I will not fail him again.”

With that, he stormed past his father, ignoring his calls for him to 'come back here this instant'.

His father can think whatever he wants. He'll definitely pay for this later, but Izuku is worth it.

Deku really was worthless.

He'd promised everyone he wouldn't run away anymore, yet here he was. Running away.

Kacchan was right.

But how could he not run? He was so scared of everything. The whole time Shouchan was arguing with Kacchan all he could do was shake in fear as 'TOO LOUD, TOO HOT, FIRE, BURN IT TO ASH' played on repeat in his head. Now here he was, hiding out in Boundless like a coward.

Kacchan was right.

He must be a disappointment to everyone – his classmates, Pre-Heroics, Aizawa-sensei, Shouchan. There's no way any of them would want to be his friend, especially not after this. A useless Deku like him can't have friends.

Kacchan was right.

He openly sobbed, clutching the multi-colored sand of the crystalline beach in his fists, and wished
someone was there to comfort him. At his subconscious command, mom, Katsu, and Shou all materialized and sat down next to him.

“Oh sweetie, it's gonna be okay.”

“You just need to ignore what that other me said! He hasn't changed at all!”

“It's okay to run away if you need to.”

“I-I just...it's so hard! Being out there, around all those people. It's l-like...like they just i-ignore all the bad stuff in life! We've been attacked by villains, Kacchan's a jerk, a-and yet we just carried on with the sports festival like nothing was wrong!”

He huffed, releasing his grip on the sand and laying down on his back. Mom began gently stroking his head. “The real world certainly is tough, isn't it?”

Katsu flopped back to match his position. “At least you have Boundless. We don't ignore problems because there are no problems here.”

He laughed sardonically. “Yeah, because everything is a construct of my own mind. Reality has some nice things going for it, but...it's such a gamble. If you find something you like, you have to hope that it won't break or get stolen. If you find a place you like, you have to pray it doesn't close or get covered in garbage. If you find people you like, you have to trust that they won't betray or abandon you.” He sat up in frustration. “I'm so sick and tired of fighting all the time to keep hold of the few things I enjoy in life!”

He threw a fistful of sand, as he thought about the mother that was killed in front of him. “Why does everything I care about have to be taken from me?!” He thought about the father that stopped loving him. “Why can I never have anything nice?!” He threw more sand, as he thought about the childhood friend that hurt him. “Why does everyone have to turn their back on me?!” He thought about the beach whose beauty was robbed from him. “Why does the world always have to ruin everything good I find?!” He thought about all the times he failed the goals Aizawa-sensei set for him. “Why can I never do anything right?!” He thought about all his classmates in 1-A and Pre-Heroics, who no doubt hated him. “Why can't I get anybody to like me?!” He thought about Shouchan, who was better off without him. “Why am I always holding everyone back?!” He grabbed more and more sand, throwing it as hard as he could, fistful after fistful. “Why does the whole world hate me?! Why, why, why, why, WHY?!!”

Boundless vibrated with the force of his thoughts as he stood to his feet, clutched his curly green hair, and screamed.

“AAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHH!!!”

His frustration flooded out of him with his voice. With that gone, he dropped to his knees and let out a sob.

All that was left was agony.

His fractal mother and friends hugged him from all sides.

“It doesn't matter if the world hates you.”

“It doesn't matter if everyone else betrays you.”

“It doesn't matter if reality takes everything from you.”
“It doesn't matter because you have us.”

“It doesn't matter because we would never betray you.”

“It doesn't matter because we could never hate you.”

“We can be your friends.”

“We can be your family.”

“We can be all the beauty you want to see.”

“We can be everything you want.”

“We can be everything you need.”

“We can be everything you lost.”

The three voices spoke as one. “Because we are Boundless.”

De- Izuku was about to reply, to say 'Yes, I don't need reality when I have Boundless', when his brain buzzed.

Shouchan was texting him.

Chapter End Notes

Ah, I'm so proud of that Boundless scene. It's about time Izuku vented his frustrations, no? After all, no one said getting better was going to be easy and painless. I've got one more chapter to post and that surprise. I can't wait to read your responses! Also, I'm glad at least some of you understood where Nedzu was coming from. He doesn't want Izuku to suffer, but he believed this to be the best way to handle the situation (I was originally just going to have Izuku and Bakugou meet by chance, but then my brain was like 'what if Nedzu orchestrated the whole thing? He has his reasons for it, after all'). His motives will be made more clear in future chapters. See you in the next chapter! Or the surprise, whichever you read next!
Oh, what's this? An artsy chapter? One told entirely through text messages? The question is, did the author do this purely out of artistry, as a narrative tool? Or did she also not want to write out all the details of the 1v1 tournament? I'll never tell. All those super-exciting battles aren't important anyways. You guys will get to see the finals though! Next chapter!
Now, ladies and gentlemen and everything in between! The author is proud to present: Shouto blowing up his phone while systematically losing his mind! Enjoy~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Me:

Izuku? Are you okay?

I'm sorry

I let my anger get the best of me again

I'm so sorry please forgive me

Don't listen to Bakugou. You're worth so much more than you know – to me, Aizawa-sensei, and all our friends

Please come back

Please at least answer

Izuku

Izuku please

They're going to withdraw you from the tournament

Izuku

The tournament's starting

They'll probably let you back in if you want

Please Izuku

Hitoshi's going first. He's up against a 1-B kid

The one that makes blades

Please come back
We all want you back
Hitoshi won
Izuku
I'm up next
Please come watch
I beat Sero
I may have overdone it a little
Izuku I miss you
Itsuka won her round too
We all miss you
The quarterfinals are starting
Izuku
Hitoshi lost
He wants to see you
We all do
I'm about to go again
I beat that Monoma kid
I think I overdid it again
He was just...so haughty and
And I'm upset
Please answer
Nothing Bakugou said is true
You're not a worthless deku
You're my best friend
Itsuka won again
We're all worried
Aizawa-sensei is too
He said he's been texting you too
Please
I can't take it

Come watch the semifinals

Me and Itsuka promised that one of us would beat Bakugou

For you

So you won't have to be afraid of him anymore

Izuku

Please come back

I don't know why Bakugou was allowed to continue in the festival

Nedzu said it's because people will get suspicious if he drops out too

And he wants us to have a chance to prove ourselves to him

And overcome his influence over you

Please Izuku

I thought you said you weren't gonna run away anymore

I'm sorry that was mean

I just miss you so much

Itsuka lost to Bakugou

She's pretty beat up

She wants to see you too

I guess that means I can't lose

I'm up against Iida

I won't lose

I won

Izuku

It's me and Bakugou in the finals

I don't know if I can win but

I can't lose

Please

Izuku

I know I can beat him if you come cheer me on
Izuku

I can't lose

Please don't let me lose

I don't want to lose you

Chapter End Notes

Oh man, here we go. Bakugou v Shouto round 3, and this time there's no distractions or interruptions and quirk use is encouraged! I'm going to try very hard to make it exciting, so expect lots of explosions, fire, ice, and yelling. All the yelling. Oh! And probably some angst too.

I'm about to post the surprise (told ya I was on a roll last night), so I recommend reading it now if you haven't yet. Warning for heavy angst though! I seriously teared up a bit while writing it, so if you're holding out for happy fun times, maybe don't read it...

Either way, I'll see you next chapter!
I'm alive!
Man, has it really been almost a week since I updated this?! Sorry about that. I think I tapped out my muse with that triple update, so this fic was on the mental back burner for a few days.
But anyways, here's the fated battle between Bakugou and Shouto! Who will reign supreme? Will Shouto outwit the overgrown party popper and defend Izuku's honor? Or will Bakugou assert his dominance (minds out of the gutters everyone, not that kind of fic) and keep his hold over the greenet's life?
Either way, I hope you enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

As Shouchan's pleas flashed through his mind, Izuku and Boundless were strangely quiet.
Shouchan had been sending him text after text, nearly nonstop, for hours. It was so much, he'd considered ending the connection just so his brain would stop constantly buzzing. But every time he thought that, his brain would buzz again, with another plea to come back, don't run away, please. Sometimes the text would just be his name, and he could practically hear it being called out by his best friend.

In the end, all he could do was sit in silence and think.

He'd dismissed his fractals a while ago, now sitting on the pier with his feet in the water. Shouchan had been sending him updates on the tournament among his appeals, including how he'd soon face Kacchan in the finals. He's way braver and stronger than I am; he'll be okay. Then another text came in.

'I don't want to lose you'

.........He was being a bad friend right now, wasn't he?

Shouchan must be sad. I guess...I should reply.

Shouto's hands were shaking as they clutched his phone, his latest message to Izuku having just been sent. He was about to be called out for the final: his fight against Bakugou. But as tears gathered in his eyes, he felt as if he couldn't move from his spot - let alone fight - with his lungs frozen, body locked in position, and wracked with emotion. How can I possibly fight to defend his honor, when I was the one who was so blinded by anger? If I wasn't there for him when he needed me most, can I even call myself his friend? What if he wants me to atone for my mistakes? What if he wants me to lose?

What if he never comes back?
He was so wrapped up in those thoughts, he almost missed the familiar tone of an incoming message.

**Izuku:**

I'm sorry. I know I said I wouldn't run, but I did.

I'm sorry I can't be there. I want to, but I'm not ready, so...good luck shouchan! Do your best!

The gasp of air that filled his lungs was a breath of life unlike any other. The tears that had been forming overflowed and carried with them some of his pain, guilt, and shame. He typed out a reply before he hugged the phone to his chest and let the tears fall.

**Me:**

I forgive you. I'm sorry too. And...thank you.

*Those words aren't enough to express how I feel. It's too much for any words to truly convey. Even so, I hope you understand.*

He was too choked up to answer when Aizawa-sensei knocked on the door. He entered after a moment, looking incredibly haggard (even for him), obviously stressed at the situation as well.

“Hey, Problem Child. It's time for the final. You sure you want to go through with this? I know you and your friends promised to fight for Izuku's sake, but...” He paused as he noticed Shouto's tears. After a brief moment of surprise, he rushed over and placed a gentle hand on his shoulder. “Are you alright? What's the matter?”

Shouto heaved a sob, that slowly turned into a wobbling laugh. He looked up with a shaky smile, and held out his phone for his teacher to see.

“I-It's Izuku. He f-finally replied.”

Black eyes widened, and Shouto watched many of the same emotions flowing from his tears lift from hunched shoulders. Aizawa-sensei gently took the phone, as if he was afraid to destroy the precious message it had received, and read the text.

After taking a second to compose himself, Aizawa-sensei gave him back the phone and sighed in relief.

“Good work; he's communicating, even if he's not ready to come back yet. We can work with that. But right now, there's something else you need to focus on, isn't there?” A second hand came down on his other shoulder, his teacher now directly facing him as he crouched down to his level. “With Izuku and all your friends cheering you on, you have a tournament to win.”

Shouto wiped his eyes, and once more steeled his resolve. “Yeah. I'll do my best!” *I won't let you down again, Izuku.*

Shouto walked onto the arena to the deafening cheers of the audience, his opponent glowering at him on the other side. Oblivious to the tension on the field, Present Mic was still commentating energetically with All Might (who, for some reason, was helping with commentary for the 1v1
tournament instead of Aizawa-sensei).

“Aaaaand here we are, the fight you've all been waiting for!! It's the Pre-Heroics powerhouse and hot-n-cold prince: Todoroki Shouto!! Versus 1-B’s explosive blond with a quirk to match: Bakugou Katsuki!! These two are facing off for first place, here in the finals!!! Who will reign supreme over the first years? All Might, what's your take on this match?”

“Hahaha, what an energetic introduction Mic! And what an exciting battle we surely have ahead of us! Both young Shouto and young Bakugou have shown incredible combat abilities, annihilating all their competitors! Honestly, I think this one could go either way!”

“Well then, we'll just have to let them duke it out!! Alright Midnight, give us the signal!!”

Midnight stepped up to her own microphone on the referee's stand.

“Both competitors ready?”

Shouto looked to Bakugou, already feeling his anger rise, before he took a deep breath to quell it. I won’t lose control again. Izuku's counting on me. He took a defensive stance, already anticipating his opponent to attack immediately. I won't lose.

“BEGIN!!”

As expected, at the call to start Bakugou launched himself towards Shouto, hands blasting behind him to propel him forward. Shouto stomped his right foot to create a wall of ice between them that spanned and rose up several feet. Okay Shouto, stay calm and think. You've blocked the direct path, and it's too far for him to easily go around; that means he'll either fly over or bust through. His thoughts were proven right as an exploding fist punched through the relatively thin wall, followed by a still-airborne Bakugou – who lost his course as he dodged the wave of flames Shouto had shot out as soon as the wall broke. The blond had had to blast himself out of the way of the surprise attack. Just as Shouto hoped.

The relief of Izuku's reply had provided him with a clearer head, allowing him to better strategize. Bakugou, with his quirk, can break through my ice and is likely somewhat fire resistant – that leaves me two options to win: either force him out of bounds, or outlast him. Unfortunately, Bakugou showed in his other matches that he both has good awareness and high stamina; that means, to give me the best chance of winning, I need to force him to use many large explosions and keep him on the edge of the field, while I avoid large-scale attacks and keep my temperature regulated. Even with a strategy in mind, Shouto knew his victory was far from assured; but even if he lost, he wasn't going down without a fight.

Having been effectively grounded by Shouto's fire blast, Bakugou growled and charged in on foot. Shouto turned his left side forward, already alfame, causing the blond to hesitate slightly; that hesitation was all Shouto needed to roll out of the way of the incoming blast and lightly frost over the ground. With the ground slick, he'll need his quirk to either melt the ice, skate him along, or fly again. Sure enough, Bakugou blasted straight down at the ground, evaporating the thin layer of ice before rushing in again. No good; I need him to make bigger blasts. Maybe if I- A blast near his face returned his focus (he's fast!) as he jumped back to avoid most of the damage.

Then Bakugou started shouting.

“That all you got, scarface?! Come on, what happened to those big f***in' icebergs you used before? I'll blow them all up!!”
“How I choose to fight is no concern of yours.”

“How?!! You better stop half-a**ing it and come at me with your full power, you d*** candy cane bastard!!”

So now I'm a candy cane, huh? He's getting more creative, I suppose. I didn't want to rile him up in case I rile myself up as well, but since he's doing it himself... “Considering that we're not at sea right now, 'glacier' is probably a more apt term.”

Bakugou blasted himself away from the incoming fireball. “I don't give a flying f***!! Stop holding back!!!”

“I'm not.” Another ice wall.

“YES YOU ARE!!” Another big explosion to destroy it. A little bigger than necessary, even.

Good, it's working. He blocked the exploding punch with an ice-covered arm. “Why would I hold back when my friends are cheering me on?” His icy gauntlet shattered, but his fiery left arm convinced Bakugou to back off once more. Thankfully he seems just as wary of an out-of-control blast as I am.

“What, you mean Deku, Ponytail, and Eyebags? That's one s***ty cheering section!”

Don't get mad, stay in control... “If you can't see the value of them or their friendship, then that's your problem, not mine.” An open palm approached, ready to blast, forcing Shouto to skate along an ice path to the other side of the arena for some distance.

Bakugou whirled around, somehow yelling even louder. “Value? What value?! You Pre-Hero f***ers can't do anything on your own! Always needing help from teachers who baby you!” He blasted apart the wave of ice Shouto sent his way. “Well guess what! The real world's not gonna give you s***! It's gonna chew you up and spit you out for being weak!”

Shouto could feel his rage building. “You really think we don't know the world will try to tear us down? It already has! We're in Pre-Heroics because the world is against us! I'd say we're better prepared than most to enter an unforgiving world because we've been there, and few people know it better than Izuku!” He took a deep breath to calm himself, silently thankful that Bakugou's fuming had given him a brief respite to collect his thoughts. I'm getting cold, I'll aim another fire blast to force him towards the edge.

His opponent ducked out of the way of the fire, stopping right at the boundary line. Tch, he's still too aware and still too 'calm' to use excessive blasts...time to up my game. “In fact, in that respect Izuku is much stronger than you.”

Shouto subtly smirked as an enraged Bakugou let loose several large, unnecessary explosions.

“How is that LOSER stronger than ME?!!” He took to the air again, shooting up before diving down in a spiral, blasting all around him; Shouto's quick ice wall blocked most of it, though he still felt some of the shockwave. He bit back the pain, and sprouted more flames to continue warming him.

“He's got an inner strength unlike any I've ever seen! You don't know the half of what he's been through, is still going through, even though a lot of it is your fault! Yet he keeps going, keeps fighting, even when the whole world is against him!”

Bakugou dashed in close, sending explosive punches as Shouto dodged and blocked, forming
another ice gauntlet to alleviate the burns he was no doubt receiving.

“*My fault?! All I did was rough him up a little as kids! You s***s are makin' a big deal outta nothin'! And now that f***in’ rat of a principal says I have to go to *therapy* to stay in the school?!! Bull's***!!*”

An ice-covered fist connected to the blond's cheek, causing him to stagger back.

Shouto's teeth clenched in a concerted effort to *stay in control*. “Bulls***?! ’Rough him up’?! Did you think you weren't hurting him, maybe even *helping* him?! Did you *ever* stop to consider that maybe, just maybe, you weren't the only problem in his life?! That maybe you were making things *worse* ?!”

Bakugou stood stunned as Shouto continued in righteous fury, barely maintaining some modicum of control over his anger. He got much quieter as he informed his adversary of Izuku's tribulations.

“Did you know he watched his mom die? Did you know his father neglected and threatened him? Did you know you weren't the only one to torment him?”

Bakugou tried to interject, but Shouto refused to let him until he'd said his piece. “Did you know he had to *steal* just to survive? Did you know he used to sleep under his bed, so he wouldn't be seen by his father? Did you know he taught himself to be silent and invisible, so his *own* father wouldn't decide to *burn him to death* ?!”

He began to step forward, rising in volume with each sentence. “Did you know his quirk was his only respite? Did you know he decided to live there and never come out except to steal when he’d finally had enough? Did you know that the day he left, you had *broken his rib* ?” He grabbed the front of Bakugou's uniform, who was still too shocked to react, and pulled him closer as he yelled out the nail in the coffin. “Did you know he could have *died* that day?! Did you know you were centimeters away from *killing* him?! From *murdering* a boy with *no one* to mourn him!!”

“I- what-” Bakugou seemed to regain his senses a bit, pushing Shouto away from him with a small blast. Shouto was undeterred.

“I almost never met my best friend because of you!! And you have the *gall* to say you didn't do anything wrong?!” Bakugou's trembling hands meant one of two things: either he was at his quirk's limit – or he's *incredibly shaken by what I've said*.

Either way, this fight was ending soon.

Shouto summoned up the most ice he could, having preserved his stamina to the best of his ability. He sent out a massive wave, ignoring the shivers crisscrossing his body, right at Bakugou. The red-eyed teen tried to destroy the incoming glacier, letting off a few explosions; but between his overused quirk and frazzled mind...

He was soon stifled, encased up to his neck in ice.

A moment of silence passed over the whole stadium that had long been forgotten in the heated duel.

Then, snapping out of her astounded stupor, Midnight called the match.

“The winner is Todoroki Shouto!”

Shouto tuned out the cheers of the audience and excited commentary from the booth, walking over
to the contained Bakugou. With his emotions back under control, he lifted his left hand and began melting the ice.

He almost missed the uncharacteristically quiet voice.

“I didn't...that nerd...he- he should've said something...I didn't want to...”

He sighed. At least he seemed to have knocked some sense into him. “You know, one thing I've learned in Pre-Heroics is that everyone makes mistakes. And while you can't change the past, you can change the future.” The other was silent. “I won't say something like 'you must apologize' or 'atone for your crimes'. But I will say this: if you really want to make up for what you did, go through the therapy. Become a better person. And do your best to stop others from following in your footsteps.”

Upon release, Bakugou stood for a moment, unmoving, before slowly turning and walking out of the arena without a word.

Me:

Thank you for cheering me on, Izuku. It means the world to me

I won

Chapter End Notes

Well, I hope that was satisfactory, especially for taking so long. For me, I'm proud of the beginning and the ending, but I find the middle to be so-so. Maybe it's because I can't seem to write an exciting action scene that's exciting because of the action, and not super emotional dialogue. I guess dialogue, inner monologue, and character viewpoints are just my specialty. Ah well. I'll try not to take a week to update this time. It may still be a couple days though, I'm pretty busy this weekend, but I'll do my best to get some writing in now that my muse is well-rested.

On a side note, is everyone enjoying Bad End? I poured as much angst into that as I could. If you haven't read it yet (and you're into cold, hard feels), you can find it in the Escapist series or under Escapist: Bad End. I've gotten quite a few 'Ow my heart', 'I'm crying rn', and 'how could you do this to me' type comments on it, so...mission success?

Anyways, see all you lovelies later!
I'm not dead, I swear!
Gah, over a week?! I'm sooo sorry! I was a little stuck on this chapter, and lacking interest in writing. I feel so bad, since I said you guys could expect a chapter every few days at least, and here I am going back on my word! My deepest apologies for all of you faithful readers who I'm sure have been chomping at the bit for this; but finally, here it is! The official end of the sports festival arc!
Hopefully this extra long chapter will help make up for the last two weeks of slow updates.
Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shota was watching the award ceremony with... complicated feelings.

First of the emotions swirling inside him was relief – Izuku had contacted them, Shouto had kept hold of his temper and won the finals, Bakugou would be getting the help he desperately needed and seemed to finally be reflecting on his actions and attitude (judging by his reserved demeanor and conflicted expression on the podium). Second was pride; two of his students were up there on the podium, with Itsuka currently being awarded her 3rd place medal by All Might, and Shouto standing tall in 1st place. He would certainly be giving all his students high praise for clearly giving it their all, and also for handling the whole mess of an afternoon pretty well, all things considered. The third emotion was something akin to stress over said afternoon, then frustration at his ineptitude to stop it or minimize fallout, then hope – Izuku was talking with them, and though he apologetically texted them he wasn't ready to come out yet, he hadn't given up on reality.

The last emotion was foreboding.

Iida Tenya was supposed to be on that podium as well, after all.

As an underground hero, he'd naturally been informed of Iida's older brother, and his former classmate, Tensei's villain encounter in Hosu that left him with grievous injuries. Ingenium had almost certainly been forced into an early retirement.

He also knew quite a bit about the villain responsible for it: The Hero Killer, Stain.

Shota's instincts were going haywire, practically screaming at him that this wasn't over, that something big was going to happen.

As Shouto received his medal, he desperately hoped that for once, his finely-honed instincts would be wrong.

Shouto snuck out the back exit of the stadium after the award ceremony. He just knew his father
wanted to lecture him for some perceived mistake, or gloat about Shouto's victory like it was his own, or drag him away for extra training now that he was using his fire, or try to pull him from Pre-Heroics (as if he, Nedzu, and Aizawa-sensei would ever let that happen). Whatever it was Enji wanted, Shouto would really rather not deal with it right now, so as soon as the ceremony was over he quickly and stealthily worked his way outside.

Besides, PH was having a post-festival party in the dorms, and Shouto was loathe to let his cranky old man ruin it for him.

He kept his guard up until he'd reached the dorms. He placed his hand on the doorknob, heard it sense his uniform's green tie and unlock, and went inside with a sigh of relief. Mission successful. Time to get ready for the party. The celebration was scheduled for that evening, allowing time for the pre-heroes to relax or meet with their families, but there was a lot of prep work to do first; Shouto and Izuku had volunteered to handle the set up (since both would much rather stay at the school anyways), but considering the situation, it seemed Shouto'd be doing it alone. Well, maybe not completely alone...

He slid his phone out of his pocket while he tracked down the party supplies principal Nedzu had provided.

Me:

Can you make it to the party tonight?

Izuku:

........

I don't know.

Me:

That's ok, take your time. Can you still help me with setup? You don't have to leave, just tell me where to put stuff cus I have no idea

Izuku:

Oh yeah, you've probably never decorated for a party before! I mean, I haven't really either, unless thinking up decorations counts

Shouto snickered a little as he opened the bags and began to pull out the supplies; he was wholly unsurprised to find that everything was the school colors – red, white, blue, and of course, dark green.

Me:

lol I don't think so. But that's fine
I really just need your eye for detail and design

**Izuku:**

Well in that case, I'll be happy to help!

What've we got?

