**Summary**

Even in our world, if you have no parents, you rarely have anything else. You're never given a chance to properly control your Quirk; in fact, you're strictly forbidden from using it at all. Basically, feign Quirkless at all costs, even though your Quirk can go off on a whim and get you sent back on the spot. Then you're locked in a cold, dark room for an indiscernible amount of time. You are to never leave the building of your own accord. This means you are forbidden from going to school, confined to the building, and only given the bare minimum of what you have to learn. You are to never complain about the circumstances of any foster or adoptive home you're placed in, even if it means letting horrible things happen to you.

And that, unfortunately, is just the tip of the iceberg.

Cross-posted on Quotev.
They were everywhere. Attacking everything in their line of sight with violent abandon using their Quirks. Several Pro heroes were called in to try holding them off, but the Quirks belonging to these people were charged to massive degrees. Many of them were normally very kind and quiet, but right now they were all acting like wild animals. The Pros were for the most part able to stop them without causing too much collateral damage. Even so, there were still a lot of them that were able to dodge the Pros and keep attacking unafflicted civilians.

Aizawa could barely hold down the one he was already fighting without the burning in his eyes forcing them closed. This guy had claws like nobody's business, and he was flailing them around up by his face and clawing his capture weapon apart. The man bellowed, exposing his Trigger-tainted black tongue as he charged again, swinging his clawed hands like a raging bear. Aizawa managed to dodge, but it sent his opponent flailing in another direction.

Towards a young family with three children.

Aizawa tried to grab the attacker with his half-shredded scarf as the oldest of the children rushed in front, arms out. He wasn't going to be fast enough to reach them in time. "Get out of here!" he shouted, rushing towards them.

"Get back!" the girl shrieked at the same time. Her eyes gave a very subtle shift... and then it happened.
Over the course of a few seconds, the world turned black around Aizawa, the other heroes, and their opponents. The girl thrust out her hands as enormous shapes appeared out from behind her and attacked with a violent vengeance. Aizawa was sure there were only two, but they were almost too fast to see, only pausing as they took down the impromptu villains one by one. The Pros could only watch in awe as their own opponents were all taken out by the creatures. Aizawa was pretty surprised at what he was seeing; had he not seen it first appear, he wouldn't have believed this was a young child helping them. And, after really looking at her, there was something lifeless and horrifying about her unblinking deadpan stare -- two electric indigo rings on black pearls -- as she oversaw the counterattack.

*Is this that little girl's Quirk? Did she consciously activate it? Or did it activate itself without her trying?*

It didn't take long for the battle to be won. All the villains were sprawled on the ground; the family was safe in an alley, though they looked borderline traumatized. The heroes were stumbling to their feet from the aftermath of the battle, and from some getting accidentally knocked aside by the creatures. Cameras were flashing and filming all the while as police and ambulances showed up and began rounding up the unconscious impromptu villains. The creatures stopped, looking suspiciously like a giant humanoid cat and rat, before they disappeared into the family's direction. Then, the little girl who caused it all to happen fell down on her knees.
The cameras were still flashing and recording as she stood up shakily, looking around at all the heroes and cameras as she cradled her head in her dainty hands. She turned to her terrified family and tried to approach them with a shuddering step, but Aizawa saw the mother and crying children back away in fear. It was then that he realized how different the sudden source of aid was to the other members of the family. The mother, father, and twin kids had honey blonde or light brown hair. The girl's hair was too red to be their child; she must be a foster or something. The father quickly marched out, grabbing the girl's skinny forearms with a large hand. His arm turned into shackles on a chain, and she was led away with the family.

Aizawa heard someone's footsteps approach him from behind, and turned to see his blond old friend, Present Mic, looking pretty shaken up. "Hey Shota, you know exactly what was going on with that girl?... You were around here when that happened, right?"

The dark-haired hero nodded before putting some eye drops into his desert-dry eyes. "The girl was protecting her foster family when her eyes changed and those creatures appeared and counterattacked, possibly on instinct. I guess they don't like the way she helped them; some thank-you. She did pretty well in taking out all the villains, even if her Quirk got some of us."

The blond man nodded. "Poor girl. She did so well, too."

Aizawa hummed and turned to the cement and paving trucks being led by Cementoss. "Ishiyama should be able to fix any collateral damage around here, Hizashi; we should get going."

"What were you THINKING?!" the father shouted at the 5-year-old within a golden soundproof barrier the mother created. "Why didn't you tell us you had a Quirk like -- like -- like THAT?!!" The girl whimpered and slunk back to the bedroom wall, violet eyes glittering with frightened tears as she clutched her aching head. "What kind of Quirk was that?!"

"I... I just... I wanted to --"

"Dear, they can't sleep," the woman said as she poked her head into the barrier. "They're having bad dreams about what happened earlier with... her." She pointed to the little girl whose eyes were darting for a means of escape. "They say she used the monsters from straight out of their nightmares. Her display is also all over the evening news, calling her all sorts of... titles." The father growled as his hand became an iron plate, slapping her to the ground with a welt on her cheek.

"You know what? I don't particularly care; you're going back. It doesn't matter about the money we get for fostering you, no one wants to be near a child that can take advantage of them just like a -- a... a demon! Yes, that's it! Your name comes from the word for demon, right? Akuma? Then that's what you are to anyone and everyone! That old place is going to go bankrupt anyway; it might as well have someone to blame."

The woman hurriedly let the barrier down, turning an ice-cold eye at the child as she turned her back. Her husband grabbed the child's wrists and formed his hand into shackles again, as he dragged the crying girl out the door, back to the orphanage. All that left the girl's quavering lips was, "It's Ayuma."

"A horde of rampaging people drugged with Trigger. A group of professional heroes struggling to ward them off. And a Deus Ex Machina thanks to the most unlikely source: a little girl with a powerful Quirk of her own. Here we have Eraser Head and Present Mic to explain exactly what happened. Eraser Head, do you mind starting us off?"
A certain green-haired Quirkless boy looked up from his finished dinner at the TV. *A little girl took out a huge group of bad people?* he thought he heard. He jumped out of his chair and went closer, plopping on the couch to watch and listen.

"Well, I was first fighting this guy with a clawed-hand Quirk when he started heading to this family stuck in the crossfire. The oldest of the three kids stepped out in front of the others when her eyes noticeably changed color, and the world turned dark as she pulled out those creatures from somewhere behind her. She managed to take out the clawed guy and start attacking the others afflicted by Trigger, using them as puppets."

"It was over super fast, too!" Present Mic added. "Those things moved so fast it was hard to see them take out all the villains! Really, though, the girl was protecting her foster family and only got dragged off for it like she was part of the Trigger-caused onslaught! That's not the best thank-you I've heard about. She really saved a lot of people. A bit more of a handle on that Quirk of hers and she'd be a great hero!"

Eraser Head's brow quirked. "That's what I said after the battle. And after closer inspection, the effects my old friend here spoke of were pretty much exact. If she's a foster kid like I think, she hasn't gotten proper Quirk counseling, just like all the other orphans in the system. Even though they should. With control and proper training, she would be a real force to be reckoned with."

"You heard it here first, folks!" the reporter grinned to the camera. "No doubt we'll find a wonderful new hero in this little girl someday; maybe a good rival for Gang Orca if you know what I mean."

"What?" the boy tilted his head at some of the words they said. He flipped a few more channels to see more heroes reacting to the same thing, stopping when he saw All Might on another report with a male commentator. "Hey Mom! It's All Might!"

His mother came in from the laundry room and sat down on the couch next to him, keeping him under her arm. He leaned forward eagerly at seeing the girl's eyes change and the shadowy shapes appeared and attacked, swatting down the villains with record speeds and causing trails of shadow to trail behind them. His eyes glittered when the creatures vanished to show the defeated villains and unharmed heroes, even though he wasn't exactly listening to the reporter.

"I may have not been present at the girl's Quirk's activation, but after seeing it in action against such a multitude of opponents, I am quite impressed," All Might replied to the reporter's questions. "She has a lot of strength, and potential for when she gets older. And my colleagues and I will be waiting eagerly for when she reaches the age to become a hero. Unfortunately, it doesn't seem like her foster father is happy about the fact that her power must've frightened his biological children."

The boy squealed in excitement, but stopped at the last part; he detected a drop in All Might's otherwise cheerful tone. "Mom, what did he mean?"

His mother sighed and pulled him closer. "Izuku... you know what adoption is, right?"

"You mean when a family takes in someone who doesn't have a family of their own?"

"Yes. That girl did something to save the family that took her in. But some people don't take in kids out of love. When that family saw what she could do, it scared them. They might send her back to wherever they picked her up from."

Izuku frowned. "They'll get rid of her? That's so mean!"
His mother nodded. "Yes it is, Izuku; very mean. That poor girl..."
All Might was in the faculty lounge, waiting for all the other teachers to arrive. Nezu called the whole staff in for a surprise faculty meeting around lunchtime that day. He wasn't really sure what it was all about, aside from it being clear Mr. Aizawa and Miss Kayama had something to do with it. He never really found either of them in the school main building to talk to them, so he was left in the dark.

In any case, the principal was making tea for all the staff as they gradually filed in, one by one. All Might even used a mental headcount for anyone who still had yet to come to the meeting. He decided not to listen to the white-furred creatures feeble attempts at small talk.

Recovery Girl, of course... Lunch Rush... Hound Dog... Ectoplasm... Cementoss... and so on it went in his head until finally, Midnight and Eraser Head entered the lounge. Now that's rather strange with Midnight. Wouldn't she normally be here before Cementoss? Whatever this is about must've been a bit of a challenge even for her.

"Fashionably late," the R-rated Heroine sighed as she sat at her typical spot.

"Ah, there you two are," Principal Nezu smiled, handing out cups of tea for the teachers. "I'm glad everyone was able to come here on such short notice. A certain twosome would like to inform all of you of a very recent event that occurred only yesterday afternoon."

The last two teachers to arrive immediately stood up and went to the center of the room. "We had to capture what we believed to be a villain not long after leaving the school," the woman began. "She was battling against Endeavor in the middle of a street. She was displaying incredibly high aggression and figured it'd require more than just a few whips and chains to make her submit. Eraser Head was able to disable her Quirk -- the cause of the whole problem -- which made it relatively easy to do so."

"However, she's apparently been unconscious since her capture, and more intel has shown the attack wasn't her fault," Eraser Head continued. "She wasn't even doing anything villainous, unless you give brushing by a hero without acknowledgement such a title. According to various security cameras, she and Endeavor crossed paths on a sidewalk, and the latter immediately attacked her without even giving her a warning or reason why. And the girl was provoked into attacking for good reason."

He pulled out a holo-projector and set it down for it to show the footage. It showed a chestnut-haired girl walk right by the familiar Flame Hero on patrol, his flames relatively dormant. As soon as she brushed past -- without even giving him a glance -- he spun around, fire suddenly flaring in aggression. The girl turned back to look at him only for a jet of white-hot fire to surge right at her. Unsurprisingly, she started running away into traffic, causing quite a few cars to swerve and stop in a circle around her. Endeavor seemed to have everyone inside the cars leave their vehicles, before setting them all on fire to trap her in.

The girl was obviously scared, and a different camera showed her eyes were turning black around the irises. The girl went entirely still, various knives, blades, and other sharp objects appearing and floating around her in shadowy forms. The blades started flying all over, slicing at the flames and somehow putting them out. Endeavor relit the fiery trap, only compelling the blades to target him instead. He used miniature blasts of fire to vaporize the blades and sent a few other fiery attacks to his minor opponent. But more appeared around the girl, all while still cutting at the flames apart.
Not long after, a dark figure approached the fight. Just when a blade was thrown at the figure, the fire and everything the girl formed had vanished into smoke. The figure that was clearly Eraser Head sent out his capture scarf, grabbing her and sending her to the ground as Endeavor nodded and left the scene. When she tried to stand up and try to flee, a second person walked up to her from behind, tore their sleeve, and caused a wave of thick lilac mist to rush over her and the girl. As soon as the police showed up, preparing to load the unconscious girl into the yawning black void of an iron maiden, the footage cut off, and the teachers sat back down.

Present Mic exploded out of his seat. "SHE'S A LITTLE GIRL! NO OLDER THAN OUR STUDENTS! YOU CAN'T DO THAT TO A KID WHO GOT ATTACKED!! SHE WAS TRYING TO DEFEND HERSELF! BESIDES, ONE WOULD THINK YOU'D KNOW HER, SHOTA!" He got no response from either of the fellow heroes and started pacing around the room, raking his hands through his gel-solidified blond hair. "Yeah, yeah, I know it's been at least ten years since we last saw--"

"Do please calm yourself, Present Mic," Principal Nezu chided. "We were getting to that." The blond man grudgingly sat down, bouncing his foot impatiently. "I'm sure all of you recall the incident ten years ago concerning the little girl who helped nullify a full-scale attack of Trigger-afflicted impromptu villains."

"Oh yeah, the little girl who made top breaking news on almost every TV channel," All Might recalled. "The authorities combed the whole district to find her and help her learn to be a hero, but no one could figure out her location, even in any orphanage or foster home." The other teachers voiced their agreement.

Nezu smiled and nodded, glad they all knew who he was talking about. "The nature of this present girl's mysterious Quirk appears nearly identical to that of the poor child from ten years ago. That is why we have come to believe they are one and the same. Unfortunately, as like many orphans she has no school records, we can only speculate without any knowledge of even her name."

"They have the same hair color, same eye color, and possibly same strong Quirk that runs on instinct and severe emotions," Eraser Head ran over the list. "Believe it or not, as soon as I entered the girl's line of sight, the world went black, and those blades were a lot more real than the footage showed. But, as she's been unconscious, we can't know for sure if she really is the same girl."

"She's been closely examined by authorities while under heavy restraints and even additional sedation since last night," Midnight added. "I should know, as I administered the restraints myself."

That seemed to only get Present Mic even angrier. "THAT'S EVEN WORSE! YOU DON'T THINK SHE'D BE SCARED OUT OF HER SKIN WHEN SHE WAKES UP?!" Half the teachers had to cover their ears from the subsequent sound wave.

"He does have a point," Thirteen agreed. "Even if restraining her is for everyone's safety including her own, overdoing it can make her feel like she was kidnapped. And on top, she may have been injured by Endeavor's attack, and from the fall with the scarf and pavement. It's just like with any incident concerning Trigger: it'd be better to call for an ambulance as opposed to an iron maiden on a victim."

"Besides, if she really is that little heroine who disappeared ten years ago, what happened to make her disappear?" Snipe asked.

"It's a common practice of most orphanages to ban use of all Quirks regardless of potential,"
Recovery Girl pointed out. "Unfortunately, Quirk counseling is very lacking, and most children in the system seldom learn to properly control their abilities. We all know of her potential, but she was forced to seal it away despite a lack of control, which might've caused its volatile nature."

Nezu looked at the time. "And all that locked-away potential is precisely why I'm going to see if she will join U.A. High School," the animal declared. "All in favor?" All the teachers in the room lifted a hand; the principal gladly pulled out a satchel. "It's settled then. The moment of truth, however, will be the girl's choice. Thus concludes the meeting for me; I am off to meet our potential new student!" He jumped from the couch and happily headed out the door. Some of the others also left.

"He still didn't answer my question," Snipe muttered in exasperation.

"Come to think of it, the Police Force was pretty determined to find her," All Might recalled. "Just like with Hawks, I think. But they called it off after only about a week because they couldn't. Recovery Girl, isn't it normal for 'bad kids' in orphanages to be locked in a basement... or something to that effect?"

"Any small dark place with a locked door would do," the nurse replied. "It's most often meant specifically for the children the head of the orphanage especially dislikes and... oh dear..."

That's when the realization hit them, like a convoy of trucks. The girl really could've been found all those years ago. She should've been! But in that one chance she had to leave the foster system as a little girl, she was undergoing some kind of seclusion punishment. Locked in a dark corner of whatever orphanage she was living in, hidden from the entire world and unable to be seen. Because no one looked into every dark nook and cranny, no one could save her and give her the home she needed.

"Dammit," Aizawa slammed his clenched fist against the arm of the couch. "What heroes are we to not be able to save someone who so obviously needed our help?" His mind flashed to the vivid image of that foster father dragging the girl off with his arm turned into restraints. It was a mocking image that just shouted to him in that little girl's high shriek, How could you have not realized until NOW?! I was THAT CLOSE to you AND YOU DIDN'T DO ANYTHING!! "That foster family dragged her from her heroic display in literal shackles and chains. Like a prisoner. She was right there, pleading for our help... And none of us even looked twice at her..."

Midnight also looked pretty guilty, eyes trained on the handcuffs on her costume. "We can only hope that she accepts Nezu's offer to be a student. If she does... maybe we'll be able to help her... and let her show us what she was forced to lock away..."

Shoto stood at the door, unsure of what to do. It was all over the news, not that the man on the other side of the thin barrier would care. The boy knew that he'd normally refrain from confronting him on such a matter, but this was something entirely different from the norm. The entire world was in an uproar about the latest headline story, and what it could mean for a certain hero's reputation.

Before he could fully rethink what he was about to do, the door slid open. The hulking man previously behind it stepped forward as any trace of the boy's previous expression immediately dissolved. Piercing turquoise blue eyes met one of the same color, and one dark gray. A dark red alpha wolf challenged by a red-and-white coywolf; a father faced by his youngest son.

"Can I help you?" the larger man inquired, his glare as fiery as his Quirk.
Shoto fearlessly inclined his head towards the bigger and older man. "Is it true?"

His father's brow furrowed. "Is what true?"

Shoto's eyes narrowed. "...That you randomly attacked someone just yesterday." He got no answer. "It's everywhere on the news, and Principal Nezu himself told me about it. You attacked a girl my age on the street without warning or reason, using a stream of fire. Then you trapped her and forced her to fight you until Mr. Aizawa and Midnight showed up. Not only that, but everyone at U.A. and beyond recognizes her from a certain incident ten years ago. You caused all sorts of damage for many people with no apology. Tell me, Father... why?"

His father's composure barely shifted. "She is a dangerous threat to your success, Shoto. As dangerous as any villain, with a Quirk that someone like her is not fit to have. I know she is that same girl from so long ago; the way she conjured the dark world with her unending wrath was identical to the first time. Her actions clearly admitted that to me on that road; her true nature lies in those blank demon eyes. It's a good thing she's been properly apprehended after running free for so long. She's as troublesome as any other orphan in the world; so be grateful that you aren't one of them."

Shoto was glad he was able to hold his composure. To think his father was insulting kids who already had enough trouble in their lives! They didn't have any biological families who'd take care of them, and were often forced to endure the worst that humanity has to offer; and that's without all the insults! "I dare you to repeat that to those least fortunate in the world," he replied simply before turning on his heel, not once looking back at his stunned father as he walked away.
Meeting Her

My poor head... Where am I?... Why is it so dark?... What happened?... I can't talk... I can barely even move!... Please don't tell me... not her... not the scissors... NOT THE SCISSORS!

There was the sound of a door opening that silenced her splintering mind. "Hey. Are you awake yet?" The voice echoed off walls that were very close. Wherever she was, it wasn't very big; she jerked her head around to get a fix on exactly how close. Someone near her walked up and removed a thick leather blindfold and gag from her face. "Sorry 'bout Midnight overdoing it with the restraints."

She blinked in the bright light directly above the table, where she saw her hands bound with bands of metal that were latched to said table. (They were so tight her wrists were hurting from them.) A chain was tightly wrapped all around her torso and infinity-looped around the ladder-like back of the metal chair she was sitting in. She also felt the cold metal of shackles on her ankles binding her to the bar between the folding chair's front legs. All she had on was a loose gray tunic shirt and shorts that exposed burns on her left arm, and scrapes and minor scratches all over her.

She looked around and saw the small room she was in, and the who else was in the room with her as far as she could see. A regular police detective in a tan long coat was sitting down in a chair with the blindfold and gag put aside, with his hat in front of him on the table and a clipboard and pen on the side. His dark eyes took in her electric indigo irises and long, chestnut red hair.

An officer?! Where am I?! What am I doing here?! Did I do something wrong?! WHAT DID I DO?!!

A pair of cold, metal hands rested on her shoulders. Her mind instantly flashed to a knife pressed against her neck, causing her to instinctively arch her back in silent fright. The man was wreathed in flames, holding an orb of fire in his hands that was growing hotter and glowing brighter by the second. Red, orange, yellow, white, just a hint of blue. Was there a villain close to her? Had she done something wrong? She was just going to get her groceries; that wasn't a crime, was it? The jet of fire was flying straight towards her as she turned around and started running, feeling the searing flames lick hungrily at her T-shirt, side, and arm, causing an image of her body becoming a bonfire to flood her mind.

She heard the heavy footsteps of the man running after her, and the smell of smoke was right behind her before the flames surrounded her. Turning around, the image of the chasing, clawing fire beast seized the entirety of her already frightened mind. Her world was flickering between a circle of flaming cars and a black void riddled with glowing images of people, including the vicious red-orange of the flaming man. She was surrounded, closed in on all sides, her mind flipping to her body practically closing in around her, and the glint off of scissor blades. They all shouted that it was her fault; everything was her fault. They all wanted to stop her from escaping. They wanted to punish her for everything she'd done. They wanted to kill her...

"Hey... Hey...Shh, it's alright... You're alright... Don't be scared..."

The scenes in her mind faded, flickering between a dark void with three glowing silhouettes and the small room with two young men along with the detective. She concentrated on the latter image until it was all she saw. Both of the new boys had dark blue hair and lighter blue eyes, with one wearing glasses by the officer, who was standing from his own chair. The one in front of her -- who was holding her hand in one of his and shaking her shoulder with the other -- seemed to have on a hero costume with metal gauntlets that were probably the same hands she felt on her
The hero sighed in relief. "There you are. You gave us quite a start when your eyes were like that. They change when your Quirk is active, according to Eraser Head and Midnight."

"What do you want?" she demanded, voice shaking as badly as she was. "What did I do?!" Her jagged-edged teeth were clenched, and her eyes were like those of a wild animal caught in a trap.

"Hey, hey, take it easy. We only want to ask you a few things," the hero in front of her said calmly. "Let's start with names. I'm Tensei, -- but you can call me Ingenium -- and over there is my little brother Tenya."

"I'm detective Tsukauchi," the coat-wearing man said cordially as he sat back down. "Nice to meet you."

"Ayuma," she said, trying not to shake so much. "Now why am I here?"

The detective chuckled. "Right to the point. The thing is, on top of what happened yesterday, we'd like to ask you about something that happened ten years ago."

Ayuma's face blanched and her pupils shrank. "If this is about the first time, I swear I didn't mean to! I'm sorry that I hurt so many people!"

Ingenium shared a sad and confused look with his little brother and Tsukauchi. "Ayuma, you didn't intentionally do anything wrong, even back then," the Turbo Hero murmured. "They only chose to restrain you so you wouldn't hurt anyone while you were scared. Besides, what you did back then wasn't taken badly by the public at all. Didn't you ever see it on the news?"

"She should have," Tenya remarked. "It was on every channel but those strictly for children at a specific point in time."

Ayuma looked down at her lap, replying in a small voice, "I never got to; I was never allowed to see it."

The trio's eyes all widened; Tensei looked back at Tsukauchi, who nodded solemnly. Tenya frowned, quickly got out his phone, and pulled up a compilation of some of the news videos concerning the incident, resting it horizontally in her hands so she could watch. The voices of the various reporters and heroes giving her all that praise and encouragement echoed through the tiny room. So much praise and encouragement she never got to hear when she needed it most. She silently watched the footage and interviews, hands shaking. She felt her widening eyes grow hot and filled with tears. Memories of all the negative feedback she ever got flooded her mind.

"Is this really me they're all talking about?" she asked quietly, tears falling from her eyes onto the table. "I only remember people yelling at, punishing, running away from, and just hating me. Blaming me for things going wrong, especially the financial ruin of the home I was always going in and out of. That was the last foster family I ever had, and they called me exactly what my name means. No one wants to be near a child that can become such a demon. That's the word everyone thinks my name is, and that's all I'll ever be."