**Me:**

<attachment>

**Izuku:**

Wow ok

Nedzu is as subtle as always I see

**Me:**

At least we didn't have to buy all this

**Izuku:**

lol true

Twist the different colored streamers together

and run them along walls in arcs like this

<attachment>

**Me:**

Sure thing

Wait

Did you just send a jpeg with your brain?

And did you really recreate the common room in boundless so you could tell me how to decorate it?

**Izuku:**

...maaaybe

It helps me visualize, ok?

Once that's done, push the table against the far wall and set it up for snacks and drinks

<attachment>

Hang that banner outside over the door
And tie those balloons here
<attachment>
And here
<attachment>
Here too
<attachment>
<attachment>
<attachment>

Me:
OMG SLOW DOWN I'm still hanging streamers!

Two hours later found Shouto utterly exhausted and the common room fully decked out. He'd followed his friend's instructions to the letter, and it showed. That attention to detail paired with a quirk that allowed him to freely test designs and alter them at will? If heroism doesn't work out, Izuku should totally pursue a career in interior design...

Shouto flopped onto the couch to rest. He still had an hour and a half before people started showing up for the party, and he was very tempted to take a nap. That plan was scrapped when his phone buzzed one more time.

Izuku:
Can we talk?

As soon as Shouchan's reply of 'of course' flashed through his mind, Izuku gathered his courage. I-I will...appear...in the common room... He squeezed his eyes shut as the all-too-familiar sensation washed over him; without opening his eyes, he held out his hand. A rustle of fabric, tender footsteps, and no words before an ice-cold hand gently grasped his and he brought his best friend to Boundless.

Izuku opened his eyes and released the breath he was unaware he'd been holding. Shouchan simply smiled empathetically, before guiding him to sit down; the ground had turned to a pier by the time they reached it. Shoes and socks were removed and bare feet dipped in the shimmering ocean before any words were exchanged.

“Thanks for not giving up on me.”

“I should be the one saying that.”

Izuku turned to glance warily at his friend. “Why? I'm the one who broke my promise and ran away like a coward.”

Shouchan shook his head. “You're not a coward. It was a bad situation you were unprepared for; I
think that qualifies for what sensei would call a 'tactical retreat'. The fact that you want to come back is enough; you may not have stood your ground, but you haven't surrendered. You're not letting your fear defeat you.” He pulled one foot out of the ocean, crossing his arms on his knee and resting his head. “I let you down. I was supposed to be your backup, your support, your reinforcements – but I was so caught up in the battle with Bakugou and my own emotions, I lost sight of my objective and failed you as a result. If anyone botched the operation, it was me.”

Izuku leaned back on his hands and chuckled. “I can tell Aizawa-sensei's been teaching you strategy and military tactics. You carried that metaphor pretty far. Do you really need that much practice with the terminology?”

Shouchan playfully shoved him as he laughed. “Says the guy who once spent an entire afternoon signing and writing in third person.”

He sat up and shoved back. “Hey! Principal Nedzu said I needed to practice my point-of-views!”

The teasing shoves turned into splash attacks, the pier fading away as both boys romped around in the knee-deep water, laughing joyfully. One more strong push from Shouchan sent Izuku tumbling into the water, thoroughly soaked. He held out a hand, that was soon taken by the giggling heterochromiac to pull him up.

Izuku pulled him down instead. *Sweet revenge.*

With both of them soaked through and the laughs dying down, Izuku made the water recede from around them and out of their clothes, leaving them on the warm sand, fully dry.

“Man, I needed that after today.”

“It has been a long day. We both went through a lot.”

“...Hey, Shouchan?”

“Yeah?”

“I don't wanna worry over what happened anymore.”

“...How about we just say we both messed up, we'll do better next time, and leave it at that?”

“I'd like that.”

“Me too.”

By the time the other pre-heroes arrived for the celebration, Izuku was sitting next to Shouchan on the couch – still a little fearful, but ready to face the world once more.

He didn't even finish signing his apology for worrying his friends before he was engulfed in a group hug.

*I'm home.*

*He's late.*

He scratched his neck in irritation, while his foot tapped impatiently on his bar stool. Kurogiri just kept cleaning glasses, either unaware or uncaring of his foul mood. *If you weren't so vital to us, I'd*
Just as he was about to release all his pent up annoyance on anything within reach, there was a knock on the door.

Without waiting for an answer, a smoking man with short gray hair and round glasses waltzed into the bar like he owned the place, the smug motherf***er. Another person on his list of 'people to turn to dust the moment they stop being useful'.

“It's about time you bothered to show up, Giran.”

Giran shrugged nonchalantly. “I had to finish up some... business first. Now, what can I do for you, Shigaraki?”

The blue-haired leader of the League of Villains turned to look at his guest; at least he knows when to get to the point. “I need you to get some info for me. We’ll pay you well, of course, if you can deliver.”

“Hm? Information? That's new, coming from you. What d'ya need to know?”

Tomura picked up the nearby remote and pointed it at the tv in the corner. On it was the recorded footage of the UA sports festival that morning – particularly, the first year arena. Giran watched in mild interest as Tomura fast-forwarded through the opening ceremony before hitting 'play' at the start of the first event.

“GO!!”

“Eehh?! What's he doing?! The course is that way!”

“If I know Izuku – and at this point, I'd say I know him pretty well – then he's about to show us his specialty: bending the rules to reach an unconventional solution.”

“Whaa?! Where'd he go?!”

“Check the finish line.”

“WHOA!!! AND JUST LIKE THAT MIDORIYA IZUKU TAKES FIRST PLACE!!!”

At that point, Tomura paused the video on a close up of the greenet having just won the first round. “That kid – Midoriya Izuku. Bring us as much info on him as you can. That's your mission.”

Giran hummed, intrigued. “Alright. But why that kid? He seems pretty plain to me.”

He huffed. Does no one else really see what I do? The potential? At least Sensei understood. “His quirk is anything but plain.” Memories of vividly colored sand and unbreakable crystals swirled in his brain.

“I know teleportation quirks are rare, but you already have one, and this one seems to be more limited. What's so special about it?”

“Because it's not a teleportation quirk.” That seemed to really catch Giran's attention. I don't want to share too much about the legendary weapon, but we need information so we can obtain it. His smirk, partially hidden by Father's hand on his face, was still visible to his informant as he
elaborated. “Try a pocket dimension he controls with his brain, even breaking the laws of physics if he wants.” That brief interaction between the two of them played over in his mind again, as it had countless times before now, every detail he could remember picked apart and pondered on. He had to learn as much about that quirk as he could, after all. “Applications include warping, storage of personnel and items, communication, even quirk-immune, escape-proof detainment. And even more, probably.”

Giran let out a low whistle, clearly impressed. “I can see your point. I know a lotta people who’d pay good money to get their hands on a quirk like that...”

Tomura glared at the other man. “We spotted him first, bastard. You better not hand him over to anyone else! If I hear you gave this information to anyone, I'll-”

He raised his hands in a placating manner. “Whoa whoa whoa, calm down. I'll help you acquire this kid for sure; your Sensei's always good on his payments, after all. I was just thinkin' I could give you a discount on all my services, as long as you let me borrow him now and then – y'know, lend him out a bit. I can turn that kid into a major moneymaker for ya, as long as I get a cut of the profits.”

Tomura narrowed his eyes, thinking on the offer. Sensei said he needed good business sense, and having the League be more self-sufficient would be nice...but not if he was going to lose his trump card in the process. “Fine. We'll consider it -” Giran grinned broadly at that, but Tomura wasn't done. “- IF you agree to some conditions. First, our operations are the priority; no one else can use him if we need him for something. Second, we'll be informed of any and all requests for him, and we can opt him out of any side quest. And third, he only goes out if you can guarantee he'll come back; he's a key item for us, and I'm not gonna lose him because of some stupid NPC's mistake.”

“Of course, of course. I'll work out the details with you and Sensei another time. Until then -” he stood from his stool and extinguished his cigarette on the countertop, to Kurogiri's obvious chagrin. “I suppose I have some digging to do on this...Midoriya Izuku.” And with a casual wave behind him, Giran sauntered out of the bar.

Tomura turned back to the counter as Kurogiri scrubbed furiously at the singed wood. All that was left to do was wait. He looked up to the screen in the corner, still paused on the shot of his target; Better enjoy the hero course while you can, Midoriya Izuku...

Because soon enough, you'll be ours.

Chapter End Notes

I've been waiting for that to happen for a long time, at least since USJ. It was a bit longer than planned, but I'm satisfied with how it turned out. For those of you who think 'wow, Izuku got out of Boundless quick', just remember that it was a whole afternoon in real time, and at least twice that in Boundless time - so Izuku was hiding out for pretty much a full day.

I was very pleased with the whole interior design thing when it magically appeared on
the document I write this in (which just passed 200 pages by the way). Y’all can consider that the ‘neutral ending’: Izuku doesn't become a hero, but instead becomes a highly acclaimed designer, and the go-to specialist for Shouto, PH, and 1-A when they become pros. I won't write that (unless you guys reeeaaally want me to), but feel free to imagine that to your heart's content.
Anyone still waiting for yandere!Shigaraki? Because the end of this chapter will be the start of the spinoff! The first chapter of Escapist: Alternate Route is set to be my next upload, which I will begin writing either tonight or tomorrow (hopefully), so get hype for that!
Finally, I need to figure out when I'm going to end this fic, and I want your opinion! I have some plans for Hosu, so the cutoff point will be at least after the internships. I also have a couple ideas for the training camp, but nothing set in stone yet. So, here's your options:
-end with the internships
-end with the training camp
-end with provisional license exam
-end at a later point (this might include a brief hiatus for this fic until I catch up in the manga or season 4 airs)
Let me know in the comments!
Thanks for reading this far, and I'll see you soon!
Understanding

Chapter Notes

Hi everyone! I'm back, and for chapter 50!! The last two weeks have been insane, but it's over! I can write more often now! Hopefully!
If anyone's thinking "wow, it's been forever since she updated this", that's partially because the writing time I did have I spent writing the first chapter of that yandere spinoff I promised - Escapist: Alternate Route! You can find it either under that title, or in the Escapist series. Note that it will be almost entirely Shigaraki being super creepy and obsessing over a certain greenet, so if that's not your cup of tea, don't read it. Otherwise, please do! I hope you enjoy my take on the yandere trope.
As for this fic, this is...not really a filler chapter, or transition chapter per se...but I felt it needed to be written. You guys are gonna get a bit more insight into why Nedzu orchestrated Izuku and Bakugou's encounter. Don't hate him, he's trying his best.
Enjoy 'Nedzu And Aizawa Talking For An Hour'!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It's way too early for this.

Shota took another large swig of jet-black coffee, relishing in the bitter burn of the steaming liquid as he shuffled down the hall. Normally, Shota wouldn't show up at the school until the last possible moment that could still be considered on time; today, however, there were some... issues that he needed to address, and as soon as he could at that. So here he was, over an hour before school starts, making his way to Nedzu's office.

He didn't even bother knocking.

“Good morning, Aizawa. How unlike you to be here so early. To what do I owe the pleasure of this unexpected visit?”

Shota narrowed his eyes at the furry creature. “Cut the crap, Nedzu. You know exactly why I'm here.”

The principal simply poured another cup of tea for himself, utterly nonplussed by his accusing glare. “Ah yes, I assume you mean yesterday's incident? I'm surprised you decided to address it so soon.”

“I actually wanted to confront you yesterday evening, but I decided it'd be better to encourage and support my students – you know, what we teachers are supposed to do at all times.”

“Hm, you seem quite upset over the matter.”

Shota slammed down his thermos onto the desk; is he for real right now?! “Of course I'm upset!! You manipulated everyone! You forced our students into a potentially ruinous situation! You made a risky gamble with their well-being on the line!”
Nedzu sipped his tea, waiting for Shota to finish shouting. “But it worked out, did it not? We now have the evidence and leverage to mandate therapy and anger management for young Bakugou; Izuku returned to reality of his own volition, and having faced some of his personal demons, his recovery can continue to progress instead of stagnating. ’All's well that ends well’, I'd say.”

Shota poured all his ire into his glare. “And I’d say 'the ends don't justify the means'. Yes, we needed to get Bakugou help. Yes, Izuku needed to face him eventually. Yes, we needed to push Izuku so he could continue to grow. Yes, your gamble paid off for now. I'll concede you that much. But it's not worth putting our students on the line like that! Especially since we promised them we'd help and protect them!”

“Naturally. That's why I went through with it. Our students have overcome adversity and are better for it. I don't see the issue here.”

Looking into Nedzu's beady eyes, he could see the mammal was truly at a loss for what was wrong. An ear twitch, a slight head tilt, a swaying tail. It reminded Shota of something important he often forgot.

Nedzu wasn't human.

Sure, the principal's quirk High Spec gave him intelligence that surpassed most humans, but his intelligence was purely on the workings of the world. He was still an animal, and one cruelly experimented on at that; it was inevitable Nedzu would struggle to understand the nuances of the human heart. His sense of empathy was severely stunted, and he couldn't comprehend many of the finer details of human emotion, though not from lack of trying – not many people were aware of it, but Shota knew the principal had an extensive collection of fictional books; when he'd asked why, Nedzu answered with “They're for studying, of course! I've studied psychology extensively, but nothing provides a better insight into the human 'heart' than books like these. Reading from the perspective of various human characters as they go about their lives...I feel like I understand humanity just a little bit more each time.”

Shota took a deep breath, pushing aside his anger as he had taught several of his PH kids to do; there was a time and a place to let out that anger, and this wasn't it. Once he was sure he was calm (and had a plan to vent that anger when appropriate), he continued the conversation in a more rational manner.

“I...can see why you're confused, Nedzu, so how about I clarify my own view of what happened? Then we can discuss in a more meaningful way.”

Nedzu's tail swayed, pleased at Shota's understanding of his predicament. “I would very much appreciate that, especially if it is as much of a problem as you make it out to be.”

Shota clasped his hands, elbows on his knees as he leaned forward in his chair, “What I'm hearing from you is that you were honestly trying to help our students; you saw several problems that required intervention, and came up with a plan to solve those problems in a quick and efficient manner. Is that correct?”

“Yes, that is correct.”

*Thank the stars for all those conversation and conflict resolution tips I've been teaching Shouto – this could have ended ugly.* Working through a disagreement without it escalating into an argument was a delicate procedure, requiring self-control of one's emotions, meticulous word choice, and careful direction of the conversation; but it could be done, and Shota would do his best to be a good example for his students, even if they weren't here. After all, integrity was about what you did
when no one's watching, and how could he possibly promote these guidelines if he didn't follow them himself? With the verification that he had understood Nedzu's stance, he proceeded to explain his.

“Now, my issue is not with your intentions – you're right in that those things needed to be dealt with, and I am glad you addressed them. My problem lies with your methods.”

“I see. Please, continue.”

He could tell he had the principal’s full attention. Nedzu clearly wanted to improve in his comprehension of human emotion, and was willing to listen to other's opinions to do so (as long as those opinions were presented in a respectful way); that was why Shota could put up with him in moments like this. “My concerns are in two areas in particular: first, how you orchestrated Izuku and Bakugou's encounter behind everyone's backs. The fact that you went ahead with this plan without telling any of us – including me – is quite distressing to me. You know I care quite a lot about those kids. I'm heavily invested in their development and well-being. I've been working with Izuku and Shouto extensively, both in Pre-Heroics and 1-A. Yet you did not consult me before going through with that, and that makes me feel lots of things; I feel betrayed that you didn't work with me on this, when we teach those kids together. I feel frustrated that I was unable to do anything about it. I feel angry at being manipulated.”

Nedzu hummed in thought, a paw on his chin. “That does sound distressing. So you would have preferred if I consulted you on the issue beforehand? Even if doing so could have needlessly complicated things?”

He nodded. “Yes, I would. You and I have known each other for a long time, Nedzu; we've worked together many times in the past. But going behind my back on something like this? To me, it didn't seem like you were streamlining your solution – I felt like you didn't trust me or value my input on such an important matter. This incident has been troublesome enough as is, but if word gets out to the kids involved that this was your doing – or worse, this sort of thing happens again – your students and staff are going to lose much of their trust in you.”

Beady black eyes closed as the implications of his words settled in. “You're saying that, even if I acted with the best intentions, my ‘optimal solution’, in it's secrecy, could be seen as a betrayal of trust? I suppose that could pose a problem in the long run; I'll take that into consideration in the future.”

“Good. If no one else, talk to me about these things before they get out of hand. I'll keep you grounded, and vouch for your sincerity if the need arises.” He leaned back, and resisted the urge to cross his arms. Better not appear closed off in what's supposed to be an open, honest discussion. “The second issue I have with how you proceeded is with the risks you took for it.”

Nedzu's head tilted again. “You mean more than the potential loss of hard-built trust?”

“That's part of it. But more than that, you gambled with our students' hearts and minds, and it was an incredibly risky bet!”

“Actually, I calculated the odds of success to be over 80%...”

Shota shook his head. “That might be fine, and good odds in some situations, but when something as important as our students is on the line? That's not good enough. 80% is far from assured success. What would you have done if it didn't work?”

“If it didn't work? In what way? I had it all planned out: Shouto was certain to accompany Izuku,
Bakugou was bound to confront them and antagonize them, Shouto would most likely lose his composure, and there was a noticeable chance Izuku would retreat to Boundless – in which case, I had faith that between you and Shouto, you could convince him to come back. I suppose there was a slim, 2% chance Izuku would refuse to return…”

He pinched the bridge of his nose, trying hard not to blow up at how close they got to that 2% chance. “That's exactly what I mean. If Izuku cut off contact with us and decided to stay in Boundless, the emotional damage alone would be devastating. Not only would we have lost our chance to turn Izuku into a fine hero, but everyone around him would feel the loss; Shouto would be utterly despondent, Hitoshi, Itsuka, and the other pre-heroes would be heartbroken, and I know I'd probably never forgive myself for failing him. Can you, in good conscience, say that you operate for the good of the students when you're willing to take risks like that? No matter how sure of victory you are, there are just some things you can't risk losing.”

Nedzu's tea sat cold and forgotten as their discussion went on. By 10 minutes before the first bell, they'd come to a compromise. Nedzu was aware of Shota's concerns and agreed to take them into consideration in the future, while Shota understood Nedzu's well-meaning intentions and promised to help the principal in his future endeavors, lest he unknowingly neglect the emotions of others again.

“Still, I often forget how you struggle with this kind of stuff. I mean, you know a lot about helping people with mental issues, and I always hear the pre-heroes talking about how considerate you are of their needs; heck, you write a lot of the curriculum for Social Essentials, yet your empathy is still…”

“Lacking? Misguided? Underdeveloped?” Shota scratched his head awkwardly while the principal chuckled. “I'm aware. When it comes to those other areas you mentioned, I am rather capable since I've studied topics like psychology and behavioral therapy extensively. But in terms of the subtleties of emotion, even I forget sometimes how uninformed I can be.”

“Yeah...guess I'll just have to keep you in line as you learn.”

Another chuckle. “Naturally!” The laughter died down, as Nedzu returned an air of seriousness to the room. “Well, I'm afraid I must consult you on a matter immediately. Now that I understand the emotional harm my actions could have caused, how should I go about making amends?”

Shota scratched his prickly chin. He hadn't thought much about what to do after he confronted his boss.

“First, let's not tell any of the PH kids the ordeal was due to your meddling – especially Shouto and Izuku. We'll have to tell them eventually, preferably far in the future when this is long behind us and they're more...stable. If they found out now, I don't believe they'd take it well at all.”

“Agreed. I suppose it's serendipitous you were the only one I told.”

He nodded. For once, Nedzu's secretive nature was a blessing in disguise. “I do think we – and by we, I mean mostly you – need to apologize to those boys. They went through a lot because of this, and they deserve to know we're sorry and will do everything in our power to prevent similar incidents in the future.”

“I suppose that's fair.”
"From there, I think the only things we can really do to make amends is steer Bakugou and others like him down the right path, and give all our students – especially the pre-heroes who need it most – our full support."

The mammal sighed in resignation. “I see. If that really is the best we can do...” Shota cocked an eyebrow at the contemplative look that appeared on his face. Thankfully, he didn't need to pry as Nedzu began talking. “The vast majority of Izuku's mental issues can be traced back to his troubled childhood, yes?”

He had no idea where this was going. “...Yes?”

“The neglect at the hands of his father, as well as the bullying and abuse from his peers, played an integral part in warping his mental, social, and emotional development into what it is now...”

“...yes...”

“Our intervention has already worked wonders for his mental health. But if someone had intervened much earlier, it likely would never have gotten to the state it did.”

Shota was done with the guessing game, so he decided to ask directly. “What are you getting at?”

Nedzu spun his chair around and stood, paws clasped behind his back. “I am simply considering what else I can do: both to atone for my own mistakes, and to help prevent more children from suffering through what young Izuku did.”

“That's great and all, but how are you going to accomplish that?”

“In cases like this, prevention is key. Unfortunately, Izuku's mind is already severely damaged; we can help him improve significantly, of course, but I fear complete recovery is impossible. The damage has been done, and all we can do now is try to lessen it's impact upon his life.”

He didn't need the reminder. He was already well aware his Problem Children would never fully recover from their respective traumas.

Nedzu continued, now turning to face Shota with a determined expression. “I want to teach people – parents, teachers, first responders, anybody – how to spot the signs of neglect and abuse.” Shota's eyes widened. “These incidents don't happen in a vacuum. There will be evidence of what's going on, even if it's subtle. If I can inform people on the importance of stopping neglect and abuse, and show them what to look for...if even one child is spared from a terrible fate because of my words...I believe that's the best way for me to honor Izuku and carry on his legacy.”

Shota sat stunned for a moment, before sighing. “He's not dead, you know...but, for what it's worth, I think that's a good idea, and I'll support you in it.” He smirked. “But seriously, the dark green everything for PH isn't enough of a legacy? What's next? A plaque in the courtyard? An entire wing of the school named in his honor?”

“........”

“........Nedzu no.”

“Maybe upon his graduation I could -”

“It was a joke! Don't you even dare!”
Shota marched towards his homeroom, exasperated.

But those who knew him well could see little hints of amusement and satisfaction behind his scowl.

Chapter End Notes

I hope that wasn't too boring, and that you all understand Nedzu a bit more. People tend to give him a bad rap, saying he's sadistic or doesn't care or whatever. But he's an animal - I think it's only logical he wouldn't fully grasp certain human traits and behaviors. I'm not saying there's no empathy in the animal kingdom, but it would show itself a bit differently, wouldn't it? Nedzu was honestly trying to help his students, though he was unaware of how his actions, despite his intentions, could hurt them emotionally.

Anyway, with that out of the way, once again it's poll time! This time, I'm looking for hero names! I'll need a new name for Izuku at least (he will not be Deku - too much trauma associated with that name in this fic). You can also submit a name for Shouto (I don't want to use his first name like in canon since he's grown much more in this fic), though I am fine with using Promise (his hero name from Bad End, which he chose to remember the promises he made with Izuku). I'll also take names for the other PH students as well, so send in your suggestions!

Well, thanks for reading this far! You guys are so awesome, and I'm honored to be able to write a story you all can enjoy.

Seeya later!
Hey-yo! What's up, everyone? I've got a new chapter for ya!
Bit of an OC warning for the first part of this chapter - nothing major, just PH fluff and me keeping my promise to all of you who submitted your OC so I could pad out the roster a bit! If yours hasn't appeared yet, don't fret! I have a full list of all the OC's I received, so yours will be mentioned at some point, though it might be a while.
This chapter is just pure fluff, by the way. Izuku is getting some major platonic doting-on here, because he deserves it (and because my angst side was getting a little out of control, so I need to balance it out).
But aw man, I was looking through some previous chapters of this and noticed several typos and minor continuity issues! Augh! I've been trying so hard to avoid those. I'm tempted to go back and fix everything, but...I don't wanna go through 50 chapters of it. So if you notice a typo or continuity discrepancy, feel free to inform me and I'll fix it. I want this to be a high-quality story for you guys, so I'm always open to hear ways I can improve it.
Anyways, I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

If Izuku said the morning after the sports festival surprised him, that'd be an understatement.

If he said he didn't appreciate it, and in fact disliked what was going on? Well, that would be a straight-up lie.

He'd awoken in the morning to a marvelous smell, walking out of his dorm to find Tamaka-senpai cooking breakfast for everyone, her prosthetic leg occasionally clanking on the tile floor. Neither being prone to talking, they exchanged 'good morning' waves before she turned back to the stove and he went off to wake the others.

They all ate breakfast together, with animated talking and signing all around the table. They hadn't talked much about the festival at the party (they were too busy celebrating to really discuss anything), so this morning was spent sharing stories.

“So, you made it to the top 3, Amajiki-senpai? Awesome!”

“Y-yeah...it w-went...well......”

“How about you 2nd years?”

The slightly-sadistic Mika-senpai was quick to throw her friend under the bus. “Cedar fainted again!”

Said goat-mutant shoved her with a hoof as she cackled. “Oh come on! I only fainted once the whole day!”
Hitochan chuckled. “I wish I could've seen that. But honestly, I'm just glad the festival's over.”

The conversation quieted as everyone was reminded of what had happened; several students were sending sympathetic glances towards Izuku and Shouchan. He wasn't sure when they'd learned about Kacchan, nor did he know who told them, but by the time he'd returned to reality it seemed all of Pre-Heroics was in the loop.

“Aw man, I'm so bummed I missed it now. I could've turned that Bakugou jerk to stone! Bullying is sooo not cool.” Karitara-chan huffed, clearly pouting, even if her eyes were covered by her blindfold.

Ryoushi-senpai's eight eyes gleamed with dubious intentions. “I can always string him up if you'd like, my little underclassmen~”

Shouchan spoke up at that, eager to stop that train before it went much further. “No need. Aizawa-sensei told me that Bakugou will be undergoing mandatory therapy and anger management if he wants to stay at UA. Anyway, we better finish up or we'll be late to class.”

At his prompting, they all scarfed down the rest of their meal and prepared for school.

As was practically tradition by now, all the PH students walked to the school together in a large group; though for some reason, instead of splitting off in the entrance hall as usual, they all continued to follow him. *Strange. Most of their classes are on the other side of the building.* Eventually, he reached 1-A, and turned to see that the entire group was still there.

He finally understood what was going on when each student said goodbye to him specifically before heading to their own class, many giving him a hug or a word of encouragement. They were comforting and encouraging him!

By the time he finally made it into his class – only to be enthusiastically greeted by 1-A, who also somehow heard about the incident – he was a blushing mess.

At some point during those minutes before class started, Ashido had stood on her desk and proclaimed that the events of yesterday will henceforth forever be known as Triple F – The First-year Festival Fiasco. No one dared dispute the name.

“All right class, let's get started already.” Aizawa-sensei strolled into homeroom, the students immediately silent. “First, let me show you this.”

Shouto watched their teacher project a list of names and numbers up front.

“These are the numbers for those of you who have received internship offers.”

The class burst into excited chatter at the indirect announcement of internships; one quirk-fueled glare from Aizawa-sensei though, and they all settled down. “You'll all be going on a week-long internship under an approved Pro-Hero of your choice. Those who have received offers may choose from them; everyone else, UA has a list of pros we've partnered with that will take you on.”

That's odd...I won the festival, but I don't see my name, or Izuku's for that matter.

Thankfully his unspoken question was answered by their teacher as he continued. “Oh, and Pre-Heroics students will be doing something different. Barring any special circumstances, to ensure that proper support, education, and care is provided for you, all pre-heroes will be undergoing a different kind of internship, which we're calling the PH Intensive; we've prepared personalized
agendas for each of you, including unique lessons and activities for Intellectual Proficiency,
Physical Fitness, and Social Essentials. You'll also be going on mini-internships with carefully
selected UA staff; overall, the internship week should be a good experience for everyone, though
you all should choose carefully who you intern with. Oh, and Itsuka?” Said redhead looked up at
attention. “Because of your position as PH ambassador, you may choose to do an internship of your
choice or the intensive. If you choose the intensive, you'll be focusing on public relations and
communication, just so you know. Now with that out of the way—”

He was interrupted by Midnight-sensei slamming open the classroom door and waltzing in like she
owned the place. “With that out of the way it's time for you lovelies to pick your hero names~!”

Aizawa-sensei sighed deep, dragging his hand down his face in exasperation. *I feel your pain.* “I'm
pretty terrible at stuff like this, so Midnight's here. I'm taking a nap.” And with that, he slipped on
his bright yellow sleeping bag, zipped it up, and flopped onto the floor.

The 18+ hero merely shook her head at her coworker, before passing out whiteboards and markers
to the class. “Now, choosing your hero name is important! You can change it later, but what you go
by now will likely stick with you for your whole life, so choose carefully~ And once you have an
idea, come up here and present it to the class!” They heard a thump that sounded suspiciously like
a heavily-clothed foot kicking out, and watched Midnight stumble a moment, looking nervous. “U-
unless you really really don't want to! In which case, wave me over and I'll take a look! But you
should get used to being called by that name – and after all, it should be a name you're proud of!”

At that, the class dove into the activity. Some were chatting with their friends and neighbors,
sharing ideas, while others were brainstorming quietly to themselves. Shouto's attention was drawn
to Izuku signing to their teacher.

“Sure! Fine with me, just be back in a few minutes, mmkay~?”

Knowing immediately what his friend was up to, Shouto held out his hand.

“Uwaah, I just don't know! I haven't even thought about what my hero name should be!”

Shouto was sitting in the sand while his best friend paced around Boundless. “I have no idea
myself, though I'm sure whatever we pick will be fine.”

“You're not helping, Shouchan.”

“Okay okay, I'll help. Just sit down! You're gonna wear a hole in your own subconscious at this
rate.”

Izuku huffed, but complied. “Where do I even start?”

Shouto thought for a moment; *where does one start with something like this?* “Hmm...how about
we talk about our message? Like, when people see us, or hear our name, what will come to their
mind? What is it that you want to tell the world?”

“Uuuhhh...I dunno. How about you?”

Just because he wasn't all that surprised by the returned question, didn't mean he was exactly ready
for it. *Shoot, think of something quick!* He floundered about mentally for a moment, before
deciding it might work better to think with his mouth.

“I think...I think I want people to find balance. Like, letting your past influence you, but not define
you. Getting angry, yet holding onto peace and calm. Not burning, or freezing, just comfortably warm or pleasantly cool. Moderation. Walking the middle road. Everything evening out to reach equilibrium."

That seemed to get Izuku's brain working, as he put his hand to his chin in thought. “Equilibrium, huh? Nice idea, but a little long for a hero name...” He snapped his fingers. “How about Stasis? A system coming to rest, opposing forces balancing each other out perfectly – you can be The Equilibrium Hero: Stasis!”

Shouto hummed, mulling over the name. “Stasis, huh? I like it. It suits my quirk too.” Izuku beamed at him, obviously glad he liked his idea; _shame it's my turn to turn the tables on him._ “I've got mine now, how about you?”

His friend sputtered. “Well uh...I...still don't know.”

Shouto patted his back in sympathy and support. “No idea, huh? Maybe this'll help.” _Now's the perfect time!_ He reached into his pocket and pulled out a small vial attached to a chain, handing it to his best friend. Izuku gingerly took it, holding it up to his eyes; he gasped at the grains of colored sand that shifted in the vial with each movement, the hues clearly chosen to match the natural shades of Boundless.

“I've been wanting to give this to you for a while, though I couldn't find the right time. The sand is from that beach you used to visit with your mom. Ever since you told me that story, I've been searching for it, and I finally found it the other day – Dagobah Municipal Beach Park.” He took Izuku's hand in his. “I got this for you for two reasons: one is to remind you of Boundless when you're struggling in reality; with this, it's like you have a piece of Boundless with you, even when things are tough. You have so much potential, Izuku. You don't need your quirk to accomplish whatever you want in life, the strength to do so is already within you, and I want this to be a reminder of that. The second reason is to remind you of our promise, that together we'd make the world a more beautiful place for everyone.” He looked up into teary emerald eyes. “I...wanted to ask if, maybe, you'd like to clean the beach together? It would be good training for PF, and we could get everyone else involved too! And, well, we'd be restoring the paradise of your memory and returning some beauty to the world.”

Izuku sniffed, wiping his tears. “Thanks, Shouchan. I...I'd like that.” He held up the bottle of sand, watching the glass glisten in the refracted light of a crystal sun. “And I think I know what my hero name should be.”

When it was finally their turn to present, Shouto and Izuku went up together. He looked to his friend and, at his nod, began to present their names.

“First, my name. I've decided that I want to represent finding balance – with my quirk, within my heart, and in the hearts of others. To bring peace to those around me, a product of opposing forces reconciling, I am...” He turned his board around. “...The Equilibrium Hero: Stasis!”

'Ooh's and 'aah's sounded at the reveal.

“Oho, very nice! It suits you, and has a lot of meaning behind it! Now, how about Izuku?”

He squeezed his friend's hand reassuringly. “Izuku's name has two meanings to it. He wants to be someone with limitless potential, not held back by fear; he also wants to make the world a more beautiful place, so people can find joy and comfort even when they're suffering.”
Those names work for everybody? I'll admit I put off writing this chapter for a while so I could wrack my brain for good hero names. Your suggestions did help, even if none were quite what I was looking for. But now we've got Stasis and Crystalline, two heroes-in-training ready to- *gasp dramatically* what if I gave them a duo name?!
You know they're gonna stick together even as pros, so they should have a team name! Ooh, and maybe some other PH kids will join because the course is so tight-knit! If you have an idea for a duo/team name, let me know! I'd love to hear it (if it's a team of more than Shouto and Izuku, please include who else is on that team).
On an unrelated note, while I was procrastinating overcoming my writer's block I wrote a bit for some other fic ideas I have (namely the roulette one you guys voted for and the LoZ crossover because I just wanted to), and also came up with a bunch of other ideas. I think I'll post all those prompts and ideas in a separate 'fic', where y'all can see what's been swirling around my head, vote on what fics you'd like to see, or even borrow my ideas for your own fics! I know I can't possibly write for all the ideas I have, and I don't mind sharing. I'll probably get that up today, so if you're interested check it out on my profile!
That's all for now, so toodles!
Chapter Notes

Oh gosh, it's been...waaaaay too long since I've updated this. I'm soooo soooorrrry!! I don't even have that good of an excuse! I was going through some serious writer's block paired with lack of motivation to write - it legitimately took me several weeks to get out one chapter of Alternate Route. This chapter didn't take as long as that did, but still. I don't want to be one of those writers that won't update for months at a time, or straight up doesn't finish a fic. That being said, thank you for patience. I'm fairly certain that my inspiration and motivation will pick back up a bit now that we're diving into the Hero Killer arc - an arc I've had ideas about for a long time, and have been sooo excited to write! Hopefully it lives up to all your expectations. With all that out of the way, it's now the first day of the internships/intensive! Aizawa's got plans for all of his kids, especially Problem Children #'s 1 and 2. What's in store for our pre-heroes? A week of fun, learning, and personal growth aka character development? Or is there something more serious on the horizon? Honestly, it's probably more character development. Apparently I live for the stuff. I can't stop writing it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The time of the internships/intensive was finally upon them. Izuku had spent the last week buzzing with anticipation, nearly bouncing off the walls (which he may have actually done in Boundless once or twice, to Shouchan's apparent amusement) in his excitement. Aizawa-sensei had given the pre-heroes their individualized schedules last night, and the week starting today was chock-full of fun activities, challenging exercises, and group bonding events – including several workdays where all of PH would be cleaning up Dagobah Municipal Beach Park together! When he first saw that, he teared up in joy and crushed his best friend in a bear hug, before turning around and crushing his teacher as well.

The fact that Aizawa-sensei smiled and hugged him back was PH's little secret.

To be fair, he was a little nervous about it; he hadn't left UA's campus since he'd enrolled (USJ didn't count because it was a UA facility). With how caring and understanding all his classmates and teachers were, it was easy to forget sometimes what his life used to be – a social outcast, an unwanted child, a compulsive thief. At UA, he was accepted for who he was, loved despite his flaws, and forgiven for his stealing as they taught him how to fight his urges. As ridiculous as he knew it was, and as much as his friends would tell him it wasn't true if he told them, he couldn't help but have one niggling thought.

If I leave UA, will things go back to how they were before?

He was going to find out this afternoon, whether he liked it or not.

The swirling doubts and hesitations were temporarily silenced when his teacher cleared his throat, looking out at the students of 1-A assembled at the school gate.
Now that you're all here, we can get this going. Today marks the first day of your internships. This experience could prove to be incredibly beneficial, or an utter waste of time – it all depends on how you go about it. I'm sure you've all put lots of thought into your placement; maybe you're playing to your strengths, maybe you're focusing on your weaker points, or maybe you're checking out a different side of heroism. Either way, what you get out this depends largely on what you put in. Those of you who give it your all will surely gain great experiences to help you grow as a hero.” He paused for a moment, before switching gears. “Alright, so here's how this morning is gonna go down. Those of you doing the Pre-Heroics Intensive already have your schedules, so upon dismissal head to your first assignment. Everyone else, I'll be escorting you to the train station. As you leave, remember that not only are you representatives of this school, but future heroes. The heroes you are interning with may be future bosses and coworkers – and even if they aren't, your actions this week will reflect on both the school and your career. I expect each and every one of you to be on your very. Best. Behavior. Any questions?”

Red eyes scanned the group, while several classmates stood up straighter or slumped lower under the weight of his expectations. When no one raised a hand, Aizawa-sensei nodded in approval.

“Good. Oh, and Izuku and Shouto?” At his name, Izuku locked his attention on their teacher, not even needing to look to know Shouchan was doing the same. “Don't wait for me, go ahead to the gym. I've left you boys some instructions so you can get started immediately; I'll meet you there when I get back. One last thing before we go.” The thought of 'there's still more?!' was so evident in the minds of his classmates, Izuku could practically hear it.

Aizawa-sensei merely smirked. “We can't possibly send you off without a cheer of the school motto, can we? All together now!”

The entire group, full of wide smiles, put their hands into a 'P' shape that shot up into a 'U' high over their heads, the official sign for their school motto, along with their cheering.

“PLUS ULTRA!!!!”

When the two of them entered the PH gym, they found the instructions their teacher left them and quickly started their stretches across from each other. As usual, their warm-up time was spent talking (or signing, in Izuku's case), though today it seemed Shouchan had something more important on his mind.

“Hey, Izuku? I need to ask you something.”

He gave his friend a meaningful look to say 'I'm listening'.

“Have you noticed anyone acting...strange, lately?”

A quirked eyebrow was enough to convince his friend to elaborate.

“Like...being uncharacteristically quiet, or tense, or brooding.”

_Ooohhh, I know what's bugging him. 'You worry, I-I-D-A?'

Shouchan's face was serious, even as he continued his stretches. “So you noticed it too, huh?”

He nodded.

The two finished their stretches and started their jog, not stopping the discussion.

“I mean, of course I'm worried...I've seen faces like that before... I used to wear one before I met
you... It's a face of anger...a quiet anger...a dangerous anger.”

Izuku's signs bounced up and down as he jogged. 'Me hear his brother hero, hurt. Maybe angry why? Brother hurt.'

“Well, yeah...that's definitely what started it, but I'm still concerned... Anger like that, it makes you do... really stupid things.”

He hummed. 'He i-n-t-e-r-n with hero. Hero watch-watch, he do dumb? Hero stop.'

“I hope you're right about that.”

They left it at that and continued jogging around the gym, silent save for their footfalls and huffing breaths. I may not know Iida that well, but surely he's smart and straight-laced enough to know better than seek revenge, right?

By the time their teacher returned, Izuku and Shouchan were hard at work on their first assignment – practicing teamwork and combo moves. After many talks with Aizawa-sensei, principal Nedzu, and each other, the two had set their sights on debuting as a pair; practically all of the PH students were on board with becoming one massive conglomerate with it's own agency, made up of smaller teams so no one would have to work alone, and they were no exception. But it wasn't just because they were best friends who were nearly inseparable (okay, that might have been part of it) – they knew each other better than anyone, trusted each other deeply, already had pretty great teamwork, and their strengths and weaknesses balanced each other out nicely! Shouchan excelled in combat, especially long-range, but struggled a bit with close-quarters and rescue operations (particularly those that required a finesse he simply couldn't get with his powerhouse of a quirk); meanwhile, Izuku could hold his own in a hand-to-hand fight – after all, one touch from him and any opponent can be sent to Boundless and out of commission – and was well suited to rescues and more... delicate manoeuvres. Though, there was little he could do in a long-range bout, and he'd decided he really didn't like direct combat anyways and would rather avoid it if possible...so naturally they were well-suited to be partners!

......Okay, so maybe they just wanted to work together because they were best friends. Is that really such a bad thing?

Regardless of the reasons, the future duo was taking the exercise seriously; at the moment, Shouchan had his hands clasped low in front of him, nodding to Izuku that he was ready for him. The greenet planted his foot into the hands, and heard Shouchan count quietly.

“One, two, three!”

On three, Izuku shifted his weight fully into the makeshift foothold as his partner hefted him up, giving him just enough height to reach the ledge above their heads; with his weight supported by his hands, the foothold fell away, leaving him hanging on the edge. Izuku's muscles strained as he pulled his body up, first getting his elbows on top of the wall before swinging his leg over. Once he was fully up, he reached down as far as he could and nodded to Shouchan, who backed up to do a running jump; they snatched each other at the wrists as they'd been taught, and Shouchan was lifted until he got his own grip on the ledge and scrambled up. They only gave themselves a moment to breathe before the ice-and-fire user was lowering Izuku by his wrists until he could safely drop down and create his own foothold, catching his foot and slowing momentum when he pushed off the wall.

They'd been doing this same up-and-down sequence without quirks for at least 20 minutes now, alternating roles each time, and they were definitely feeling it.
They didn't even realize their teacher was back until he addressed them.

“Nice work boys. 10 minute break then we're practicing combo moves with quirks.”

Aizawa-sensei smiled fondly as the two sweaty friends sighed in relief – those team lifts weren't too bad when you did it once or twice, but as many as they'd done this morning? *Pure torture.* Shouchan seemed to be of a similar mind.

“Why are we practicing those kinds of moves? Either one of us could easily get up there with our quirk much faster” – he rolled his no-doubt very sore shoulder – “and with less strain.”

The teacher walked over to the practice wall and started pushing it into the corner, freeing up more space in the center of the gym. “Because I want you to be prepared as much as possible. There's a good chance at some point you'll have to get by without your quirk – maybe you've overworked it, or need to be stealthy, or are dealing with someone like me who can prevent you from using it. Whatever the reason, when that happens, you boys will have a much better time dealing with it if you're already familiar with stuff like this.”

Shouchan nodded in acceptance. “Yeah, I guess that makes sense. Better to already know what we're doing than have to figure it out when we're already disadvantaged.”

Coming back from the corner, Aizawa-sensei crouched down in front of them. “Anyways, I should probably explain your goals for this week. As you know, everyone doing the Intensive has a theme, and each activity is centered around that theme – in light of your interest in debuting as a pair, your theme is teamwork, and you'll be doing nearly everything together.”

That was certainly an awesome prospect, even though it wasn't really a surprise at this point; *after all, our schedules are exactly the same.* Regardless, both boys smiled, always eager to spend time together.

“For each class – Physical Fitness, Intellectual Proficiency, and Social Essentials – you two will be working on a project of sorts, the completion of which will be your goals for the week. Like everything in PH, coming short of those goals is not failure, simply a chance to learn, grow, and try again, though I will kick your butts if you're not giving it your all. Make sense?”

Izuku could feel the determination swelling within him. *No matter what those goals are, I'm gonna do my best!*

At their nods, the blacket continued his explanation. “Good. Your job for PF is simple: create and master at least one super combo move only the two of you can do, metaphorical bonus points if it uses both your quirks. It can be combat-based, rescue-oriented, movement enhancing, whatever, as long as it takes both of you to pull it off. Try to have it perfected by the end of the week; as you've no doubt noticed, Saturday is marked as Demonstration Day, which is when everyone doing the Intensive will share what they've learned over the week. That includes your new combo move.”

Izuku and Shouchan shared an excited look as Aizawa-sensei stood up and clapped his hands. “Alright kids, break time's over. The rest of this session is for you to start brainstorming and experimenting, so hop to it!”

“Yes sir!” Shouchan shouted while Izuku saluted, before they ran off together to get to work.

*This week is gonna be a blast!*
Oh, poor, sweet, naive little Izuku. You know not the horribly wonderful and wonderfully horrible things I have in store for you~ But I will tell you this: you're in for one heck of a week buddy.

I'm gonna plug my recently renamed Concept Compendium again! Wanna know what kinds of crazy ideas go through my head while I'm daydreaming (my favorite pastime)? Check it out under my works tab! Vote on what you'd like to read, borrow ideas for your own fic, or just take a look at what's been on my mind! I've got some more cooking right now, so check back soon.

One more thing! Anyone wanna suggest combo moves for our boys? Or a duo name? I have a few ideas already, but I'd love to hear what you think. Share in the comments!

I think you guys are gonna like next chapter. A lot's gonna happen on this first day, and I have a feeling you're gonna go nuts over...well, the whole intensive really. I'll try to have the next chapter posted within a few days. See you then!
Told ya this would be up sooner than last chapter!
Not gonna lie, I'm pretty excited for your reactions to this arc. I think I've got some exciting things in the works, though all I'm gonna say is if you've been enjoying characters working through their problems together and growing as people, you're gonna enjoy this arc (and probably the rest of the fic at this rate).
Speaking of, I came to a bit of a realization: ever since I started this, all the comments have been super supportive and encouraging, to the point where I was thinking 'what the heck, isn't this the internet? Where's the negativity?', because it certainly wasn't here... Then I realized this fic was almost exclusively people learning how to be upstanding members of society by talking about their issues, accepting needed help, practicing healthy coping mechanisms, etc. The kinds of stuff angry, negative people need to hear but don't want to - in other words, they probably either never bothered to read this, or jumped ship a loooong time ago.
Anyways, enjoy 'first day of the intensive part 2'!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I really don't know, Izuku. I mean, our quirks are so different; how are we supposed to combine them without it being either inconsequential or a complicated mess?”

Shouchan was literally scratching his head while he walked beside Izuku on their way to their next session – Intellectual Proficiency with principal Nedzu. They hadn't made any progress towards their PF goal this morning due to the dilemma his friend had just voiced, so they were hoping IP would go better. Upon reaching the Pre-Heroics classroom, Izuku rapped his knuckles on the door; at the cheerful “Come in!” from the principal, he shifted his hand to the handle and waited for the signature whirring click of the lock as it registered his green tie before stepping in.

As usual, the maybe-rodent was sitting at the teacher's desk, sipping tea.

“Good morning, boys! Go ahead and have a seat, you must be tired from Aizawa's training; we've been sharing all our plans for the intensive, and allow me to say I don't envy any of you!” Nedzu chuckled darkly at that, and the sadistic glint in his beady eyes sent a shiver of fear down Izuku's back. Oh joy. Maybe this won't be as fun as I thought... Unaware of his student's internal struggle (or, perhaps all too aware), the principal moved on.

“As I'm sure Aizawa has told you, each of your classes has a goal for you to complete, which you will present to your friends on Demonstration Day this Saturday. For this class, I've set you up with a project that your homeroom teacher described as 'intricate, intriguing, and deviously cunning'!”

........Oh no.

Clearly of a similar mind, Shouchan audibly gulped before speaking. “W-What does it entail?”
The mammal’s smile did not lessen his nerves at all. “I’m glad you asked! Now pay close attention as I explain – this is a bit complex, but I’m sure once you get started it will make sense. I’ve designed this scheme with numerous goals in mind, so completion of this project will signify extensive growth in both of you. You both will be writing essays to turn in to me, as well as presenting your work on Demonstration Day, though the format of that presentation is your choice. As for the essays, well...for Shouto, I’m aware you struggle a bit with English, so your paper will need to be typed in English – I will be teaching your material in English as well.” Said boy's face was visibly draining of color, making his scar stand out even more in contrast.

“Since Izuku’s still a beginner in English, I’ll be teaching you in Japanese, so no worries there.” He really wanted to sigh in relief, but he was waiting for the other shoe to drop. “But your writing still needs work, so your paper will be entirely handwritten.”

Izuku probably matched Shouchan now.