She looked down at her cuffed hands as Tenya retrieved his phone. "That's why I decided to call my Quirk Nightmare. I don't quite know the details... When I'm especially scared or angry, it activates... I guess it makes me and everyone in my line of sight see this dreamlike void... Then at least one person's worst nightmare is extracted and used in battle... B-but I can never remember..."
I-in any case, my name and Quirk are awful, and my control over the latter is just as bad. It's... it's instinct; we're just barely taught literacy and math, l-let alone how to control our abilities."

Ingenium and Tsukauchi looked heartbroken. "But... Your Quirk is still something to behold," the hero said comfortingly, walking to kneel beside her while keeping a hand on her shoulder. "Please... Listen to the praise you should've heard all your life. You'd no doubt be something incredible as a hero, orphan or not. You're able to easily take out villains without much trouble or even getting hurt."

"It's a very practical Quirk." The door to the room swung open as a small white creature strolled in and hopped up to the table. "Using your opponents' fears against them to fight from a safe distance. And even with your abilities, you still behave far more like a hero than a villain. You truly are incredible, aren't you."

"Principal Nezu, thank you for responding to our call," Tenya bowed in thanks. "This is Ayuma. It turns out Mr. Aizawa was correct in his assumptions concerning ten years ago."

The creature smiled. "You're quite welcome, young Iida." He turned to face the girl in cuffs and pulled out a key ring. "Forgive my rudeness, and that of my fellow hero. I am Nezu, the adorable, fuzzy principal. Now let's see to undoing those chains one of my faculty so crudely bound you with."

He unlocked the cuffs on her wrists, leaped behind the chair to remove the chain, and removed the cuffs on her ankles. She instantly retracted her hands and massaged the bright red rings around her wrists, where the cuffs were digging into her pale skin.

"Much better, don't you think? I deeply apologize for Midnight's overuse of restraints. A very unprofessional bad habit, and she gave in even after you were already disabled and put to sleep."

"Disabled? Put to sleep? Ayuma tried to recall at least the last minute or so before being brought here. All she could remember was becoming herself again, and something grabbed her, sending her to the ground. When she tried to get up and get away, there was that rose-colored mist washing over her before it all went dark.

She was so upset, confused, and scared of what was happening and why. If they didn't have any reason to do all this to me, why did they? she thought bitterly, eyes growing wet again. She felt a soft paw wipe away her tears and looked up to see that Nezu character back up in front of her on the table.

Nezu's paw was still on her cheek. "You know you need control, but like most orphans, you never got any Quirk counseling, correct? That's why you use your Quirk without trying to."

Ayuma started slightly, but nodded. "That fire man attacked, my first reaction was escape, I was trapped in the ring of fire, and then my Quirk activated and took over." Her head lowered as her eyes started burning again. "But I didn't strike the first blow, and I hope subconscious self-defense doesn't count as such. Because I was still captured, chained, and even blindfolded and gagged like any deadly criminal." She sniffled, fighting to hold back her tears as her clenched fists rattled against the table, voice rising to a shrill. "I wouldn't call that justice; it's the same victim-blaming punishment that I've had to put up with forever!"

"We realize that, and wish to make it up to you," the animal before her agreed, his paw patting her head. "I will certainly converse with Midnight concerning the manner after this. In the meantime, I would like to make you a deal, little Ayuma. You can become a student of U.A. and"
receive proper Quirk counseling and education, and we can see the true potential that you've been forced to lock away." Out of a satchel he'd been carrying, he produced some papers and slid it into her line of sight. "All you need to do is fill these out, and we'll gladly welcome you like you deserve."

Ayuma's head shot up with wide eyes, dripping with tears. "You... You will?"

"Of course. Consider it our way of saying thank you for ten years ago, and sorry for Endeavor and Midnight's actions. (I've already spoken with the former's son about the matter.) You defended your foster family back then, even though they clearly rejected thanking you. Many others did the same. You might call your Quirk Nightmare, but those who befriend nightmares are far stronger than some may realize. You proved us of that ten years ago, and I'm sure you'll be able to do it again, many times over." He took the pen from the clipboard and held it out to the teen. "Will you accept?"

Ayuma was silent, searching all of their faces for any sign of a trick; she saw none. She looked down at her hands. They're really letting me in? After all this time? Is this really happening to me? They're really saying that... after everything I've ever had to deal with during my life... I didn't deserve any of it? She remembered all the bits and pieces of when she used her Quirk, and the ways she found herself unable to suppress it. If I can learn to control Nightmare... and remember everything it does... maybe I really will be able to show the world what I can do. What any orphan can do, in fact.

With a determined look, she wiped her eyes, took the pen, and filled out the papers. Everyone smiled around her, sighing in relief. As soon as she was finished, she handed them back. "I don't know if I'll live up to your expectations or image of me, but I can try."

"We wish you the best of luck in U.A.," Tsukauchi told her.

"You'll make many people proud, no doubt," Ingenium grinned.

Tenya nodded in agreement and walked up to her. "I'll hopefully be seeing you in classes soon, Ayuma. As class representative of Hero Class 1-A, I welcome you alongside our principal."

The girl nodded and shook his offered hand, smiling slightly, for the first time in what felt like forever.
The New Student

It was almost a month since Ayuma had taken the offer to enroll in UA's Hero Course, and she's done little more than train and learn. She had gone over the Student Handbook a few times to make sure she was prepared. She already had the uniform and was learning everything she missed out on, and seemed to be catching up fairly easily. She already had her Quirk evaluated and took the placement test, even writing why she wanted to become a hero.

In the essay, she mentioned one thing that was fiercely against her own morals: restrictions on Quirks. While she understood why, she couldn't help feeling bitter that not just anyone could truly show what they were made of; it was the main reason why Quirks overall were banned in the system. The regulations were nearly impossible to enforce anyway, in her opinion. They've tried this hard without their abilities, and their opponents -- far from just the Meta Liberation Army -- have only fought harder with them. Half the policies in the Status Quo indirectly target orphans like her anyway.

Before she was scheduled to have her first day in class, Principal Nezu had helped her in finding her way around the school, and introduced her to the main faculty. Recovery Girl seemed like a very kind parental figure; she said she would've healed the burn on her arm as a welcoming gift had she come earlier. (Her left arm was pretty much permanently scarred at that point.) Lunch-Rush didn't say anything, but he gave her a friendly thumbs-up, which was a promising sign. Thirteen was quite courteous, and gladly offered to help Ayuma with potential use of her Quirk in rescue missions once she had a handle on it.

As Ayuma was going to begin classes next week, she was currently in the guidance office. It was to decide the best course of action concerning the volatile nature of her Quirk, and she knew she would need it. She had been answering little questions about it for about half an hour at this point. She also had to explain her perspective on the incident with the Trigger attack ten years ago, and the more recent event concerning Endeavor attacking her out of nowhere as well as the following fight; neither of which had a lot to go off of. The guidance counselor had been taking notes throughout the visit.

"Given your personal experiences of using your Quirk, I'd say that it's particularly dependent on your subconscious mind," stated the guidance counselor, Hound Dog. "Compare it to an iceberg: the tip of it being conscious, and the larger part underwater being subconscious. With you, the latter is far more active than that of most other people, most likely because of your Quirk. That explains why your memories of your Quirk ever being active are more dream-like than anything else, if even existent to your conscious mind. Subconscious reactions to fear and other strong emotions also have a role, of course; they form the triggers to activate it, which in turn reacts accordingly."

"Since dreams and instincts are both in the lower part of the metaphorical iceberg, that would explain the nature of Nightmare," Ayuma realized, shifting in her chair in the guidance office. "It gives an instant fight-or-flight reaction to anytime when I'm scared or angry; the former being more common. It takes every sudden move not in my line of sight as a false negative, like a small poke in the back taken as a sword run through from behind."

"Good analogies," Hound Dog replied in approval. "Do you have any times when your Quirk didn't activate because of fear? Just as a precaution, of course."

Ayuma tapped her finger, brow furrowed in thought. "Nothing much. I think there was that
time Nightmare activated when some of the older orphans at the home were bullying the little kids. Let's just say one of said bullies was really afraid of dogs. Either way, it was down to the basement afterwards and I hardly remembered a thing." She scratched the back of her head. "I don't like bullies."

"Hmm, that goes without saying. Have you been working on how to activate your Quirk's effects at will? Connect all parts of your mind like those of us with animal Quirks? Possibly concentrate it on a single target as opposed to a large radius?"

"Yes. I've been working with Ectoplasm a fair amount of the time and... What are you doing?"

Hound Dog caught himself at her question; he was chewing on his pen like it was a chew toy. He hurriedly removed it and cleaned it with his other hand. "Pardon me, young Ayuma; a bad habit on my part. Have to be reminded of it all the time." He barked out a nervous laugh that turned into a whimper as he flipped to another page. "But, it seems you have been improving quite well with Ectoplasm's tutelage."

Ayuma nodded in agreement. "The headaches from those sound frequencies and mental exercises are a lingering, but declining issue, and the triggers aren't as touchy as they used to be. But it's still a problem that I can't use the effects of my Quirk at will yet."

"He's taken note of that. He likes to push his students to their limits, but he always makes sure that progress isn't rushed. In truth, he admires the way you once shined under the highest pressure. But he also has the feeling you're not as confident in yourself as he thinks you should be. All of us, in fact."

Again with that incident... "I was five. I've been trying to see what everyone saw in me back then, but it's not that easy. Being constantly berated and blacklisted by the system for those same 'heroics' is a lot of hard memories to get rid of."

"So I've come to realize," Hound Dog mused, catching himself before he could start chewing on his pen again. "In any case, you'll be placed into Class 1-A, where Mr. Aizawa will be able to keep an eye on your power just in case. For the time being, your Heroics class will instead be focused on getting a proper hold of Nightmare. If any other concerns turn up, feel free to drop by my office."

Ayuma nodded in thanks. "I'll keep that in mind."

As soon as the students began trickling into UA, the rumors were in full-swing among most of the students. The supposed demon orphan girl was scheduled to arrive for her first day of class that morning, and they were all on the lookout. All the rumors went on about how she was supposedly huge, ugly, nasty, battle scarred, and with a villainous, uncontrollable Quirk on top. That she had fire for hair and black pearls for eyes. Her Quirk was supposed to make her look even more demonic than she already was, and she could and would attack other students just because they had parents. However, a couple of students didn't even bother.

It all went silent when the students noticed a girl they'd never seen before striding into the school. She was pale, of a fairly average height and maybe slightly underweight. Her unevenly cut chestnut red hair, touched with the color of cinnamon in the morning sun, fluttered down to her lower back, sporting a metallic slate blue ribbon (the tails of the knot obviously peeking out under her hair) with a steel blue star clipped onto it. Her bright indigo eyes shifted around with an almost paranoid look, flinching at almost every little bump as students brushed by each other. Her ankles twisted strangely as she walked in a mild hurry, as if she'd never worn shoes before, much less the
loafers of her uniform.
She may have been the demon of every foster family she had. She may have had a Quirk that let her use people's worst nightmares. But, to the disappointment/relief of those who believed the rumors and the satisfaction of those who didn't, she was nothing like what they thought.

Ayuma weaved through the other students to reach class 1-A. She cautiously knocked at the door a few times before Tenya opened it. "Ah, Ayuma! Glad to see you've made it," he smiled, letting her inside. The teacher was in a yellow sleeping bag at his desk, snoozing away with his face covered in bandages. "Everyone, I hope you welcome our new classmate. I'm sure at least a few of you remember the incident concerning her ten years ago."

"And that my father had attacked her out of nowhere about a month ago," a boy with red and white hair added. (Endeavor's his father?!) Ayuma realized.

"All over the news, both times," a blond-haired boy with a black lightning bolt streak commented. "Quite the reputation, if you ask me."

"She's beautiful!" the smallest of the boys shouted as he leaped towards her. Ayuma's eyes widened and turned black as her surroundings darkened before the class' eyes. Even the boy himself suddenly screamed as one of the other girls grabbed him with her tongue before he landed. Thankfully, before anything could manifest, Ayuma suddenly came back to herself as the darkness disappeared.

That turned out to be the teacher's Quirk, as his eyes glowed red one second and faded to coal black the next. "Everyone, we have a new student. Introduce yourselves, get acquainted, find where she'll be sitting, etc." He flopped over and unzipped his sleeping bag, revealing that a lot more than just his face had been bandaged. He must've gone through quite a lot to be that injured. And he's still here teaching; talk about resilience.

"Nice work, Tsu!" a girl with pink skin and hair cheered, earning a thumbs-up from the frog-like girl as the traumatized boy was slammed back into his seat. She turned back to Ayuma with a grin. "Go on, new girl. Yao-Momo and Midoriya will make sure Mineta doesn't try anything. It's nice to see a gal pal who managed to scare him silent!"

Ayuma nodded in thanks, smiling nervously. "Um... hi, my name is Ayuma," she introduced herself to the heavy silence. "You might, uh, remember me... from around ten years ago... with the whole Trigger -- counterattack -- thing... I hope we'll all be able to, you know... get along..." She saw the students' expressions vary from realization, to pity, to sympathy and empathy; a few were still largely unreadable. One of them only gave her a constant glare, like he wanted to tear her apart no matter what she did. (Shadow: Guess who~!)

"A person's origins are irrelevant," the boy with the bird head said sagely, "it is what one does with their life that determines who they are."

"Very wise words, Tokoyami," Tenya nodded approvingly. "Speaking of whom, Ayuma, you'll be behind him and Todoroki."

The girl nodded and headed through the center of the room to the empty seat behind the bird-headed boy and the boy with red and white hair. After she sat down, the latter turned around. "I'm sorry about what my father did to you, you know. I can't believe he'd hold a grudge against someone like you all this time. You probably weren't even given the opportunity to learn about controlling your Quirk."

Ayuma nodded, ignoring the stab-in-the-eye reminders she'd been repeatedly hearing. "And my Quirk is pretty... touchy..." Is he really Endeavor's son? she asked herself. He hardly acts like
him, not that I'm complaining. With the eye and hair on his left side, I can see it; his right side is
totally different. Quite a case of heterochromia.

The next few hours were spent taking notes and a few conversations with the other students. Most of
them asked about her likes and dislikes and occasionally about her Quirk. She was a bit surprised they were so
eager to learn about Nightmare, and didn't react badly when she answered. Class went on as normal until the
lunch bell finally rang. Mr. Aizawa -- otherwise known as Eraser Head -- reminded the class that gym period
was to be swapped out for something about a Sports Festival. Ayuma took out the pouch containing her
lunch money and was about to head out when the not-so-quiet redhead of the class -- who seemed very close to her in
height -- jumped in front of her. (She failed to avoid a flashing image of getting crushed by a boulder.)

"Eijiro Kirishima! Nice to meet ya!" he flashed her a sharp-toothed grin, thrusting a hand out
to shake. Ayuma hesitantly accepted the gesture. "For a girl who hasn't gone to school before, you
look like someone who'd fit right in around here. You need any help getting to the cafeteria? Or
want a tour of the school?"

Ayuma smiled apologetically. "I don't really need to; Principal Nezu showed me around a
while ago. I can find my way to the cafeteria just fine."

"Oh well. We might as well head off together since everyone else is heading that way," he
shrugged. "Follow -- WHOA!" he was suddenly yanked from the doorway by the arm. When
Ayuma looked out the door, she got grabbed and pulled into a chest.

"Hey there," the guy with the black bolt in his hair greeted. "Denki Kaminari's the name,
checking out a pretty girl like you is the game. You know, the rest of the school thought we'd get a
demon, but it turns out we got an angel instead."

Ayuma blinked at the boy's half-lidded eyes and crooked grin. He had her hand in one of his
pulled back with her other hand on his shoulder. His other hand was on her waist, and his
posture over her was bending her spine backwards. Realizing the position she was in with him,
panic rose in her chest and formed the dark void and black eyes again. He was soon short circuiting
from a small, dark thundercloud and dropped to the floor, brain-dead. She returned to normal, saw
her latest victim, and panicked as she hurried away in the opposite direction, stumbling over her
own feet more than she already was.

"Hey! Ayuma, wait up!" Kirishima called out, picking himself off the wall and scrambling
after her. He managed to catch up, grab her shoulder and make her slow down; they were already
in the cafeteria at that point. As soon as he walked in front of her, he almost thought he saw someone
else entirely for a second there. "I'm sorry about Kaminari pulling that on you. I should've warned
you he acts like that around pretty girls. Not as bad as Mineta, but he's a huge flirt. Nice work in
getting him off, though; Jiro's sure to get a kick out of it."

"IIIINCOMIIIIIING!" a new voice bellowed. Kirishima looked behind them, eyes widening.
Ayuma followed his gaze to see a blur. Which was someone running straight toward them both!

Ayuma reacted in a split second, shoving Kirishima aside (accidentally into a table) before the
running student knocked her down on her side. The collision with her assailant, whose body was
hard as steel, gave her an instant image of being hit by a truck.

"Testtetsutsu!" a girl's voice scolded. Ayuma turned over to see a girl with fiery orange hair. In
the other direction was a silver-haired guy rushing to the lunchline, not even looking back once.
The ginger sighed, helping Ayuma to her feet as the latter flinched from pain in her rib cage. "I'm
so sorry about him," the green-eyed student apologized. "He should've been looking where he was
"Kendo, are you apologizing to someone from Class 1-A?" a blond-haired boy asked, sliding into the conversation and getting up in Ayuma's face. Her mind started to immediately flash a warning that he was a psycho. Always one with a weapon closeby, as if his mind weren't enough of one already. "Yes, this one is very peculiar, but 1-A is just a bunch of overpowered idiots. Why apologize when Tetsutetsu was just doing what anyone should to a girl like you?"

That sounded a little too similar to all the orphan-related taunts Ayuma heard over her lifetime. Thankfully, before he could continue, the green-eyed ginger karate-chopped the back of his neck, sending him crumbling silently to the floor. She dragged his unconscious form away by the collar as she said, "Sorry again!"

At seeing how quickly the guy was dealt with, Ayuma sighed in relief and went to the lunchline, ignoring the pain. After getting her lunch, she went to her class' tables, trying to decide where to sit. The boy with the tail flagged her down to sit between him and the boy named Tokoyami. "Mashirao Ojiro. We saw what happened with those class 1-B students while we were at the lunchline; you alright?"

Ayuma nodded. "The girl wasn't as bad as the boys; she apologized for both of them... I think the blond guy said her name was... Kendo, I believe?... Kirishima and Kaminari probably hate me now... after I got one to short circuit with my Quirk, and shoved the other into a table."

"They're hardly like that; I'm sure you had a good reason to punish Kaminari," Tokoyami commented. "Speaking of which, you did quite well getting Kirishima away from that other student. Have you met Dark Shadow?" Ayuma shook her head while she was eating.

A dark violet creature sprouted from his back, hovering around the girl and scanning her with bright yellow eyes. "Hey! I remember you! The girl that two of our teachers talked about back when we were little guys!"

Ayuma smiled slightly, patting its head. "So you're Tokoyami's Quirk? I've never heard of anyone harboring a separate entity as a Quirk before."

"We haven't really heard of a Quirk like yours either," Ojiro countered. "Mr. Aizawa also warned us that you were never given a chance to learn to control it."

Ayuma hummed and nodded solemnly. "...Such is an orphan's life, regardless of their true potential. But I-I've been taking remedial lessons, to learn to control it. At least at this point, it doesn't go off as easily as before, thankfully. But I'm now training so I can use it on command."

"You have trouble controlling your Quirk, too?" the green-haired boy she remembered as Midoriya asked her, a girl with warm brown hair and eyes beside him. Ayuma nodded, and he smiled as he and the other girl sat down. "I know how that feels. My Quirk has some pretty bad backlash that I'm having a hard time getting over. Izuku Midoriya, the guy who sorta beats himself up in fights." He laughed nervously at his own joke.

Ayuma nodded in understanding. "By the way, i-is that Mineta person normally such, um, a..."

"Yup," the girl nodded grimly. "Unfortunately. He's a real headache for all of us, and he usually gets himself knocked around for it. I'm Ochaco Uraraka, by the way; and we all heard your name is Ayuma. You don't need to worry, 'cause we think you'll do great here!"
Ayuma gave them both a smile. "Yeah... I probably will."
Sports Festival

At the end of class, Ayuma took a look at the clock. She was going to have to hurry to get to Ectoplasm's Quirk control lessons. She was pretty excited about this Sports Festival, but also a little nervous because of how it reminded her about her Quirk. And her lack of control of it, even though she was getting a handle on it now. She was packing her stuff when she heard voices outside the door, and saw what looked like a lot of people. She sped up with packing her things and approached the human barricade, not paying attention to what they were saying.

"Excuse me, I need to get through if you don't mind," she said nervously to the crowd. "I-I don't want to be late to my extra lessons." Surprisingly, the students gave somewhat of an opening, just enough for someone her size to squeeze through. She sighed in relief and went right through it, keeping her head down so as not to draw attention.

Only to almost run headfirst into the steamroller (according to her brain) that was someone's chest.

She squeaked in alarm and immediately stumbled back before any contact was made, looking up at the guy she almost ran into. She obviously didn't quite catch his attention, thankfully, as he was glaring down at the explosion boy she tried to slip past. He was a little taller than her, with messy, flared blue-violet hair and purple eyes lined by the familiar dark circles of nightmare-ridden sleep. He was asking the temperamental blond boy, "Is everyone in the Hero Course delusional or just you?"

Ayuma looked back at her new classmates vigorously shaking their heads. Tenya and Kirishima were trying to tell the blond boy -- Bakugo, apparently -- to stand down. "D-don't worry," she tried to break in. "Um, it's mostly just --"

"How sad to come here and find a bunch of egomaniacs..." The other students around him started glaring down at them all.

"Wait! I-I promise you, he's the only one!" Ayuma piped up. "The -- the rest of the class are completely different from him. As far as I know... It's just him that's mean! Ask anyone!" Everyone in Class 1-A aside from Bakugo voiced their sincere agreement, many of which also audibly thanking her.

The violet-haired boy looked at the rest of the class, then back to Ayuma with an odd expression. Surprisingly, despite the fierce determination behind his tired eyes, her mind didn't make up any stupid worst-case scenario. "Really... If so, than you should make sure that your not-so-courteous classmate is on a tight leash. Since it looked like you had somewhere to go, and since you're probably new, you can be on your way."

Ayuma was a bit surprised that he was letting her go as he turned to the other students, who quickly cleared a path. Almost like... they were afraid of him. "Thank you. I -- I hope to see you at the festival." She entered the crowd of students in front of the classroom. "I wouldn't be surprised if you're a better person than everyone else thinks you are, she thought as she passed by him.

She managed to get through the crowd as soon as the guy who probably mowed her down in lunch -- Tetsutetsu, according to Kendo at lunch -- started shouting. She successfully made it to the PE ground where Ectoplasm was waiting. "I hope you have prepared yourself for today's training, even though it's your first day of classes," he said in his warped voice.
"I have, in any way I could," Ayuma replied. "Sound frequencies, mental exercises; all without a problem. But I still have to learn to use Nightmare without a prior action for it to react to. It went off a couple of times today like that."

Ectoplasm nodded in understanding. "Agreed. You need to discover how you can use this new connection between the different parts of your mind. It's already had an effect on you catching up with your classmates in schoolwork. You can begin by trying to summon the dark landscape that appears in your time of need."

Ayuma nodded. Alright. Just the void. I just need to form the void and get him to see it.

She closed her eyes and concentrated on what she could remember about it. The world going still to her senses. Voices around her disappearing completely. She opened her ultramarine orbs, visualizing the world turning into the familiar black void, Ectoplasm a glowing image in front of her...

Nothing.

She tried again, going through the whole process. Nothing again. "Come on..."

"Perhaps there is another way to perform the transformation," the cloaked hero suggested. "Was there ever a way that supposedly showed that your Quirk was soon to appear?"