The principal apparently wasn't done. Cheerily, he kept hammering proverbial nails into their metaphorical coffins. “As for the content of those essays, I'll be teaching you boys two different aspects of hero teams and partnerships: Shouto will learn the history of hero teams and the laws concerning them, and Izuku will learn the ethics and philosophy behind them.”

This was difficult enough already, but the final nail had yet to be spoken.

“Oh, and one last thing – those papers will be written on the content your partner was taught.”

Silence.

Shouchan's eyes whipped between just-as-shocked Izuku and the all-too-serious-though-obviously-enjoying-this principal, before he let out a heartfelt “Well, crap.”

Oh.

Oh joy.

Oh joy of joys.

Aizawa-sensei was spot-on in his description of this project.

Shouto's mind was still reeling when Izuku seemed to gather his mental faculties enough to sign a simple 'How?'

Yeah, I'd like to know as well how the heck this is supposed to work.

Fortunately, the white-furred animal was inclined to answer the unspoken (literally) question.

“Easy! When I press this button,” he held up a small remote in his paws, “a soundproof wall will split this room in half, separating you two and ensuring you can't listen in on each other's lesson. I'll teach one lesson, then switch sides and teach the other; while your partner is learning, you may work on whatever you see fit. Then, when you both have had your lessons for the day, the rest of the time for this class will be for you to teach each other what you learned! Naturally, you are allowed to do your own research and work on the essays outside of IP, though I will tell you this: I've instructed everyone at this school – including faculty – not to share any information regarding your own essay with you, you can only ask about the topics you are being taught! In other words, the only source of information you're allowed to access for your essay is your partner! A true cooperative effort if there ever was one, if I do say so myself.”
This really was complicated. “So, let me get this straight. I’m learning the history while he learns the ethics. We’re writing each other’s essays. I can’t ask for any ethics info and he can’t ask for any history. We have to teach each other everything we need to know. My lessons and essay will be in English, and his essay will be handwritten. On Demonstration Day we present the material from our essays however we see fit. Did I get all that?”

“That is correct! I understand this might seem a daunting task, but if you both do your best I’m certain you’ll accomplish it! Now, I’m going to teach Izuku’s lesson first today, so I highly recommend you start on this, young Shouto.” Nedzu pulled a couple of books off the teacher’s desk as he walked around, dropping them in front of him.


_Oh geez, this is really happening, isn't it?!_

Shouto barely looked up in time to see the principal snickering as he pressed the button on the remote. Sure enough, a panel on the floor running the length of the room slid open as a huge pane of soundproof glass rose up right between his and Izuku’s desks, with a door in the glass soon to be the only connection between the two sides.

His best friend shared his horrified expression as their fate began to seal.

Before the glass reached the ceiling, Nedzu called out one last encouragement.

“Good luck to both of you – after all, there's a reason we're calling this week the _intensive_!”

He'd never been more thankful for lunchtime in his life.

After his history lesson (which he'd spent frantically flipping through the dictionary with one hand and scrawling notes with the other), as promised he and Izuku were given time to teach each other. Between his bilingual notes and Izuku's barely legible writing, it was an absolute disaster and a half.

Currently though, everyone doing the intensive was gathered around their lunch table, chowing down and sharing stories from the morning sessions. Shouto had just told them about the principal's class.

Hitoshi had the nerve to laugh at him.

“HAHAHA, so _that’s_ what that urgent message was about this morning!! You can't- we were told not to- hahahaha! Oh man, that's hilarious!”

Shouto felt a strong desire to slam his face into his soba, but opted instead to level his purple-haired friend with an exasperated glare. “Oh hush. So he really did instruct all of you not to share any info with us?”

Due to Hitoshi's continued laughter, Itsuka (she'd decided to do the intensive with them) answered for him. “Not exactly. We were told we can share history with you and ethics with Izuku, as long as the history is in English and ethics isn't written – so you still have to translate and Izuku has to write everything down himself.”

“Why don't you just look up stuff online?” _Gee, he actually has some good advice when he's not busting a gut at our expense._
“That's actually a pretty good idea, especially from you Hitoshi.” Shouto spoke in retaliation.

“Hey!”

Smirking at his friend's mockingly aghast expression, Shouto pulled out his phone and searched for 'hero team ethics'. For not the first time that day, he blanched.

Not only was he booted from the search results – he was taken to a screen of UA's logo, overlaid with a blue text box containing a message clearly meant for him. In English.

'Nice try, but no cheating! Feel free to look up heroic history though! In English, of course ;^) - Principal Nedzu'

When he showed his friends, Itsuka was the first to comment. “Is...is that a winking mouse emoji?”

“Whoa, he's really serious about this. I don't envy you two.”

Setting his phone on the table, Shouto quirked an eyebrow at the perpetually tired teen. “You say that now, but don't you and Itsuka have him after lunch?”

Hitoshi groaned, while Itsuka smiled excitedly. “Yeah! I had him first thing this morning, and it was really interesting! I'm almost interning under him actually. He's teaching me about management skills, public relations, and communication; my goals for the week include helping run Demonstration Day and planning a celebratory outing for PH on Sunday. According to the principal, I'm pretty well suited to the more administrative side of heroics, and if I continue to nurture those skills I could easily run an agency.”

“So our Pre-Heroics agency already has a manager lined up? Sweet. And that means you're probably gonna be working on your own communication skills, Hitoshi.”

His only response was another groan.

One more session before the beach trip.

Izuku had managed to stymie his nerves a bit later in the morning, but with the moment of truth only two hours away? All that nervous anticipation was coming back in full force. Hopefully whatever he was doing in Social Essentials would distract him enough from the impending...however this trip was going to go down. Highly unlikely it's impending doom, but I will be doomed if my nerves don't stop eating me alive.

He and Shouchan met up with Aizawa-sensei in the PH lounge. The scraggly man was wrapped up in his sleeping bag, probably just waking up from a nap; he may not be in charge of every session for every pre-hero, but as one of the teachers leading the program, he was no doubt incredibly busy this week. Regardless, their teacher smirked at them as they entered.

“Hello again, Problem Children. How was the rest of your morning?”

Shouchan dragged a hand down his face. “Honestly, I kinda despise Nedzu right now. Him and his convoluted schemes.” Aizawa-sensei gained an odd expression akin to a wince, but it vanished quickly; whatever it was about, the teacher did not appear inclined to elaborate, so Izuku decided not to comment as his friend continued. “I mean, I can see that this whole thing was well thought out, with many layers in terms of challenges and benefits for us, but I'm admittedly torn between pushing through the obstacles as intended or finding some work-around.”
A dark eyebrow raised at that. “Oh? And what cheats did you have in mind?”

“Well, I know that Izuku can send pictures to my phone, so it's not a stretch to say he can probably send video too; he could send me his memory of Nedzu's lectures, or bring me to Boundless to watch him replay them, though that wouldn't work with my own lessons...”

Izuku nodded along, having discussed this with his friend earlier. *My quirk is really good for bending the rules, but it's not infallible. Besides, even if Boundless could access Shouchan's memories, he'd still need to translate the English for me.*

Aizawa-sensei rubbed his chin. “Not a bad idea. Though, it's not like you two to shy away from a loophole in the rules; using your brains and quirks creatively to overcome adversity is part of teamwork too, so I say go for it. Any other moral quandaries I need to resolve before we get started?” At their head shakes, he moved on, unzipping his sleeping bag and sliding it off. “Alright. The theme of SE for all of you this week is 'difficult conversations'. It's vital that you kids know how to handle those kinds of conversations, whether talking or listening. Demonstration Day is going to feature everyone from Pre-Heroics sharing their struggles and encouraging each other – in other words, one massive 'difficult conversation' for all of you to participate in.”

“So... group therapy?”

Their teacher huffed a laugh at Shou-chan's response. “Basically, yes. Now, your goals. I've compiled a list of people you boys need to talk to at some point for your own personal growth. You don't have to do all of them now, but I firmly believe you should have all of these conversations eventually. Talking with at least one of these people and participating in the discussion on Saturday is the goal for you, Shouto.” He pulled out said list, glancing at it from time to time.

“Your conversations are: Mineta and/or Bakugou, discussing how their words hurt you and your friend and apologizing for losing your cool. Your mother, forgiving her for burning you as a child. Your father, standing up to him by sharing your resolve and the pain he put you through – though I recommend saving that one for later, and having a teacher present. And lastly, the one I believe the most important right now: detective Naomasa Tsukauchi, to testify about the abuse you suffered in the Todoroki household.”

Shouchan's eyes were wide, no doubt shocked at his list. It was clear that yes, all of these conversations needed to happen so Shouchan could move on, but that didn't make it any easier.

“...I-I see...”

Aizawa-sensei's dark eyes grew softer. “I know it's daunting right now, but I also know you can do it. Don't worry about deciding now, we can talk about it throughout the week.” He turned his attention to Izuku, who stiffened in preparation. “Izuku, your list is a bit shorter and less pressing, since I don't think you're quite ready for any of them just yet. If you do decide to try one of these, I recommend Mineta; similarly to Shouto, with him you need to explain how he hurt your feelings with his words and actions. The rest of your list – which, again, I don't recommend doing now – is Midoriya Hisashi if we can find him, and Bakugou Katsuki, telling them how they hurt you and that you won't let them rule over you anymore. You will need to talk to them at some point so you can get closure, but it can wait until you're more grounded, better prepared for what they might say.”

*Wow, I'm really not looking forward to any of those. But if Aizawa-sensei says I should wait for all of them, then what's my goal?*

“That being said, I have a different goal in mind for you.”
Izuku gulped in anticipation. They weren't pulling any punches with this intensive, so he steeled himself for whatever his teacher had planned. Shouchan joined their hands in silent support as Aizawa-sensei delivered the verdict.

"Your goal will mirror the one you had when you first started Pre-Heroics: I want you to get through a full conversation with me outside of Boundless."

*That's too easy, there's gotta be a catch.*

"Using your voice."

---

**Chapter End Notes**

What, did you think I'd let Izuku talk that one time at the festival and never again? Of course not! No stagnation allowed in my fic. You will mature as a character! For those of you freaking out, Izuku will not be forced to talk if he does not want to. I'll go into more detail in the next chapter, but long story short Aizawa is trying to encourage Izuku to overcome his deeply ingrained fear of speaking, not force him to do something against his will.

I hope that whole essay thing made sense. It makes sense in my head, I just hope I wrote it out clearly enough. But even if you didn't quite get it, it's not a big deal; once I finish writing the first day, the rest of the week will go by quickly (except for when everything goes wrong, of course!). By the way, if you have any suggestions for the PH day trip (or agency name, or team names, or anything like that), share in the comments! I'm looking for something fun everyone can do together to unwind from the intensive, so let me know what you think they'd enjoy.

The next chapter will probably be up pretty soon, I really want to get through this first day and get into the meat of this arc. Until then, toodles~!
Hello lovelies~
Here's 'Day 1 of Intensive part 2!' Or is it 3? I lost track. Anyways, it's done! Have some more fluff while you can. I'm not planning on this arc being too angsty, but you know how I am; there's a good chance I'll be halfway through and my muse will go "Nah, too fluffy. Needs more pain." so be ready for that just in case. I'm already starting to feel it.

This chapter took an interesting turn into reminiscence I was not expecting. Probably because I've been thinking about potential plot threads that need either resolution or a callback...hopefully they don't feel out of left field when I start bringing them up. I'll almost certainly reread earlier chapters to avoid plotholes and inconsistencies though! Enjoy!

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“Your goal will mirror the one you had when you first started Pre-Heroics: I want you to get through a full conversation with me outside of Boundless.”

*That's too easy, there's gotta be a catch.*

“Using your voice.”

……………….Yeah, there it is.

Combating the rising panic inside him, Izuku took a deep breath, determined to see this through to the best of his ability. Shouchan gave him a concerned look, and gently squeezed his hand in comfort.

Aizawa-sensei's hands were folded in front of him as he explained himself. “Your part of the speech at the Sports Festival was a monumental step forward for you, even if that progress was hindered by that... *unfortunate occurrence* ...what was it you kids started calling it?”

Both Shouchan and Izuku winced at the not-so-distant memory he was referring to. Despite this, Shouchan managed to answer the question. “According to Ashido, it was the 'First-year Festival Fiasco', or Triple F.”

“...Right. Anyways, speaking out like you did was an incredible feat of personal strength, and I couldn't be prouder of you for it; that being said, I'd like to keep that momentum going to help you overcome your fear of speaking up. I understand – and you should as well – that your silence is something you learned out of necessity and fear, and has become second nature to you when outside Boundless, a habit you've practiced for many years. That means progress will likely be slow, and it's possible you'll never be fully comfortable with speaking.”

Aizawa-sensei must have noticed his downcast expression, because he gently placed an
encouraging hand on his shoulder.

“And that's okay. I've told you many times that even baby steps constitute notable progress, and not all wounds heal completely, even given time.” If any of them noticed Izuku's hand moving to his side to ease a phantom pain, they didn't mention it. “Even so, I want to help you move on from those old wounds as much as possible. Of course, this is said with my understanding that you want to talk again, and that your mutism is out of fear and not personal preference – if I am incorrect about this, please let me know and I will come up with a different goal for you. Also, if at any point you are truly uncomfortable with speaking, you have the right not to talk. You will always be allowed to either sign, write, or simply not answer, and anyone who has a problem with you not talking can come talk to me. Okay?”

Izuku wiped a gathering tear from his eye, and signed 'Thank-you. Me want try talk.'

The awestruck look on Shouchan's face and pride shining in their teacher's eyes was all the confirmation he needed. L...I can do this!

After all their sessions had let out, all the intensive students gathered by the front gate in their workout gear, ready to start cleaning the beach. Alongside the students were several teachers, many of whom were driving trucks to haul away the garbage; at the moment though, the trucks were loaded with everything from water bottles, to work gloves, to a first aid kit, to beach blankets, to coolers packed with food. That was possibly the best part of the beach trips (aside from doing a public service, physical training, and restoring the beach to its natural glory) – each trip would end with a massive picnic right there on the beach, so the students could observe and enjoy the progress they make on the shoreline.

But first, they had to get there.

Izuku had already confided in his friend and teacher during SE, sharing his secret fears about this trip: that he’d be unable to resist stealing something, that he’d freak out and run off to Boundless...that everything would go back to the way it was before. They'd heaped encouragement on him and one by one assuaged each fear, until all that was left was the tiniest bit of doubt – which was easily overshadowed by excitement.

Now, with all his friends by his side (including Ama-senpai, who left his internship early to join them at the beach), Izuku finally felt ready to face the outside world once again.

“Okay, everyone remember to stick together. Don't run ahead of me, and stay in front of Mic; if you need to slow down or stop, let us know. Alright, let's get going!”

At that, Aizawa-sensei set off at a jogging pace, all the students following behind as they made their way to the beach.

The jog through Musutafu was uneventful, save for the occasional stares at the large group of kids in green-accented UA gym uniforms running down the street. Each lingering gaze caused Izuku's anxiety to spike a bit, worried that they were focused on him, even if he knew it was incredibly unlikely that was the case. Apparently, UA students were often the center of attention wherever they went, especially if they were in uniform or stood out at the sports festival (he'd obviously never experienced it, but he'd heard stories from his 1-A classmates). Naturally, being in a group of UA students in uniform would draw people's attention – and with it being the elusive PH class that was rarely seen outside the walls of the school? It was no wonder why people were gawking, some even taking pictures to post on social media.
Despite Izuku's worries and the public's interest, they group made it to the beach without incident; after taking a few minutes for the less physically-inclined students (like Izuku, though he was much improved from before) to catch their breath, Aizawa-sensei gestured for them to gather around.

“Alright, everyone listen up! I've got some instructions for you before you get started. Gloves and shoes need to be worn at all times when cleaning; the only exception is if you need to remove them to use your quirk, and only when using your quirk. Stay on the beach, and stay close to the group – no wandering off out of earshot. When tackling one of the large piles, particularly any higher than your head, make sure you have a spotter to watch for falling debris. You can move the trash using your muscles or quirk, though I recommend using this time to work on both. I want everyone pushing themselves, but don't overdo it – take a break if you need to, and stay hydrated. And lastly, remember we're doing this for your training and as a public service, but don't forget to have a little fun with it! That's all. Now hop to it!”

Soon, the beach was bustling with activity as students hauled garbage to the trucks or destroyed it with their quirks, hard at work but enjoying it nonetheless.

“Hey, look what I found!”

“This truck's full, so take it over there while I drive to the dump.”

“Can someone spot me? I'm gonna climb up there and start tossing stuff down.”

“Here, let me help you with that!”

By the time the sun went down, a sizable chunk had already been cleared, and everyone was sporting tired smiles at all the exhausting yet fulfilling work they'd done. Currently, they were sitting on the beach blankets, chowing down on dinner and chatting away. Izuku, however, was lost in thought.

It really was surprising how much had changed in so little time. Less than a year ago, Izuku was a traumatized kleptomaniac who lived his life by hiding from everything and everyone; he had no friends, no hope, no future. If he hadn't met Shouchan that day in the store, he probably would have lived the rest of his days like that before dying alone, with no one even knowing he was gone. It hurt to think about how close he'd gotten to that being the case.

But he had met Shouchan, he had given reality a second chance, he had decided that running wasn't worth it. He knew now that running from your problems doesn't solve them, and more often than not you end up running away from all the goodness in life that makes it worth living. He'd learned that it's okay to ask for help, that there are people out there who want to help you and see you succeed. Day by day he was facing the fears that ruled his life for so long, telling them that this was his life and he was going to live it as he sees fit – and that had led him to here and now, surrounded by friends he could trust as they made a difference in the world together. He dragged his hand through the sand, feeling it slide between his fingers, and looked out at the sliver of ocean now barely visible through the mountains of trash.

He couldn't wait until they finished clearing up the shoreline he knew so well.

His thoughts were interrupted when his best friend stood up with his cup and cleared his throat.

With the whole group's attention on him, Shouchan raised his plastic cup and addressed them.

“In light of what we've accomplished here today, and over the last few months, I'd like to propose a
toast.” Cups were raised all throughout the group as he spoke. “Before I met Izuku – and consequently, all of you – I was bitter, angry, and lost. Being in Pre-Heroics with everyone has taught me how to let go of that bitterness, manage my anger, and find my way. Today is just the beginning of what I expect to be a lifetime of wonderful and meaningful moments like this. So, a toast: to Pre-Heroics, to friendship, and to making the world a better place for everyone in it. Cheers!”

All throughout the clearing, plastic cups were bumped together in beautiful camaraderie.

“CHEERS!”

By the time they had returned to the dorms, everyone was utterly exhausted from the long day. Very few chose to linger in the common room – after all, it was only the first day of the intensive, so there was plenty more to come tomorrow. Izuku himself was part of the majority, wishing everyone a goodnight in sign before shuffling down the hall. He paused only briefly at his door ghosting his fingers along the embossed nameplate that resided there.

I'm apparently in a reminiscent mood tonight...

His room was rather bare for a teenager, given that he didn't possess all that much stuff (the things he stole from his shoplifting days were mostly food and clothes); most of the personal items he did have were his mother's old things, like the vase he lovingly displayed on his bookshelf. Collapsing on his bed in purple pajamas, Izuku was overwhelmed with a kind of bittersweet nostalgia.

All those days of sneaking around a dark house...hiding out in a dusty room...my hidden stash of stolen supplies...sleeping under the bed so I wouldn't be seen...

It all felt so long ago, and yet so recent.

But that had been before he discovered his quirk, and for not long afterwards.

If Kacchan hadn't told me to disappear that day, would I still be living like that? A stowaway in my own home? Terrified of being seen or heard? With the fear of burning to death looming over me? Was...that actually a good thing he did?

His mind swirled around that one thought for a while as if tasting it, pondering over the intricacies of it's flavor. He supposed it wasn't a good thing per se – it was still wrong to bully people like that, and he had the phantom pains and mental scars to prove it – but even bad things can lead to good things eventually. His mom dying, Hisashi neglecting him, Kacchan bullying him, becoming a serial shoplifter, running away to Boundless. All of those were terrible events. But if even one of those didn't happen, it was likely he'd have never been caught red-handed by Shouchan. Or he wouldn't have recognized the look of fear in his eyes. Or they wouldn't have escaped Todoroki Enji. Or they wouldn't have become friends. Or their mental and social impairments wouldn't have convinced Nedzu and Aizawa-sensei to start Pre-Heroics.

There was no denying he'd had an awful childhood. There was also no denying he wouldn't be here without it.

As he drifted off to sleep, the last thought left in his brain brought a smile to his face.

My past may shape me, but I define the future.
And I say my future looks bright.

Chapter End Notes

"The future's so bright, I gotta wear shades" - Timbuk 3
Told ya it got oddly recollective at the end there. This also started sounding way more like a final chapter than I was anticipating...but no worries, it's not over! Stain is still on the loose after all, plus y'all seem to really want me to keep this fic ongoing, so I will (and don't fret that I do this solely because I'm a people pleaser - I am enjoying writing this)! I'm considering writing the neutral end and possibly a good end as well soon, so look forward to that!
Speaking of, how do you like this otome game-esque format I've got going with Alternate Route and the various endings? Honestly, it's a lot of work on my end, but I kinda like the idea of you guys being able to pick whatever route/ending you want, and it's fun for me too!
Also, should I start posting one (or both) of the other fics I've got started? I don't know how that would affect my updates, just that I wouldn't abandon this one. If you want to read something by me that's not Escapist, let me know! What I've got started is "By Some Random Chance" (random quirk) and "Hero of Legend" (Legend of Zelda AU); if you want something else, check my Concept Compendium and tell me what you want to see!
Until next time, au revoir!
Hello! I'm back!
I honestly don't have much to say about this, other than it's hero killer time! So, yeah.
Let's get this party started.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was Wednesday when it happened.

To be fair, the day started normally. Shouchan and him had finally come up with an idea for a combo move yesterday (which Shouchan had been hesitant about at first, not wanting to hurt him when they tried it), and spent all of PF fine-tuning it and practicing the timing so Izuku wouldn't end up either fried or frozen. Which he greatly appreciated – his fear of fire was a lot less pronounced now, but it was still there; though naturally, he trusted Shouchan to not burn him to ash, so his fire was even less frightening.

IP and SE were both fine as well; Izuku was sick of writing, and Shouchan despised English at the moment, but they were both making noticeable headway. As for those 'difficult conversations'? Shouchan apparently talked with Mineta today (who seemed to be...better, though he still had a ways to go), and the police detective would be coming by tomorrow so he could testify about Enji's abuse.

Izuku was most definitely not putting off his verbal conversation with Aizawa-sensei. Not at all.

........

He just needed more time to prepare, okay?

All in all, it was a perfectly average day.

Until it was time for the trip.

Instead of cleaning the beach as they had been, Wednesday afternoon was set aside for a kind of mini-internship; the pre-heroes were split into small groups who would intern under a UA faculty member for the afternoon. Of course, Shouchan and Izuku were in Aizawa-sensei's group (he was their homeroom teacher for one, and Izuku wasn't very familiar with the other teachers, so he'd be a bit uncomfortable with anyone else). Their teacher had decided to take them patrolling around Hosu, leading them through the streets and teaching them all sorts of things. They'd promised beforehand that they wouldn't get involved in any scuffles unless given permission or in case of an emergency, and that they definitely wouldn't go looking for trouble.

Thing is, Izuku doesn't ever look for trouble. It always comes to him.

By all rights, it should've been a piece of cake.
Just bring the students along on a simple patrol, let them watch him take down a few petty criminals, instruct them on various aspects of heroism, answer their questions, then bring them back to the dorms. A simple, beneficial, and safe experience for kids who'd already been given enough grief in life.

He'd researched which district to take them to extensively, eventually settling on Hosu; just enough crime to nearly guarantee they'd find some, but also improbable to be anything more serious than a mugger or purse-snatcher. Sure, he'd heard that the hero killer was in the area, but he only attacked heroes who were alone, and there was no way Shota was letting these kids out of his sight, so the odds of running into him on a busy street with a bunch of heroes-in-training in tow was acceptably slim.

Shota and his group (which included the Problem Children of course) had entered Hosu without incident, and were well on their way through the route Shota had carefully mapped out when it happened.

A building a few blocks down exploded.

Within minutes, much of Hosu is ablaze, with citizens running to evacuate in panic, villains crawling out of the woodwork in the pandemonium, and heroes struggling to regain some semblance of order. He and his group were helping with evacuation when he saw it.