That had Ayuma remember something. Of course! The eyes! I've always been told the whites of my eyes turned black when my Quirk activated. Tensei even told me that my eyes changed when I was remembering fleeing from Endeavor! The only reason it didn't happen was those Quirk-blocking cuffs! She closed her eyes and concentrated on the image of what her eyes would look like. A pair of glowing, electric indigo rings in the midst of two black expanses. The darkness surrounding her as every part of her nervous system buzzed with its strength, despite her skin appearing a deathly pallor in the midst of the black void formed by her Quirk.

Her vivid imagination and the picture in her mind would probably make it so anyone who saw it wouldn't be able to sleep again. On that thought, a part of her mind wandered to one of her memories concerning the headmistress of the foster home. She'd always say it when one of us had a bad dream. You can't possibly have any nightmares, if you can't sleep. Her own eyes opened with black sclerae, her surroundings a black landscape. The familiar stillness surrounded her as she faced the pale blue image that was Ectoplasm.

"Well done," the math teacher congratulated. "Now to release the energy safely."

He watched as the dark landscape wavered slightly around them. After a few seconds of tense concentration, the darkness disappeared into its creator like a vacuum. Her eyes were back to normal as soon as she blinked. "I guess that means I managed to get you to see it," she commented. "You were a glowing silhouette in front of me."

"Indeed," Ectoplasm replied. "Since you are now able to summon Nightmare's beginning power, and see this starscape on your own, you will most likely be able to do more on your own without my help. You are allowed to leave to continue training independently."

Ayuma nodded and got her things before she headed home, ready to test her newfound strength and prepare for the festival.

The remaining days until the festival went by quicker than Ayuma had thought, and so did her training with Ectoplasm and in the actual Hero classes. As soon as she properly got ahold of
Nightmare, she was able to put up a fight and work through quite a few sparring matches with her classmates. All Might was very impressed with how well she could utilize her Quirk in battle, turning her classmates' worst fears against them.

At the day of the festival, everyone spectating was talking about the different classes. Some mentioned Class 1-A being attacked someplace called the USJ (where Mr. Aizawa got all his injuries). Some of them also heard about the "Mini-Vigilante" making a comeback as another of the first-years more recently enrolled (obviously Ayuma realized that to be her).

In the locker room, everyone including Ayuma had on their gym uniforms. Mina seemed pretty upset she couldn't wear her hero costume. (Ayuma sent her requests for that a while ago) but Ojiro pointed out the school was simply keeping it fair. She couldn't really complain, since she didn't really have much to "amplify" her abilities aside from something to improve the headaches Nightmare tends to cause. They usually didn't go far beyond a dull throb, but they got really bad after using it too long and would be joined by a dizzy spell or two. Ayuma wanted her costume to have some sort of compression on pressure points that could ease the headaches and dizziness.

However, she wasn't really paying attention to what everyone else was talking about. She was paying more of that to the huge red blotches on her left arm that her sleeve almost entirely covered, if not left a sliver exposed. She barely kept it out of sight of her classmates. When it was time to go make their debut, Ayuma rushed to join her classmates. She followed them through the passage and into the sunlight. Hello, world; guess who's making a comeback.

After Class 1-A filed onto the field, all the other classes soon followed. The determined violet-haired boy was at the forefront of the otherwise nervous students of General Studies. Present Mic was running his mouth talking about all the different classes, A-K. He certainly talked up 1-A quite a bit, as far as she could hear over the crowds in the stands.

At the podium was a woman with a cat-o'-nine-tails, someone Ayuma recognized from her "capture." Midnight. She emits a sleeping gas from her body, which is otherwise covered by that bodysuit she wears. The bodysuit is made of fabric that tears easily for when she has to use it. They must've let her be referee in case anyone gets rowdy in the festival. No wonder she's considered a mature-content hero, especially with her choice of costume.

"Is that really appropriate apparel for a high school game?" Tokoyami inquired in disgust from beside her. Auma also noticed Mineta giving a thumbs-up. Of course he would think so.

"I'm not sure... but I doubt it..." Ayuma replied.

Midnight made it very clear it was time to start things off. "Silence, everyone!" CRACK! "And for the student pledge, we have... Katsuki Bakugo!"

"He's the first-year rep?" Midoriya asked shakily.

"I guess that hothead did finish first in the Entrance Test."

A girl from General Studies sighed. "Only for the Hero Course exams."

"Hey... W-we don't have anything against the rest of you guys," Ayuma told the glaring students. "Some of us would rather not have people after us for being something we're not."

As Bakugo was at the mic, everyone was deathly quiet to hear the ash blond boy. "I just want to say... I'm gonna win." An uproar ensued. "Not my fault the rest of you are just stepping stones to
my victory." He silently walked down the podium, ignoring Tenya's enraged stuttering. His crimson eyes were locked on Ayuma. "Especially you. I don't really care that your first show of your Quirk was taking out a bunch of tipped-off villains. Or that you were picked off the streets and dropped into our class because of that and Icy-Hot's father. I'll send you and anyone like you right back to the dusty old building you crawled out of."

Ayuma couldn't tell, but she almost thought she saw the violet-haired boy turn his full attention to them. Despite the looming image of Bakugo throwing his Quirk's full strength against her vitals, she put on a brave face as she replied, "I'd like to see you try." Bakugo scoffed and walked away.

"Without further ado, it's time for us to get started!" Midnight announced. "This is where you begin feeling the pain..." a spinning slot appeared behind her, stopping at "Obstacle Race."

"Ta-da! All eleven classes will participate in this treacherous contest. The track is four kilometers around the outside of the stadium. I don't want to restrain anyone, at least in this game. As long as you don't leave the course, you're free to do whatever your heart desires. Now then, take your places, contestants!"

Everyone prepared to start at the gate. Ayuma was already forming the dark void as the three lights slowly went out, one by one. Once the last one went out, "Begin!"

All the white silhouettes of the students rushed into the tunnel. Ayuma immediately formed a large bird from someone in the Support course and shot upward and out, feeling an icy breeze underneath as Todoroki surged forward. She and quite a few of their classmates soon followed. Just when she thought she was in the clear, she was almost knocked out of the air by the arm of a robot. She swooped down and let down the bird to land, getting a good look at the size of those things. Did everyone have to fight these monstrosities before?!

As soon as one of the robots lunged, Ayuma pivoted to dodge. She nimbly slid under the arm, just before it dropped on her, running as fast as she could as Todoroki sent out a wall of ice she barely dodged. She was quick to catch up with him, even though he didn't look back or notice how close she was behind him on the side, running like a roadrunner.

This whole thing is made for someone like me; it's the life of any homeless orphan. Nowhere to stay, anywhere to run, everything to run from, and any place to hide. Never having the time to hesitate. Making friends but never truly trusting anyone. Because that's the only way to survive.

After a while, Ayuma realized she'd be able to make it through the next obstacle without losing ground thanks to not using her Quirk that much, given she was seeing something else up ahead. She formed the bird again and soared over a huge area filled with stone spires linked with wires over a deep pit, ignoring the headache building in her skull. That pit would mean a pretty nasty fall if anyone were to lose their footing, even if there was something soft to land on at the bottom. But then again, it was too dark to see.

She saw Todoroki skating along the cables on trails of ice; a very clever move on his part, but that meant she'd have to avoid any wires he went on if her wings really faltered. As soon as she was just a little ways away from solid ground on the other side of the canyon, her head started to really pound and her vision wavered with black spots. She released the bird and dropped to the ground when she realized she misjudged the distance. She grabbed the edge of the final platform with the abyss looming underneath, and the surge of fear mustered just enough energy to get back onto the platform and resume running.

Ayuma soon joined Endeavor's son on the other side of the canyon obstacle and followed him along the next turn, once again running on her own power. She stopped when she noticed him
walking slower than normal on a field littered with mounds of dirt. Signs were along the outer edge of the field saying, "Danger! Mines!" A lot of mounds of dirt were in the field, so she'd just have to be able to make sure not to step on any of them. She began carefully navigating the minefield, stepping between the mines and getting a feel for the distance between each mine. At least she could get a handle of her stopping distance before picking up speed. She'd only step on any mines if she knew the right place to step to land back on her feet.

It wasn't long before the other contestants started to catch up, and explosions started going off left and right. Bakugo even caught up to Todoroki without touching the ground, ensuing an on-the-fly fight between the two. She was able to pick up a little speed and start catching up, but then heard a huge KA-BOOOOM! behind her. She glanced back to see Midoriya riding off what looked like the combined concussive waves of several mines going off simultaneously. Todoroki and Bakugo stopped and stared as she ran past them, Midoriya right beside her.

Eventually, the green-haired boy started losing speed allowing Ayuma to pull ahead. Todoroki and Bakugo caught up fast and dashed past her, the former leaving an ice path for her to use as they shot ahead. Sliding on the ice, Ayuma slid off onto the outer edge of a mound and was blown forward, barely able to steady herself and keep going. At least she was still running after the landing, and was closing the distance fast. Somehow, Midoriya got past the other two boys and was going strong. She was able to leap into the tunnel as she closed in on the finish line, past the other two, right on Midoriya's tail...

"IZUKU MIDORIYA IS OUR CHAMPION!" Present Mic announced.

Ayuma slid to a stop not far behind, trying to catch her breath as the others started filing in. She and Midoriya locked eyes, and she gave a good-natured smile.

"As for the girl who was so hot on his heels, I'm sure a lot of you remember a certain little heroine from yester-years," Present Mic continued. "Say hello to Ayuma! Anyone who's seen her first display ten years ago would recognize her pretty easily, as well as her Quirk. As the other contestants come in one after another, let's give a round of applause for all of them while we prepare the results." The crowd roared with cheers as she hesitantly waved at one of the cameras.

"Good work out there, Ayuma," Tokoyami congratulated. "Your powers were certainly impressive. Perhaps at some point you'll even have more to show." Ayuma nodded in agreement.

The next battle was going to be something called a Cavalry Battle. The first 43 students will form groups, each with a different point value depending on the members' placements in the race. Unfortunately, Midoriya had an especially high bounty on his head: 10 million. And of course Midnight called it "a chance for those at the bottom to overthrow the top!"
Midnight explained the rules of the Cavalry Battle. The Velcro-attached headbands will contain the point values of each team. The team leader was to never touch the ground or face disqualification. And they were given fifteen minutes to pick out all the teams. She knew most of her classmates' Quirks, but it was pretty difficult for her to decide whether she was to be a rider or a horse for a team. *From the top of the line to the bottom of the barrel. What am I supposed to do if my Quirk is almost useless in something like this?*

"Hey, it's you," someone got her attention. She turned to see the violet haired boy from before approaching her. "Sorry we never got each other's names back when you first covered for your classmate. Hitoshi Shinso." He held out a hand to shake. "Also, congrats on getting second place."

The purple-eyed girl accepted the handshake. "I-I'm Ayuma, nice to meet y--"

Before she could say anything else, her mind went all fuzzy, her body still as stone. She vaguely saw Shinso smile. *Join my team... Ayuma.*

She heard him through the haze, clear as day. She couldn't move her body because he had a hold of her conscious mind. Her subconscious was slipping into raw panic to get free. It was flipping between fight and flight, back and forth, over and over, faster than the speed of light. She wasn't following him, or even moving an inch. She couldn't hear anything, but she saw him look confused at how she wasn't following his command.

An electric sensation surged through the rest of her brain, through every nerve in her body and burning behind her eyes. She saw the void forming around them. She barely heard him crying out in pain, and felt tears leaking from her wide-open eyes, but neither of them were able to let go. The brain fog exploded out of Ayuma's head with her heart racing in her chest as he managed to slip his hand out of her tight grip. She was reeling back as a monstrous, puppet-like creature appeared and charged at his indigo silhouette. Ayuma's vision was blotched with dark spots and blurred as she lost her balance, the world tilting sideways as she dropped into nothingness.

Shinso couldn't believe what just happened. One minute, he was "asking" this girl to join his team because he thought it could use one more horse. All was going on as normal: he asked her something, she responded, he gently took control of her just because he was that nice. But in the next ten-to-thirty seconds, something inside her turned the whites of her eyes black and tightened her grip as that void just appeared. Her nails and vice-grip digging into his hand was surprisingly painful. Then she attacked with the monster doll he always saw in his worst dreams; that thing barely missed swatting him before the girl behind it dropped, and the creature and void vanished.

*What... just... happened?*

Everyone was watching him and Ayuma, the latter unconscious on the ground. He barely registered Midnight saying Ayuma was being DQ'ed for trying to attack another student before the game even began. Medic bots took her away on a stretcher to Recovery Girl, and he couldn't get his eyes off her until she vanished from view.

And he knew it was his fault. *He* took control of her only for something in her to fight back like that. *He* was the reason why she suddenly tried crushing his hand and attacked him with a figure straight from his nightmares. It was like a part of her was attacking him for her, at the cost of draining all of her mental and physical strength. And her blank expression as she cried through
the mind control seconds before it left her... that was an eerie image he'll never be able to get rid of.

But he couldn't let that keep him down for the whole festival. She'll be fine. We just took each other by surprise not knowing our Quirks would interact like that. Even so, the last time I saw her Quirk was on a screen; back then, when all the students standing here were just kids. She was probably running on instincts like she was just now, and I caused it... Maybe I can apologize to her about it later...

Ayuma woke with a start, hissing in pain and cradling her head with one hand. Her skull was pounding like a drum. What happened back there?

She felt someone kiss her other temple, causing the pain to almost completely disappear. She looked over to see Recovery Girl standing at her bedside. "Took you long enough to wake up, dear."

Ayuma looked around, seeing she was in a hospital bed in the infirmary. "...What happened to me?"

"That boy's brainwashing Quirk caused your own Quirk to react on him at the cost of yourself," the nurse explained.

"You mean Shinso?... Brainwashing... I didn't know he had a Quirk like that... He probably didn't know mine, either..."

Recovery Girl hummed in agreement. "After the footage of the event was more closely analyzed, I thought he was going to be disqualified and you'd be placed back in the competition. Unfortunately since neither of you knew your Quirks would react in such a way, and you're too strained to fight anyways, things will have to stay the same. As long as you take it easy, -- and possibly get something in your belly at some point before the festival ends -- you can return to your classmates and watch the rest of the competition. Young Izuku is battling against that same boy, and I believe you'll want to see it."

Ayuma nodded and got out of bed. She went over to the stands where the rest of her class was sitting, but staying in the back so none of them saw her. Sure enough, she recognized Midoriya and Shinso down on the battlefield, and the former was walking to the edge until he suddenly stopped.

"What's this?! Midoriya stopped just in time!" She heard Present Mic cry over the loudspeakers. Everybody started cheering, even guys like Tenya and Ojiro.

He must've used his brainwashing on Midoriya to win the match, but he broke through it before he could step out of bounds. Shinso probably isn't the best when it comes to physical fighting, and his Quirk definitely isn't physically based. It's a mind-based Quirk... Just like mine...

She spun around and took off down the corridors, heading to where she'd be able to hear anything said in the battle over the crowd. Of course Shinso and I would be the same, and not just with our eyes. Our Quirks are based around the human brain, and we'd be physically useless without them. The main differences are that Nightmare focuses on people's subconscious fears. His involves controlling the conscious minds of others and enforcing his will upon them.

"How'd you DO THAT?! There he is."

She made a sharp turn and headed just up to the entrance. No one would be able to see her, but she could hear everything either of them said. She saw a skinny blond man who looked much like
All Might in the corridor where Midoriya must've come out. She also noticed her classmate's fingers to be very discolored.

"Come on, say something," Shinso beckoned to the green haired boy. "I didn't know you had so much power in your fingers. I'm kind of jealous of you." Midoriya charged at him, not saying a thing. "Thanks to the way my Quirk works I've always been at a big disadvantage. But someone as blessed as you wouldn't understand that! You're lucky enough to have a HEROIC Quirk! IT'LL BE SO EASY FOR YOU TO REACH YOUR GOAL!"

As Midoriya started pushing him out of bounds, Shinso started fighting back. Ayuma was shaking where she stood, seeing herself in him all the more. In all the times her Quirk didn't work for her, and all those times people hated her for what she could do. He was saying what she always wanted to, to all those people who doubted her moral standing and her Quirk.

*If only he had someone to show him his Quirk could be useful as a hero. If only he was able to see it like I could.* She felt tears fall from her eyes as Midoriya lifted Shinso over his head and shoulder-threw him out of bounds, right on his spine. She couldn't even move out of the dark to help him.

"And with that expertly-performed throw, we have our first victim of the finals! Class 1-A's Izuku Midoriya!"

Present Mic and the crowd's cheering snapped Ayuma out of her daze. She rushed out to help Shinso stand up, so he could at least face his opponent one more time with what was left of his dignity, in spite of him wincing at the pain from his spine.

"Why do you want to be a hero?" Midoriya finally asked. "What's driving you?"

Shinso turned his back to the boy he lost to and started going down the stairs. "You can't help the things your heart longs for." He barely was able to meet Ayuma's eyes as he approached her on the grass. "I'm sorry... about before..."

Ayuma waved it off. "Don't worry about that... It's my fault anyway. Besides, I think I know where you're coming from... You want to show them that a person's Quirk doesn't make them a villain or a hero. You want to be somebody that they don't have to be afraid of. You want people to see who you really are, not what your Quirk makes you out to be."

Shinso looked up at her in shock. "You... How did you know?"

Ayuma smiled sadly at the familiar look of shock on his face. "How do you think people would treat someone with a Quirk based on nightmares they can't control?"

Realization and desperate hope crossed his face. "Does that mean...?" Ayuma only nodded, and he looked like he was about to cry.

"You were awesome out there, Shinso!" one of the other General Studies students called out to him, drawing their attention.

"We're proud of you!" the girl from the starting ceremony waved. Some of his other classmates joined in.

"You didn't tell us you were that good!"

"Yeah! You're the star of our program!"
"I can't believe you put up such a great fight against the dude who was in first place earlier!"

"Listen to them!" One of the other classmates was gesturing up to the Pro Heroes. Ayuma put a hand on his shoulder and pointed up to them as they also voiced their good words for him.

"With a Quirk like that, it would be very simple to capture dangerous villains. Wish I had it..."

"I can't believe they stuck him in General Studies. Ugh, those idiots."

"Well, there are a ton of applicants each year. Guess sometimes people slip through the cracks."

"If only he had more combat experience."

"Yeah, I bet he would've dominated. What a waste."

The grinning classmate turned back to the two on the green. "Shinso, you hear that? It's great; they think you're incredible!"

Shinso was pretty taken aback at all the praise. "When I was little, I was deaf to praise like this," Ayuma murmured. "The kind of praise that proves that heroes can come from people like you and me."

Shinso hummed and smiled, looking back to Midoriya. "Depending on the results, they might transfer people into the Hero Course. Remember that. Even if it didn't work out this time, I'm not giving up. I'll get onto the Hero track; get certified. And then, I'll become a better Pro than any of you." He looked down at Ayuma with a different look in his eyes, as if to say, Well, maybe you will be around the same as me.

She looked at Midoriya as he agreed before he froze, eyes blank. She stifled a giggle as Shinso chuckled. "You know, usually people tense up whenever they talk to me. If you're not on guard, someone is going to defeat you. So be careful." He let him go. "You better not lose and make me look bad."

"I won't!" Midoriya got brainwashed again, and Shinso was in silent disbelief.

Ayuma couldn't help laughing at the scene, and Shinso cracked a smile at her reaction. "Midoriya, you should go see Recovery Girl about your fingers."

Shinso let the poor guy go, and Midoriya nodded with an embarrassed expression before heading off. After the victor was gone, he and Ayuma went back into the corridors. "So how exactly does your Quirk actually work?"

"When Nightmare is active, it creates that void you saw," Ayuma explained. "I can then temporarily extract someone's worst subconscious fear and use it to fight. When you tried to take control of me, Nightmare reacted to get you out. Since the nervous system is the source of my Quirk, that must've been why my hand constricted without trying to. It was at the expense of draining all the stamina I had, too... with the overkill of attacking you with that puppet thing. You're lucky you weren't hurt because I was so exhausted, and reeling from just getting out from under your control."

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Shinso nodded. "No wonder you didn't obey my commands under my control. Your Quirk combined with mine would make us a pretty good team if we ever had to work together." They both stopped at the fork in the corridors where their respective classes were going to be. "Might as
"Well, I know I'm just to be sure I didn't throw my back out there. Think we'll see each other again, Ayuma?"

"Maybe, if not anywhere else or any other time here," the chestnut haired girl smiled and headed up the 1-A path. "See you later."

"Hey there, Ayuma." Ojiro greeted as she joined her classmates, sitting next to Yaoyorozu. "We saw you down there with that Shinso guy. What happened?"

"Well... I saw someone I... knew in him during the match," she replied. "Someone who needed to see, his Quirk doesn't define him as a person like he was taught to believe. His classmates and all those heroes showed him that."

Tokoyami seemed to understand. "You saw yourself in him. Two Quirks with a mental base as opposed to a physical one. Two people judged for being people they're not just because their Quirks make them seem that way. And in any case, he did something to you in the Cavalry Battle. I could tell after seeing what your Quirk had done: his had done something first."

Ojiro seemed to know exactly what Tokoyami was talking about. "He tried to brainwash you like he did to me, Aoyama, and Shoda from 1-B. You're lucky; at least your Quirk made sure you weren't controlled, even though it accidentally got you disqualified."

"He apologized for that, but it's not like either of us knew it would go down that way," Ayuma defended. "Even though it's my fault for my Quirk going off. But Tokoyami was also right in how I saw myself in him. We're a lot alike, if you really look.

"We did something to garner a lot of praise even though we're otherwise hated for our Quirks. But at least he heard it as it was being said; I had to wait a decade just to get a taste of it." ...So what's the next match?"

"Todoroki vs Sero," Tenya answered. "And we all think we know how it will end."

"Sero's the guy who shoots tape from his arms, right?"

"Yes."

Ayuma took a deep sigh. In that case, we can either wish Sero luck, or bid him farewell from the competition.

As soon as Midoriya came back, Tenya and Ochaco invited him to sit on Ochaco's other side, just in time for Present Mic's next bout of commentary. "Enough standing around! Now welcome to the ring, our next players! He's got skills, but at the expense of some really creepy-looking elbows; from the Hero Course, it's Hanta Sero! Versus, an early front runner in the competition who's way too strong for his own good; someone who rightfully got into the Hero Course based on recommendations, it's Shoto Todoroki! And now for the second match of the finals! BEGIN!"

Sero immediately sent out two long shots of tape that tied up Todoroki, disconnecting one and preparing to sweep him out of bounds. But then Ayuma had a certain gut feeling. "He's gonna counterattack!"

It was only a few seconds after she said that when a tsunami of ice appeared. It slammed against the stands and narrowly missed where quite a few people in the stands were sitting. The force of it knocked some of Todoroki's classmates off the ends of the pews.

"Tell the truth, Sero. Can you move at all?" Midnight's voice sounded a little shaky; not even she was spared! After a few seconds, "Sero has been immobilized! Todoroki advances to the
second round!"

People in the crowds started shouting, "Nice try!" at Sero. Ayuma and the others managed to shimmy out from under the ice, and she went to a different part of the stadium to see Todoroki help Sero out of the ice prison by melting that tiny section of it. The heterochromatic boy looked pretty ashamed that he let his power go overboard like that. *Especially since all that ice is going to be a chore to clean up.*
Battling Challengers

During the mandatory intermission, Ayuma swung by the food vendors and got some takoyaki to go, waving a friendly greeting to Mt. Lady, Death Arms, and Kamui Woods. Apparently, the ice had formed claw-like shapes above the concession stands, casting long shadows below. She was surprised at seeing Shinso again at one of the other vendors. He looked even a little relieved when he saw her. "I saw how close that ice wall got to Class 1-A's section in the stands. Are you and your class alright?"

"A bit shaken up, but we're all fine," Ayuma replied, taking a bite of her food. "And that includes Sero. I decided to get something to eat while I waited, since Recovery Girl also suggested that earlier. And since I was unconscious during the lunch break."

Shinso nodded. "Same here... At least, Recovery Girl's suggestion, anyway. Good thing you all got out in one piece. It probably will be awhile before the next match; I figured I'd grab a bite, too... Think we could... grab a bench or something?... Get to know each other better?"

Ayuma tilted her head at his quiet, hesitant tone, but nodded in agreement. "Sure. We can do that while we wait until the ice is cleared."

They both went to an empty bench between the stadium and the vendors, where they could eat and talk with no one eavesdropping. They began talking about all their likes and dislikes; those kinds of things. As it turned out, they shared quite a bit of common ground. The conversation went a little deeper as the ice was gradually cleared from the stands.

Shinso found it very intriguing how the girl once had no self-confidence or real strength before starting at U.A. She talked about her lethal lack of control over her Quirk and how easy it often would be for it to go off. He chalked it up to the fault of the foster system. He heard quite a lot about how orphans were taught to be little more than obedient, Quirkless slaves. Told to never use their Quirks, always behave, deal with every situation -- even monetary exploitation -- as if it were perfectly normal. He also couldn't blame her for the fact that she was never taught to control her Quirk at a young age like all children should. Anyone running a building in the foster system should know and do that, but most don't bother.

Ayuma found the purple-haired boy to be fascinating; a really nice person behind all his barriers. Apparently, he had to grow up building all of them strictly to hide his true feelings towards being dissed about his Quirk. And yet, despite being so reserved, he seemed to always be able to spark a conversation. He even mentioned that to be an important tactic for his Quirk. He was pretty awkward with her since he never had a lot of friends growing up; to be fair, despite her best efforts, neither did Ayuma. They were both a work in progress, so they could easily learn from each other. Yeah, they had issues with people their age or a little older in their younger years as well. Especially bullies that wanted to "prove" they were villains or Quirkless or anything else that could garner more bullying.

Once they were finished with their food and threw out their trash, something caught Ayuma's eye. The ice was gone from the stands, and it sounded like the next match was going to start soon. "Looks like the ice is gone, so the matches can continue," Shinso noted, having also seen it. The girl nodded before they headed back into the stadium. "See you later, Ayuma; and thanks for the talk."

"Actually, Shinso... we might as well stick together," Ayuma suggested, looking down at her hands. "Something tells me the second match in the finals won't be the last... in which someone
goes a bit too far... I know a good place to watch."

The two headed up to the level that was just above where the class' stands were. They stayed up there and watched as Present Mic announced the next match's contestants. "Even beautiful flowers have thorns; it's the assassin from class 1-B, Ibara Shiozaki from the Hero Course! Versus the boy with the electric personality; another hero in the making, Denki Kaminari!"

"Electricity doesn't do well against that girl your classmate's up against; he'll be out of here faster than the last guy," Shinso warned. The whole place went silent when Shiozaki interrupted, apparently having taken Present Mic's intro of her a bit too literally and requiring quite the sincere apology.

"Kaminari's also a flirt," Ayuma added with a wince. "And even if electricity did work well against Shiozaki... he'll fry his brain if he puts all his power into one attack."

Sure enough, Kaminari kicked off the fight with a huge electric shockwave. Shiozaki merely turned her back and sent out a wall of vines that detached from those on her head. The wall of foliage effortlessly blocked the electric attack. The vines tore through the concrete and overtook the brain-dead blond boy, leaving him tied up shoulders-to-legs in vines strung above the battle stage. Shinso gave a subtle cringe at the sight, and Ayuma covered her face with a hand.

"Good news and bad news: we were right," her new friend commented.

"I should make sure none of Shiozaki's classmates are gloating to my class," sighed the hero student. "I'll be right back." She headed over to where the 1-A and 1-B stands were to see the blond psycho peering over the wall and taunting her classmates. She ducked under the wall and stalked closer, hearing Kendo was also drawing near. Ayuma slipped right behind him alongside the ginger, preparing to strike in case he tried anything. He kept on laughing until Kendo chopped the back of his neck to knock him out, catching him by the collar of his uniform.

Kendo poked her head over the barrier and said, "Sorry 'bout him," to Class 1-A. She turned to Ayuma just when she turned to leave. "You too. We saw how you treated that guy from General Studies; if you ask me, you guys don't deserve all those insults. Hopefully my classmates -- especially Monoma here -- won't give you as much grief in the future."

The purple-eyed girl nodded. "I hope so. By the way, I'm Ayuma."

"Itsuka Kendo, and don't worry; I'll make sure my class doesn't bite yours," the orange-haired girl said before heaving Monoma over her shoulder and returning him to his seat.

Ayuma turned around and headed back to where Shinso was to see the next match. They nodded at each other as Present Mic proceeded with the intros. "He's the kid with engines in his legs; Tenya Iida from the Hero Course! Versus, a fully-equipped gadget dynamo; the Support course's Mei Hatsume!"

Both of them saw the equipment Tenya and that Support student had. "Some of the second and third-year students say Support students like using the Sports Festival to advertise their gear," Shinso recalled. "Unless you're fond of watching your friend down there get humiliated or anything like that in a student-made infomercial, we probably shouldn't bother watching."

"Point taken," Ayuma agreed. "I'd rather not have anything like that to remember this by." She sat down on the platform behind the tall banisters, her violet-haired companion doing the same in front of her. Thankfully, it was easy to tune out the pinkette's voice over her own speakers.
"I guess you're starting to really hate how you were thrown out of the competition," Shinso presumed. "You did really well in the obstacle race, and those displays of your Quirk were pretty impressive. A freak accident got you kicked out even though I caused it; you'd probably be down there in the finals if not for me."

Ayuma sighed. "I admit, I don't like I couldn't show more of what I could do. If I was still in this, I probably would be in the finals... But I'm not putting the blame on you anytime soon, Shinso. How could we have known our Quirks would interact like that?"

"...I guess that’s a good point, since neither of us knew until it happened." He looked down at his hand, the one that both shook hers in greeting, and felt her Quirk's effect. "I suppose I never took a moment to realize the real power or volatile nature some Quirks can actually have. Like the ones you and Midoriya have."

Ayuma hummed in agreement. "It's a lot of practice to get a good handle on such Quirks. I wouldn't be surprised if you needed practice for your Quirk, too. Is there even a limit for your Brainwashing?... You know, like the amount of time I can use Nightmare before the headache gets to be too much?"

Shinso thought for a moment. "I can't take control of many people in one shot, since it makes me lose consciousness for at least a couple of hours. I can't have anyone under my control perform any kind of advanced brain function, like writing down something from memory. I can just control their bodies and keep them quiet while I do so. And my Quirk doesn't work when I talk through a mic or megaphone or anything like that. You see what I'm talking about?"

"I think so. That was why you were assembling your team in the Cavalry Battle one at a time. I'm pretty sure 'advanced brain function' also involves use of their Quirks. And it makes sense that you can't control anyone through a device that turns your voice artificial."

Shinso nodded. "Exactly. Even if I did get into the Hero Course, my Quirk isn't the easiest to improve upon. Yours isn't all that different."

Ayuma gave a light shrug. "I have to deal with increasing headaches and dizzy spells when I use Nightmare for too long... and I can potentially pass out from it; it also tends to give me some bad dreams, too... There are pressure points and other things to help the headaches and dizziness, thankfully. Since my main physical attribute is speed, there might also be a way to increase physical strength and reduce strain.

"Your Quirk's weakness is that your target just has to not talk even with though you can pressure them into doing so. If you could imitate the voice of someone your target knows while not in their line of sight, you could get them to respond and easily take control. But that still leaves the physical department if that doesn't work out, particularly since muteness can render your Quirk entirely useless."

Shinso's eyebrows rose, a bit taken aback by how much she said without a pause. "I never pegged you to be such an analyst. But all those suggestions you made sound like they'd actually work."

Ayuma smiled in embarrassment, scratching the back of her head. "I kind of had to grow up able to get a good sense of things on the fly. Mostly for hiding places... or bullies."

"Mei Hatsume has stepped out of bounds! Tenya Iida advances to the next round!" Midnight called over the loudspeakers. The two stood back up to see Tenya seriously upset as that Hatsume girl casually walked away.
"Poor guy must've been humiliated..." Ayuma winced. "I wouldn't wish that on anyone; not even Bakugo... Well, unless he actually tried to kill someone."

"We're gonna charge right along into the fifth match!" they heard Present Mic declare. (His tone sounded like that was quite a relief.) "Let's hope that giant belt serves some kind of purpose; it's Yuga Aoyama from the Hero Course! Versus, -- is there some kind of purpose for those things sticking out of her head? -- from the same class, Mina Ashido!"

"Mind giving a better description for these two, Ayuma?" Shinso asked, clearly annoyed by the announcer's horribly vague intros of her classmates.

"Last I checked, Mina's Quirk allows her to secrete acid from anywhere on her body," she commented. "Aoyama can fire a laser from somewhere around the stomach, and firing it too much can give him quite a physical drawback -- also from that area. Mina might be at a slight disadvantage with the lack of cover, but her shoes let her skate using her acid; not to mention all of us know Aoyama's weakness, and her acid can corrode that belt he wears."

Aoyama immediately fired his laser at his opponent only to miss as Mina dodged, skating on her acid. She skated in circles around him as he fired again and again, and she only got closer while evading every attack. After a particularly large blast from the French-talking blond, Mina flung acid from her hands right on his belt, breaking it. It even caused his pants to drop for a second there, causing him to panic and try to hold them up. The pinkette finished with a hard uppercut to the jaw, knocking him out.

"Aoyama has fainted! The winner of this match is Ashido!" Midnight called out.

"Was that how you thought the match would turn out?" Shinso inquired.

Ayuma nodded as Aoyama was rolled off to Recovery Girl. "Between Aoyama's weakness and Mina's Quirk and physical strength, the latter had a crucial advantage. Next are Momo and Tokoyami, which will most likely depend on timing and strategy."

"Offense and defense in one, the dark samurai and his darker shadow; from the Hero Course, Fumikage Tokoyami! Versus, the Great Creator, she was admitted because of recommendations and I think we can all see why; also from Class 1-A, Momo Yaoyorozu!"

As soon as it began, Dark Shadow surged from Tokoyami and right at Momo. She barely managed to create a small shield to block the attack, which Dark Shadow ran into headfirst. But before she could form a weapon, it struck her shield again, pushing her back further. It got her a third time knocking the shield off her arm, forcing her to make a new one; that one soon also took a hit. But after that last strike, Dark Shadow stopped. Momo probably didn't realize she was out of bounds as she formed a pole in her other hand, until Midnight pointed it out and declared Tokoyami the victor. He retracted the shadow creature and bowed silently before leaving the battle stage.

"The bird was focusing his attacks on her shield to push her out," Shinso noted. "Not bad, considering he probably didn't want to hurt his opponent."

"A safe and effective strategy on his part," Ayuma agreed. "No surprise for Tokoyami. But poor Momo; she looks pretty crushed. She didn't even have the chance for a counterattack." She looked up at the screen displaying the match-ups. "Looks like the next one contains the only other non-1-A student in the finals. Kirishima against Tetsutetsu."

"Those two survived being crushed by a pile of broken robots in the Obstacle Race thanks to
their similar Quirks," Shinso added. "Wait, I think I actually saw when the latter ran you down in the cafeteria; I was in the lunchline, a couple of hours or so before we actually first met. He clearly didn't realize you were new when he plowed you down. I also thought I saw you look really scared while that happened; the fear-for-your-life kind of scared."

Ayuma cringed, crossing her arms in discomfort. "I'm usually like that, mostly for fear of my Quirk going off. At least Kendo apologized for him, and probably scolded him later." The two listened as the boys at the battle stage were both called "passionate, manly fighters made of steel/rock" by Present Mic.

Shinso rose a brow as the two charged at each other and started exchanging blows with their armored bodies. "Looks like this one's going to take a while. Might as well talk about the next match. I think it's that brown-haired girl up against the delusional blowhard. Any info on them?"

"Ochaco's able to make things float by touching them with pads on her fingertips. She can't use it too much, or some pretty severe nausea will set in. Trust me, it's never pretty after Hero class. Despite that, she's a good person who knows how to be serious when the situation calls for it.

"Bakugo has sweat glands on his hands that secrete a substance like nitroglycerin, which he can make explode. During sparring training, he'd often give his opponents -- including myself -- some pretty hefty, but realistic death threats... He was apparently one of Midoriya's top bullies as a kid... and he can carry out whatever threat he makes."

Shinso's eyes narrowed at the fear in her tone. "He really is an ass. I thought I heard him threaten you at the starting ceremony. He does seem like the kind of guy who'd bully other kids just to flaunt his power. Do you think he ever got punished for it?"

Ayuma thought of all the times she witnessed Bakugo threatening to hurt and kill his own classmates. And all the times he actually got close. She saw every bit of training footage involving him almost killing Midoriya while the latter was already tearing himself apart. And she regularly saw the green-haired boy warn anyone about to spar against Bakugo about just a few of the things done to him.

"Even if they tried, I don't think anything would've worked. He would just blast himself out of anything, even if it was a load-bearing wall. It's not like any of us can help it, or that anyone can blame us. Every teacher he ever had was probably really scared of him; though some of us don't want to admit... so are we."

Kirishima and Tetsutetsu gave each other one last slug across the face before dropping to the ground, unconscious. Present Mic was begging to know who the winner was, but Midnight called it a draw. The winner was going to be determined by a simple contest as a tiebreaker. ("Perhaps arm-wrestling," Midnight suggested.) The medic bots carried them both to Recovery Girl before Present Mic introduced the next match.

"He was kind of a hot-shot in middle school, and just look at that determined face; from the Hero Course, Katsuki Bakugo! Versus, the one I'm personally rooting for; also from Class 1-A, Ochaco Uraraka! Let the eighth match BEGIN!"
Defy Gravity

As soon as they were given the green light, Ochaco charged at Bakugo, reaching out to touch him. He coiled back his right arm, his hand sparking with tiny firecrackers. He swung forward in a sharp right hook, sending out a blast that sent the brunette flying backwards. He threw another blast only to realize it wasn't her, but her jacket, and she swung behind him only to take another blast from the blond.

"Bakugo also has some serious reaction time," Ayuma remembered. "You have to be really good at pulling off attacks without giving any warning to catch him off-guard."

"And their Quirks are a poor match-up for the girl to begin with," Shinso commented. "Hers relies on physical contact, while her opponent's Quirk can cause damage and send her flying back. The reaction time he has is just rubbing salt in the wound."

Ochaco made another charge only to be blown back by another blast. Blow after blow came down upon her, and Ayuma began to notice something about the debris from each blast. They did fly upwards at the force of each blast... but they never came back down. She looked up, eyes widening as she tapped Shinso's shoulder, pointing up. He followed her gaze, also looking a bit surprised. A swarm of rocks was floating above the stadium, only growing as more debris was blown off the stage. They looked at each other and realized that was her plan, in case her original one didn't work.

Everyone in the stands started booing at Bakugo, calling him out for the bully he was, basically telling him to show a little mercy to the poor girl. Even Present Mic seemed to agree with the jeering crowd until they heard a loud *THUNK!* over the loudspeakers. "Where is the man who started this uproar?" Mr. Aizawa's voice rang over the system, sending everyone into silence. "Are you a Pro? Because if you're being serious, you can go home and hang up your cape. I'd suggest looking into another career. Bakugo's fierceness is an acknowledgement of his opponent's strength. He knows she deserves to have made it this far. So he's making sure he does whatever it takes to keep her at bay and come out on top."

"I'm surprised no one realized the flying rocks sooner than we did," Shinso said.

Ochaco released all the debris flying above the stadium, sending it down on Bakugo in a literal meteor shower. Even Present Mic was a bit surprised he hadn't seen the debris floating above the stadium. She gave one more charge as Bakugo lifted his hand to the sky. Ayuma's eyes widened in realization and terror. "Look out!" she exclaimed as she grabbed Shinso's shoulder and pulled them both into hiding behind the wall.

**BOOOOM!**

With a final, enormous blast of smoke and fire, a vicious shockwave tore through the stadium, all the chunks of debris dropping in a shower of smoke-trailed pebbles. When the two finally got up and looked over their shelter, the devastating explosion had sent Ochaco flying back into what was left of the floor.

The whole stadium was dead silent... Watching... Waiting... Watching as Ochaco struggled to her feet, swaying briefly. Bakugo charged at her, and she spun to meet the impending attack. But Ayuma saw her gravity-controlling classmate falter before she even had her foot back on the ground. Ochaco's legs buckled; her body -- shaking with exhaustion -- dropped heavily to the ground, stopping her opponent in his tracks. Present Mic's voice was disrespectfully loud against
the heartbroken silence. The poor girl was trembling, trying to just move a little even though she was so badly hurt. She managed to crawl, only an inch or so at a time, but then she stopped.

Ayuma had her shaking hands against her mouth, tears dropping like snowflakes from her eyes. Shinso had a hand on her shoulder, never taking is eyes off the battle. Midnight walked over and knelt by the fallen brunette, holding a hand up toward Bakugo. "...Uraraka is KO'd. Bakugo advances to the second round." The medic robots immediately came to the field, soon carrying the shattered girl to the infirmary.

"And that's it for the first round!" Present Mic called out before heaving a sigh. "I was really pulling for her. Oh yeah, I guess Bakugo is moving on. Now neither of the girls I was rooting for are in this."

"You're supposed to be unbiased, you know," his flat-voiced co-commentator pointed out.

"Let's try to forget that depressing outcome!"

"Or not..."

"With that, the first round is complete! We're taking a quick break and then we're back with more matches!"

Shinso looked over towards where Class 1-C was in the stands. "We should probably get back to our own classes before they drag us apart," he advised. "I might have to explain why I was hanging with you for the past handful of matches. And they probably won't let me come back regardless of anything I do."

"Same here," Ayuma agreed shakily. "It was nice having your company, though, Shinso. I hope we can meet up again sometime."

She thought she saw him crack a smile as he turned and started walking off. "Sure."

Ayuma smiled as she turned and went back to Class 1-A's set of pews. Kaminari charged toward her, and if that didn't already scare her, Mineta made a leap for her torso again. She was already about to sidestep behind the wall to dodge them. Tsu caught the little perv with her tongue before he could land and slammed him back into his seat, and Kyoka stuck her earphone jack into Kaminari's ear, sending him reeling back. The girl took a deep breath in relief, thanking her classmates, and went back to her seat by Momo.

"Come on! We saw you with that mind-control guy since after Todoroki fought Sero!" Mineta protested, wriggling in Tsu's tongue. "He didn't control you to do anything during Iida's match against that Support girl, did he?!!"

"Shinso didn't use his Quirk on me at all... not after the incident before the Cavalry Battle," Ayuma replied. "We were there so we wouldn't have to deal with another attack that went up into the stands like Todoroki's ice prison."

"Ribbit! You must've gotten to him pretty good if he agreed to that," Tsu commented, finally letting Mineta go.

"Yeah! What was he like?" Mina and Toru inquired in unison. The latter's uniform was clearly showing the invisible classmate bouncing in her seat. Mina had a knowing, mischievous look on her face.

Ayuma tried to ignore the heat rising to her cheeks at seeing Mina's expression. "He seemed
very friendly... a-a lot nicer than first glance may suggest... And we... we decided not to watch as that Hatsune girl... exploited Tenya in her little ad-run."

The boy in question smiled in relief. "I'm glad you both were respectful enough to do so, Ayuma; it was a very humiliating experience I'd rather not repeat."

Ayuma chuckled before turning to the noirette next to her, whose gaze seemed to be in a thousand-yard stare. "Momo?" she asked softly, resting a hand on her shoulder. She jolted at her touch before her eyes regained focus and turned to the indigo-eyed redhead.

"Oh, hello Ayuma," she greeted halfheartedly. "...Are you enjoying the Sports Festival?... Even after my loss against Tokoyami?"

Ayuma smiled sadly. "I'm happy you managed to even get so far, Momo. Remember, I was disqualified on a freak accident with Shinso before the Cavalry Battle even started. You'll be able to do better next time; I know it."

Momo averted her eyes, mustering a smile. "That was a very sweet thing for you to say, Ayuma. Thank you."

"Ha! Imagine that! A lowly orphan girl helping out the mentally-crushed rich girl!" Monoma's voice taunted from the other side of the barrier. "Definitely not something I'd expect from Class 1-A's idiots. You really are a weird bunch. Hey, wasn't that orphan girl hanging with that weird guy from General Studies? Wonder what possessed her to even walk up to the guy."

Ayuma sighed before she got up and went around the wall. Despite the looming image of him pulling a weapon on her telling her not to, she faced the psychotic blonde. She was so upset with all of his verbal assaults after seeing the pain her classmates were in, she didn't even know where to start. All of it sent her Quirk into a mindset of its own, chafing to come out and tear into this psycho. She could feel her spine tingle with Nightmare's power, the void starting to appear around her. Monoma's silhouette was a pale navy, speckled with black shadows that her Quirk ached to attack; Monoma himself was starting to realize that he just bit off more than he could chew. She didn't know what could've happened had that vine girl from Kaminari's match not intervened.

Out of nowhere, a swarm of mint green silhouetted vines swept in and wrapped Monoma in a cocoon of thorned foliage. "Have you no shame, Monoma?" she chided. "Have you even a heart? To insult people in such pain, especially someone no different from you, while Itsuka is in the lavatory." Monoma was quickly and firmly set down back in his seat, and the vine-haired girl's silhouette quietly approached Ayuma, her image a mellow green. She was still struggling against her Quirk clawing its way out, and only briefly locked eyes as she felt her control waver. But Shiozaki calmly, silently slipped a single vine into the chestnut locks and touched the side of her neck. In only a few seconds, the pounding in her skull and the one thing she feared most went silent, the void vanishing into her normal vision.

"I'm terribly sorry for our classmate," Shiozaki apologized with a bow before coming closer. "He clearly denies how similar he, you, and that young man from General Studies really are. Such disrespect to your classmates as well."

Ayuma was a little surprised at her courtesy, cradling her head at the subsequent blazing headache. "Th-thank you, very much. You -- you're very kind. Um... Shiozaki, right?"

The other girl smiled. "Call me Ibara. And you're quite welcome..."

The ginger smiled in spite of the pain. "A-Ayuma."
Ibara nodded as she returned to her seat, and the violet-eyed girl turned on her heel to return to hers. She sat down heavily, craning her head against the backrest as she tried to get the painful lingering headache to subside. Judging by the sudden sway in her position and few seconds of lightheadedness, it probably wouldn't be going away anytime soon. *Bad enough to cause a dizzy spell and it wasn't even very long.*

"Hey Bakugo," she heard Sero greet as she massaged her forehead. She heard the conversation of Bakugo playing villain in the match, but didn't bother joining because of the headache. (Bakugo's little bit of shouting just made it flare up even more.) She felt a pair of hands press the base of her skull and sides of her head, and the pain suddenly dissipated. She turned to see that Ojiro had been the one to do it.

"Pressure points," he said simply as she looked back questioningly. "Believe me, I've had my share of headaches in learning martial arts, not to mention the Cavalry Battle after Shinso's mind control. Does that feel any better?"

"Much better, thanks," Ayuma smiled and nodded. "Continuous taunting can really set off Nightmare. I'm just glad Ibara made sure it didn't cause another ruckus, going off when I don't want it to."

They all soon looked back down at the stage to see Kirishima and Tetsutetsu arm-wrestling on a small table. Present Mic was cheering at the fact that the tie could finally be settled. Even then, the two of them seemed evenly matched. After a minute or two, Tetsutetsu's armored body finally broke, letting his dyed-haired opponent slam his forearm into the table and win the match.

"Kirishima is the winner! Add him to the bracket!" declared Midnight.

Kirishima shouted his triumph with a fist in the air. He then offered a hand to his kneeling counterpart, with an almost brotherly countenance. Tetsutetsu grinned and accepted the hand as Midnight seemingly fangirled at the sight. Not long after they left the field, Ayuma caught the faint whiff of something coming from the corridors.

...Smoke?

The fleeting image of Endeavor surged over her memory.

*Don't tell me...*

She hesitantly looked back to see a faint orange glow disappearing down the corridor. *I should make sure he doesn't pull off another unnecessary attack, especially on Midoriya.* She stood up and went after the flame.

"Ribbit? Hey, Ayuma, where are you going?" Tsu inquired.