A noumu. Just like at USJ.

And I brought them here to avoid the League of Villains!

The hulking beast looked slightly different from the one before, but Shota didn't want to know how else it was different. He knew those things operated only by command, so he desperately wanted to go find who was calling the shots...

But there were a handful of mentally and physically scarred teenagers right behind him, kids who by all means shouldn't see this kind of action until at least third year, kids who were depending on him to keep them safe.

He wasn't gonna let them out of his sight if he could help it.

There's too many in the group for Izuku to transport at once, so we'll have to do multiple trips – but if we do it here, whoever isn't in the first trip will be dangerously exposed...

Whirling around to face his students he shouted above the chaotic din surrounding them.

“Everyone stay close and watch each other's backs! We're going to find a safe area so we can warp out of here!”

Needing no further instruction, the teens clustered together, watching for danger in every direction as Shota led them through the streets. They'd managed to meet up with some other pros soon enough...

But things went from really bad to really, really bad with what they saw – or rather, didn't see.

Pro-hero Manual was running frantically about. Calling for Iida. Who wasn't there.

Iida was either the victim of an unfortunate turn of events, or doing a very stupid something he had
just the other day told Shouchan not to worry about.

Suffice it to say, it was time to worry about it.

*He's run off at the absolute worst possible moment, I'll give him that. Going off on your own in the middle of a huge villain attack? Has he not been paying any attention in Foundational Heroics? Because I'm pretty sure we covered this.*

He looked around, taking in as much information about the situation as he could. He was in the middle of his intern group, a fairly sizable number of classmates wholly unprepared for an attack of this magnitude – too many in number for him to teleport in one go, but too defenseless if the group is split up. One classmate with unknown whereabouts, and heroes too occupied with other, seemingly more pressing emergencies. Himself, with the power to move long distances near instantly and immediately remove a person from danger.

It was probably not his brightest idea, and Aizawa-sensei was bound to hate it, but...there was really only one thing to do, wasn't there?

Waving to his teacher, he signed his half-baked plan.

'Me move-move-move, search I-I-D-A. Find, together escape. Hero busy-busy, can't search. Me find.'

Dark eyes widened as he signed. “No! Absolutely not! You are *not* going off on your own!”

“I'll go with him!”

Izuku turned to see Shouchan staring boldly at their teacher, determination shining in blue-and-gray eyes. “Izuku's right, he's our best chance to find Iida when all the pros are occupied like this. I'll go with him and protect him until we can return back to you – hopefully with Iida in tow.” Aizawa-sensei still looked unconvinced, so he kept going. “This is what we've been training for, right? Moments like this. So let us show you we can do it.”

Izuku could tell the instant his teacher caved, realizing that this was the only way for *all* of his students to possibly make it out alive. He sighed in resignation, before piercing them with his concerned gaze. “Alright. I'm giving you permission to go find Iida. You will find him and *all three of you* will come right back to me. Do *not* engage any villains unless you have to – your goal is getting out alive. Got it?”

They both gave serious nods in understanding, then Izuku took Shouchan's hand and scoured the smokey skyline for the tallest building he could see.

A quick hop through a Boundless thrumming with adrenaline-induced energy, and the two were standing on top of a nearby building. Shouchan watched for danger while Izuku scanned for signs of their classmate in the streets below; when he found nothing, he teleported them to the roof of another nearby building to repeat the process.

It was a couple roofs later when he spotted it.

Iida sprawled on the ground with a blade trough his shoulder, a man he assumed was a pro-hero slumped against the nearby wall...

and an ominous-looking villain swathed in tattered cloth, glimmering blades, and a thick air of bloodlust.
Tomura watched the city burn with no small amount of glee.

He could see the forms of dozens of heroes far below him, scrambling about like freshly beheaded chickens; it seemed they couldn't make up their mind what was most important – evacuating civilians, capturing villains, putting out fires, stopping the noumu, or locating the ringleader of the attack (namely, himself). He chuckled darkly at the frantic looks he could see, reveling in the fact that he had turned a calm night into a living hell.

A slight disturbance could be felt in the air before Kurogiri appeared next to him, hopefully bearing good news. “Well?”

“Chances are high that the hero killer is still here, though we have yet to find him. However, the heroes are indeed focused more on the League than the hero killer at the moment.”

Tomura scratched his neck lightly. “Make sure it stays that way, and find that Stain bastard! We need to send him our ‘regards’ before he skips town.”

After the stunt that noseless freak had pulled, there was no way the League was letting him off easy.

He’d only agreed to the meeting because it was Sensei’s idea – try to get the hero killer in the party, and if he doesn't join, use his infamy to draw other powerful allies. A sound strategy, and certainly one Tomura’d have to be an idiot to ignore, but that didn’t mean he had to like it.

In fact, he had a feeling he was going to hate the man’s guts.

He was seated at the bar when Kurogiri returned with their guest, a man with an angular face and chopped-off nose, obscured by the red cloth mask he wore. He certainly looked villainous, he’d give him that, but that was the extent of Tomura's favor upon first impressions. Regardless, he began his speech as instructed with as genial an expression he could muster.

“Welcome, hero killer, to the League of Villains. I am Shigaraki Tomura, the leader of this little troupe. We've heard of your impressive feats, and ask if you would consider joining us in our cause to reform society.”

Stain eyed him warily. “That depends on your motivations. If they align with my own, I'll consider your offer.”

...Apparently, their motivations did not align, as within minutes Kurogiri had been paralyzed, Tomura was stabbed, and that Stain f***er was down a knife. They'd managed to come to a shaky truce and sent their guest back to Hosu – though right then and there Tomura swore he'd steal the spotlight and end the hero killer himself.

After all, no one calls Tomura a 'weak, half-a**ed villain with no drive' and gets away with it.

Just the memory of that too-recent encounter was enough to prickle his nerves. “Anything else?”

“One of our operatives spotted a group of UA students in the area – including one Midoriya Izuku.”
Now that is some good news!

Tomura's wide grin was enough to prompt his companion for more information.

“The students appear to be aiding the evacuation efforts and are being chaperoned by Eraserhead; I have already instructed that operative to keep an eye on them and inform us of any significant updates.”

“Excellent. Have him watch for any time Midoriya Izuku is separated from the group, even luring him away if needed – we don't need Eraserhead and those other brats getting in the way of his retrieval. But before that, there's a couple things you need to get. That kid will wriggle out of our grasp if we don't do this right.”

After giving the mist-man his instructions, Tomura returned his focus to the disorder below him.

Looks like this party is just getting started.

Chapter End Notes

Oooh, here we go. I hope this is a satisfactory introduction to the Hosu incident. Any ideas on how our boys are gonna get out of this one? Here's a hint: if you consider the major themes of this fic (particularly after the establishment of PH) and the Problem Children's intensive (especially SE), then you probably already know some of what I've got in store.

By the way, I started posted another fic completely unrelated to Escapist! It's the roulette one you guys voted on all those chapters ago: 'By Some Random Chance'! I think it'll be a fun read, so check it out if you're interested.

As for my next updates, I've got another already written chapter of BSRC I'll probably post today, then I might whip up one for Alternate Route that coincides with the current arc here. Then again, I may just write the next chapter of this because I'm super excited for the hero killer confrontation! We'll see.

One last thing - do you guys want me to post that other fic I've started as well? It's a Legend of Zelda crossover called 'Hero of Legend', and I've already got a few chapters written...I don't know how adding another fic to the mix will mess up my update...'schedule', only that I'm not abandoning any fics and would try to update them on some semblance of a cycle. Let me know what you think, because I don't mind adding in another fic, but I want to know how you all feel about it. Either way though, don't worry about Escapist disappearing - I've really enjoyed writing this, and don't plan on stopping anytime soon, even if I spare some time writing other things.

Anyways, I'm on vacation right now, so chances are I'll be able to get some serious writing in. See you next time!
Lllllilet's get ready to rum-bllllllllleeeee!!! It's finally Hero Killer time!
I've been waiting for this arc...probably since I finished USJ, if not before. To finally
be in the thick of it is a great release on anticipation. That being said, I sincerely hope
you all enjoy it.
This may seem like a short chapter, but that's because I had to cut it into two chapters.
I wanted to get all the way through the first half of the confrontation, but by the time I
was reaching over 6 pages I figured I should probably split it - definitely the right
choice, as the next chapter is as long as, if not longer than this one. But don't fret! That
chapter is also finished, so you guys get a double update tonight!
Shouto and Izuku have just found their classmate at the mercy of Stain! How will our
boys handle this serious threat? Will they be able to end Stain's reign of terror? Will
they even be able to get everyone out alive? It won't be easy, but maybe the things
they've been learning this week will help turn the tables.

If he'd found Iida any later than he had, it would've been too late – the villain was stalking over to
his classmate, poised to strike a finishing blow on his clearly defeated opponent.

Izuku tried very hard not to think about that particular scenario.

As it was, he had spotted them, and wasted no time in snatching Shouchan's hand and teleporting
them in front of the downed teen.

"Oh? More children? Are you on a foolish quest for vengeance too? If so, I will do you a favor and
end you here and now."

Paying no attention to the words of the hero killer, Shouchan moved in front of Izuku defensively,
ice and fire already spilling from his arms. "Izuku, get those two to Boundless! I'll cover you!"

Trusting his partner to protect him, he quickly assessed the state of the two victims; the pro-hero
(he was still painfully unfamiliar with any hero who debuted in the last decade – what with living
in Boundless and having no access to the news before that – so he had no clue who this was)
seemed totally fine except for a small cut on his face, though he appeared to be unable to move.
Iida was in far worse shape with a nasty shoulder wound from the embedded knife, and in a similar
state of paralysis...*the villain's quirk, maybe?*

Whatever the case, his priority was getting them out of here.

He dropped to his knees in front of Iida, reaching out to touch him as the telltale rush of cold air
and crackling sound informed him of the ice wall that now blocked them from their attacker.

The blue-haired teen pinned to the ground was apparently not too keen on Izuku's presence, as he
spat angrily. "What are you two doing?! Get out of here! This is my fight!!"
Wow, really? I'm saving your life from your own stupidity and you yell at me? I seriously thought you were smarter than this.

He really wanted to chew him out (and he definitely would later), but this wasn't the place or time. So despite Iida's protests, Izuku channeled his favorite teacher, gave him a deadpan glare that said 'I don't want to deal with your idiocy right now', and sent him to Boundless with a well-deserved smack to the head.

The clanging of metal against ice reminded him of the urgency of the situation. Jumping up and dashing to the wall where the hero was, Izuku instructed his quirk to manifest his mom and first aid supplies so she could start patching up Iida; it would be a bit of a strain on his mind, but it was necessary until the paralysis wore off – then he'd just ask the hero to do it.

He, at least, was more grateful of his and Shouchan's efforts.

“T-thanks, kid. We would've been goners if you two hadn't shown up.”

Izuku gave him a smile he hoped was reassuring, and with a touch to his shoulder he disappeared.

With the two injured parties successfully rescued, he returned his attention to the fight right as Shouchan's ice wall shattered, the villain leaping through to lunge at the heterochromic boy who jumped back to stay out of range. Izuku was tempted to step forward to fight by his side, but he was stopped by a frosted arm that swung out in front of him.

“Stay back, Izuku! He's too quick, and you're our ticket out of here once he's subdued.”

The hero killer huffed indignantly, even as he continued his onslaught. “Another false hero in the making, simply in it for the glory.” He sliced at Shouchan with his jagged blade, before rolling to the side to avoid a wave of fire.

“I don't give a crap about glory! I just know that if you're not stopped now, you'll keep killing! I don't care who stops you, as long as all this pain and death ends tonight!”

Stain jumped over the ice blast Shouchan sent his way, a near gleeful expression on his face.

“Hmph, it seems you're not half bad, little hero-in-training; I suppose I can let you live. But all false heroes shall die by my blade, so I must ask your friend to bring those two back from wherever he sent them.” He sprinted towards Izuku, but was halted by dense flames. Seeing a menacing glint, Izuku pushed Shouchan to the side to dodge the throwing knives, getting nicked in the arm in the process.

Seeing how close he'd come to grievous injury, Shouchan cursed lightly under his breath. “S***, I can't win like this...”

As the struggle continued, Izuku's thoughts went into overdrive.

This isn't working, we need a new strategy. Stain can easily read Shouchan's moves and dodge, and he's too fast for me to get close without being stabbed, even using Boundless. Getting some backup would be ideal, but probably isn't gonna happen for a while. The only person nearby who I can contact is Aizawa-sensei, and he's protecting the rest of the group right now – besides, I don't know where exactly I am, so I can't tell him a location. I could go bring reinforcements, but that would either leave Shouchan alone or give the hero killer a chance to slip away and kill more people...no, we need to stay here, and reinforcements are unlikely to happen. That means we either need to get close without the possibility of stabbing, or make Shouchan's attacks less predictable...

In the span of a second, Izuku knew exactly what they needed to gain the advantage.
When the battle lulled for a brief moment – the hero killer driven back a ways by fire – Izuku took the chance to tap Shouchan's wrist twice, the signal they'd agreed on.


He knew. After all, they'd only been working on this tactic for two days, but it was their best bet at ending this stalemate.

A cold hand grasped his, even as both pairs of eyes stayed locked on their enemy.

He felt the chill of Shouchan's quirk, and after sparing a quick thought to put Iida and the hero in a separate sector, focused on the one thought that would hopefully turn the tides of this and future battles in their favor.

*The ice from Shouchan's quirk will pass through Boundless to appear when and where I want.*

Izuku could see the confusion in his opponent's eyes – something he would definitely take advantage of. Quickly analyzing everything from the surrounding alley to the villain's defensive stance, he focused his mind, and...

*Under his back foot.*

Ice suddenly rose up from the ground, encasing the hero killer's foot. Shock flashed across his face, but was soon replaced by determination as he raised the hilt of his sword to smash himself free. *As if I'd let you. Behind the blade.* A pillar of ice sprang forward out of nowhere, knocking the sword out of Stain's grasp, the only indication of the attack's origin being the slightly shimmering air at it's origin.

Izuku could feel a quirk exertion headache coming on already, the continuous teleportation taxing on his brain. Even so, he pushed through. Trusting his friend completely to guard him, he lessened the strain by letting everything else fade from his awareness.

*The left wall. Around the knife. Right in front of him. By his head. Freeze the ground. Freeze him.*

As he sent wave after wave of Shouchan's ice through Boundless, he didn't even hear the hero killer's words or his partner's passionate replies. He barely even felt the chill on his skin and in his mind – the only thing that mattered was the battle right in front of him, dominating his thoughts yet somehow separate from him. It was as if he was watching a movie, intensely focused on the scene playing out in front of him but not a part of the action. The angle of the shot kept changing, but that didn't matter. As long as he could see where the antagonist was and what he was doing, that was all that mattered.

Everything else was superfluous.

Chapter End Notes

Oh ho, betcha didn't see that coming! I'm honestly a bit surprised no one guessed even
close to Cold Conductor when I asked for team moves. This was the most useful one I could come up with, so I hope you like it. Also, I like the name and think it's fitting (a conductor being both a person who directs and a substance that currents like electricity and heat can readily pass through), but if you think you know a better name for it, send away! I'm not adverse to your suggestions.

If you don't quite know what's going on, you'll get to see the battle from Shouto's view in the next chapter as well as a bit more explanation on what Izuku's doing. If you're still confused after that, send me a message and I'll try to explain it in more detail. Stain Fight Part 2 should be up in a few minutes. Seeya then!
Welcome back! Here's the next chapter!
Since I literally just posted the last chapter, I have no clue how you all are reacting to the Stain fight. Is it exciting? Or at least mildly intriguing? Even just mediocre? As long as you wonderful readers find it acceptable, I'll be happy. But don't be afraid to tell me if it's not! I may or may not cry...but if my writing needs improvement, I want to know so I can get better. Even if I cry.

Anyways, let's find out what's been going on while Izuku's been tunnel-visioned, shall we? Besides, it can't be that easy. My muse won't allow it, and we've got too much character development to get through before this arc is done for it to end here...

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Shouto had to end this, and fast.

The combo move he and Izuku had come up with only yesterday had certainly given them the upper hand in the fight, but it wasn't something they should be using so extensively so soon. It was based on a new technique his friend had devised, which he simply dubbed Conduction, where he continuously passes objects through of Boundless in a sort of rapid-fire teleportation. Combine that with an emission-type quirk like Shouto's, and you got their first team move: Cold Conductor (he knew that at some point they'd probably use his fire with it too, but Shouto was still afraid he'd accidentally burn Izuku, so it was only Cold Conductor for now).

It made sense, and worked well enough in practice, but there was one small problem.

When Izuku uses Conduction, the brainpower needed to keep entities moving in and out of Boundless in a constant stream is enormous. With nearly all of his mental faculties occupied, and to prevent his brain from overloading itself, the normally aware and observant Izuku is forced into a state of hyperfixation. If they can't get Stain contained within the next few minutes, there's no telling what kind of consequences there will be for his partner – especially since he likely won't notice any of his own pain or injuries.

Which means until I can snap him out of it, I have to keep him safe.

Free arm hovering protectively in front of them, Shouto watched his ice appear from thin air and knock the sword away; unfortunately, their seeming victory was short-lived as Stain wrenched his foot free from it's confines with an audible crack. Whether it was the sound was from ice or bone, he couldn't tell, nor did he care as the hero killer darted forward once more. Ceasing his stream of ice for only a moment, Shouto shot out a blast of fire at their attacker to keep him back – but his opponent was too fast, leaping to the side and using the alley wall as a springboard past the flames.

Or he would have, if more ice hadn't erupted from the wall right in his path.

Smacking into it, the villain cursed and threw another dagger at them, only for it to be frozen in midair and fall to the ground.
“I had decided to spare you two, but if you continue to interfere I will be forced to change my mind!”

Shouto steeled his gaze and resolve at Stain's warning. “Then might as well change it now, because I won't stand down anytime the people around me are threatened – especially my friends!”

The villain smirked, even as his advance was once more halted by ice. “You have quite the impressive drive, little hero.” He slid under the attack that brushed by his temple. “But so do I.” He drew his blade and aimed for their joined hands.

Crap! He realized we need physical contact for Cold Conductor!

Izuku's green eyes were zeroed in on Stain, the need to move not even registering in his mind. Shouto grabbed him around the waist with his free hand and pulled them both away. Izuku's really out of it...I hope we end this soon! He continued the awkward dodges, keeping the greenet and their joined hands as his priority.

Which led to his side slicing open.

Shouto wasn't concerned though, it wasn't that deep. It hurt, but it did little more than draw blood.

He readied his stance again as the hero killer charged once more, sword raising up and long tongue licking out. But then Izuku froze the pavement beneath them, causing their assailant to slip and succumb to a glacial imprisonment.

He watched for a moment, holding his breath.

The hero killer didn't move.

We...we got him.

Tension bled from his body as he turned to Izuku, though he made sure to keep the villain in his sight. He gently tugged his hand out of an ice-cold grip, placing his already warm left arm on his partner's to alleviate the frostbite that had accumulated there.

“Hey, Izuku. It's over now, you can come back.”

The greenet gave no indication he'd even heard.

Shouto huffed. “Earth to Izuku... Come in, you space cadet!” He snapped his fingers right in front of his face.

“Come in, you space cadet!”

Izuku blinked at the snapping fingers positioned at eye-level. He brought a palm to his forehead and winced as pain flared in his skull, his quirk protesting at using a technique he wasn't conditioned for yet. His eyes roamed the scene, finally allowing themselves to take in the bigger picture of what had happened: Shouchan was there, looking relieved, and the hero killer was blessedly still inside his own mini glacier.

Oh. They won.

“Welcome back. How are you feeling?”
He lifted his right hand (his left was definitely frostbitten) and signed as best he could with one arm. 'Arm hurt, head hurt, but o-k.'

His best friend sighed, and gave his shoulder a pat. "Good. But no more strenuous quirk use for the rest of the day, and no using Conductor for more than a couple minutes at a time until you've had more practice, got it? We don't want a repeat of USJ."

Izuku nodded in response, and was about to sign a reply, when he heard a quiet chink.

*Like metal on ice.*

His focus returned to the captured villain too late, as Stain fractured the ice enough to release a hand still holding a sword. Shouchan whirled around just in time to see him raise the edge, grotesquely long tongue darting out to glide along it.

The moment that tongue lapped at a barely there sliver of red, Shouchan stiffened.

"Shoot! I can't move!"

.....That's not good.

With one arm free, Stain was making quick work of the ice. *If we don't do something soon, he'll either get away, or worse, kill us!* Izuku shook his immobile partner, desperately hoping to spur him into action even though he knew it wouldn't work. Panic welled inside his chest, only growing at the back-and-forth shouting aimed at him.

"All false heroes must be expunged from the world! That is my creed, and I will see it through!"

"Run, Izuku! Get out of here!"

"Those two you 'saved' are not worthy of being called heroes! Bring them to me, or you and your friend shall be judged in their stead!"

"Izuku go! I don't care if you have to leave me, just GO!!"

*It's too loud too loud TOO LOUD TOO-

No! Stop. Calm down. Think. Remember what sensei taught you – in a time of crisis, your brain is often your greatest asset. I can get through this, but not if I'm panicking. Think it through.

*I can't take him on my own. It's too risky using Cold Conductor right now, especially with Shouchan paralyzed. I could take us to Boundless, but that would let the hero killer escape, and there's no telling if he'll go after Iida, that pro hero, or even me and Shouchan again. Backup is still a non-option. It really would be best if he just gave up on us...*

...........

Well, it's worth a shot I guess.

While Izuku came to a decision, Stain had finished freeing himself from his icy prison and stalked over to the two teens. Raising his blade to the greenet in an implicit threat, he spoke once more.

"Well, little heroes? Have you made your choice?"

Izuku ignored the pain in his left arm, using both hands to sign as clearly as he could. 'Stop! Please please! Friend, don't fight!'
Stain watched, but made no move to lower his sword. “If you are trying to speak to me, you should know I never learned sign.”

T-That's fine, Shouchan can translate!

“Stop signing and GO, Izuku! I'll be fine, just get back to Aizawa-sensei!”

Shouchan did not seem to be in a state to translate.

The villain stepped closer, ready to slaughter them at a moment's notice.

How do I convince him to stop if he can't understand me?!

Unbidden, his teachers' words returned to the forefront of his mind. Everything he'd learned in Social Essentials, from overcoming fear to conflict resolution and everything in between, flooded his thoughts. Even the recent lessons on navigating difficult conversations seemed coincidentally appropriate for this exact situation.

There couldn't be a lot more 'difficult conversations' than convincing a serial killer to stand down before he slices you to ribbons.

There probably weren't many ones even more crucial either.

I know what I need to do, and now is the time to do it. Everyone's rooting for me – Shouchan, Aizawa-sensei, principal Nedzu, Itsu-nee, Hitochan, all of Pre-Heroics. They've supported me all this time: encouraging, but never forcing. Understanding, and never judging. Accommodating, yet never complaining. But now it's time for me to put that support to good use, and step up. I've let this fear rule my life for far too long!

Izuku's voice caught in his throat.

The sword lifted into the air.

Izuku summoned all his courage and urged his vocal chords to move.

The blade began it's swift descent, aiming for a bicolored head.

Izuku pushed his voice past his lips, and the words that came out were...

“L-let's talk about it!”

...not what he was expecting.

Chapter End Notes

Good job, Izuku! Way to punch fear in the face! Or, y'know, just tell it "I understand why you're here, but I've decided I don't need you anymore, so if you don't mind I'm going to move on and grow as a person" because that's just how this fic goes now. But eh, Izuku's not much of a puncher anyways.
I seriously love how tense the situation is, how Izuku finally garners the courage to speak again and it's a life or death situation, and instead of something logical like 'stop!' or dramatic like 'you'll have to get through me first!', he's all 'let's talk this out like civilized adults!' It cracked me up a bit when I wrote it. I think Aizawa is really rubbing off on these kids.

Next chapter should be out soon as well, because I'm really looking forward to it. Plus, it's what I do best: character development via deep, personal, heart-to-heart conversations! Hooray! And once that's done, I can finally write another chapter of Alternate Route (it starts with that Tomura scene from two chapters ago, so I started writing it before realizing if I wanted to continue it would inevitably contain huge spoilers for the rest of this arc). After that (or maybe before), I'll try to get another chapter of BSRC done and maybe start posting Hero of Legend.