Ayuma froze. "Um... I-just thought I saw something in the passageways. I'll go check it out and -- and be right back." She took off down the hall before getting an answer. She took off her sneakers and started running as quickly and quietly as she could, following the faint orange glow of the hero's fire, and the smoky smell hanging heavy in the close quarters wherever the Flame Hero went. She nearly rounded a corner when she heard Midoriya yelp the Flame Hero's name in surprise, but stopped and hid behind the wall. She stood there, listening, trying not to make any noise that'd give her away.

"Ah, I was looking for you." The Flame Hero sounded relatively tame compared to when she last saw him.
"O-oh yeah. Hi. So, w-what are you doing back here?" No surprise Midoriya sounds nervous. Anyone would be intimidated by someone like Todoroki's father, even if Todoroki himself is far more approachable.

"I saw your fight against the brainwashing guy. Your power is pretty impressive. To create so much wind pressure just by flicking your fingers... It reminds me of another Quirk. You seem to have much in common with All Might."

"Um, well, I -- I guess I never thought about it that way... Sorry, but I should get going." She heard Midoriya's lighter footsteps walk in another direction.

"It's my Shoto's duty to surpass All Might as the Number 1 Hero," Endeavor commented, and Midoriya's footsteps stopped short. "And his match with you will be a good testing ground for how much training he has left. So hit him hard; don't disgrace him or yourself by holding back." The tense silence was palpable, and felt like it could break with the slightest twitch. "That's all I wanted to say. I apologize for bothering you." He started to walk away.

"Endeavor," Midoriya finally said, "I am not All Might." Endeavor started to ask what he was talking about. "And the same goes for Todoroki. He may be your son, but he isn't you." As her classmate's footsteps resumed and grew distant, the discussion fell into a dead silence so still Ayuma almost thought she could just peek out and see them gone. But her instincts gave a firm no. Not while the smell of Endeavor's fire was still strong. She waited in stone-still silence until Endeavor's footsteps also departed before she finally fled back to where the rest of her class was. She nearly collapsed in relief when she reached the sunlight and got back to her seat.

Tokoyami noticed how much she was shaking. "What happened? What did you find?"

Ayuma took a few long, deep, but shaky breaths before daring to speak. "Endeavor was looking for Midoriya so he could have a chat with him. Something about his Quirk being a lot like All Might's. He told Midoriya to give it his all, but there was something in Endeavor's voice when he said All Might's name, and said it was somehow Todoroki's 'duty' to become the Number 1 Hero... I can't help thinking something's horribly wrong with the Todoroki family... and that it's because of the father."

"So the match hasn't started yet?" All of them looked to see a swollen-eyed Ochaco coming back to her original seat. "That's good."

Tenya yelped at seeing her face. "Something horrible has happened to your eyes! You need to go see Recovery Girl!"

"I already did," the brunette replied, rubbing her eyes. "This is from... something else."

"Ah, of course. If I were you, I'd be frustrated, too."

"It's no time to wallow," Tokoyami chided. "Use this next fight as a source of encouragement."

Ochaco nodded in agreement. "So wise," Tenya breathed. Had she not just gotten back from eavesdropping on one of the most dangerous heroes in Japan, Ayuma would've chuckled.

Meanwhile, Present Mic sounded especially excited about the first match of the second round. "It's the guy who won his last fight by a landslide and literally left half the audience frozen; the Hero Course's Shoto Todoroki! And this kid almost walked out of his first match-up, but made a stunning comeback by showing off some impressive moves; also from the Hero Course, Izuku
The two on the battle stage faced each other like two lions on the border of their territories. "Tokoyami, how do you think this match will go?" Tenya inquired.

The bird-headed boy replied without shifting his gaze. "It depends on whether or not Midoriya is able to get in close to him."

"They'll probably start attacking at the word 'go'," Ayuma added. "But what will Midoriya use against Todoroki's icy barrage?" Her classmates all nodded in agreement. These two displayed themselves to be as evenly matched as Tetsutetsu and Kirishima.

It didn't take words to know they were all wishing their classmates the best of luck, and wondering who was going to come out on top.
As soon as the match began, Todoroki sent out a myriad of ice crystals, each one bigger than the last like a horde of shark fins. It almost got to Midoriya when he flicked his finger at the ice, and the whole previous attack shattered and flew back at its caster and the audience behind him. The only reason the dual-colored boy didn't fly out of bounds was because he braced himself on an iceberg. Todoroki used the same barrage attack again, and Midoriya gave the exact same response. They both did it again, and Ayuma noticed the dark red spreading along Midoriya's fingers with each flick.

"Oh no, crap! I'm missing it..." She turned to see Kirishima rushing in.

"Hey, nice job making it into the second round, Kirishima," Kaminari congratulated.

Kirishima flashed them a toothy grin. "Thanks, man. Looks like I take down Bakugo next."

"I'll kill you," Bakugo replied in an uncharacteristically flat tone. (Ayuma still flinched at it, though.)

"Yeah, sure; in your dreams. But seriously, it's crazy how you and Todoroki both have moves that blast the whole stadium. Must be pretty nice."

"Plus you don't have to pause between attacks," Sero threw in sourly.

"It's not as easy as you think, you morons," Bakugo lectured the two. "If you overuse your muscles, you risk tearing them apart. If you sprint too much, you run out of breath... Quirks are physical abilities, too. They can get worn out; you can't just use them non-stop."

"Makes sense when you put it that way," agreed Kirishima. "Wonder if that's how Midoriya thinks he's gonna beat Todoroki."

Ayuma thought of her own Quirk and its own nature. *If you think about it, mentally-based Quirks are like that, but in different ways. Mostly having some kind of effect on the nervous system -- parts of the brain in particular. And some such Quirks can't interact or one lashes out at the other; quite violently, in fact... Like Shinso's Brainwashing and my Nightmare.*

Todoroki sent barrage after barrage on Midoriya, who managed to fend them all off by flicking his fingers. He ran after him on a streak of ice that also got flicked away, and failed to falcon punch Midoriya. He sent another wall of ice that encased Midoriya's foot, and he punched the ice to shatter it and cause even more of a blast. The only reason Todoroki didn't get blown away was barricading himself in ice, and now Midoriya's entire arm was bright red.

"Why is Midoriya breaking himself to fight Todoroki like this?" Ayuma asked. "He never did that in sparring matches, did he?"

"Deku's Quirk tends to do that," Ochaco answered. "It has a serious drawback that breaks his bones every time he uses it. Needless to say, he's a regular with Recovery Girl."

"And Todoroki... I think something's seriously wrong with his family life," Ayuma added. "Something based around Endeavor. I know it sounds like I'm prying... but orphans make it a rule to know everything about each other." *The way he apologized for his father's grudge against me... The way he almost never uses the fire part of his Quirk...* She looked up at the Flame Hero up in the stands. *Endeavor... what did you do to him?*
Todoroki sent out another barrage of ice. But even with his injured finger, Midoriya flicked away the ice. He seemed to be having a conversation with his opponent, but no one could really hear what they said other than it had a lot poured into it. Ochaco was horrified at the state Midoriya was in and hid her face in Tenya's shoulder. A certain pair of violet eyes from General Studies locked with Ayuma's over the distance, and they knew this was serious. *This can't go on forever. It shouldn't!*

Todoroki charged at Midoriya, but he seemed slower than before, and Ayuma suddenly noticed the patches of white on his skin and uniform. *Frost? Is that from using his ice too much? He should be able to thaw himself with his fire. But why won't he use it?* Midoriya lunged at him and threw a vicious punch to his opponent's stomach, sending him flying backwards while a patch of ice appeared on his arm. Todoroki staggered to his feet and sent another glacier attack that Midoriya dodged. Todoroki got in close but was blown back by yet another flick. It only got worse for Midoriya, hurting himself again and again. His fingers had gone from red to dark purple, looking even more painful than they already did.

At that point, Ayuma was just trying to figure out the truth about the boy who always sat in front of her in class. Finally, a frightening thought about Todoroki crossed her mind. *If his father wants him to be the Number 1 Hero, what training would that require? Was he training under Endeavor all his life?... Did he do some really bad things in the process?... It's like Todoroki's father has become... a nightmare to him. And his flames only remind him of his father, so he only uses his ice.* "Of course."

"What?" Tenya asked as her classmates turned to her. "Is something the matter, Ayuma?"

Ayuma looked at her class and shrank under all the sudden attention. "I... I just realized something huge... and possibly terrible. Endeavor wants his son to be the best hero in the world; better than All Might. And he talked about Todoroki as if he were an object. He had to have been training under his father his *entire life*, with no chance at all of having a normal one. And if he has any siblings, they may have had it just as bad. Maybe they suffered the same training; maybe they were just ignored entirely, which is arguably worse.

"Endeavor had to have done something *awful* to him or them -- maybe something to do with Todoroki's scar, or even a lot more -- to make him vow to only use his right side. It's as if his father -- and therefore his flames -- have essentially become the worst of his nightmares. I almost guarantee his grudge-holding father would be right there if I used Nightmare to call up his fears."

Midoriya charged at Todoroki, headbutting him and knocking him back while he was off his guard. Afterwards, bad arm laden with ice, Midoriya walked step by painful step to his opponent. Todoroki seemed lost in thought, frozen in place with eyes in a thousand-yard stare. The frost spread more and more over his body. Nothing in the stadium moved except that frost, and Midoriya approaching Todoroki. He delivered another punch to the gut; weaker this time, but still tossing the dual-colored boy backwards. He barely got himself back up, his classmates looking down pityingly at the battle. At last, one thing that Midoriya said carried up to the stands.

"IT'S YOURS! YOUR QUIRK, NOT HIS!!"

After a few tense, silent seconds -- seconds that felt like centuries -- steam began to curl from Todoroki's skin. The steam darkened to smoke. The frost on his body slowly vanished. The smoky plumes blossomed in red and orange and golden yellow. At the first little flames, his power erupted into a roaring, white-hot blaze that clawed at the sky, waves of heat pouring over the stands.

"He's using his fire!" Ayuma faintly heard Ochaco over the wild flames, hair blowing from the heat wave.
That's it, Todoroki. Forget him. Forget everything he'd done to you. Forget everything he'd done to your family. Burn him away from yourself and show the world that you are better than he'll ever be, not only as a hero, but as a person!

"YES SHOTO!" Endeavor's voice bellowed from the other side of the stands, a malicious red-orange pouring over the top of his son's column.

Oh no...

"Have you finally accepted your purpose? That's it! Very good! This is the dawn of a new era for us! With my blood in your veins you'll surpass me. You will live up to the REASON I CREATED YOU!"

Ayuma felt a bitterness inside her shoot through her body, as bad as when Monoma was taunting her and her classmates. How she wished she could fly over there and confront the hero that hurt his own children. The way he said he "created" his son was that more infuriating; he literally saw his son as a piece of art to display! She gripped her arms, unknowingly pushing up her sleeves to her shoulders to show the rest of the red splash on her arm. Does Endeavor even realize what he did to him? What he did to his family? What he did to me? What nerve!

She fought back her Quirk, finding at least some relief in seeing Todoroki not reacting to his father's words; probably couldn't hear it over his own roaring fire. Ice shot up in a white-and-blue geyser from his right foot. Midoriya's own Quirk tore through one leg of his pants up to the knee. She saw Cementoss start to form a barrier between them, and Midnight tore her sleeve to release the familiar lilac mist. They were trying to stop the battle, but Ayuma knew they wouldn't be able to like that; not completely.

A final tidal wave of ice surged towards Midoriya as he leaped toward his opponent. The ice wave circled up and over, surging back at the boy flying through the air. Todoroki grazed his hands together and formed a blistering combination of hot and cold as they drew closer. As soon as their attacks should've collided in the brutal final swing, several yard-thick concrete walls appeared between them, vaporized in the blast.

Ayuma ducked off her seat and crouched under the banister, covering her head as a deafening crash and vicious gale of wind ripped through the air. Barely able to hear anything over the noise, she only glanced up to see a fountain of pebbles pour over the stands. As soon as the stony downpour subsided, she mustered the courage to get back up and try to squint through the cloud of smoke and dust blanketing the stage, rubbing her ears from the noise of the blast.

All of her classmates leaned forward in shock as they saw Midoriya on the outskirts of the looming cloud. His face unreadable under his hair, he collapsed from the inner wall under the General Studies classes' stands. Todoroki, still in the shattered arena but the whole left half of his PE uniform jacket completely burned away, looked equally horrified.

She could barely hear over the screech in her own ears. Her vision blurred as she staggered where she stood, burning liquid pouring down her face. She was crying, but she felt entirely numb, tingling and shaking violently. Then the images came, one after another, each one a more brutal way in which she and many others could've died. Her mind spurring "what if..." scenarios at her only made her state of paralyzed shock shock turn to untainted terror that made her knees buckle. She barely saw a dark blur rush up to catch her in ghostly, cool hands, as she dropped into darkness.

Ayuma jumped awake as if emerging from a night terror. Her vision was blurry. Her eyes
stung. Her breathing was heavy before she took a deep breath and relaxed. Her vision cleared up to show none other than Todoroki sitting in front of her, worried and ashamed, but he wasn't looking at her face. He was looking down, to his right, and she could feel his cold hand tracing over the upper part of her arm.

Her left arm.

He glanced up at her eyes when she shifted her head a tad to see him better. "I'm sorry." His voice was soft, shaken, and horribly empathetic. "My father left this behind... after he used that fire stream on you..." It came out of his mouth far more as a statement than a question.

Ayuma nodded slowly. "You have no idea... how much I had to keep my Quirk... from attacking him... when he started calling out to you..." Wow; her throat felt lined with cotton, and her voice sounded more exhausted than she thought. "I must've scared everyone... when I blacked out... Sorry..."

"Don't be... I was the one who caused you to.

"You gave us a scare alright," Kaminari agreed above them. Ayuma looked up from her position on the floor in front of her seat to see a good number of her classmates looking over at her. "At least you weren't out any longer than 5 minutes; we're just waiting for the stage to be repaired. At least Tokoyami had Dark Shadow catch you."

"Could you even hear us calling to you?" Kirishima inquired as she got herself back on her seat, Todoroki standing up not far from her.

"I doubt it," Shoji answered. "She may have been the only one to duck and cover from the blast, but she was hit by the sound of the explosion like all of us. Her ears are likely to be very sensitive like those on my tentacles, and reacted very poorly to the noise it made."

"By the way, we told Todoroki about everything that you said you realized about him," Tokoyami added. "As well as when you eavesdropped on Midoriya and his father."

"And...?" Ayuma beckoned hesitantly, her ultramarine gaze turning to the classmate in question.

Todoroki looked at his left hand. "Your theory was almost entirely accurate; more accurate than I thought it could be. That's all I'd prefer to say for now, though." He looked back up t her. "I'm impressed you had the courage to listen in on my father, after what he did to you."

"I'm glad I did; I probably wouldn't have known the truth had I not heard Endeavor say it himself... But what about Midoriya?"

The temperature of the conversation in the 1-A pews dropped drastically. "Asui, Uraraka, Iida, and Mineta haven't gotten back from seeing him yet, so we have no idea," Sero sighed dejectedly. "It looked pretty bad, though, so it might be awhile."

Just then, Mineta, Tsu, and Ochaco came back and sat down solemnly in their seats. "Well, what's the verdict?" Kirishima asked them. "And where's Iida?"

"Iida's getting ready for his next match," Tsu explained. "I think he's going against the girl who beat Kaminari."

"But Deku.." Ochaco was already starting to cry. "Recovery Girl has to do surgery on his arms from hurting himself so much." Everybody looked at each other with pitying expressions at the
Ayuma realized. And yet, he still worked to make Todoroki let go of his spite and use his fire. Why does he do things like this? Has he even tried to get his Quirk to stop hurting him this way?

The next few matches went by pretty quickly. When up against Ibara, Tenya used his Recipro Burst to outrun her vines and quickly push her out of bounds. (A completely harmless, but very effective and efficient strategy. Hopefully, this will keep Monoma quiet.) Tokoyami did largely the same to Mina, having Dark Shadow evade her acid and push her into falling backwards over the line.


"She said she had to perform surgery," the brunette repeated.

"Recovery Girl's the best," the grape-headed boy replied. "You've got nothing to worry about."

"He's right," Tsu agreed. Ochaco only gave them a weak smile in return.

Before long, it was time for Kirishima and Bakugo to face off. The two immediately charged at each other, one turning himself completely solid, the other blowing up in his face at every chance.

"KIRISHIMA! GO STRAIGHT FOR HIS CHIN! HIS CHIN!" A familiar voice shouted from over the divider.

That's probably Tetsutetsu from 1-B, Ayuma figured. The guy who ran over me in the cafeteria and shouted at the class crowd.

Kirishima started punching at Bakugo in a sort of barrage attack, but missed each one. After a while of being pushed back, Bakugo finally countered with a right hook explosion to the rib cage, and Kirishima looked in more than a bit of pain. With a barrage of explosions that tore Kirishima's uniform and partially-solidified body, he collapsed to the ground, the win for Bakugo declared a knockout. Tetsutetsu started ranting in frustration even louder over the divider, to his classmates' likely chagrin. (As if they weren't ticked enough that only 1-A students were in the finals at this point.)

Not long after, Midoriya finally returned, his cheek with a patch bandage and white gauze wrapped all over both his arms and one leg. He limped over to sit by Ochaco, reassuring the worried brunette. Only a minute later, it was time for Tenya to face off against Todoroki. Like before, Todoroki kicked off with an icy blast to Tenya's rib cage, and Kirishima looked in more than a bit of pain. With a barrage of explosions that tore Kirishima's uniform and partially-solidified body, he collapsed to the ground, the win for Bakugo declared a knockout. Tetsutetsu started ranting in frustration even louder over the divider, to his classmates' likely chagrin. (As if they weren't ticked enough that only 1-A students were in the finals at this point.)

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As soon as he dropped, Tenya grabbed the back of Todoroki's jacket and rushed to the border to toss him out of bounds. But before he got there, he suddenly stopped, and there was ice all over his engines. Ice spread from Todoroki's foot, and his hand once he grabbed his opponent's arm. A
body cast of ice encased Tenya, leaving him immobilized in an iceberg on the platform and giving Todoroki the win. Knowing how much Tenya wanted to impress his brother, Ayuma couldn't help feeling pity for her bespectacled friend. That wasn't the only negative gut feeling she had, even though she couldn't put her finger on whatever else was bothering her.

The next match had Bakugo facing Tokoyami, with the former having the advantage because of Dark Shadow being so weak against light as she soon learned. Every explosion on the dark entity had tears flying from its gold eyes. Mina was ranting about his defensive manner while wondering why the "bird-brain" wasn't going on the offensive like he did against her and Momo. However, Momo and Ochaco soon realized Dark Shadow's weakness. Midoriya took note of how Tokoyami kept his weakness a secret.

Another game of elemental rock-paper-scissors, Ayuma noted. Nightmare wouldn't do much better than Dark Shadow anyway. The creations are sturdy enough, albeit very ghost-like to cameras, but anything Nightmare forms vaporizes when caught in the right combination of heat and concussive force; just like what happened with Endeavor. With every charge from Bakugo, Dark Shadow and Tokoyami get pushed back further and don't have the time to recover.

She winced at hearing Dark Shadow cry in agony from a diving blast to the head. As soon as Tokoyami tried to attack, Bakugo cupped his hands and formed a blinding, powerful explosion. When the light and smoke cleared, Tokoyami and his sobbing shadow were pinned under Bakugo, his hand on the bird-headed boy's beak. With little choice otherwise, Tokoyami surrendered, sending Bakugo to the final match.

"I'll have to take notes for next time," Tenya commented as he returned. He gave Midoriya, Ochaco, and Ayuma a nod in greeting, which was returned, before he started rattling. The two in the row behind freaked out at it, but immediately relaxed when they found out that was Tenya's phone. His eyebrows rose when he read the caller ID, grabbing Ayuma's attention. "Excuse me, but I have to take this," he said briskly before turning on his heel and leaving for the nearest corridor in a bit of a hurry.

Concern rose in Ayuma's eyes. "I wonder what came up..."

"Hopefully nothing serious," Todoroki murmured as he stood up, leaving to prepare for the final battle. He hid his eyes under his hair, leaving without a word to the others.

Ayuma frowned sadly. *We can only hope.*
As soon as it was time for the final battle, Present Mic sounded especially excited. He didn't really need to introduce the finalists, but did so anyway with plenty of vigor to go around. The whole stadium was abuzz with chatter on how amazing the first-years were, and as full of cheers as ever.

Once it began, Todoroki sent out an icy wave similar to the one he used on Sero, but more controlled. Bakugo blasted through it as much as he could only to get completely encased. After a bit of tense silence, the stadium was rattled by a series of booming noises. The ice began to crack with each sound, until he broke out through a gaping hole he made, his opponent leaping back from the concussive wave.

The two soon charged at each other, with Todoroki trying to grab Bakugo, but the latter used an explosion to dodge in mid-air, grabbing him instead. After landing, Todoroki was thrown over Bakugo's shoulder with an explosion, which he managed to cushion with a wave of ice. He skated back around on the wave, closing Bakugo in an icy spiral and grabbing his arm with his left hand.

"Another fire attack?" Ayuma wondered.

"Do it, Shoto!" Endeavor's voice rang through the stadium once more. This time, Todoroki heard perfectly well, and didn't. Instead, he simply threw Bakugo aside.

"Bakugo timed his explosions and grabbed Todoroki's left side on purpose," Aizawa explained. "He's done his research. His aptitude for this becomes more apparent with every fight."

"Interesting!" Present Mic commented.

"Todoroki's doing well so far, but his attacks are too simple. It almost seems like he lost his spark after the match with Midoriya."

Bakugo started shouting at his opponent angrily, lashing out at how he wasn't using his power like he did against Midoriya. (Bakugo called him "Deku," though.) Todoroki didn't even budge as Bakugo charged at him, the ice spreading further over his body.

"COME ON, TODOROKI!!" Midoriya stood up and shouted. "DON'T GIVE UP! DO YOUR BEST!"

Todoroki jumped at hearing his voice, steam starting to curl off his skin again melting the frost on his body. He burst into flames as Bakugo leaped into the air, using his explosions to spin him around towards him. Faster and faster, wreathed in smoke, Bakugo plummeted at his opponent. Todoroki prepared a stream of fire, and Ayuma's mind immediately jumped to Endeavor attacking her. Todoroki might've seen it, because next thing she saw was the flames dying down completely. In the next second, Bakugo slammed into the ice, which erupted in a volcano-like explosion, leaving the battle stage clouded over in smoke again.

Once it cleared enough to see, Bakugo was lying on the ground in the stadium. Just like Midoriya, Todoroki was unconscious and out of bounds, lying in a wasteland of his own shattered ice. Bakugo struggled to his feet and walked over to him, grabbing him by the collar and yanking him upward. He was shouting again at him, his hand ready to slam another explosion even though Todoroki was out cold. Ayuma watched Midnight slowly creep up behind him and carefully tear her sleeve to release her sleeping gas, giving her a flashback of her own capture. And just like
how it stopped Ayuma from running away, Bakugo just stopped shouting and dropped, enveloped in the mist Midnight let off.

Ayuma felt the tears start coming again, seeing her own memory on replay. Losing all presence of her power in one second... the mummy-like wrappings tying her up and holding her to the ground... trying to get up and run before anything else happened... not even realizing someone else was around... the footsteps creeping up behind her, accompanied by that ripping noise... the mist washing over her, and the sudden dizziness that for once didn't come from her Quirk... her vision becoming a black circle that tightened the same way her chest clenched in terror... feeling herself drop down an endless abyss... realizing this wasn't like falling into the basement as a child... thinking it was so, so much worse...

...Save me...

As soon as Bakugo dropped into slumber, Midnight stopped releasing the fragrance of her Quirk. She lifted her hand and declared, "Todoroki is out of bounds! That means... Bakugo is the winner!"

As the crowd roared in response, something a bit off caught her eye. She looked up to the area where the rest of Class 1-A was to see a peculiar scene. All the students in the stands were gathered around one of their own, with long reddish hair. Last she checked, only one student had that hair color: the girl she and her fellow teacher (who was currently up in the announcers' box) captured. Isn't her name Akuma or something?... What's that all about? It doesn't look like her classmates are attacking her. Is that supposed to be some kind of trick she's pulling? Or is it some kind of psychological episode? If it's that, then what is it? And where did it come from?...

As she wondered, her gaze traveled back to where Todoroki and Bakugo lay before the medic bots brought them to Recovery Girl. The place where the first-year victor lay was suspiciously familiar. It was a lot like...

Like when I used my Quirk on her...

That was a punch of guilt to the chest. If the girl really was in there because of some sort of post-traumatic stress attack, then Midnight caused it. Because of how the R-rated Heroine's part in her capture affected the girl. I wish I could just compare it to using a tranquilizer on a wild animal, but this girl is far more than that. Did I seriously think she'd be over getting captured for a hero's recklessness that easily?... Maybe, she admitted to herself. She watched as the students suddenly partially dispersed, and the girl was soon led away by her classmates for the closing ceremony.

"You scared us back there, Ayuma!" Sero cried out in the corridors. "What the heck was that all about?!!"

Ayuma winced from the shouts that angered her headache, stumbling along despite Koda keeping an arm around her as support. "I-I think... it -- it was Midnight, sneaking up on Bakugo... It was a lot like... when she and Mr. Aizawa captured me -- well, Endeavor's attack."

"Ribbit! I can't blame you for that," Tsu commented, laying a hand on her shoulder. "You got attacked by three heroes in a single day for something that wasn't even your fault. I don't think anyone could walk away from something like that without a scrape."

It kind of was my fault, though... "You have a point, Tsu. I'm sorry I scared you guys with that
"It was only your own reaction to something bad that happened to you," Shoji reminded her. "There's no need to feel shame for something you have no control over."

At the award ceremony, hordes of cameras were watching from behind a barricade fence. All the classes were gathered in the center of the field where the battle stage previously stood. Fireworks was going off all over the place, in all sorts of bright and beautiful colors.

"The first-year students have completed all of the events for the U.A. Sports Festival!" Midnight announced. "Now it's time to relax and enjoy the awards ceremony!" In response, a great fanfare and bigger fireworks show played out as the winner podium rose from the ground in a cloud of smoke and confetti. All the students were a bit taken aback to see Bakugo muzzled, arms encased in metal, and tied to a sturdy pole while fighting to get free. Tokoyami and a dead-staring Todoroki were on either side, but Tenya wasn't with the bird-headed boy, to Ayuma's confusion.

"Whoa..." Mineta whimpered from Shoji's shoulder.

"What the heck?" Kyoka remarked in confusion.

"He's been going nuts ever since he woke up," Kirishima cringed. "Man, Bakugo, pull yourself together..."

"Tenya Iida actually shares third place award with Tokoyami, but unfortunately he had to leave for family reasons. Gotta love those familial bonds!" Midnight winked, but Tokoyami seemed to recognize the "bond" joke she made and gave her an appalled look.

"Too bad Iida couldn't be here; he was so excited," Tsu said sadly. Ayuma couldn't help agreeing, but also wondered even more about what could've happened. Is it something to do with his brother? she recalled the friendly face of the Turbo Hero, feeling a harsh pit in her stomach at the thought of anything bad happening to him. I hope not.

"Now let's break out the hardware!" Midnight called out. "Of course, there's only one person worthy of distributing the awards!" A silhouette rose over the stadium, followed by laughter from above as the crowd cheered louder.

"CITIZENS!" All Might's voice rang out over the stadium. "I AM HE--!"

"All Might, the Number 1 Hero!" Midnight interrupted his catchphrase as he landed. The whole place was dead silent; All Might turned back at Midnight with a glare. "...Ruined that, didn't I..." she realized, putting her hands together in apology for talking over him. "So now that you're here, All Might, why don't you start the presentation."

All Might laughed off the mess-up and took the medals. He started with third place, placing the bronze medal around Tokoyami's neck. Then, the great hero hugged him, leaving Tokoyami rather surprised. After he let go, Tokoyami looked at his medal humbly. Then, All Might went to Todoroki to give him the silver medal; after a little while standing eye to eye, he was also given a hug. Finally, he went to Bakugo, still writhing on the podium. Like Tsukauchi removed Ayuma's blindfold and gag, All Might removed the muzzle.

Unfortunately, that let a very long slur of frustration from the blond out for all to hear. He didn't even want the medal and tried to keep it from being put on. All Might eventually had to settle for putting the strap in his mouth.

"Here they are: the winners of this year's Sports Festival!" All Might declared. "But listen
closely. Any of the first-years could've ended up standing on these podiums. Think about what
you've done today. You've challenged each other, learned from each other, and climbed even
closer toward your goals of being pros. I think the next generation is proving to be our most
promising one yet!" He raised a finger to the sky. "So I have one more thing to say! I want to hear
everyone yell it with me! You know what it is!"

"PLUS ULTRA!" the stadium exclaimed.

"Thanks everyone for your hard work!" All Might said at the exact same time. After a bit of
dead silent confusion, the whole place started booing mercilessly at the Number 1 Hero's fake-out.
He scrambled to cover it up by saying that everyone did a great job. That didn't do much though...

Back at the classroom, Aizawa congratulated his class for their work at the Sports Festival.
He explained they had the next two days off to recover. "I'm sure the Pros watching the Festival
will want to recruit some of you. We'll look at the drafts and update you when you when you
return. Get some rest; you still have a lot of training."

"Yes, sir," the class replied in unison.

As soon as they were dismissed, and Ayuma was on her way home, her phone started ringing.
She didn't recognize the number, but something told her it was important, so she picked up.
"Hello?"

A woman's voice sniffled on the other end. "Hello, is this, um... that friend of my sons?...
From a while ago? Akuma, I believe?"

Ayuma tried to keep herself together after hearing her name said wrong; she knew that voice.
Tenya introduced her to his family and asked for her number, (NOT THAT WAY!) assuring they'd
be in touch in case something happened on either side. She thought it a good idea at the time since
she had no family of her own. "I'm... sorry, Ms. Iida, but do you mean Ayuma?"

"Oh, yes, that's it... I'm so sorry... Tenya told me to contact you with the number you gave
him."

That immediately got her attention as she got on the bus. Tenya told his mother to call me?
Why? "I see... Has something happened?"

Ms. Iida sounded about to burst into tears. "It's... It's Tensei... A villain got him... The Hero
Killer... He's in the hospital... The doctors say even if he makes it... he's paralyzed from... the
waist... down..." Ayuma heard the woman break out in tears before it was replaced by the steady
tone that told her that the other end of the phone was hung up.

_Hero Killer? Wonder who that is..._ Ayuma searched up the title, and soon was staring at
millions of articles and links, all about the same person. This Hero Killer, called Stain, was
notorious for the deaths and permanent injuries he's given to many heroes, famous for his ruthless
nature and ability to prevent his victims from moving just after a taste of their blood.

And now Tensei's part of the list.

The force of the situation couldn't have hit any harder than that single moment. Ayuma was
completely numb as she paid and got off the bus, heading to her apartment. She held her
composure as she checked in with the lady at the front desk, went up the elevator, and shut the door
to her little home before she broke down, crying quietly into her hands. Tensei was lucky he wasn't
killed, but... he'll never be able to walk -- let alone do hero work -- ever again. The memories she
had of the first hero who was kind to her only made that punch-in-the-gut feeling that much worse.

Why did it have to be Tensei?... Tenya must be even more upset than his mother... He always wanted to be like his older brother... And now that brother... if he even survives... will live out the rest of his life in a wheelchair...

The next morning, Ayuma put on her usual clothes. A light orchid tank top, a large faded purple T-shirt that sagged over her shoulders, and a pair of worn out jeans. (The kind that actually become that way from use.) The jeans covered her feet enough to conceal the fact that she didn't have any shoes, just socks. Shoes were too expensive, and any donated ones she ever got were normally too old and worn for use, even if they were the right size. The news about Tensei weighed heavy in her chest, but she couldn't leave this alone because of that. Not with the awful dreams that plagued her the night before.

I know I'm not going to like this, but the hospital won't let me see Tensei since I'm not family. I haven't seen her in a long time anyway.

The memories still lingered in the back of her mind. The looming silhouette standing above her. The cold basement floor beneath her body. The awful smell of iron thick in the air. The agonizing pain clawing at the inside of her head with that incessant feeling of just breaking under that silhouette before falling as a useless sack of flesh on the floor. And the scissors...

It took her everything she had not to give into the flashback as she walked through the back alleys. They were her safe haven, from all the harsh words and shrewd glares when she looked like this. She could be dressed as a pretty little schoolgirl out in the open and no one would look twice. That uniform was almost like a disguise for her; to them, her in a school uniform and her in her normal clothes were two entirely different people. No street drunk or perv or gang member would set foot in the back alleys because of her. They knew the "fearsome demon of terrors" lurked in the underground. A gatekeeper that supposedly let none pass through her door of tarnished silver.

It wasn't the best reputation for most, but it was better than that of who Ayuma was going to visit. The day they found out, we thought we were saved. But they only saw us as contraband, and kept us as mute evidence for their little case. And even then, she plead insanity to be sent there and save her own skin while we weren't allowed to say a word. They thought we'd take it all lying down like she'd force us to, not even thinking about what we wanted. We had to run, and take back what they took from us; we couldn't let another one have us, not after her. It's not like that place would've held up much longer anyway. Sure, it wasn't legal, but would it have made a difference?... What choice did we have?...

As soon as she reached the building she was looking for, she went right in. When she spoke with the women at the desk, they gave her the directions to room 320. One of the staff mentioned someone around her age was also visiting a patient, not far from that room. She paid little mind to it and went to the room with quiet footsteps, stopping at the labeled door: Miss Kita. That's not her name; it'll never be her name. Not to us. She shook her head to remove the nasty thoughts, took a deep breath, and reached for the handle.

The woman was almost just like she remembered. Dark sienna hair pulled into a neat bun, thin fingers working tirelessly between a pencil and paper even in the light blue clothes that showed she was a patient. Silver eyes turning from the desk to her in a deathly cold glare. "Akuma," her voice sneered icily.
"Madame," Ayuma replied in a more eerily calm tone. She didn't move a millimeter, despite the sting at base of her skull that reminded her what this woman could do.

The woman was quiet for a little bit as she studied the visitor's face, searching for fear and finding almost none. "You're the last one to come visit me, you know," Madame Kita remarked. "Did it take you that long to forgive and forget?"

"You know we'd never be able to," the teen replied. "We can forgive, though we probably won't; but we can't forget... How could we, really, after what you did to us?"

"Well if it isn't for that, then what are you here for?"

"I wasn't saying I wasn't." Ayuma stared into the woman's eyes. "I'm part of U.A. now." Madame Kita's eyes widened. "I've gone far beyond the scared little 'demon girl' you once knew. I'm training to become a hero, to protect the innocent from the true demons of the world... People like you. But I also want to forgive you, and give you a chance to start over."

"You? A hero?" The silver eyes narrowed as she chuckled dismissively, her voice like scissors cutting the air. "Don't make me laugh. How can you be a hero when I know you'll cause the most trouble out of any so-called hero-in-training? You and your awful reputation could never be a vigilante, let alone in U.A."

"And yet, I am. As it turns out, they saw a potential hero in me every time I was called a villain. My name never was Akuma, Madame Kirai," she said the words for "demon" and "hate" with a particular icy chill on her tongue. "My name is Ayuma. I'm giving you a chance to make things right; you just have to apologize. If I'm the last one to give you that chance, and you don't take it... I suppose you can say we're leaving you in your guilt forever."

The woman turned up her nose at the teen and turned back to her paper. "Useless fiend; I'll deny that claim, and I'll deny your offer. Goodbye, Little Nightmare."

Ayuma turned on her heel and went through the door. "Goodbye forever, Lady of Hate."

As soon as the door closed, it felt like a great weight lifted off Ayuma's shoulders. She faced the woman of her childhood nightmares without a tear or raising of her voice. It was hard to keep her composure and say all those things. But she overcame that old hurdle like a champ, the same way all of her home-mates probably did. She gave the owner of that foster home one more chance to change. She would've been fine if Madame Kirai took it, but she didn't, and that was fine, too. She and her mind-breaker Quirk would never hurt any child again. She was about to leave when she heard something in the room a few doors down. She heard two voices, talking and quietly laughing: those of a woman and a familiar boy. As she walked to the door, not even looking at the name of the patient inside, the words "Mom" and "Shoto" leaked out and graced her ears.

"Is that... who I think it is?"

No sooner did she think she recognized the male voice did the door open, and she was right. "Ayuma? What are you doing here?"

She stumbled back the second the door opened and stared at Todoroki. Her eyes wandered back to the door and label of room 320. "The owner of the home I used to go to... I gave her one last chance to make amends... but she didn't take it." She glanced at the name label and looked behind him to see a woman sitting in a chair; her white hair and dark gray eyes were identical to his right side. "Is that your mother, Todoroki?"
"Do you know this young lady, Shoto?" the woman asked.

"Uh, yeah. She's a classmate," Todoroki replied, looking back at her for a second before turning back to Ayuma. "Come on in; I'll introduce you."

Ayuma smiled, nodding in thanks as he allowed her inside.
Ayuma was riding on the city bus to get to school after the miniature break was over. She was also wearing a gray poncho over her uniform, since it was a rainy day. She was mostly reminiscing about how well her trip to the mental institution went, aside from Madame Kirai. Miss Rei (she insisted Ayuma call her that) turned out to be a wonderful person who was more than happy to meet her. She seemed very glad that Todoroki was making such good friends with people like Ayuma and Midoriya.

"Psst! Hey," she heard a woman's voice whisper, pulling her from her memory. "Excuse me? You're Ayuma, the Mini-Vigilante who reappeared in the Sports Festival, right? From Class 1-A?" She looked up to see a neighboring passerby talking to her, and many others turned to her. "You did very well in the Sports Festival, for where you came from. Many police officers I know were rooting for you. I'm sure you'll do wonderfully next year." The other passengers looking at her began to chime in.

"Whoa, aren't you the one who stopped all those villains when you were a little kid?"

"Sure looks it. And a lot of heroes had great things to say about that."

"Even Present Mic knew it was you; he brought it up in the Sports Festival!"

"I think she even stood up to Endeavor not too long ago, and put up a good fight!"

"She can hold her own against the Number 2 Hero? Amazing!"

"You look like you really want to be a Pro one day."

"Yeah, you'll probably blow us all away someday!"

"Keep on trying, hero!" they all said.

Ayuma, surprised at all the attention, replied, "Th-thank you. I-I'll do my best!"

As soon as she got to school, put her poncho in her locker, and got to class, Ayuma heard that she wasn't the only one to receive such recognition and praise on her way to school. Just about everyone in her class got similar feedback on their way to school. Sero still seemed pretty bummed out over being told "Nice try" on his way here by a bunch of elementary school students. Tsu said it again as a guess, only making him even more upset.

Mr. Aizawa soon came in as well, this time without any bandages. Now, Ayuma saw his face, and recognized it from her own capture and from somewhere further back, aside from the scar under his eye. "Morning."

"Good morning, Mr. Aizawa," the class greeted their teacher.

"Ribbit! Mr. Aizawa, you don't have bandages anymore," Tsu pointed out, pressing a finger to her chin. "That's good news!"

"The old lady went a little overboard in her treatment," he brushed off. "Anyway, we have a
big class today, on Hero Informatics." An arctic wind swept over the class, wondering what it was specifically going to be. Ayuma could tell Kaminari and Kirishima were in an internal panic because they weren't all that good at such things. "You need code names; time to pick your hero identities."

The whole class cheered, to the point Mr. Aizawa used his signature Erasure glare to make them quiet down. "This is related to the Pro hero draft picks that I mentioned last time we were in class together. Normally students don't have to worry about the draft yet -- not until their second or third year, actually -- but your class is different. In fact, by extending offers to first years like you, Pro heroes are essentially investing in your potential. Any offers can be rescinded if their interest in you dies down before graduation, though."

*Okay. Not too different from parents fostering children before actually adopting them,* Ayuma mentally remarked. *And rescinding the offer is... like being sent back...*

"So what you're saying is we'll still have to prove ourselves after we've gotten recruited," Toru summarized.

"Correct," affirmed the teacher. "Now, here are the totals for those of you who got offers." He pulled out a remote and clicked on it for a projector to show the numbers on the screen. Todoroki was first, then Bakugo, then Tokoyami, Ayuma, Iida, Kaminari, Yaoyorozu, Kirishima, Uraraka, and Sero. Ayuma had to do a double take to realize she was up with Tenya and Tokoyami, containing 324 offers. "In past years, it's been more spread out, but there's a pretty big gap this time."

Ayuma and the others were pretty surprised that Todoroki and Bakugo got a few thousand offers each. Not to mention that she got so many votes without even being in the finals. Her public reputation must've withstood the test of time for her to still be sought after. Todoroki figured most of his offers were on account of being the son of the Number 2 Hero, and Ochaco was shaking Tenya with glee. Mineta was trying to comfort Midoriya since he didn't get any votes (probably because of his Quirk's drawback).

Aizawa continued, "Despite these results, you'll all be interning with Pros, got it? Even those of you who didn't get any offers."

"Oh! So we're all interning?" Midoriya perked up.

"Yes. You already got to experience combat with real villains, be it in the USJ facility or," -- his eyes picked out Ayuma, Midoriya, and Bakugo -- "... some other point in life. But it'll still be helpful to see Pros at work; up close and personal, in the field, first hand. These hero names will likely be temporary. But take them seriously, or--"

The door swung open. "You'll have *Hell* to pay later!" A few of the guys giggled in anticipation as Midnight strode into the classroom in a flirtatious pose. "What you pick today could be your code name for life. You better be careful, or you'll be stuck with something utterly indecent." Ayuma tried to keep down her shivers when her two captors were standing side by side at the teacher's desk.

"Yeah, she's got a point," Mr. Aizawa agreed. "Midnight is going to have final approval over your names. It's not my forte." He pulled his sleeping bag out from under the desk. "The name that you give yourself is important. It helps reinforce your image and shows what kind of hero you want to be in the future. A code name tells people exactly what you represent. Take All Might for example."
A bunch of tablet-sized whiteboards and markers were handed out. As soon as Ayuma got hers, she started thinking. What kind of hero do I want to be? What exactly do I represent?...

After a while of Mr. Aizawa snoozing in the corner, Midnight finally asked, "Now students, who among you is ready to share?"

Aoyama immediately stood up and went to the desk. "Hold your breath. The Shining Hero: my name is 'I Cannot Stop Twinkling!' Mon amie, you can't deny my sparkle." Maybe not, but the class was still pretty much appalled by the fact that his hero name was a whole sentence.

"It'll be better this way," Midnight advised, taking the whiteboard and adjusting it. "Take out the 'I' and shorten 'cannot' to 'can't.'"

"It's stunning, Mademoiselle!" Aoyama approved of his new name being "Can't Stop Twinkling;" the rest of the class was still pretty dumbfounded.

Mina went up afterward, her code name being "Alien Queen." Midnight compared it to a "horrifying monster with acidic blood" (possibly from one of those old horror flicks) and sent Mina to try again.

Everyone was so weirded out, no one had the guts to come up and show their hero names. At least, until Tsu volunteered. "I've had this name in mind since grade school. Rainy Season Hero: Froppy."

"That's delightful!" Midnight grinned. "It makes you sound approachable. What a great example of a name everyone will love!" A lot of the others were so happy that there was a more 'normal' code name, they got up and cheered!

Kirishima showed his name to be the Sturdy Hero: Red Riot. Apparently, it was a nod to the Chivalrous Hero: Crimson Riot. Midnight reminded him that using the name of one he admires will mean he has that much more to live up to, but Kirishima said he was up for the challenge.

In the meantime, while Kaminari was wondering about his hero name, Kyoka suggested "Jamming-yay." Ayuma saw enough of Kaminari's short-circuits to know it was a joke and almost laughed, but he thought it was a nod to some author. At least, until Kyoka explained it while holding back a laugh herself, much to the flirty blond's chagrin.

Anyway, Kyoka went up to the desk calling herself the Hearing Hero: Earphone Jack; Midnight gave her seal of approval. Shoji went with Tentacle Hero: Tentacole, which got similar feedback as a portmanteau. Sero was the Taping Hero: Cellophane. Ojiro came up with Martial Arts Hero: Tailman. Sato's code name was the Sweets Hero: Sugarman. Mina's second choice, Pinky, won Midnight's approval with how much it referred to her appearance.


"King Explosion Murder."

"I'm gonna say that one's a little too violent," Midnight frowned, earning a tirade from the blond.

"Why don't you be Explosion Boy?" Kirishima piped up, which he and Kaminari seemed to
get a kick out of despite not getting the best feedback from Bakugo.

Ochaco went up to the desk after Bakugo was sent back. Her whiteboard simply read, "Uravity." Midnight loved it, clapping her hands with delight.

"To be honest, choosing names is going faster than I thought it would," Midnight commented. "All we have left is Bakugo who needs to rethink his; and Iida; oh yes, and Midoriya; and of course Akuma, too."

Ayuma froze when Midnight basically just bluntly called her a demon in front of the whole class, plus Aizawa. "IT'S AYUMA!" various voices from the class exploded lividly, and Midnight quickly apologized for her unintentional blunder. Under the shock of the shouting, the girl in question found it heartwarming for her class to correct the teacher.

Tenya decided to use his first name like Todoroki, which came as a surprise that he didn't take up the name Ingenium. As soon as he sat down, Ayuma went up to the desk, taking care to remain on her guard around Midnight. She took a deep breath and cleared her throat before turning her whiteboard over. "The Dreamscape Heroine: Nightmaiden."

"Oooh! How dreamy!" Midnight grinned. "It sounds so surreal! Well done, Ayuma!" the girl in question nodded at the teacher and went back to her seat, sighing in relief. "Well, Midoriya, are you ready?"

He looked up. "O-oh! Yes," he stood up and went to the desk. After a few seconds of silence, he turned his whiteboard. The whole class was taken aback, and a little worried. In two bold characters, "Deku," -- the name given to him by none other than his childhood bully -- was on his whiteboard. "Right, I used to hate it," Midoriya explained. "But then something changed. I guess... someone taught me it could have a different meaning. And that had a huge impact on how I felt, so now I really like it. Deku; that has to be my code name." As soon as he sat down, Bakugo gave it another try, but...

"Lord Explosion Murder!"

"That's basically the same thing," Midnight said flatly.

"Are you sure something like Explosion Boy or Dynamite wouldn't work, Bakugo?" Kirishima inquired.  

"SHUT UP WEIRD HAIR!"

Guess not...

"Now that everyone's decided on their hero names, we can go back to talking about your upcoming internships," Aizawa began after he woke up. "They'll last for one week. As for who you'll be working with, those of you who were on the board will choose from among your offers; everyone else will have a different list. You have a lot to think about. There are around 40 agencies across the country who've agreed to take on interns from your class. Each agency has a different specialty that its heroes focus on; keep that in mind."

"Imagine that you were Thirteen," Midnight chimed in. "You'd want to choose a place that focuses on rescuing people, not fighting villains. Understand?"

"Think carefully before you decide," Mr. Aizawa repeated.  

"Yes sir," everyone replied.
Once everyone got their lists, Ayuma looked over her choices. They were told they only had two days to decide their internships before they were dismissed. When Ayuma got up to leave, she noticed a strange look in Todoroki’s eyes. With a peer over his shoulder, the word "Endeavor" caught her eye. Her eyes narrowed in bitterness. Of course his father had to put in an offer for him. The poor guy...

The next day at lunch period, the internships were all that the class was talking about. Mineta already decided on Mount Lady (didn’t take much to guess why without making Ayuma almost gag). Midoriya was spending the whole time on his little muttering spree. Ochaco had selected the hero Gunhead's agency to get in more experience on another perspective. Her original plan was to focus on rescue, but growing stronger in a battle-based agency would give her more possibilities.