*blows a kiss* Goodnight everybody!
Whoop whoop, this chapter is done! Finally!
It was a bit of a struggle writing this, especially since the last leg of our trip had no
wifi and only spotty data on my phone. That meant I could still write, but I couldn't
post or look up stuff without a) using my phone with b) a sloooow connection that c)
kept cutting out every couple minutes. But whatever, I'm back and finally finished the
chapter! Plus, it's a long one!
Izuku has just spoken! But will he be able to convince Stain to spare them? What
about Iida? And can you really solve problems like this by talking about it?
Let's put everything our boys have been learning to the test, shall we~?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“L-let's talk about it!”

The blade stopped mere feet from Shouchan's head as Stain raised a brow. “So you can speak.
Well? Are you going to bring those fake heroes back for their judgment?”

“Y-...” *Come on mouth, don't quit on me now!* He took a deep breath, and tried again. “You have
beliefs. So do I.” His hand reached up to his sternum, gently grasping the vial of colorful sand that
rested there; he could feel his quirk thrumming in the back of his mind, giving him the courage to
speak out like he does in Boundless.

“Our beliefs are different, but that doesn't mean we can't come to an understanding.” His words
were quiet, but clear, and held the hero killer's attention. “I...I've been learning that, when people
disagree, arguing and fighting doesn't solve it – when it's over, they still disagree.”

Shouchan, still frozen in place, had an odd expression on his face and in his voice. “Izuku...”

Even so, Izuku kept going. “T-the best way to overcome a disagreement is to sit down a-and
discuss it, calmly and respectfully.” He held out his hand. “So let's talk.”

Silence filled the alley. Eyeing the extended hand warily and curiously, the villain eventually
spoke through the quiet.

“Are you intending to trap me and deliver me to the 'heroes'?”

Izuku swallowed the lump in his throat. *I really want to stop talking now, but I have to see this
through!* “I-I won't lie, once we're done talking, I'll turn you in; but, taking my hand is a-also the
best chance you have of getting to the others.” He looked Stain in the eyes, doing his best to
portray how serious he was about this. “And I meant it when I said I wanted to talk. We won't be
interrupted there, and we can talk on even ground – my friends won't be in danger, and you'll know
where the others are.”

Please accept please accept please accept
Stain huffed in amusement, and sheathed his sword. “Very well, little hero. Let's talk.”

When the three of them arrived in Boundless, Izuku sighed in relief, the comfort of his quirk washing over him and flooding out much of his stress and anxiety.

While the hero killer glanced around the glistening void, Izuku turned to his friend.

“Oh my gosh, Shouchan are you alright?! I was sooo worried I thought he was gonna kill you and-”

“I'm okay, Izuku. I just...” Heterochromic eyes watered. “It means a lot to me that you faced your fear and spoke like that. You've really come a long way.”

He flushed under the praise, scratching the back of his head. “T-thanks. Are you still paralyzed?”

“Yup.”

Stain, who'd been waiting surprisingly respectfully for Izuku to be ready to talk, answered their unasked question. “It should let up soon. You're type O, correct?”

Shouchan looked at him, confused. “Uhhh...yeah?”

Izuku, however, caught on quickly. “Oh! Stain-san, does your quirk vary in strength depending on the blood type of the victim?”

“Correct. People with type B are paralyzed the longest, and O the shortest. Your friend should be back to normal within a minute or two.”

The greenet practically beamed at the villain. “Thank you for your honesty! I appreciate it very much.” Just because he's a murderer, doesn't mean he's not human; besides, I want this to be an honorable conversation, and an honest show of gratitude will help establish that. Addressing Shouchan once more, he asked “In that case, can I send you to make sure Iida-san and the pro hero are alright? I've got them in a separate section.” Shouchan looked between him and the hero killer, slightly worried. He rolled his eyes fondly. “You know I'm safer here than anywhere else, right? I'll be fine. Besides, we're just gonna talk, and I highly doubt he's going to attack me.”

His partner sighed in acceptance. “Okay. But call for me if you need me, alright? I know you can defend yourself easily in Boundless, but still, I'm here for you – physically and emotionally.” He smiled, but it soon turned into a mischievous smirk. “Oh, and do I have permission to lecture our classmate on how much of an idiot he is and why his personal vendetta was both stupid and dangerous?”

Izuku laughed, even as the edge of the void came forward to pass Shouchan through to the other section. “By all means, please do. Be sure to mention how he disobeyed a pro-hero, dishonored UA, and went after a dangerous villain with no backup, strategy, or escape plan like a fool.”

“Will do.”

Once Shouchan was safely delivered to the other sector, he turned back to Stain. “Thank you for your patience while I got matters... settled. Now, is there any setting in particular you'd like for our discussion? I can form Boundless into anything I'm familiar with.”

“IT matters not.”
Izuku hummed at the gruff answer, rubbing his chin. “Well, if you're sure, I suppose I'll pick...Hmm, what's a good place to have a serious discussion about ethics and ideals... Oh! I know!"

At his mental command, the fractals of the void shifted and morphed into an ornate tea house, complete with crimson silk draped from the ceiling and incense burners releasing a sweet smell. In the center of the room was a low table with an intricate carving of a dragon curling around the top and two plush cushions situated on either side. Both the hero-in-training and the hero killer sat down atop the pillows, one cheerfully and one hesitantly. As soon as they both were settled, a teapot filled with steaming tea, two cups, a pitcher of cream, and a bowl of sugar materialized between them. Izuku wasted no time in pouring himself a cup, at first not noticing the other's cautious reluctance.

“You know, I've never actually been to a tea house – I just saw this one in a movie, and ever since I've wanted to recreate it..Ah! And no need to worry about the tea being poisoned or anything, Stain-san. I wouldn't do that to you when you've already agreed to talk, and it's not real tea anyways; as soon as we leave Boundless, it'll be like we never drank anything at all.”

He took a sip to make his point, smiling when the villain finally relented and prepared his own cup. “I don't quite understand going this far to talk, but I suppose I'll play along for now.”

“Well, Aizawa-sensei taught me that these things are best done when both parties are comfortable, and principal Nedzu said tea is a great way to relax and stay calm while having these kinds of conversations. If we're gonna do this, I want to do it right.”

“Hmph, you seem quite eager for this.”

Izuku swallowed his tea hard in an attempt not to spit it out, and dropped his head onto the table. “Heavens no! I'm just trying to stop my nerves from eating me alive by acting like I'm not a bundle of anxiety.”

Stain eyed him curiously. “...You're rather honest, aren't you? Regardless, I came here to talk at your behest, so I will not attack you until after our discussion is over; also, I'm assuming since this is your quirk that you are the only way in or out?”

“Yep. I don't know if killing me would let you out, or if you'd be stuck here forever, or if Boundless would disappear with you in it, and I can't say I want to find out.” The hero killer laughed (it was more of a slightly amused huff), and it eased some of the teenager's apprehension. “Anyways, let's get down to it. First, I'd like to hear your beliefs and motivations in your own words.”

Shouto regained mobility shortly after he was passed through to the other sector.

It started with a twitch of his fingers, before his whole body was swept over with a shudder as the effects of the quirk wore off. He shook his head to brush off the uncomfortable feeling of paralysis and lingering stiffness left in it's wake; however, a quick few stretches later and he was good as new. With his body back under his control, he turned his attention to the others.

Based on the fact that they were both lying motionless on the ground, it was safe to say they were still paralyzed.

Iida was on his stomach with his wound mostly bandaged, though it seemed whoever was patching
him up left suddenly; the wound wasn't fatal though, and the bleeding looked to have slowed significantly, so Shouto wasn't too worried. The pro hero was laying face up, and much like when he and Izuku first entered the fray, he couldn't see any serious injuries. Even so, he knew better than to assume, so he asked anyways as he walked over to finish administering first aid.

“You're...Native, right? I can't see any injuries, but do you need medical attention? I can't say I'm fully qualified, but I have a basic understanding of first aid, at least.”

Turning his eyes, but not his unresponsive neck, the pro answered back. “Ah, yes, I am! Native, I mean. I'm ashamed to say the hero killer got me pretty quick, but because of that I'm not hurt. You're one of the two kids that came to our rescue, aren't you?”

“Yes. I'm Shouto, and my friend is Izuku; this is his quirk, Boundless, you're currently in. It's perfectly safe, and Izuku will return us to reality when it's safe to do so.”

Iida was strangely quiet while Shouto and Native talked. “Well, that explains a lot. What an odd quirk though! First we show up in this strange place, and then a green-haired lady starts patching that kid up with bandages coming out of nowhere, before suddenly vanishing!”

*That must have been when he started using Conductor.* He leaned down and began to re-wrap his classmate's wound with the fresh bandages that had appeared. “Yeah, that was a manifestation of his mother, and she likely disappeared when Izuku had to focus on a new technique, so he couldn't spare the brainpower to keep her formed.”

“Is that related to when it started getting really cold and icy in here?”

Now that caught him by surprise. *He got a literal brain freeze? He's definitely gonna want to hear this.* Shouto was about to respond, but that was when Iida finally deigned to speak.

“You shouldn't have interfered! That was my battle to fight!”

He gave his best disapproving look at his angry patient. “And what, leave you to die? That's not how heroes work, Iida; and in case you've forgotten, heroes *also* don't bullheadedly go after a villain for revenge, especially not alone and without any conceivable backup plan – in other words, what you did was not only unheroic, it was unbelievably foolish. So before you tell us what we should or shouldn't do as aspiring heroes, you need to take a look at yourself and what kind of hero you want to become.”

“You don't understand! He-”

“What don't I understand?! That he hurt someone you love and admire? That things are never going to be same because of what happened? That you have all this anger and pain raging inside you that you don't know how to quell? Newsflash, Iida: I know!”

Seeing his classmate's face flinch helped him realize how upset he was getting. *I need to keep my temper in check.* Shouto pressed his hands together in front of him, as if praying for patience, while he forced himself to breathe deep and speak calmly. “What you're feeling right now, I felt for a long time growing up. I was so full of wrath at the person who hurt me and my family, I spent years harboring a burning rage hidden behind a front of cold indifference.” The memories of that time felt bitter with regret. He sighed, accepting the feeling and letting it go, before allowing a small smile to form. “But then things changed – I changed. I had a new goal, a reason to get better and leave that anguish behind. I learned how to manage those feelings, not bottling them up or letting them run wild, but acknowledging and releasing them in a healthy way; that's actually one of the main reasons I'm in Pre-Heroics, so I can overcome the pain of my past and reign in those
emotions. I still have a ways to go, but looking back I can tell – I'm not the same person I used to be.”

Iida fell silent as he shared his story, and Shouto could see the contemplation in his eyes. “You let yourself be blinded by your anger, acting out in the only way you could think of to stop those feelings; I know what that's like, I've done it many times myself. But my friends and teachers taught me something I think you need to hear as well.” He looked Iida in the eyes. “Emotions themselves aren't bad, and neither is logical thinking; however, problem arises when you let one take precedence over the other. If you let logic rule without emotion, you become cold-hearted and unsympathetic. If you act on your emotions without thinking, you lose control of yourself and your ability to make smart decisions – that's what you did. It's not your grief and resentment that got you into this mess – you're allowed to feel that way, and given the circumstance you probably should feel that way – it's the fact you let your wounded heart take over your brain, when they're supposed to work together.”

It seemed the paralysis had finally worn off, as the blue-haired teen carefully pushed himself up into a sitting position. “I...see. I suppose, in hindsight, my actions were...foolhardy, and brash. As you said, I gave in to my anger and was not thinking clearly, putting not only myself, but you all in danger as well. For that, I apologize.”

Shouto nodded in acceptance. “As long as you understand, and do your best to not make the same mistake in the future, then you'll make a fine hero worthy of the Ingenium family.”

“Of course! I shall strive to take full advantage of the second chance you and Izuku have given me and live up to my brother's legacy!!” With his uninjured arm chopping in the air to emphasize his speaking, it seemed Iida had really taken Shouto's words to heart. I'm glad he's back to his normal self, if a little worse for wear.

Native spoke up then, having been quiet all the while. “Y'know, I'm glad you've learned this life lesson and everything, and definitely don't go chasing after any more top-tier villains before you're ready, but is it okay that I'm...kinda glad you did? Cus I definitely would've been mincemeat if you hadn't needed to be rescued.” With his movement also restored, he grinned at Shouto. “Also, if you weren't so good at combat, I'd recommend a career change. Like, you're really good at motivational speeches.”

That caused Iida to begin chopping the air again, prattling away on some tangent or other, while Shouto just laughed.

I wonder how Izuku's doing...though, if anyone can talk down a serial killer, it's him.

Stain won't know what hit him.

Chapter End Notes

I really hope this conversation between Stain and Izuku doesn't drag out... Anyways, do you guys think the hero killer will listen to our boy? I have an idea how this will play out, but you're just gonna have to keep reading to find out ;)
And for those of you waiting on Alternate Route, I'm hoping to finish the Stain
discussion and return to the real world within the next chapter or two, at which point I
can update E:AR; those of you reading BSRC, I'll see if I can crank out a chapter for
that before I finish the Stain discussion. Lastly, I think I will start posting Hero of
Legend (or HoL, because apparently all my fics need a shorthand except Escapist) -
then who knows? If I've got nothing to do (that was a joke. Haha. Fat chance.), maybe
I'll start a new fic because I totally don't have enough on my plate as is.
Welp, thanks for reading! Adios, amigos!
Culmination

Chapter Notes

Who's ready for Stain discussion part 2? I am! Finally! Hopefully I can do this justice. But gosh, Stain is hard to write! I tried my darnedest to make him understandable, both in his motives for killing and for accepting Izuku's invitation. I like to think he's just a bit...misguided, but much like in canon he respects Izuku's heroic spirit - only in this fic that spirit is shown by seeking to put their differences aside in a nonviolent manner. Because our boy was genuine in his appeal, Stain agreed, desiring to see if Izuku was worth being called a hero. Hopefully that came across clear enough in this chapter. Some people might say "You can't solve all your problems by talking about them". Watch me. You'd be surprised what a good, civil discussion is capable of.

Can Izuku convince Stain to leave him and his friends alone? Or will the hero killer stay true to his name? We're not out of Hosu yet, but what else could possibly go wrong?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“First, I'd like to hear your beliefs and motivations in your own words.”

Izuku would be lying if he said he wasn't nervous about all this. Here he was, seated across from a renowned killer, and instead of immediately arresting him or running away or whatever it was a person was supposed to do in this situation, he was asking him to discuss their different opinions in order to reach a mutual understanding. Whatever the proper course of action was for this scenario, sitting and chatting over tea probably wasn't it.

Then again, he'd also be lying if he said he wasn't curious.

What drove Stain to kill people? Why did he target heroes? And perhaps most of all, why would he agree to this discussion in the first place?

Ignorant to Izuku's tumultuous thoughts and feelings, the hero killer took a sip of the artificial tea and began to speak.

“My motives are simple. This world is plagued by false 'heroes', people who bear the title yet do not possess the qualities of a true hero; they seek fame, fortune, power, prestige, but they care not how they get it. They see heroism as a means to those ends, only doing 'heroic' deeds when it benefits them. Society has become overrun and enamored with 'heroes' who are selfish, cowardly, and corrupt – that is why I have taken on the task of cleansing the fakes from the world, striking fear into the hearts of those who deceitfully claim to be heroes.”

Izuku rubbed his chin in contemplation, mulling over what he'd been told. “Hmmm, okay...if I may ask, can tell me what you consider to be the characteristics of a true hero? Or, maybe, give an example of one?”

Stain seemed oddly excited to answer that. “Wait, is he... “A true hero is one who fights to save
everyone, regardless of who they are and what needs to be done to save them; they save for the sole sake of saving, without expecting compensation or recognition. A true hero is someone like All Might, fighting for peace and justice without wavering or succumbing to selfish desires.” The villain's dark eyes lit up as he spoke about the #1 hero, a hint of adoration in his tone.

*Oh my gosh, he is a fanboy! I gotta tell- nope, focus. You can tell Shouchan later, concentrate on what you're doing right now!*  

Drinking his own tea to mask his revelation (the *hero* killer was an All Might fanatic, who knew?), he ran down his mental checklist of how to conduct a discussion like this; **first, establish neutral ground and set the tone of the conversation to a respectful, honest one. Then, allow the other person to present their viewpoint in their own terms, without interrupting. Listen intently, only speaking to show you're listening or to ask for clarification. Do not antagonize the other, or bring up your own opinions yet. Next, when they've finished, summarize their stance in your own words to make sure you understand, and show that you've been listening to them.**

“I see. So, basically, you believe that the vast majority of pro-heroes in our society are unworthy of the title, acting selfishly and using heroism as a means to further their own agendas. You believe heroes should be like All Might, saving people not for payment or recognition, but purely because it's the right thing to do. Because of this, you've sought to... *weed out* any fake heroes, so only true heroes will remain. Did I understand that correctly?”

The dark-haired man nodded along to his summary, apparently pleased with his willingness to listen. “That is the gist of it. I will admit, your earnest attempt to listen and understand my beliefs is refreshing; not many would go that far, especially for one they consider an enemy.”

Izuku gave a small smile. “Well, it *is* something Shouchan and I have been working on extensively – Aizawa-sensei was adamant that we know how to reconcile disagreements without them devolving into petty arguments. As part of that, I learned to honor other people's beliefs and opinions, even if they differ from my own, and all I ask is that you return that courtesy to me.”

“I can certainly accomplish that, and I suppose it's only fair I hear you out when you were so attentive to my own views.”

At Stain's agreement, Izuku couldn't help but think of his teacher's words – being rude or mean to others leads them to return that rudeness, but when you act respectfully towards a person, they're more inclined to be respectful towards you in turn.

*Wow... I mean, I knew sensei was right, but it's still cool to see. I mean, would Stain have ever listened to me if I'd just shouted at him? But because I was courteous, here we are. Now I can share my own beliefs – in a calm and respectful manner, of course.*

He idly ran his hands over his teacup, selecting his words carefully to get his point across clearly without angering the man seated across from him. “Before I explain what I think about all this, I feel it would be best to share some of my background – that way, you'll have a better idea of where I'm coming from.” With a nod from the villain, Izuku took a deep breath and began his story.

“I had... a rough time growing up, though that may be a bit of an understatement. I won't go into all the details, but basically I was severely neglected for years; I hid away in my own house, afraid of what my father would do if I made my presence known. School wasn't any better – I was a late bloomer, so the other kids bullied me endlessly because they thought I was quirkless. It- it was so bad, I stopped talking altogether; asking you to talk with me was the first time I've said more than two words outside Boundless since I was 5.”
He could see a glimmer of sympathy in the man's eyes. “That would explain why you were so quiet during our battle.”

He nodded solemnly. He really didn't like talking about this, but it was necessary. “Yeah...it still terrifies me, but I've been working on it. Anyways, it all culminated when, shortly after I discovered my quirk, the lead bully beat me so bad, he actually broke one of my ribs. I was only 7, almost 8, and I decided I didn't want to live in reality anymore.”

Stain's surprised expression was somewhat muffled by his mask, but still noticeable.

“For years, I spent all my time here, only leaving to steal stuff – both to supply myself with necessities, and to feed my kleptomania. I knew it was wrong, but I didn't care; why should I, when everything I'd ever cared about was taken from me? Them losing a few rice balls or a nice pair of shoes was nothing compared to what I'd lost.” He broke eye contact and dropped his gaze to the table, ashamed of the person he'd been only one year prior. “I almost certainly would have continued like that, had I not happened to meet Shouchan.” He sipped his tea in relief at finally reaching the happier part of his story, while the hero killer listened on.

“It was a chance meeting, but it was enough. We became friends, bonding over our mutual suffering and supporting each other through it. Eventually, Shouchan, Aizawa-sensei, and principal Nedzu convinced me to give the real world another try.” Izuku smiled fondly. “Now, here I am: learning to handle my kleptomaniac urges, overcoming my deepest fears, and aiming to save the world I used to hate.”

He sighed, before once more locking eyes with the villain.

“What I'm saying is, people are complicated. For one, you can't possibly know what kind of person they are inside; even if you've known them for a long time, you'll never completely understand how they act, how they think.” He thought of Shou, and that small piece that was always missing no matter what, simply because he wasn't Shouchan. “How many people do you think, if they saw me shoplifting, would have simply alerted the authorities without bothering to learn why I was stealing? What I needed was food to eat and behavioral therapy, not a criminal record, but if it had been anyone else who'd spotted me that day, there's a good chance that's what I'd have gotten. If you condemn someone before learning the whole story, you're bound to miss what's really going on.”

Stain was silent, waiting patiently for Izuku to finish his piece. “And beyond that, people can change – I know I have. If you give them the chance, the support, and the encouragement they need, even someone once considered a lost cause can get a new start. I see it every day in Pre-Heroics. We've been given the help we need for a second chance at our lives, and it shows. Every day Shouchan gets a little better at using the fire he once hated, Hitochan believes a little more that he can be hero instead of a villain, Ama-senpai gets a little less anxious around people. All of us are growing and improving, and none of it would’ve happened if the teachers at UA had given up on us like everyone else had. I understand where you're coming from, Stain-san, I really do. I get that if heroes are going to be the role models they are, they need to step up to the responsibility – heck, Shouchan knows better than anyone that not all pro heroes are actually heroic. But calling them fakes and sentencing them to death just because they aren't as brave and noble as All Might...to me, that's shortsighted and close-minded. To me, it seems like these people – human beings with flaws, just like the rest of us – their reasons for their behavior, the true problem, is being ignored, and they're refused the opportunity to change. By killing these 'fakes', I honestly don't believe it solves anything. People are still gonna have issues, they're still gonna be imperfect, they're still gonna be 'false' heroes; the only difference is, now they're never gonna get the chance improve and become true heroes. If you want more real heroes out there, you can't cut them down – you need to
let them grow.”

A blanket of quiet settled over the two, wrapping around them and filling the fractal tea house. With bated breath, Izuku waited to see if his words had reached his companion, hoping beyond hope that he would heed his plea to stop. Neither dared to move, the weight of what had been said heavy upon them; they both knew full well that what happened next would seal the fate of countless people – their lives were in the hands of a ruthless killer, and the boy who'd been given another shot at life.

Eventually, though, that moment of tension, caught between life and death, had to end.

The hero killer was the one to speak and break it.

“I knew you were a strange one the moment you called out, asking to talk with me. I had hope that you were not a self-righteous hypocrite like so many others, that you could back up the morals you profess to have.” He grinned at the greenet. “I was not disappointed. So, in honor of your integrity, let's try it.”

Izikku tilted his head, confused. “Try what?”

“Try it your way. You claim people can become true heroes if given a second chance, so prove it. I'll allow you and your friend to turn me in to the police.” His eyes widened, as the hero killer stood. “I'll watch you and your friends from prison, observe as you become pros; if you are right, and you and your friends become good heroes, I'll call off my crusade.” Stain's expression turned serious. “But know that if you're wrong, and this second chance isn't enough, I'll come erase your hypocrisy with my own hands.”

Izuku matched his gaze, and stood himself as the tea house faded away. “I'll hold you to that, so keep your eyes on Pre-Heroics. We won't let you down.”

“I certainly hope you don't.”

When his teacher texted him back, stating the heroes were on standby for them, Izuku sent Shouchan, Iida, and Native (that was that one hero's name, apparently) back to reality first. Then, after they'd been safely delivered, he turned to Stain.

“Ready? I told them you were coming willingly, so they shouldn't be too rough. Probably.”

“Your concern is nice, but unneeded. I can take a little manhandling.”

Izuku huffed as he reached for his hand. “I know that! It's just that you trusted me enough to talk in the first place, and now you're trusting me to prove myself – I don't want to abuse that trust, even if you are a vill- er, ex-villain, I suppose.”

One quick thought later, and the two of them were back in Hosu, with Stain being quickly (and gently, thankfully) detained, and Izuku engulfed in the waiting arms of his best friend and teacher.