"I've actually decided on interning with Hawks," Ayuma admitted. *I've been working extra hard in learning to control Nightmare on my own. Working with another speed-specializing hero who was also scoped by authorities to become a hero could prove beneficial as a kindred spirit.*

"As have I," Tokoyami remarked. "'Tis skill, not strength, that governs a ship."

Once it was time to leave, Ayuma had handed in her choices and was about to head off. She noticed Tenya’s desk was empty when normally he'd be with Ochaco and Midoriya. When the remaining two were about to go, All Might came up and pulled Midoriya aside. Confused but brushing it off, Ayuma left and went home. As soon as she got home, she saw news story after news story about Ingenium's condition on screens. According to Midoriya, Tenya didn't want anyone to be concerned with his brother.

And yet, he still had his mother tell Ayuma all about it. At least, as much as she could before she broke down crying. The news said he was most likely beyond a full recovery; Stain had completely maimed him. Then again, Ayuma had already been told that Tensei was going to be paralyzed from the waist down, but she wished the hospital would let her in. Her curiosity was a burning sensation in her chest, only made worse because she knew they wouldn't let her see the first hero she truly met.

*Please, Tensei... Even if you're confined to a wheelchair... I just want to be able to see you alive again...*

The next morning, Ayuma finally got her hero costume, and was with all her classmates at the train station with a messenger bag containing her stuff. Mr. Aizawa was giving everyone a rundown on what they were to do. Don't wear their costumes in public, don't lose them, mind their manners with the Pros, etc. Ashido tried to switch things up on her response, but Mr. Aizawa basically shot her down for it. Afterwards, they were sent off.

*I probably shouldn't worry; wheelchair aside, Tensei's going to be fine. Who knows? Maybe I'll be able to see him when I get back and see him alive and alright. But that still leaves Tenya. Didn't he take on an internship in Hosu City where Tensei was attacked? Is he actually planning on getting revenge on the Hero Killer?*

"Hey Ayuma, Tokoyami! You two are heading to Kyushu, right?" Kirishima asked, pulling her from her thoughts.

"Yes," Tokoyami affirmed. "We'll be interning with Hawks."
"Sounds cool!" Kirishima grinned. "I'm interning with Fourth Kind. I'm sure you'll both do great!"

"You probably will, too, Kirishima," Ayuma replied before they got on the train. "See you next week."

Chapter End Notes

Aw crap, what did I just get myself into? Considering we don't know jack about Tokoyami's first internship with Hawks, I'll need to make up a lot of things that probably aren't canon. Which might throw a lot of hate on my story as well as take a lot longer than normal... F*&$... Welp, better get started...
Ayuma watched out the window as the landscape changed outside the train. She'd every so often glance at her phone to check the time, and to see if she got any message from Tenya or even his mother. Tokoyami was sitting back with his eyes closed, though Ayuma couldn't tell whether he was asleep or just resting his eyes. The scenery was beautiful outside her window seat, don't get her wrong, but... with the lingering worry about Tensei and her messages to Tenya and Ms. Iida lying unread...

Something moved out of the corner of her eye on the window side. She looked out the window, but didn't see anything. Brow furrowed in confusion, she turned back to her phone only to see it again. She looked out the window again. There wasn't anything out of the ordinary out there.

Until that bolt of red blazed past the train.

Ayuma immediately tried to look closer without pressing her face against the window. The bolt of red seemed to be racing the train, effortlessly able to keep up, and was starting to get closer to the train. The red that Ayuma saw was a pair of wings on a man's back, poking through slits cut out of the back of an aviator jacket. As soon as the man got close enough for her to see his face, he saluted at her and took off back to the sky.

Was that Hawks? If so, then Tokoyami missed quite a chance to see who we're interning for.

As soon as the train stopped, Ayuma and Tokoyami got off at the station. (She had to wake him up though; apparently he was sleeping.) She periodically looked up at the sky in search for the winged man she saw on the train ride. Unfortunately, he seemed to be gone.

"The agency building is supposed to be somewhere nearby," Tokoyami commented as they walked along the sidewalk. "Hopefully, no one made the mistake of putting in the wrong address."

"Yeah, wouldn't that be a waste," Dark Shadow agreed, head perched on Tokoyami's shoulder.

Ayuma peered at the directions, brow furrowed. "Half of these directions... they just contradict each other."

They stopped. Tokoyami scanned the directions with narrowed eyes before he growled lowly in frustration. "You're right; we've been tricked."

The two heroes-in-training and sentient Quirk heard a whistle behind them. They barely had
the time to turn around before two people grabbed them and took off with them. Ayuma squirmed out of her "captor's" grip and into the dark expanse she dubbed the "Dreamscape" that her hero name referred to. A set of black, moth-like wings appeared as soon as she looked down at the road below. She unsteadily tried to fly after the one who took Tokoyami only to be blocked by a clawed arm-wing. Wobbling in the air, Ayuma looked to the source to find an image that seemed to be a purple brown color.

"Sorry, miss; we didn't know you were capable of flight," a woman's voice apologized. "We were only sent to bring you to Hawks' agency. You... are the interns from U.A. High School, correct?"

"Yes," Ayuma replied. Next time, ask that before you sweep newcomers off the sidewalk!

The woman sighed in relief. "Good. I'm the Harpy Hero: Celaeno. If we hurry, we can catch up with Grallistrix and your friend. Try to steady yourself, then follow me."

Ayuma forced herself to straighten out, then followed the woman and landed at the top of a huge building. The shaking, indignant, red-and-purple image of Tokoyami stood on the roof with a strange tan-colored image. Under the glow, Ayuma saw he was with a taller man with an owlish mask and full wings for arms, even with the legs, tail, and talons of an owl.

"Wait, she's got wings?" he asked, tilting his head. "I didn't see wings on her."

Ayuma let her wings disappear and vision return to normal. "It's a part of my Quirk... I guess..." that appeared out of reaction to being carried so far above the ground.

"Ah! I see!" the man scrambled over to her, holding out a talon as if for a handshake. "I am Grallistrix, sidekick of Number 3 Hero Hawks and head of the night shift. Sorry for not realizing things sooner; too early for an owl, yes?"

Ayuma blinked in confusion. She looked over at where Celaeno was to see she was a dark haired, green-eyed woman covered in blue and brown feathers, wearing a long, sleeveless coat lined with fur and a navy blue sleeveless bodysuit underneath. The woman nodded as if to say "I promise he's completely safe."

Hesitantly, Ayuma shook the offered talon. He managed to not scratch her with those lethal-looking claws. ...Dreamscape Heroine: Nightmaiden... she replied softly.

"I'll bring you down to where you can change into your costumes," Celaeno explained, leading Tokoyami and Ayuma to the elevator. "I'm sure Hawks will be here as soon as you're ready."

Ayuma left the girls' bathroom in a purplish-gray, short-sleeve dress and dark grey knee-length shorts. The sides had pouches with disinfectant, medicine, and bandages. She also had dark compression stockings that reached just under her knees with a rubbery layer on the bottom of the feet; there were also compression wrist sleeves that reached the middle of her forearm, closing in a loop between her thumb and index finger. There was a grey metal collar necklace following the neckline of her dress, tightened around her neck with a purple diamond-shaped pin. On her head was a low circlet that was just like the collar, with the tightening pin glimmering under her bangs.

Plenty of pressure points to reduce the headaches and dizziness. First aid kit for any rescues. And no "actual" shoes make for better mobility, surprisingly enough to some people.

Celaeno was waiting by the elevator as Ayuma and Tokoyami returned in their costumes. As soon as they were back on the roof, the man Ayuma saw on the train ride was waiting up there, his
back facing them. Grallistrix wasn't there anymore, though. The dirty blond man whisked around as soon as they were up there.

"There you two are!" he grinned, quickly taking Celaeno's place behind the interns as he slung his arms over their shoulders. "My fellow kiddie prodigies. Nice to meet you Tsukuyomi and Nightmaiden; the latter of the two looking especially bright-eyed today. But anyways, down to the basics. I'll go on ahead to fight villains, help civilians, that kind of thing. Speed beats power, let me tell you. If you can't keep up, you'll probably be left with the sidekicks doing cleanup after any villain beat-ups I pull off. Anyway, here's hopin' for a good week! Starting now!" He shot off into the sky at a breakneck speed before either of the shell-shocked students could respond.

Celaeno sighed. "He always does that. Too fast for the rest of the world. Well, I suppose it can't be helped. Come with me, you two." She flew off at a far slower pace than Hawks. Tokoyami went to jumping buildings with Dark Shadow, and Ayuma formed her wings and followed alongside him. They were both thinking the same thing:

*What did we just get ourselves into?*

For such a fast hero, the week was going by awfully slow to Tokoyami and Ayuma. It had only been a couple of days since their arrival, but they were only able to do clean-up because they couldn't keep up with Hawks. Celaeno, Grallistrix, and the other sidekicks were all friendly and helpful in their own ways, but it was a little disappointing how they could never get a word in edgewise before he'd take off for the day. Only one evening was Tokoyami even able to talk to the guy in his "office," and it was about the USJ attack and League of Villains she knew nothing about!

The sidekicks understood the pair's distress, but explained that it was for a good reason things were this way. Hawks' biggest strong suit was his speed, which resulted in his usual phrase, "Speed beats power." If he slowed down for the rest of his fellow heroes, a lot of crimes and other problems would be left unchecked. It went without saying Ayuma and Tokoyami wished they could keep up and gain at least some real camaraderie with Hawks himself. But Tokoyami wasn't quite able to fly despite trying to utilize Dark Shadow to do so, and Ayuma was in a 2-on-1 against the drawbacks of Nightmare and practicing with her new wings.

On their third day, the interns were left standing aside in cleaning up after busting a black market station. The confiscated materials and people guarding them were apparently that dangerous, and the Pros didn't want them to get hurt. Tokoyami and Dark Shadow looked exhausted in the blazing sun, considering they and Ayuma were resting in the shade. She couldn't blame them, what with Dark Shadow being weakened by light and Tokoyami needing that heavy black mantle to guard his sentient Quirk.

She felt a familiar tug in the back of her mind that got her attention. Something was wrong, and it felt like it had something to do with Hawks. She closed her eyes and opened them to the Dreamscape. The image of the Winged Hero in mind, she was pleading with her own Quirk to help her find out what's happening. A red-gold trail of stardust in the air made itself known to her vision, and it was flickering like a light bulb that had to be changed. Something told her that wasn't a good sign.

Forming her wings, Ayuma took off along the trail, not even bothering with the voices of the other sidekicks or even Tokoyami calling out behind her. She followed the flickering trail to see the eerily motionless source. Briefly able to shift to natural vision, she saw an abandoned building that was ablaze with gold and pale yellow fire. To her horror, her Dreamscape vision was asserting that Hawks was hidden in that blaze. *Dying* in the oppressive heat and smoke, and the mere image
of that sent her mind reeling, until something else violently seized it.

Her mind went blank as the redhead dove towards where Hawks was, soaring over the flames as the wind she caused blew them aside. She ran across the red-hot floors as the hungry flames bit at her clothes and smoke crept into her lungs. Her batwing wings were barely keeping the flames back as she found Hawks, unconscious and burned in the midst of the hellscape. She pulled up the Pro hero so he was slumped over her back and started dragging him the way she came.

The headache and burning in her chest was getting worse with each step, and the wings were starting to dissipate as the hot golden tongues lashed at them. However, despite Ayuma not being in control, her Quirk seemed to know exactly what to do, forming flailing shadowy arms that tore the flames apart and threw aside the smoke. A violent counterattack seething with rage unknown to the owner's face. With the surging attack came enough adrenaline to jump and glide to safety on the ground.

Hawks coughed from Ayuma's shoulder a as soon as she let down her wings and her Quirk stopped. "Stupid... Trap..."

Obviously he was still pretty out of it, but that explained the fire coming out of nowhere. Ayuma shook off the daze, not paying attention to the fact that she had no memory of going in or out of the building. "Don't move or talk, Hawks; you'll be alright," Ayuma told the hero as she went to the worried sidekicks (and classmate) and waiting ambulance, handing over the injured hero.

One of the paramedics checked her over and determined she had minor damage considering the fire's destructive factor, but she'd be fine with proper rest. Hawks was loaded into the ambulance as the cops took his coat for some reason. Celaeno spoke with the other paramedics before they left.

"They say he'll most likely be fine," she said as soon as the ambulance left. She turned to Ayuma with an unreadable expression."We should be mad at you right now, Nightmaiden, for running off like that..."

Ayuma bowed her head in response, saying nothing. She was already prepared for a harsh lecture on what she did wrong. Not only was her costume ruined and torn from braving the fire, but she was already imagining the harsh words of listening to her elders and disobeying orders and how she could've gotten hurt and --

"But we're not."

Ayuma looked up. "Ex...cuse me?"

"We're not mad at you, Nightmaiden," Celaeno repeated. "We can't be mad, after the good you just did. You -- a student intern -- saved one of the Top 3 Pro heroes from something he would've died in had it not been for you. That's nothing to sneeze at, especially given how fast you somehow managed to realize something was wrong and take off after him before we even gave a thought to it. Nightmaiden, we all want to thank you."

Ayuma couldn't believe what she just heard. She'd never been thanked for any good deed she had ever done. In fact, "no good deed goes unpunished" was a favorite lecture that Madame Kirai and many other people would dump on her and the other orphans. And that wasn't even touching on the contradictory things authorities so often did. She barely felt it when Tokoyami wrapped his mantle around her shoulders and started leading her away.
"You'll probably be resting for the remainder of the internship, if not close to it," Celaeno admitted. "Let's get you back to the agency... little falcon."

That night of the day after the fire, Ayuma was in the room she was given in the housing quarters of the agency. The police somehow found and arrested the arsonists who caused the fire, and it was a street gang who had a personal vendetta against Hawks for capturing their leader. She was sitting at her window, staring at her phone in disbelief. After her rescuing Hawks got its day of fame, (and he was discharged after being healed) something else took the news by storm. And something about it was giving her issues.

A bunch of Pro sidekicks and three high school hero students stumbled upon the Hero Killer in Hosu City, who was about to kill the Pro hero Native. The article said a short battle ensued until Endeavor appeared and saved them all, apprehending Stain in the process. The students were injured, but that was because of their internships prior to the battle; they didn't engage with Stain.

The issue? Ayuma wasn't buying it.

She'd bet her new pair of wings that those "students" were actually her classmates; all three of them. And that Endeavor was nowhere near any battle with Stain. She even had extreme doubts that any of those sidekicks were around. She knew exactly what kinds of tricks the cops just loved to pull on the public when there isn't a camera around to see the truth first. As for who those students were, Todoroki would be guess number one, as he did choose his father's agency. Tenya would most likely also be part of it; he chose an internship in Hosu, after all, and wanted payback for Tensei. But the third one...

Knock-knock-knock!

Ayuma looked up at the door. That couldn't be Grallistrix; he should be out with the rest of the usual night shift. They can't be back already. She stood up and went to the door, opening it to see the Winged Hero himself standing there. But he didn't have on his hero costume, which was... odd, to say the least. Minus the wings, he looked like someone no one would look twice at.

"Hawks?... What are you doing here?" she asked in a whisper.

"I'm going on a little midnight flight," he answered. "I was wondering if you wanted to join me."

Ayuma could tell that wasn't the whole story. "...Might as well."

Hawks grinned and turned on his heel to leave. "I'll meet you up top. And before you ask, you won't need your costume."

Ayuma hurried quickly and quietly as she went up to the roof. Hawks was there waiting patiently for her, sitting on the edge with his newly healed wings stretched out in the breeze.

"Well...?" Hawks gave her a lop-sided grin, gesturing to his wings. "Can you fly with me?"

I haven't really used Nightmare since the fire, so it would be a good idea, Ayuma thought as she closed her eyes, feeling her wings form behind her. She opened her eyes to the Dreamscape and saw Hawks' red-gold image. Concentrating on him, the stardust trail appeared leading up to him emerged as well.

"Those wings look a little brighter than last I saw 'em," Hawks commented. "Let's go." He took off into the air, and Ayuma followed the trail of stardust behind him, able to keep a close
distance behind the hero. She realized exactly how fast she and Hawks were going by the wind in
her face and hair. She doesn't remember being able to fly this fast before.

The two landed at the top of the tallest building in the city. Ayuma let down her wings and
Dreamscape to see the glittering city below and the starry sky above. Hawks wasn't standing far
away, his wings out to be combed by the night wind.

"You know, I didn't think it was you who saved me from that fire," Hawks admitted, turning
to Ayuma with a sad smile. "I thought it was one of my sidekicks when I first woke up. At first
glance, I thought I saw some kid being mugged in that building... until I flew right into it and
something in there exploded all over my back. Next thing I knew, I was surrounded in flames and
genuinely thought I was gonna die... Until I thought I saw someone. It was really hard to see in the
blaze, but I thought I was seeing some weird shadow that the flames couldn't get through, and a
darker shadow with glowing eyes was in the middle. The rest was a blur; think you can fill in the
blanks?"

Ayuma took a deep breath as she recalled. "I followed the trail you flew on using the
Dreamscape, something that I see through when I use my Quirk. When I saw the source of your
trail, I also discovered the burning building you were trapped inside. My memory blanks out at that
point, but I think I managed to get in there and carry you out without much trouble. You were
still out of it when I got us on the ground, but said something about a trap. While the EMTs took
care of you, the cops took your coat. Celaeno told me they all should've been mad at me for
running off on them like that... but they weren't."

Hawks put a hand on Ayuma's shoulder, clearly detecting her confusion on the last part.
"Because sometimes it's better to do what's right than just follow the rules. I was just like you once;
saved a whole family from a huge car crash as a kid. Heh, barely remembered a thing because I
was so focused on helping them. Say, weren't you the one who single-handedly wiped out a
Trigger attack?"

Ayuma nodded, but didn't meet his eyes. "...Not that anyone I knew liked it... considering I
never got to see the public's reaction..."

Hawks nodded, a light scowl crossing his features as his wings bristled. "Figured as much; but
that only makes it better since you still did good things without thanks. I can tell you'll one day be
just like me. You, little falcon, are a lot stronger than you realize; and faster, too. Don't let the past
keep you grounded. Use it to fly toward your dreams like the free spirit you are."

"...That's kind of the basis of my Quirk..."

"Aw, you know what I meant!"

At the end of the internship, Ayuma was back at a window seat, petting Dark Shadow in her
lap as Tokoyami slept in the neighboring seat. She and Tokoyami were on the train heading home
after a long week's internship with Hawks and company. After the talk she had with Hawks,
Ayuma was given the chance to fly with him for the rest of the internship. Using manifested
nightmares alongside Hawks' feathers made for some great teamwork, and it felt like a genuine
achievement to be there alongside him.

That said, the internship was still pretty exhausting, physically and mentally. Being out so
much during the day was such torture on Dark Shadow that he looked on the verge of melting on
Ayuma. She could only hope that her endurance with her Quirk had improved over the week, even
marginally. She still was trying to figure out which of her classmates was there at the Hosu incident
besides Todoroki and Tenya, and only narrowed it down to Midoriya and Kirishima. A video about Stain had been circling over the internet in cycles of post, go viral, and delete, only to be reposted by someone else to restart the cycle.

There was also a side story about three villains being caught on the other side of Hosu city, with Endeavor fighting two of the three. They, along with two mysterious figures photographed near the site, were believed to be connected to the League of Villains. They attacked Class 1-A at Thirteen's USJ facility before Ayuma joined them. The pictures of the "villains" were monstrous, and she was glad she didn't have to face any of those things.

As the city disappeared, she noticed a swatch of red poking out of her bag. After grabbing it to inspect it further, she realized it was one of Hawks' feathers. It was like a personal reminder of their newfound kinship, and his own version of a thank-you note. Smiling, Ayuma put the feather back into her bag before leaning back, petting the cool feathers of the peaceful creature in her lap as they went home.

*From little nightmare to little falcon... I think that's a pretty good transition...*

Chapter End Notes

I hope you guys enjoyed this, as my own version of one of the unknown internships. Honestly hoping I'm not the only one who thinks Hawks should've been properly introduced to the anime. God knows that would've made this so much easier.
Finally reached double digits on kudos and have over 200 hits. Probably shouldn't complain, but sheesh, this is a slump compared to how it's going on Quotev. Am I doing something wrong here?

The day Ayuma went back to school, she was peppered with stories about the Hero Killer the whole way there. Every screen she saw had the same side stories about the captured "Nomu" villains from Hosu, and the same story of Endeavor taking out Stain. (She still wasn't buying a word of that one.) She wanted to contact Todoroki, Tenya, and Midoriya in that timespan, but she knew it would be better to bring it up with them face-to-face.

"Ayuma," a voice called out as she was on her way to class. She looked to see Shinso walking up to her, looking oddly worried for some reason. "I saw the news story while you were on your internship."

"Which one?" Ayuma asked. "The Hero Killer?"

"No, not that one; I'm talking about this." He pulled out his phone and showed her an article. It showed Ayuma, black-eyed deadpan and all, standing in the golden blaze of the burning building. Hawks was draped haphazard over her back, and his arms dangled over her shoulders. There was even a video from outside the building where purplish black tentacles were surging out of the middle floor. "I know it was you who saved that Pro hero from the fire. What happened? Did you get hurt in there?"

"I'm fine, Shinso," Ayuma assured him. "And so is Hawks. I flew in to save him, and my Quirk obviously kept us both safe going in and out of the burning building. I'm sorry if I made you worry."

Shinso sighed, rubbing the back of his neck as he put his phone away. "I doubt I'm the only one. Just don't scare us like that." He avoided her gaze as he went down the General Studies wing. Ayuma chuckled at his sudden concern and went on her way to her class.

Only to see Kirishima and Sero laughing at Bakugo's weird hairdo while he looked about to explode on them. Okay, that's something strange to bring back from an internship...

Ayuma paid as little mind to it as she could as she went to her desk, finding a note tucked into it. She picked it up to read that she was to head to the TDL building in her costume after school. All the while, her classmates talked about their internships. Apparently, Kyoka helped out with a hostage situation with Death Arms, and Tsu played a big part in an oceanic drug bust with Selkie. Tokoyami was essentially venting to Koda about being stuck with cleanup. Ochaco seemed very pleased with what she learned at her internship with Gunhead. Not to mention a lot of the others grilled Ayuma about her own crowning achievement on her internship.

"We heard about you saving Hawks from that fire," Momo told the chestnut-haired girl, clasping her hands. "You performed wonderfully in the rescue, if I do say so myself. Thirteen must be so very proud of you. That doesn't mean I wasn't worried, though."
Ayuma smiled, chest swelling with pride. "Thank you, Momo. I have a feeling Thirteen is very proud. I don't blame you for being worried, though; Tokoyami and Hawks' sidekicks were, too." Her gaze wandered to Midoriya, Tenya, and Todoroki, gathered at the desk in front of her. "But I suppose it pales in comparison to those three."

"Oh yeah, the Hero Killer!" Sero recalled.

"Glad you guys made it back alive, seriously," Kirishima agreed, both of whom in the clutches of an angry Bakugo.

"I worried about you, too," Momo agreed with a frown.

"You were lucky Endeavor showed up and saved you guys," Sato pointed out (inaccurately).

Todoroki was quiet, looking down at his desk. "Yeah... that's right... he saved us..."

On that topic, everyone started talking about Stain's connection to the League of Villains. Kaminari brought up the video about him too, mistakenly calling him cool right in front of his three victims/possible captors. Tenya apparently got some possibly permanent damage to his arm before going on a tirade about how he'll strive for perfection as a hero.

During Tenya's rant, Ayuma tapped Todoroki's shoulder, causing him to turn to her with an inquisitive expression. "You, Tenya, and Midoriya can meet up with me at lunch. Th-there's something I want to... need to... discuss with you guys."

Realization flitted across heterochromatic eyes. "Of course. I'll make sure to tell them; we can meet up at the farthest table from everyone else."

That lunch time, just like Todoroki said, Ayuma and the three boys met up at the table farthest from all the other students, in a corner all of its own. "I know you're probably confused... about why I asked to talk with you," Ayuma began as soon as she sat down with her lunch. "And if you're not confused... you probably know exactly why..." She took a deep breath and gave them a stern look. "I don't think it was Endeavor who saved you from the Hero Killer... I don't think anyone did, in fact. You saved a Pro hero like I did... and captured the Hero Killer on your own."