When they finally pulled back, Aizawa-sensei put his hands on his shoulders as he squatted down to eye-level with him. “Izuku, please don't do that again. You could've gotten seriously hurt, and none of us would've been able to do a thing about it, so please stop taking highly dangerous villains into Boundless with you before you've even got a hero license.” Izuku nodded, properly chastised, and the black-haired teacher ruffled his hair. “With the mandatory scolding out of the way, let me say this: great work. I don't know exactly how it went down yet, but you got everyone out alive and relatively well; the fact you convinced Stain to turn himself in is...honestly a nice
surprise. So, good job, both of you. Though I will be expecting a full debriefing later, got it?”

With Stain being led away, Iida headed to a hospital, and all the pre-heroes back together, it was time to finally evacuate with the rest of the civilians. The chaos had calmed quite a bit, but there was still much to do before the heroes could call it a night; however, according to their teacher, they were going to leave that to the pros and get back to the school ASAP.

The group had just started walking when Izuku felt a painful *prick*, right above the collar of his costume. Reaching up, he felt something long and thin sticking out of his neck.

“IZUKU!!”

He barely registered the cries of his friends and the ground falling away before the world went black.

Chapter End Notes

Mwahahaha >:D You guys seem to have found yourselves dangling from another cliff; I wonder, what could be the cause of that? Surely not the author's affinity for dramatic endings?

Anyways, I need to hurry up and write both the next chapter of this and E:AR; I haven't updated that since early August to avoid spoiling this particular plot point, and I feel terrible for those of you yearning for yandere Shigaraki and his fairy boy obsession. You guys are always waiting patiently for that, and it makes me sad :( but I don't want to fill the gaps with pointless filler or spoil Escapist, so...the next chapter will be up soon, I promise! Just hold out a little longer!

While you're waiting, feel free to check out BSRC or HoL! I think I'll post chapter 2 of HoL today, so if you like Legend of Zelda, take a look! Also, I recently added some more ideas to Concept Compendium for y'all, so be sure to tell me what you think.

With that self-promotion taken care of, I'm gonna go update HoL and do some homework. Byeeee!
Hi everybody!
I'll admit it: all your comments of 'WHY' and 'how could you do this to me' and 'omg not another cliffhanger' made me chuckle evilly. That being said, here - let me help you down from that cliff!
So we finally finish hero killer arc this chapter, though I've got at least another chapter or two of the internship/intensive left to write. Then it's...uuhhhhh...midterm exam arc, right? Been a while since I watched the show and not there yet in the manga, so please tell me if that is incorrect.
Anyways, enjoy poorly written action and a super emotional Shouto.

Below the layers of growing horror and sheer panic, Shouto had one coherent thought.

_I don't think my heart can take much more of this._

When he and Izuku had gone off to find Iida, Aizawa-sensei had trusted him to keep his partner safe. That was his job: protect Izuku, so he could focus on evacuation and exfiltration. And he'd succeeded – right up until he got paralyzed. That moment, with the hero killer poised to cut them to ribbons and Izuku refusing to run away, he knew he'd failed. His best friend was going to die, all because Shouto wasn't strong enough! He'd done his best, but his best...

His best wasn't good enough.

The fact Stain agreed to talk with Izuku (him speaking in reality was a whole other thing to think about) was a straight-up miracle. As soon as they were in Boundless, Shouto was able to push aside his fear and guilt; after all, there was nowhere safer for his friend to be than a dimension he can control at will. Iida and Native were saved, and apparently Izuku had convinced the villain to surrender. They returned to reality, a little roughed up but resoundingly victorious, and Shouto was content to simply go back to UA and sort through his complicated feelings later, preferably after a good night's sleep.

But then he'd seen Izuku wince in pain, albeit slightly (so he was being super attentive to his friend to make sure he was okay, sue him).

“Izuku? What's wrong?”

The greenet reached up to the back of his neck, and pulled out... *a needle? Where did that come from?* He wasn't all that concerned at first, thinking it was just some debris or an errant projectile from one of the ongoing battles around them. He wasn't concerned, that is, until Izuku's pupils dilated an unnatural amount, and he became unsteady.

By that point, he was very concerned.
“Izuku!!” That needle – somebody drugged him!

And right before he could catch his crumpling friend...

a winged nomu swooped in and snatched him.

Green eyes slid shut as the nomu's clawed foot hefted him into the air by his abdomen, flying off to its destination with prey locked in its talons. Cries of distress rang out through the group as their friend and classmate was stolen away; Shouto's left arm itched to launch a fireball, but the risk of hitting Izuku was too great. At a loss, he could only watch as his best friend was carried farther and farther away.

“IZUKU!!!!!”

no

no

no

no no no no

no nono NONO

“Make a ramp, now!”

His panicked brain could not recognize the voice that spoke so urgently to him.

His hard-earned battle instincts, however, didn't need to, as his foot automatically slid forward to create an icy slope under the man running in front of him.

It all happened so fast, even Shota's well-trained mind could hardly grasp it.

It started with Shouto's distraught call of his partner's name. He'd turned around, only to see a very suspicious needle fall from his student's fingers, who started to slump like a puppet who'd lost his strings.

Shota had wasted no time in darting forward to help his charge. He still wasn't fast enough.

Dread filled him when he saw exactly what was abducting his kid. There were only so many possible reasons for the League of Villains to carry off a student, and none of them were good – especially if they were targeting Izuku specifically.

Based on the needle, and the fact the one student who could escape the League with barely a thought was now unconscious ...him being singled out was scarily plausible, and the implications were terrifying.

All those thoughts had flown through his head at lightning speed, so much so that he almost missed the pro-heroes escorting Stain behind him cry out in alarm.

The hero killer dashed past him, shedding his handcuffs, and without stopping whispered something to Shouto. He ran forward, even as ice rose up beneath him, lifting him skyward. As the ice approached the flying nomu, Stain leaped; grabbing the nomu's leg, he climbed up before pulling out a hidden blade and stabbing it straight into the monster's exposed brain.
The nomu let out an unearthly screech as it plummeted to the ground; while it fell, the hero killer tugged Izuku from its failing grasp, jumping away with him just before the creature collided with the concrete, dead. Tucking the greenet into his chest, Stain rolled along the pavement, taking the brunt of the impact. When they finally came to a stop, he released his hold and stood.

At his feet was the unconscious Izuku, a bit scraped up, but otherwise unharmed.

Shouto was still too out of it to fully comprehend what had just occurred.

All he knew was his best friend was there, and he was here, and that really wasn't good enough.

So naturally he scrambled over to the prone form and gathered him into his arms. The storming ocean of his emotions sent waves of relief crashing over him and spilling out as tears; soon, the warm hand of his homeroom teacher settled on his quivering shoulders, a grounding comfort alongside Izuku's steady breathing.

“Calm down, Shouto, it's okay. He's...Izuku's okay.” Aizawa-sensei's voice wavered slightly, giving away that his words were as much for himself as for Shouto. Taking a shuddering breath, the heterochromiac looked up to finally discern who exactly had saved his friend; watery blue-and-gray eyes widened at the visage his mind was now clear enough to recognize.

...Stain? The hero killer just saved Izuku?

*It took a villain to succeed where I failed?*

With Shouto collecting himself, his teacher turned his attention to Stain, even as the other heroes came forward to re-arrest him. “I don't know why, but you saved my student – so, thanks.”

The hero killer, newly handcuffed, merely looked the underground hero up and down. “So you are the one teaching these children.” At Aizawa-sensei's stiff nod, the man grinned. “I saved that boy because he told me a second chance can turn people into true heroes; I can't let him be stolen away before he has his chance to prove that. You've got a fine pair of heroes in the making here, Eraserhead; I look forward to seeing how they grow under your tutelage.” With that, the heroes began to once more lead Stain away.

Before he got too far, though, he stopped. “And as for you, young one.”

Shouto turned and locked eyes with him as he glanced over his shoulder. “You want to protect your friend, don't you?”

Startled at the all-too-accurate statement, Shouto fumbled his words slightly – though his answer was no less genuine. “I- yes, yes I do. Izuku he- he means the world to me, but today...” He wiped his tears with the palm of his hand. “Today, I wasn't strong enough to save him – not from you, and not from that nomu. I just...don't want him living in fear anymore...”

“Then get stronger!”

His tears stopped abruptly at Stain's proclamation. “He depends on you, you know. I can tell. If you want to protect him, get stronger – then the next time this happens, you'll be ready.”

And with that, the hero killer was escorted away.

Shouto watched him go, until he felt his teacher gently tug Izuku out of his grasp, hefting him
across his shoulders in a fireman's carry. “Well, I think that's enough heart-to-heart talks for one day. Let's get out of here before something else goes wrong, alright?”

Wiping his tears one last time, Shouto laughed lightly at remark and got up, following Aizawa-sensei and his fellow pre-heroes through the streets of Hosu.

*Of course we'd be so close and something would go wrong!*

Tomura growled in rage at Kurogiri, the unfortunate bearer of bad news. He scratched his neck ferociously, wishing Stain was there so he could give him a slow, painful death.

Tomura had put a lot of thought into how to steal Midoriya Izuku away from the heroes; he knew the kid wouldn't come willingly, too brainwashed by heroes and society to even consider villainy (for now – they'd fix that for sure). He also knew that one simple thought would be all it took for the legendary weapon to elude them – if he went to Boundless, it was an automatic game over, and they'd have to try again. So they got hold of a potent anesthetic, recruited a small-time villain with a needle-shooting quirk, and made a flying nomu to snatch the prize (since Kurogiri's quirk takes a moment to activate – long enough for an interloper to screw things up for them – and Eraserhead could erase it anyways). When it came down to it, all that planning paid off, and it went off without a hitch.

Until that bastard Stain decided he wanted to be a hero instead of a hero killer.

They had the kid right where they wanted him, seconds away from being theirs – and that f***er had the gall to kill their nomu and save him!

But now Stain was in the custody of the heroes, no doubt headed off to Tartarus; it'd be inconvenient to go after him now, as much as Tomura wanted to destroy him. *I guess we'll just have to focus on the primary objectives for now...though the legendary weapon could be useful in completing that particular side quest once we get it.* He sighed, now more mildly irritated than furious, and addressed Kurogiri.

“Fine. Whatever. We'll just have to do better next time, especially now that the heroes will be on guard. When's that d*** Giran supposed to get back to us with that info?”

The mist-man was obviously relieved at Tomura's slightly better mood. “According to him, he'll stop by tomorrow with some...ahem, 'juicy' details on our target.”

“Good. Make sure we've got the payment from sensei for him – I'm gonna enjoy the anarchy a little longer. I'll call you when I'm ready for pickup.”

At his dismissal, Kurogiri warped back to base, leaving Tomura alone on the rooftop.

Gazing out once more over Hosu, the blue-haired villain grinned maliciously.

“You may have won this round, heroes, but we'll be back. Next time, we'll definitely steal him from you – and once he's ours, well...”

He chuckled.

“You won't stand a chance.”
Chapter End Notes

So I've been planning that near-abduction for like...forever, pretty much ever since I decided Tomura was gonna be super intrigued by Boundless. As soon as I went down that route, my muse was all, 'You know that scene where Izuku gets snatched by a nomu and Stain saves him? What if that wasn't just a coincidence, but an actual kidnapping attempt?' so I went 'That's a neat idea, but this Izuku could just think himself out of the nomu's clutches and it wouldn't be all that exciting', and then my muse goes 'Well he can't escape to Boundless if he's unconscious, so just drug him or something'. And thus this little plot point was born.

Welp, now that this is done, I can finally, finally finish the next chapter of E:AR! Huzzah! And maybe finish that one project for school, even though I really don't want to work on it...somebody please send me some motivation...

Farewell, until we meet again!~
Hello, I'm back!

Took me a while to write this...I probably could've gotten this done faster if I'd started it right after I finished the last chapter of E:AR, but I wanted to update BSRC first, and after that I didn't have a lot of inspiration for this. But it's done, and I hope it's worth the wait; it's longer than most chapters, so yay for that!

Not a lot in this chapter, except for Aizawa learning what his problem children went through, some more Dadzawa helping Shouto with his emotions, and telling Izuku that he's being targeted by the LoV! Fun!

---

When Izuku woke up to the infirmary ceiling, his only thought was *dang it, not again.*

He glanced over to the side, and was wholly unsurprised (but encouraged nonetheless) to see his best friend seated beside him, engrossed in a book.

He lightly rapped his knuckles on the bed frame to get Shouchan's attention.

Said boy snapped his heterochromic eyes up from the book, before closing it and setting it on the small table next to him.

“Izuku! You're awake!”

*Well yeah, it would appear so. Though I don't remember falling asleep...*

'Happen what? Can't remember. Me quirk tired?*

Shouchan shook his head. “No, you're not suffering quirk exhaustion – though you probably came close. Do you remember our fight with Stain?” Izuku thought back, and nodded while his friend continued. “What about Afterwards, when you-”

The infirmary door nearly slammed with how fast it was opened. It revealed their homeroom teacher, who strode in with purpose and a very concerned tone. “Hold on, I need to hear this too. And you can start from when you two first left the group – don't leave anything out. I told you two you'd owe me a full debriefing, and I'm cashing that in.” With that he slumped into the chair on Izuku's other side and leveled them with an expectant gaze.

Shouchan audibly gulped. Just because Aizawa-sensei was the best teacher they'd ever had and treated them with such care didn't mean they lacked respect for him or saw him as anything less than an authority figure.

“W-Well, Izuku took us up onto the rooftops so we could get a bird's-eye view; we found Iida in an alley with Native, and Stain was about to land the killing blow, so we wasted no time in getting down there. I covered Izuku while he sent Iida and Native to Boundless, a-and we *totally* would've evacuated ourselves at that point! But the hero killer was so fast, and we knew he could just target
us again later if we left, so we decided the best course of action was to try and detain him.”

A dark eyebrow rose, the only visible reaction to Shouchan's explanation their teacher gave. His partner wrung his hands nervously as he pressed on.

“I fought as well as I could, using both my ice and fire, but it was a stalemate at best. My attacks weren't giving him any ground, but he was relentless... It was Izuku's idea to use Cold Conductor.” The other eyebrow rose to match it's counterpart. “And...it worked. We managed to trap Stain; or, at least, we did at first. But right after I snapped Izuku out of his hyperfocus, the hero killer freed himself and paralyzed me.” Gray and blue eyes drifted down to joined hands, clenched in what Izuku could only guess was frustration. “I tried to get him to run, to get away while he could, but he wouldn't...”

Knowing that his friend was struggling, Izuku reached over to him, offering his hand in comfort; Shouchan relaxed minutely, and grasped the offered hand while a small smile found it's way onto his face.

“Stain was about to slaughter us when Izuku spoke.”

That prompted the most significant reaction from Aizawa-sensei they'd seen in the last few minutes. He stared at them in shock, looking between him and Shouchan. “Really?” At their confirming nods, the teacher leaned back in his chair. “Well, dang. It might not have been the most...ideal situation for a major breakthrough like that, but way to perform under pressure I guess.” He ruffled Izuku's green curls like an affectionate father. “Great job Izuku, I'm so proud of you! Now, keep going. What did he say?”

Shouchan used his free hand to scratch his head, his expression a mix of confusion, exasperation, and fondness. “Honestly, I thought he was nuts when he asked a villain to discuss their differences of opinion and reach a mutual understanding, but it makes a bit more sense looking back on it; we'd been focusing so much on how to handle those kinds of conversations lately, and my guess is it was the only thing Izuku could think of that could resolve all that without any more bloodshed.”

Izuku nodded, while Aizawa-sensei sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose. “I suppose I'll let it slide for now since it sounds like you didn't have many other options, but please refrain from engaging villains in conversation in the future – or at least wait until they're not moments away from murdering you. Is that when you all went to Boundless?”

“Yeah. For some reason, Stain agreed, and Izuku brought us all there. He sent me to finish administering first aid to Iida and Native in another sector; my paralysis wore off shortly after I arrived, so I patched Iida up while chastising him for his stupidity. I don't know what happened with Izuku and Stain at that point, only that after a few minutes the separate sectors merged and Izuku warped us all out.”

“I see. And as for you...” The black-haired man turned his attention to Izuku. “What happened with you after you brought the hero killer to Boundless?”

He shuffled a bit, not quite uncomfortable under his teacher's gaze, but not fully relaxed either. It would be super hard to sign all of what happened, especially with my arm still sore from frostbite, and writing wouldn't be much better.

Welp, if I can talk down a serial killer, I can talk to my teacher no problem, right?

He closed his eyes, took a deep breath, and once more willed his vocal chords to move.
“A-after I sent Shouchan to Iida and Native, I asked Stain about h-his ideology.” He could tell Aizawa-sensei was restraining himself from overreacting at his speaking, and he was thankful for that – he knew his teacher was very happy about it, but the inevitable fanfare could wait until he finished telling the story and found out what the heck happened afterwards. Fortunately, talking got a little bit easier as he went. “According to him, society is full of 'fake' heroes who don't actually care about saving people, only about their selfish desires; in his mind, he was essentially getting rid of the trash so only true heroes would remain. That's actually why he was hesitant to kill me and Shouchan; apparently, something about us fit with his idea of a good hero, so he wanted to spare us... Oh! And I followed all your instructions, sensei; after I respectfully listened to his viewpoint, I summarized in my own words to confirm that I understood. And you were totally right! After being honest and courteous with him, Stain was willing to hear me out. I told him a bit about my past, and how I never would've become who I am today if you all hadn't sought out the roots of my problems and given me a second chance... I guess it worked, because after I finished he said he'd let me try and prove my point – he'd surrender, and watch me and my friends become heroes; the deal is that, if we become what he considers 'fake' heroes, he'll break out of jail and hunt us down. But if we become good heroes, he'll concede that I was right and stop killing people.”

Both of the other occupants in the room were astounded.

Shouchan was the first to respond. “Wait, really? Just like that?”

Aizawa-sensei then regained his bearings. “Well, that explains a lot.”

Izuku just huffed. “Yep, and that was when I texted you and brought everyone back. Now can someone please tell me what happened after that and why I'm in the infirmary?”

His teacher and his best friend glanced at each other, clearly wanting each other to tell him; I don't know why they're so opposed to telling me. I'm not injured or anything, so it can't be that bad, right?

Eventually, Aizawa-sensei seemed to resign himself and looked Izuku dead in the eyes, his voice grave and serious.

“Izuku...you were almost kidnapped by the League of Villains.”

...........Wait, WHAT?!

Shota'd been having a rough morning.

To be fair, it was bound to be a pain after the chaotic mess that was last night.

He'd been able to lead his students back to UA without further incident (which he was endlessly grateful for – he didn't think he could've taken much more of that), nearly crying with relief when he was met by his coworkers coming to provide backup. Recovery Girl checked over the boys, healing Shouto's gash and treating Izuku's frostbite, clearing the former and saying the latter should wake up in several hours.

Shortly after he'd been released, problem child #1 came up to talk to him.

“Hey, Aizawa-sensei? Can we... ramp up my training a bit more?”

Yeah, he'd been expecting that. He had just finished preparing for it, actually.
He gave his student an understanding smile. “I figured you'd ask me that after what Stain said to you; the thing is, we're already pushing you in your training. If I pushed you much farther, it would only do more harm than good.”

“I-I see...”

At Shouto's despondent expression, Shota placed a hand on his shoulder. “Now hold on, that doesn't mean I don't know where you're coming from. I'm guessing you feel like, even though you did everything you could, it wasn't enough?” A slow nod. “Every pro goes through this at some point in their career, even I went through it – actually, I went through it again last night thanks to you boys – but that means I know how to deal with it, so I'm gonna let you in on the secret.”

He could tell the kid was hanging off his every word, eager for his advice on dealing with this, admittedly tough, reality check he'd had to endure.

“First, you need to accept that you are going to fail sometimes. We're human. We make mistakes. We can study and train and prepare for everything we possibly can, and there will still be situations we can't handle. That's just the way it is, and nothing can change that. However, what we can do is minimize how often those things happen and how bad they get. Next, recognize what led to that failure; in your case, the most significant thing you lack is experience. You're still a kid, and no amount of training in a gym can make up for real-life experience. Unfortunately, there's no quick or easy way to get that – it simply comes with time. But give yourself a few years, and you'll find yourself better able to anticipate and navigate those tough situations when they arise.”

“So there's nothing I can do right now?”

He shook his head, and gave the boy an encouraging grin. “Now, I didn't say that. It's true that most of what you need can only come with time, but there are a few things you can start now. I'll see if I can schedule in some after-school training sessions for you, so you can get more one-on-one instruction; I can probably get some of the other teachers in on it too, that way you'll get experience fighting different people. In the meantime, here.” Shota tossed him the book he'd picked up from the library only a few minutes prior. His student caught it, and began flipping through it in curiosity. “A lot of the stuff I've been teaching you about battle strategy is straight from that book. Give it a read, take some notes, and when you're done I'll help you pick out another one; also, you may want to consider going to the support department for some support gear – the more tools in your metaphorical toolbox, the more likely you'll have what you need in a given situation.”

That had been several hours ago.

Shouto had gone back in the infirmary to wait for Izuku to wake up, and Shota had checked on his other students to make sure they were alright after the stress of last night.

He was just about to knock on the door after his return, when he heard Shouto talking to (who he assumed to be) Izuku. Ah, he's awake. Good.

“Do you remember our fight with Stain?.....What about afterwards, when you-”

Yeah, I need to be there to hear this.

He marched in, insisted be informed of what happened, and proceeded to listen to their explanation. He'd have to give the kids credit, they handled the whole ordeal rather well for first-years, and hearing Izuku speak in reality was nearly a dream come true at this point. I guess this means he passed his SE goal for the intensive...
But then it had fallen to him to tell the greenet about the other mishap (because as much as he didn't want to do it, he wasn't going to burden Shouto with it), and he had a feeling the kid wouldn't react well to the news.

“Izuku...you were almost kidnapped by the League of Villains.”

He watched the shock and horror play out on the freckled face as he wrapped his head around the ramifications. “I- what?”

Shouto looked just as uncomfortable as he was, displeased with having the no-doubt traumatic experience brought up again so soon. Even so, he pressed on – Izuku needed and deserved to know.

“Right before you blacked out, you were shot with a drugged needle; then, when you fell unconscious, a flying noumu swooped in and grabbed you. If it weren't for the hero killer rescuing you, you-” Shota took a stuttering breath to calm himself, apparently still shaken by what had transpired. “There's no telling what would've happened to you.”

Wide green eyes slid slowly away from him and down to the thin blanket of the infirmary bed, no doubt processing what had just been spoken.

“...Sensei?” Shouto was the next to speak, though he waited for Shota's acknowledgment to continue.

“Do...do you think they were after...just any student from UA? O-or were they...they...”

He understood the boy's hesitance to say it, though simply leaving it unsaid wouldn't make it untrue or change what it meant.

“Given the fact he was knocked unconscious when normally he'd only need a thought to escape, it's almost guaranteed they went after Izuku specifically.”

That was all it took to set off Shouto's lingering fear, anger, and anxiety, as he stood to his feet and started pacing furiously in the small room.

“But that can't be it! How did they know that Izuku would need to be unconscious for them to take him? Did they just, have that drug and the noumu and all that on hand? And why would they target Izuku?! It just- I don't get it!”

He could tell that deep down, Shouto knew – he was simply in denial, hoping and wishing that it wasn't what it clearly was.

Though, he couldn't stay in denial for long, especially when Izuku came to the same conclusion he had hours beforehand.

“Shigaraki...he seemed awfully interested in my quirk back at USJ...” He lifted his gaze to him again, and Shota could see how lost he must feel as he silently confirmed his conclusion.

That trembling voice, already so quiet, came to him once more in a terrified, desperate plea for Shota to lead and protect him.

“S-sensei...I'm scared...what d-do I do?”
Well, I hope that was satisfactory. We'll finish up the internship/intensive arc soon, and start moving into the end of term exam arc!

Before I go, I just want to mention that I added some more ideas to Concept Compendium! There's also a poll of sorts I've got going right now - you see, I realized the other day that all of my current mainline fics are following canon closely enough that I'm probably gonna be writing them for a looooong time. That's fine, and I have no intention of abandoning any of my current fics, but I thought it'd be nice to write something that I could, y'know, actually finish before BNHA does? Yeah. So, I'm asking for your opinions on which end-able fic(s) you want me to write next! Details are in the notes of ch. 3 of CC, including a list of which prompts I'm considering; give it a look, and tell me which one(s) you like the most!

As for my next update, I'll post another chapter of HoL, then...I dunno. If I've gotten enough responses from said poll, I might start the winning fic. Otherwise, it'll probably depend on whether I have more inspiration for this or BSRC.

Goodnight everyone!
Repercussions

Chapter Notes

It's heeeere!
Yet another chapter that took me forever to finish, so apologies if the quality is somewhat less than normal; I've been really busy getting ready for the next step in my degree program, and when I had time to write I had to scrounge up some inspiration and motivation. I don't think the chapter is bad or anything, it's just not my best work - which I guess is fine, since we're coming off of the very exciting Stain arc. This chapter is more 'dealing with the fallout', then next chapter is back to our regularly scheduled Intensive, though perhaps with everyone a bit more...on edge. Anyways, let's check back in with our boys, shall we?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“S-sensei...I'm scared...what d-do I do?”
The greenet's voice quivered in fear, only audible because of the silence that pervaded the infirmary.

Now, Shota was no stranger to the burden of responsibility. He'd had to expel dozens of kids with great quirks because they couldn't take heroism seriously. He'd handled tense hostage situations, where one wrong move would spell death for the innocent people caught in the crossfire. Heck, he'd fought off villains to protect his students, knowing he was the only thing standing between them and a reality they weren't ready for yet. But this moment, with two students he'd been so careful nurturing looking to him, depending on him to save them from a looming crisis that no one should ever be faced with, least of all these children who had already suffered through so much?

That weight of responsibility had never felt as present and heavy as it did now.

He felt the gaze of green and heterochromic eyes on him as he took a second to gather his inner strength; the boys were relying on him, after all, so it wouldn't do for him to give anything less than 110% effort. When he was ready (well, as ready as he could be – no one is ever truly ready for something like this), he replied with the most calm, even tone he could muster.

“I know you both are scared, and you have every right to be – but you have me, your classmates, and the entire staff of UA on your side, and we're going to do everything we possibly can to keep you safe, Izuku. So here's what we do: first and foremost, keep training. As much as I'd love to, I can't guarantee this sort of thing won't happen again; if worse comes to worst, you may need to defend yourself until help arrives. It's unfortunate that the villains already have an idea of how your quirk works, but that can't be helped, so instead we're going to focus even more on self-defense. I'd also like to get you equipped with some support gear, stuff that could be used in a pinch.”

Izuku nodded seriously, still noticeably shaken, but doing his best to pull himself together; Shouto was listening intently as well, more determined than ever to guard his friend from this new threat – good, because his closeness to Izuku puts him in the best position to protect him, physically and emotionally.
“Aside from that, I talked with the principal while you were out to get some preventative measures in place; for one, we'll be ramping up security on campus, and there's a good chance we'll be moving the other classes into dorms as well. In other words, we're making this campus as safe as we possibly can for you and the other students. However, it would be unfair to you if we kept you confined to UA, so we won't prohibit you from leaving; that being said, if you must leave campus, you'll be accompanied by several faculty members and pro-heroes, at least until you either graduate or the League of Villains is apprehended. I also want you to promise that if anything even slightly suspicious happens, you'll go to Boundless right away. Lastly, there's this.”

Izuku listened carefully as his teacher explained how they would help keep him safe. The fear was still swirling in his gut, but Aizawa-sensei’s words and Shouchan's reassuring grip on his hand had somewhat mollified the storm of terror that previously ravaged his body.

Then his teacher pulled a tiny black disk out of his pocket, and much of the remaining fear turned to confusion.

Shouchan was the first to ask. “Sensei, what's that?”

The black-haired man held it up between his fingers, allowing the boys to see it better. “I don't know how Nedzu got his hands on one of these so quick, but given the situation, I don't particularly care; it's a discrete, high-end GPS tracker.” Wait, really? Nedzu really does work fast. “It's entirely up to you whether you want to wear it or not, but it would be a huge relief for us if you did; that way, if something does happen, we'll be able to track down your location quickly.”

Izuku looked at the tracker – about the size of a small pill – and considered the offer. It may be a slight invasion of privacy he supposed, but...

If something does happen, I'd regret it if I didn't have it. “...Okay. I'll wear it.”

Aizawa-sensei gave a relieved smile, pleased with his decision. “Thanks. We do respect your need for privacy though, so we won't track it unless we need to.” He held out his hand, and dropped the tracker into Izuku's palm. “You can put it anywhere, though it'd be best to have it hidden from sight, and keep it with you at all times; we don't know when the League may strike, and we don't want them to find out about this either. That also means you can't tell anyone about it, alright?”

He hummed in agreement while contemplating where to put it; someplace hidden, but with me all the time...oh! I know! Reaching up to the chain around his neck, he pulled out the small vial of sand from beneath his jumpsuit (which was just loose enough on his body to hide it's shape). He pulled out the cork with a tiny pop, and dropped the tracker inside before replacing the top; a light shake, and the black disk nestled itself in the colorful sand, perfectly hidden from view.

“Ooh, good thinking. I know you never take that off, and I highly doubt any villains would think to check there.” Shouchan grinned at him, while their teacher nodded in approval.

“Good. Now, can you make Boundless send out the GPS signal? No need for a false alarm just because the signal cut out.”

Izuku rubbed his chin in thought. “...I don't see why not, but I'll probably need to see the receiver.”

“I think we can arrange that just fine.”
Shouto followed his teacher and his best friend to principal Nedzu's office, hesitant to leave Izuku's side for even a moment. He knew he was being 'irrational', as Aizawa-sensei would say, but he couldn't help it; his dearest friend was being targeted by villains, villains who would stop at nothing to steal him away from them! And being so fresh off the first (and hopefully, but probably not, last) attempted kidnapping, of course he was on edge and acting overprotective! Cut him some slack.

When they reached the office, Aizawa-sensei rapped his knuckles on the door. At the call to come in, the trio entered to find Nedzu filling out paperwork in a frenzy; without looking up or slowing down his writing at all, the principal greeted them.

“Ah, Aizawa, Shouto, and Izuku, how wonderful to see you! I must say, last night's...incident has drastically increased my workload for the next several days, so I'm afraid I don't have long to chat. That being said, to what do I owe the pleasure of this impromptu visit?”

In deference to the principal's busyness, Aizawa-sensei got straight to the point. “Izuku agreed to wear the tracker, but he needs to see the receiver so Boundless will recognize it.”

“Oh yes, of course! Hold on for just a moment please.” Nedzu finally put down his pen at that, before rifling through a drawer in his desk. “Hmm...aha! Here we are!” He pulled out a sleek, silver tablet, and slid it across the paper-filled desk; when Izuku picked it up and turned it on, the screen lit up with a map of UA and the surrounding area, a small green dot flashing where Shouto supposed the office must be. The greenet fiddled around with it a bit, checking it out thoroughly. After a couple minutes, he handed it back to the principal.

“All set?” Izuku nodded to their teacher. “Great. Mind doing a test run for us?” The sentence had barely hit Shouto's ears before he watched his best friend vanish right in front of him.

He could feel that same panic from last night rearing it's head, ready to send him into hysterics once again. It's fine, he's in Boundless, he's gonna come right back, he's safe...He tried to reassure himself, knowing in his rational mind that there was no need to worry – but the thing about anxiety is that it takes control away from rationality and gives it to fear.

Clenching his fists, Shouto struggled to take in a deep breath and calm himself down; when that didn't work, he tried distracting himself by looking to the tablet's screen. The once green dot was now purple, though it still hovered over Nedzu's office on the map. See? He's juuuust fine...

He was so focused on the purple dot and his own fear that he didn't notice Aizawa-sensei and Nedzu's concerned gazes, at least until their homeroom teacher spoke up.

“Nedzu, remind me to add therapy for anxiety and potential PTSD to the Pre-Heroics schedule...”

Shouto whipped his head around, finally seeing the worried looks directed at him. “Wha- no, you don't need to do that just for me, I'll get over it soon, it's just...”

Nedzu finished for him. “Still fresh in your mind?” Shouto turned his face away, a silent admission to the mammal's claims. “That's perfectly understandable, given that the attempt happened less than a day ago – but it can't be denied that what you witnessed was quite traumatic, especially since it occurred right after you two narrowly avoided death from the hero killer. It would be negligent on our part if we let you work through this on your own, not to mention hypocritical; when we created Pre-Heroics, we swore that we would do everything in our power to provide help and guidance to every student in the program, including you.” Aizawa-sensei nodded in confirmation while the principal continued. “Besides, it isn't only for you. While it's true you were
the closest to the incident – both in terms of proximity and emotional ties – you were not the only one there; I would be more surprised if some of your fellow pre-heroes weren't traumatized as well! Why, I'm sure even Aizawa-sensei needs to see a therapist after that!”

Said teacher coughed awkwardly, doing his best to maintain his composure. “Yes, well, my own problems aside, Nedzu is right – so try not to beat yourself up over it; you're not the first person to react strongly to a traumatic event, and you won't be the last, so just let yourself cope however you can and let us help you and everyone else handle it, okay?”

Shouto was about to express his gratitude when Izuku popped back into existence next to him, so he settled for a grateful look instead; with the greenet back, Nedzu cleared his throat and forcibly changed the subject.

“Well, it appears as if we're all set – thank you for your cooperation, Izuku, now you and Shouto are excused for the rest of the day. You've both had a long night and morning, so use the afternoon to rest and recuperate as you see fit; now if you'll excuse me, I have quite the workload to get to...”

With the dismissal, Shouto turned to leave the office, before Izuku tugged on his sleeve; those warm, green eyes that he knew so well were shining with sympathy, understanding, and camaraderie. The hand that grabbed his sleeve released it and turned palm-up, a silent invitation.

An invitation Shouto was thankful for, and more than willing to receive.

The crystalline beach was just as comforting as ever, with the horizon a tangerine hue streaked with reds and pinks, while the sky overhead showed a dark night pricked with twinkling specks of light. The two boys were seated on the pier, steaming taiyaki in their hands and bare feet idly dangling in the warm ocean.

Izuku took a bite of the taiyaki, opening his mouth and breathing out to release a cloud of steam; looking close, Shouto could see the minuscule fractals glistening as they floated through the air and dissipated into nothing. They ate in silence for a long while, enjoying each other's company and letting the stress of last night fade from their bodies and minds.

After what must have been an hour, Izuku finally spoke.

“It's almost Demonstration Day, huh...”

“Yep.”

“We're gonna show everyone Cold Conductor, and do that group therapy session...”

“Uh-huh.”

“And you've still gotta talk to that detective about your father...”

“Yeah...”

“......”

“......”

“Shoot, we still have to finish our essays.”

“...Crap.”
Betcha boys forgot about that, didn't ya? Luckily for you, the author didn't >:D I worked hard figuring out those goals, so gosh darn it you're gonna meet 'em!
In other news, while I was trying to scrap together this chapter, there were times where I wanted to write but had no idea where to go with this fic...so I figured, hey - better to write something that's not Escapist or my other mainline fics, than not write at all!
Which means I started the winner of the Finish-able Fic poll: *drumroll* Diary of an HSP! It's got a couple chapters posted already, so check it out if you're interested!
Oh, and I may or may not have a few other surprises in the works...But if I did have a few other fics in progress, I certainly wouldn't tell you which ones they were, or when they'd be posted (honestly I'm not even sure on that one). Though, maybe I would give you a hint if you asked nicely ;)
I swear I'm not trying to overload myself, but...I just have so many ideas...Promise still stands though, I'm not abandoning any of my fics, even if it might take a while for me to update sometimes. I'll keep going on this rotation I've been doing, because it seems to be working out alright, especially for those of you loyal readers keeping up with my other fics! Seriously, you guys are awesome.
Welp, I hope you have a wonderful day, wherever you are!
Um...hi?
It's been too long since I've updated this - in December I suddenly decided to write a Christmas fic and was really busy, then last month I just kinda...couldn't figure out how to start this chapter? But it's finally done! Thank you all for your patience.
But hey, I should have another chapter of Alternate Route out very soon! Plus, I'm fairly certain I'll be writing the Neutral Ending within the next few chapters, so all you fans of designer!Izuku should get hype for that.
Anyways, I won't make you guys wait any longer. Enjoy the chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“and while it is true that hero teams typically have a harder time with stealth, espionage, and reconnaissance missions due to the need to mobilize and coordinate multiple people without compromising themselves, the recent increase of villain activity and criminal organizations has presented a situation where the benefits of hero teams are-”

Shouto pressed a button on the remote, pausing the lecture so he could write more notes. He and Izuku were sitting in their IP desks, hard at work on their essays; it was Thursday evening, which meant they had only one more day to work on them before Demonstration Day on Saturday, and they still needed to put together their presentations – though with Izuku's idea, that part should be relatively quick. Finishing his sentence, he turned to his best friend.

“How's it going, Izuku?”

The floor around the greenet was littered with paper balls, crumpled up and tossed aside whenever he messed up his writing or decided to change something; he sighed, setting his pen down and shaking out his hand. “I think I'm about halfway done, but my fingers are starting to cramp.”

Shouto stretched his arms above his head. “Well, I'm at a good stopping point for now, so why don't we take a break?”

“Yes! Finally!” Izuku jumped up from his seat with a cheer.

The classroom began dissolving away, including the crystalline replica of the principal who'd been reenacting lectures from Izuku's memory, and the tv remote said boy had given him to control it. Carpeted floor gave way to glistening sand (Shouto was wholly unsurprised at that), with the fractal sun shining warm and bright above them; Izuku flopped backwards, only to be caught by a purple woven hammock suspended between two palm trees.

He must've been feeling extra tropical today.

Shouto clambered into his own blue hammock, letting out a cozy hum at the pleasing sensation of sunlight on his skin; a gentle breeze rustled the dark green palm leaves above him, and sent his hammock into a light sway.
He chuckled. “Don't get me too comfortable, I just might fall asleep over here.”

“And what’s wrong with taking a little nap? I can even slow down the flow of time if you want, so you can sleep as long as you want before...”

His best friend trailed off, not wanting to mention Shouto's impending appointment. But not mentioning it wasn't going to make it go away.

“I know, but there's no point putting it off.” As much as I might want to.

Izuku rolled over to face him, sympathy clear on his face and in his voice, “It's okay if you're not ready, Shouchan. We've had a long day, and with everything that happened last night, I know Aizawa-sensei would understand if you rescheduled; plus, you've already passed your SE goal for the week since you talked with Mineta on Tuesday, so you don't need to do this now.”

He sighed. “Yeah, but...this is something I can't put off any longer. It needs to happen.” His fist clenched in determination. “I need to do this.”

Izuku was silent for a moment, as the force behind Shouto's words washed over the pair.

“...Okay. Do you want me there with you? You've supported me through so much, I want to support you in any way I can. Of course, if you want to be alone for it, I'll totally understand-”

He cut off his friend, who was waving his arms frantically as he rambled, with a chuckle.

“Thanks – but I'd really appreciate it if you were with me; besides, you've shared so much about your own past with me, it's only fair for you to hear mine.” He took a deep breath, and stood from the hammock with a stretch. Izuku followed.

It's time.

The meeting was being held in the PH classroom, which had temporarily been converted back into a lounge for the occasion. Funnily enough, the arrangement was nearly identical to that day all those months ago – Shouto and Izuku on the couch, hand in hand; Aizawa-sensei seated across from them, calm and stoic; and principal Nedzu, sipping tea in the corner.

The only differences were the extra chair next to their teacher, and the fact that they weren't here for Izuku.

This meeting was about him.

The tense silence was eventually shattered by a knock on the door. Aizawa-sensei looked to him in wordless question, which Shouto answered with a nod; he nodded back, and stood from his chair to let their visitor in.

“Hello again, boys;” detective Tsukauchi said with a reserved smile, “I wish I was meeting you under better circumstances, but I suppose I'm in the wrong profession for that.” He removed his trenchcoat and fedora before settling down next to Aizawa-sensei.

Shouto gave a quiet greeting, and squeezed Izuku's hand.

“Now before we get started, I thought I'd update you two on some of the...repercussions of last night – we normally don't approve of sharing this kind of information with civilians, but given how
integral you boys were in the whole affair, I think you should know.”

*What? What's going on?*

As much as he'd rather not bring up last night again, he couldn't deny being intrigued; plus, if the *detective* wanted them to know, it must be important. He leaned forward slightly, and from the corner of his eye he could see Izuku also paying rapt attention.

Detective Tsukauchi folded his hands in his lap as he began. “First things first, I'm pleased to report that the Hero Killer has been safely taken into custody, thanks to your efforts; and because you had permission from your teacher to act in self-defense – and especially since Stain turned himself in willingly – you're not in any legal trouble for your actions.”

He hadn't even thought to worry about that before, but hearing it was still relieving.

“That being said, you boys might have an entirely different issue now.”

He looked to Izuku, who shrugged, just as clueless as him. Turning back to the detective, he asked “What do you mean? Is there a problem?”

Tsukauchi glanced away, rubbing the back of his neck. “Well, I wouldn’t say it's a *problem*, per se... Last night, there was someone who managed to film Stain's capture and upload it to the internet – including his rescue of a UA student, his words of encouragement to that student's friend, and his praise of them both, going so far as to call them 'a fine pair of heroes in the making’.” He pulled out a cell phone, tapped a few times, and passed it to them. “Couple that with the fact that this fearsome villain vehemently insisted that his capture be credited to said heroes-in-training, and you boys have been getting a *lot* of attention all day.”

Looking down in curiosity, Shouto saw that the detective had pulled up the mentioned video and scrolled down to the comments.

'no way! A couple kids caught the hero killer???'

'omg i was so worried when that monster flew off with that boy ( 0Д0) but that rescue tho!'

'aww, what he said to the crying boi <3<3<3 im crying too rn'

'Aren't they from UA's Pre-Heroics course? I remember them from the sports festival'

'yah yah, I heard it was some kinda special ed or remedial class, but then peppermint boy won the sports festival and now helped take down stain? doesn't sound very remedial to me'

'Guys I have a cousin in the police force, and he just told me that not only did these two kids hold their own against Stain and save two people including a pro hero, but apparently the green one straight up TALKED HIM DOWN. NONVIOLENTLY. Like, literally convinced the guy to turn himself in. If you ask me, that makes them better than most pros'

'yeah im with stain on this one'

'Can we just stop for a minute and appreciate Eraserhead? He seems like a fantastic teacher ^_^'

'tbh when the one kid was rescued i just kept thinking about how fluffy his hair looked and i lowkey wanna pet it...'

Oookay...apparently some comments were more serious than others.
Though he could confirm that yes, Aizawa-sensei was a fantastic teacher and yes, his best friend's hair was very fluffy – it was kinda weird to see people commenting on it, though.

Shouto scrolled back up to the video, and nearly choked on his own saliva. *Over 5 million views?! This happened less than a day ago!*

The detective took the phone back from Shouto's shaking hand, smiling sympathetically at his dumbstruck expression. “Suffice it to say that anyone who somehow didn't know you two from the sports festival certainly does now, and it's only gonna increase from here; we don't know who leaked the video or the information about your involvement in Stain's capture, but it's too late for us to put a lid on this. This is probably gonna make headlines tomorrow, too.”

He ran his free hand (the one that wasn't firmly wrapped around Izuku's) through his red-and-white hair, struggling to process the fact that any anonymity they still had just flew out the window; Izuku was quiet and still, but Shouto could tell he was far from calm.

Aizawa-sensei's caring gaze and comforting tone helped assuage their panic in the way only he could do – with understanding words and calmly spoken logic. “It can't be helped, but it's not as bad as you're probably thinking; you'll both certainly be the center of attention for a while, but it'll slow down once the story reaches the end of the news cycle and it's not 'news' anymore. Besides, though this might be inconvenient right now, there's a good chance it'll prove to be a good thing in the long run – it's already boosting Pre-Heroics' reputation, and will likely do the same for you two when you become pros.”

Shouto took a deep breath, letting his worries slowly fade from his mind. “Yeah...yeah...this is fine...” He turned to his partner, who gave a small smile and squeezed their joined hands, a silent reassurance that they were in this together.

Once they'd regained their composure, the detective pulled out a notepad and pen, clicking the top to reveal the tip and pressing it to the paper.

“Now, Shouto-kun, I know this will probably be uncomfortable for you, but tell me about your home life and relationship with your father – whenever you're ready.”

He gulped, nerves constricting his throat like a too-tight tie; he knew this was coming, but that didn't make it any easier to share the secrets of his past. Years of pain, of sorrow, of that little voice in his head saying ‘no one will ever believe you' and 'telling will only make it worse', it all pushed against the hope in his chest and tried to force out some kind of denial...

But his best friend brought his other hand over top of their joined ones, and gave him a smile that said everything he needed to hear.

Shouto closed his eyes and let the painful memories out.

“In nearly all of my earliest memories, my mother is crying...”

“You better have some results, Giran.”

Tomura could see the giddiness in the scumbag's eyes as he took a seat next to him at the bar; as much as he hated Giran's smug grin, the fact that he was this happy could only mean he'd not only found something, but something *juicy*.

“Well, I certainly had to pull a few strings – UA's defense is top-notch, and they've been ramping it
up for months now – but you're gonna like what I found out.”

The 'audio only' message on the tv showed that Sensei was listening, but he was letting Tomura run the show for now.

“If I'm gonna like it so much, hurry the f*** up and tell me.” His fingers twitched with the desire to decay something.

Alright, alright – don't get your panties in a twist.” Giran exhaled, a cloud of cigarette smoke dissipating in the stagnant air. “Turns out, that Midoriya kid's pretty messed up – mom died when he was 5, dad fled to America to avoid charges of child neglect, and the kid was missing for 7 years.” He took another puff of his cigarette. “From what I can tell, his enrollment at UA was the first time he'd been seen since he went missing – at least, **officially** seen.”

Well, color him intrigued. “What do you mean, 'officially'?”

“Throughout the time he was gone, though it started a little bit before that, there were reports of a serial shoplifter in the area where the kid lived – a shoplifter who, on the odd occasion he was caught in the act, would vanish before he could be arrested.”

*A shoplifter? Does he mean...?*

Giran smirked. “Such a strange coincidence that the shoplifter hasn't struck since the start of the school year, don'tcha think?”

Tomura's grin probably matched the informant's – kids who'd already broken the law were more likely to continue doing so. “Sounds to me like it's gonna be easier to get him in the party than we thought.”

“Oh, it gets even better.” Giran passed him the stack of papers he'd brought with him, letting him leaf through it while he continued. “It'll cost ya a bit extra, but one of my sources managed to hit the jackpot: a psychological evaluation conducted just before school started. I guess UA's puttin' him through therapy or somethin’, but there's only so much they can do in so little time – and there's a few doozies in there.”

*Social anxiety...PTSD...kleptomania...pyrophobia...phonophobia...*

*We can definitely use these to our advantage!*

By the time Giran left, Tomura was deep in thought. New plans and strategies were already starting to form in his head, the information he'd received providing many of the pieces he'd been missing.

The heroes would be stepping up their game after his failed attempt, but he'd make sure the League was ready for the next raid.

*Perhaps it's time to re-spec the party.*

Chapter End Notes

*tbh, I'm really proud of this chapter's title because there's so many layers to it - the*
lecture at the beginning was made from Izuku's memory, the lounge is back to the way it was, the boys are gonna be remembered for bringing down Stain, Shouto is finally sharing the pain of his childhood, Izuku's past isn't being forgotten (in fact, it may be coming back to haunt him...), and the League is about to literally get re-membered! Plus, the author remembered that Shouto was supposed to meet with Tsukauchi before the end of the intensive... So yeah. Good title.

And hey, would you guys be interested if there was a way to interact with me outside of ao3? I'm not into regular social media (I quit facebook years ago and don't regret it), but I'm open to your suggestions. If I find one I like, I'll create an account and share it with you guys; otherwise, I'm fine with sticking to comments :)

I hope this chapter was satisfactory for the long wait. It shouldn't be as long for the next one, especially since we're at Demonstration Day now and I've been wanting to write that for a while.

That's all from me for now! Byeee~!

End Notes

And so it begins. What did you think?

I know Deku seems out of character, but I did change his childhood significantly, so this will be a very different Deku than in canon.

Next chapter is the "Deku's school life sucks" part of what could be considered the prologue. I don't have a set plan in my head for how this story will go (just a vague sense of where I want it to), so we'll see what happens.

One last thing: I'm a college student at the moment with variable levels of motivation, so unfortunately I can't make any promises of an update schedule or even finishing this, but I'll try my best!

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!