The boys stared at her, the shock clear on their faces and only growing as she continued. "Ayuma... how did you... how did you know?" Tenya finally got out after she stated her case.

The memories flew past in her mind. The cops standing above her younger self in that terrifyingly quiet court room with all the other children. Being told not to say a word in their velvet-roped pen as they sentenced a secretly smug Madame Kirai to a mental hospital, and said another caretaker would be coming to the foster home. How she wanted to say something, how she wanted all of them to say something. Say that she wasn't crazy, she was evil. The armored police inside and outside the foster home, keeping them inside. Being held up by the shirt by one gloved hand and having her hair yanked by another.

"Let's just say... I know from experience... how the police can really be," she answered, a distant look in her eye. "How they tend to cover up stories... when there isn't a camera around to see the truth..." She shook her head to repel the memories. "But this isn't about me, it's about all of you. You can tell me... what really happened that night, and rest assured I'll be as silent as the three of you."

They looked at each other in a mental conversation, debating on whether or not they should tell her. Eventually, they all nodded at each other, and Tenya sighed in relent. "Alright, Ayuma.
We'll tell you the truth...

Like Ayuma thought, Tenya went after Stain for revenge over Tensei. After a short battle, he and Native were almost killed by Stain when Midoriya showed up, having come on the bullet train. Midoriya had a far quicker recovery time from Stain's Quirk than Tenya and Native because of his blood type, which gave him an advantage. He called for backup by sending his location, and Todoroki responded, telling his father to send any other heroes or sidekicks to the location as Endeavor dealt with the Nomu. Todoroki managed to help Tenya and Midoriya beat Stain with his fire and ice attacks. Particularly, to get the paralyzed Native and Tenya away from Stain so the latter could recover, and get back up to deal the final blow alongside Midoriya.

They had the villain restrained with rope from a dumpster and were about to head to the police station as soon as Native was able to walk. (The Pro hero was carrying Midoriya since he hurt his leg fighting Stain.) That was when they were found by Gran Torino (the hero Midoriya was interning with) and several sidekicks. But a flying, wounded Nomu dropped in, snatched the green-haired teen off Native's back, and tried to fly off with him. However, Stain managed to somehow get free and taste the Nomu's dripped blood to paralyze it, racing over to kill the monster with a spare knife he hid in his sleeve, and save Midoriya.

After Stain's speech (the one that was displayed on the internet video) petrified everyone around him, a broken rib punctured his lung and incapacitated him. At the hospital the day after, the Hosu Police Chief visited them with Manual (Tenya's internship) and Gran Torino. The chief proposed the ultimatum to make it look like Endeavor was the one to stop Stain. (Much to Todoroki's anger, as he added himself.) The chief said it was because being revealed as the ones who badly hurt the Hero Killer would kill their budding hero careers, as it would garner charges of vigilantism.

Ayuma was silent through it all, and took a moment to process it at their conclusion. "Stupid police..." she hissed, her anger concealed by her fringe. "They like to lie, don't they... to shift blame and fame to others at every chance..." As the bell rang, the four of them stood up and went back to class. One day, the world will know the truth. They'll see what you did, and what the police did to hide it all. The one who stood up for a fallen brother; the one who stood up to his own father; and the one who was saved, by a killer.

"I AM HERE! Hope you're ready to return to our lessons; today it's hero basic training. Feels like I haven't seen you in awhile, welcome back!" All Might greeted the class at one of the training grounds. "Now then, listen carefully for what's in store. We're going to be conducting a little race! Take everything you've learned from your internships and apply it to this rescue training."

Tenya raised a bandaged hand. "If it's rescue training, shouldn't we be at the USJ instead?"

"That facility specializes in disasters," All Might corrected. "As I said earlier, this is a race. So, prepare; you're about to step into Field Gamma! Inside is an area full of factories that forms an intricate labyrinth, so good luck finding your way around. You'll be competing in groups of five or six. Each person starts at a different location on the outskirts of the model city. I'll send a distress signal, and you do what you must to rescue me. Whoever finds me first wins! But try to keep the property damage to a bare minimum, please," he pointed a finger at Bakugo for emphasis. "Alright! First group, get to your places!"

The first group was Tenya, Ojiro, Midoriya, Sero, and Mina. Everyone was essentially betting on who was going to win the race. A lot of them said Midoriya had a serious disadvantage, since his opponents had far better mobility. Ayuma personally figured Sero would win along with Kirishima, with maybe Tenya close behind.
During the race itself, it looked like she and Kirishima had made the right choice. Sero was using his tape as grappling hooks to swing above the rest of the maze. However, Midoriya was surprisingly able to keep up and even pull ahead, using a style of jumping not unlike Bakugo's (who noticed the similarities) as he leaped from column to column. What's more, he wasn't hurting himself at every jump and sparked with green electricity as opposed to a simple general glow. Unfortunately, he accidentally slipped on the edge of a pipe, leaving Ayuma cringing at the following fall. With that fumble, Sero won the race as anticipated.

_Ooooh... Nice try, Midoriya. Definitely better than last we saw you, though._

Ayuma was part of group 2, along with Aoyama, Tsu, Mineta, and Shoji. She took her spot surrounded by all the pipes and buildings around her. As soon as they were given the go with the air horn, they took off.

Ayuma started by preparing her wings and Dreamscape to fly above the field, tracking all of her opponents' silhouettes and scanning for All Might's. (She couldn't use the stardust trail trick because she never managed to see his eyes.) Mineta seemed to be using his Pop-Off balls to stick to different parts of the buildings and bounce between them. Tsu was leaping all over the place, sometimes using her tongue to swing. Aoyama was using his laser to propel him backwards, eventually slipping off the edge of a platform. Shoji was swinging along the pipes with his tentacles like Ojiro did with his tail last round. Eventually, her eyes locked onto All Might's golden yellow image flecked with several other colors, and she dove right in to land on the platform.

"AND IT'S OVER!" All Might shouted as soon as she touched down, putting a victory sash over her like with Sero. "Thanks, hero, and congrats!" They waited for all the others to catch up, but they all looked pretty taken aback that Ayuma had won. "Well done, all of you. I can see you've all improved very much. Keep it up and you'll make it through your final exams!"

"Sir!" The five of them replied.

All Might grinned as he dismissed them. "Group 2, leave the field. Group 3, you're up!"

At the end of the training session, all the girls were in the locker room. All of them were chatting about how rough training had been, commenting how much better they had gotten, and even giving each other various battle tips. All the while, the girls changed back into their uniforms. Aside from Ayuma, of course, who was sitting on a bench with a water bottle in her hand and an ice pack on her head. The girls asked her why she wasn't changing, but she only had to show them the note for them to understand.

"Ribbit! Nice work on the race today, Ayuma," Tsu commended. "You found All Might really fast compared to the rest of us."

"Yeah, how'd you even find him?" Mina inquired. "Does it have something to do with your Quirk?"

"Sort of," Ayuma replied. "When Nightmare is active... When the void-like Dreamscape appears... I can see all these glowing images of all the people in my line of sight. If I focus on someone's face hard enough, I can also form a sort of trail... to lead me to them... Has that always been there?" she asked, pointing at a hole drilled into the wall. "It looks like it leads to the... boy's locker room." Her eyes widened in realization as they all heard a lisp-ridden voice talking of obscene things through said hole. "Oh no..."

"Mineta," the other girls growled. Ayuma slid to the other end of the bench as Kyoka leaned
against the wall, sticking an earphone jack above the hole while sticking the other inside. It trailed further and further in, until it stopped, and a loud, high scream was heard. Undoubtedly from the dirty-minded shorty himself, and all but confirming the girls' suspicions.

Toru growled in a huff. "Thanks, Kyoka."

"Despicable," hissed Momo. "We'll close up this hole immediately."

As soon as the other girls were dressed, Momo was able to conjure a bit of clay to plug up the hole. Kyoka filled it with her earphone jacks, making sure it was nice and compact. As soon as they finished, they left, and Ayuma went to the TDL building. She gulped, almost losing her nerve when she knocked at the massive door. It instantly opened to show Mr. Aizawa standing at the door.

"Good, you got the note," was all he said before letting her in. "Shinso, here's the new training partner I told you about last time."

Shinso? Last time? Training partner?!

Sure enough, in his PE uniform, Shinso was at one of the many sections inside the massive building. He looked up from a small notebook he was writing or drawing in, and his eyes widened upon seeing her. That was when she saw the scarf that Shinso was wearing around his shoulders - not unlike that of her teacher. She looked up at her homeroom teacher about to ask about what was happening, but his minor glare explicitly told her not to.

"I get that you're probably confused," Aizawa told his Hero student. "I've been training Shinso here ever since you left for your internship. I recognized his potential as a hero, as well as his dilemma in joining the Hero course. He's been learning to master the capturing weapon while coming up with some sort of equipment to help his Quirk."

"How... how am I supposed to help there?" Ayuma asked.

"You'll see," Aizawa assured cryptically. "Let's start off with a typical sparring match. Show how well your Quirk works against the capturing weapon."

Ayuma nodded, still a bit confused as she took her place on the opposite side of the battle field Shinso was on. At the word "go," Shinso immediately sent out the strips of his scarf. Ayuma leaped above him to dodge, the world darkening around them.

"Oh, it's this little trick again," Shinso mused, charging at her as soon as she landed. He wound up running straight into a glowing ribbon of Ayuma's creation, which grabbed and twined around his arms and shoulders while phasing right through the scarf. "And then you go and copy me and your teacher. Considering he took part in your capture, I wouldn't be surprised if you suddenly gained a fear of these things. Speaking of which..." He sent out his scarf again only for Ayuma to dodge again, stumbling a little this time.

Just don't talk to him. He might use his Quirk to take control even though Nightmare could go crazy on him. It's safer for both of us not to answer.

Dark spots were dancing all over Ayuma's vision again, her head hurting to the verge of dizziness. Aizawa turned to look at her in her peripheral vision. She wrapped the ribbon around her wrist a couple of times, grabbing the scarf in her other hand. Then she gave a hard yank that pitched Shinso to the ground, making the ribbon disappear as she herself was reeling back, just barely able to keep her balance.
Shinso clearly saw something was wrong as he got back up. "Ayuma, are you alright?"

Ayuma's vision was blurring, and she could feel her balance and consciousness slip and slide all over the place. She was having a growing problem in trying to summon the humanoid of Shinso's nightmares with the headache quickly escalating to migraine levels. She was so concentrated on trying to form the puppet creature, she forgot all about the capture scarf that was now holding her up.

"That's enough," Aizawa said. "Ayuma, you can deactivate your Quirk. Don't even bother trying to continue; you can barely stand."

Ayuma then realized with a rush of guilt the scarf wrapped around her shoulders and waist. She deactivated Nightmare as Shinso took over for the scarf in keeping her upright. She felt a hand loosen the circlet and collar of her costume and slip them off of her. The headache and dizziness quickly decreased enough for her to be able to stand on her own. It still hurt a lot, though.

"So I'm guessing you were using these for those pressure points you told me about back at the Festival," Shinso commented, still with an arm around Ayuma for support as he handed Aizawa the items.

"If so, they were both far too tight," Aizawa frowned, inspecting the metal accessories. "And to think, they're supposed to apply pressure to certain areas to lessen your Quirk's drawback. But, it appears that they only made it worse. You probably barely managed to hold up through Heroics class. These are definitely not as fireproof as they should be, considering that's probably how they wound up this way."

"What...?" Ayuma asked. "You mean... Hawks?"

"Specifically, the fire you saved him from," Aizawa explained, handing them back to her. "Look along these areas; it's thin as wire where it should be much thicker to push on those pressure points when tightened. Whatever alloy they're made of had to have burned or even melted in that blaze. When you tightened it, it was actually constricting blood flow and only worsening your Quirk's drawbacks. Adding in a few other issues, you might need a full overhaul on your costume at some point in time. But, for now, you two can get ready to go home."

"Yes sir," Ayuma replied quietly as she turned on her heel and headed off, Shinso keeping up with her.

"All things considered, you did pretty well in that match," the violet-haired boy commented. "Can I expect something even better next time, partner?"

A pink hue dusted over Ayuma's cheeks, but she smiled and replied, "Of course."
Final Exams

Chapter Notes

Of course it had to be THAT HARD to pull off the final exams! 'Cause the match-ups HAD to be placed THAT PERFECTLY. Welp, at least there was one teacher that wasn't included in the practicals until now. And I managed to come up with something for Ayuma considering she's the odd girl out.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A couple of days later, Mr. Aizawa told the class that there was only one more week before the final exams begin. He was expecting everyone to be studying and training for the written and practical portions, respectively. He also reminded the class that anyone who failed would end up with summer school remedial lessons as opposed to going to the training camp after exams were over. As soon as he left for lunch break, Ayuma's classmates all started discussing their places on the midterms and things like that.

Ayuma was only subconsciously listening to what they all were saying. She was a bit surprised to hear that Mineta was actually in the top 10, and that Bakugo was in the top 3. Quite a few people asked for some tutoring from Momo, who gladly accepted. At least, that's what Ayuma could tell with how bouncy Momo suddenly became while talking about preparations for it. Kirishima actually openly stated he was counting on Bakugo to help him. Aoyama, despite being very, very low on the score rankings, he didn't seem too concerned. He was even offended when Shoji himself pointed out that fact to the French-talker.

At lunch, Ayuma was heading up to the lunchline when it almost happened again. As soon as she got in line, it wasn't long before Tetsutetsu was a split second behind her. She was already along the line and didn't have to worry about getting run down, but being run into was something else entirely, and the 1-B student got very close to doing so. Ayuma could only shake her head and continue on with her day, glad she didn't start off her lunch as roadkill to the steel-armored student.

On her way to getting her lunch, she saw Monoma sneak up on her classmates' tables and rudely elbow Midoriya in the head. While he was (most likely) taunting them, Kendo sneaked up on him, chopped the back of his neck again, and caught his tray before it fell along with him. She set the tray on a table while holding him up by the back of the collar. Stepping over the unconscious blond psycho, Ayuma sat down at the table with her own lunch.

"I apologize for him," the ginger sighed in exhaustion. "I'm pretty sure there's a hole where his heart should be... So I was listening; I know you're all worried about what's going to be on the big final practical. I heard it's gonna be combat against robots like the entrance exam."

"Really? How do you know that?" Midoriya asked in surprise.

"One of my friends who's a few grades up filled me in. I know -- cheating! -- but oh well."

Midoriya reassured her it wasn't cheating, but soon went on a muttering spree that clearly had Kendo rather unnerved. "That's normal of him, as far as I'm concerned," Ayuma told the 1-B class rep.
"What kind of idiot are you, Kendo?" Monoma asked in a strained tone. "You just gave away our whole strategic advantage. This was our chance to finally pull ahead of that class full of idiots - -" he was stopped by another chop to the neck.

Kendo irritably grabbed his tray and dragged her downed classmate back to their usual tables. "They're not the idiots."

Admittedly, Ayuma wasn't too eager that they'd be battling robots. The only things she could actually affect with her Quirk would be people and their own Quirks, so robots were obviously not on that list. Unlike Kaminari and Mina, who, despite having hard-to-control Quirks like Ayuma, could easily take out such machines.

"It shouldn't matter if it's robots or actual people," Bakugo commented. "Why are you morons so excited?"

"Who are you calling a moron?!" Kaminari tried to deflect.

"Shut up!" Bakugo forced them silent. "You need to learn how to control your Quirk! Got it?!" He turned to Midoriya. "I don't know what's going on with your power, but I saw how you're using it now and I want you to know, it's seriously pissing me off. I won't have another half-assed win like the festival. We'll be getting individual scores in the upcoming finals, -- new rankings -- so we'll all know exactly where we're standing. I'll show you how much better I am." He then flipped his attention behind him. "And Todoroki, I'll kill you, too."

Ayuma's heart started to speed up in fear when he turned around and stalked towards her as she was backing out the door. "And you... I'll definitely murder you." He grabbed her right shoulder with one hand, which immediately started burning her jacket, and he also stomped on her foot. "...They'll never find the body."

She slapped his hand away and took off down the hall, shoes abandoned in the doorway.

The rest of the time with the preparations towards the written tests went incredibly slowly, and yet super fast at the same time. Ayuma studied as much as she could while training her body and Quirk with Mr. Aizawa and Shinso, all while waiting for her circlet and collar to be fixed. She visited Power Loader a few times for updates on when they were going to be ready. Every so often she'd have to dodge at least a couple of failed inventions in the Support wing (as they tended to blow up).

After the written test, everyone met in the center plaza for the practicals. All the teachers were there, as apparently the tests were changed for "various reasons," according to Principal Nezu. In short, the students were going to be paired up to fight against the teachers. That had Ayuma very nervous for multiple reasons. 1: She was the literal odd one out in the class and might not have a partner, which was scary all on its own. 2: She still had yet to get over her fear of Midnight, and in some cases, Pro heroes in general. 3: She already had a close call with Bakugo; she didn't want to end off the finals with a Midoriya-kind-of-serious injury or a surprise loss of control over Nightmare.

Each team was going to have 30 minutes to complete the exam. They could pass by either handcuffing their assigned opponent or escaping the combat stage. (Mina was actually surprised that they were allowed to make a run for it to pass.) As a little "helper" for the students, the teachers had the Support Course compete to create ultra-compressed weights for the teachers. Mei Hatsume, the girl who humiliated Tenya at the Sports Fest, won the contest with her design. They
looked like simple cuff bracelets, but added half each teacher's weight to their bodies to wear them out and slow them down.

"E-e-excuse me?" Ayuma raised a shaky hand, drawing the attention of the faculty to her. "W-with all the teams and match-ups already picked, I-I don't have anyone to fight or fight with. Wh-what am I g-going to do?"

Nezu smiled. "Fret not, young Ayuma. Of course you have a partner, as well as an opponent. You and your partner will be battling against Mr. Vlad King, teacher of Class 1-B, in the second-to-last match."

Ayuma caught the knowing glance Aizawa shot at her from the corner of her eye. He knows who my partner is going to be. I should probably know... wait... Only one candidate rose in her mind as a partner. Of course. After being in nothing but sparring matches, we should know how well we can do as a team. Particularly against a teacher we're not familiar with.

Sato and Kirishima were called up first, fighting against Cementoss. Before meeting the heavyweight teacher, Ayuma recalled how scared she was of him, but much like Koda and Shoji, he turned out to be a fairly quiet and pleasant person. As the two boys left for their exam, Ayuma went searching for her partner so they could come up with a plan.

Like before, Ayuma looked through the Dreamscape and concentrated on that person's face from her memory. The following stardust trail led to somewhere in the building, so she was right about who her partner was. She followed the trail to his blue-violet silhouette and deactivated her Quirk. Sure enough, there he was, with the scarf and PE uniform as she caught up and walked in step with him.

"Hey there, Ayuma," Shinso greeted with a lazy smile. "Surprised to hear we'll be fighting one of the teachers?"

Ayuma nodded. "Yeah, especially considering our opponent is the one teacher we know nothing about."

Shinso hummed, "Good point. I was thinking of getting something to drink before talking strategy for the exam. You?"

"Yeah, I was thinking of coming up with a plan, too." They both stopped at a vending machine. Shinso got a simple water bottle, while Ayuma got an iced tea.

Shinso managed to unscrew the thin cap on his water bottle. "I think there's a briefing room somewhere nearby where we can plan--"

HOOOONK! "Sato and Kirishima have been knocked out; exam over."

Ayuma's blood ran cold. Already?! It hasn't even been five minutes!

Shinso frowned, looking up at the PA speaker. "Hmm. I remember that Kirishima guy was only able to maintain his Quirk for a little bit from the Sports Festival."

"And Sato needs to eat sugar to activate his, but he always drops after a few minutes," Ayuma recalled. "Those two must've tried to capture Cementoss instead of run."

Her training partner sighed, "Dumb move on their part. Anyway, let's go come up with a plan. I think the room we're looking for is just around the corner."
Not long after they found the briefing room, the PA system announced Tsu and Tokoyami were starting their exam against Ectoplasm. "Alright, now how are we going to defeat or escape a teacher that we don't know anything about?" Shinso asked as he sat across from her at the table in the small room.

"Any plan we come up with would mean we need to have a lot to look out for with Vlad King," Ayuma replied. "If one thing's for sure, I'll especially have to keep my guard up. I don't want to risk losing control of Nightmare and causing a huge mess. And I'm pretty sure he isn't mute, so we can cross that problem off the list on your end."

"If that's the case, I'll be able to use my Quirk in either situation. We've both been training our Quirks so we can avoid an outburst from Nightmare. And the scarf's been getting somewhat easier to control like your little ribbon trick. That could be useful if either of us need to get out of a tight spot. As far as I'm concerned, the element of surprise is our best bet. You're the one with wings, so you can search the area from the air while I take the high ground. We can both look for him and the gate."

Ayuma could see where this was going. "Yeah. As soon as either of us spot anything, one can flag the other down. If we find Vlad, you can attack with the scarf while I attack with my Quirk. Whether or not you can use yours on him, we'll be able to apprehend him without much trouble."

"And even if push comes to shove, that also means either of us can make a break for it," Shinso added. "Considering you're the faster runner and -- once again -- can fly, it might fall on you."

The PA horn blared again. "Team Asui and Tokoyami have passed the final."

"That means Tenya and Ojiro are next," Ayuma recalled. "Five more to go. In any case, we might as well specify our plan in case Vlad King has a Quirk that can stop our first one."

Shinso nodded in agreement. "Last I checked, Vlad King is also called the Blood Hero."

"So... some kind of blood-related Quirk. Maybe manipulation? I don't know; I'm not Midoriya."

Shinso chuckled. "Point taken, but that'd be my guess. If it's some form of blood manipulation, we still don't know if he can either control his own blood or that of those around him. I'm sure we both know which would prove more of a problem."

Ayuma nodded, brow furrowed. "Let's start off with if he can control his own blood. He'd probably have something in his costume to channel it outward to utilize it. Then there's something else on that track: Can he make weapons out of his own blood, or simply use it to defend or restrain?..."

The rest of the time they spent until their match was trying to figure out their opponent's Quirk. Every so often the PA system would go off to tell everyone if each team passed or failed. Tenya and Ojiro made it against Power Loader. Momo and Todoroki beat Mr. Aizawa. Ochaco and Aoyama took down Thirteen.

After a long series of incredibly loud crashing noises and their following vibrations, Kaminari and Mina failed by running out of time against Nezu. Ayuma and Shinso were wondering if they even got out of whatever that was in one piece. The girl even thought their principal was a little sadistic if he was the one who caused all that noise.
Koda and Kyoka passed without much trouble, even ending it off with a very loud scream from Present Mic. Shoji and Toru won against Snipe, too, probably thanks to the latter's stealth capabilities. Sero and Mineta (unfortunately, in Ayuma's opinion towards the latter) passed the exam against Midnight. Knowing it was now their turn, Ayuma and Shinso headed off to meet their opponent.

The two were assigned to the combat stage that seemed to be based off of an industrial wasteland. Broken model buildings were everywhere. Debris of all sorts of material was littered all over the ground. Rickety scaffolding structures and rusty metal frames stuck out all over. All of it with tall, dry grass reaching up in a poor attempt to hide whatever "destruction" had caused such a mess. And in the midst of all of that, an opponent neither of them knew waited for them.

"Ready?" Shinso inquired softly, hand on Ayuma's shoulder.

Ayuma took a deep breath, hand laid on the cuffs in her costume pouch, and turned to her tired-eyed teammate. "As I'll ever be. But are you sure I can use your nightmare to fight this guy?"

Shinso nodded with a half-smirk. "So long as it helps us out, I'll be fine with it."

The horn sounded. "Team Ayuma and Shinso; practical exam. Ready, go!"

Ayuma immediately formed her wings and took flight while Shinso used his scarf to swing from the scaffolding. Flying as high and fast as she could, Ayuma scanned the ground for any splash of color aside from the dark, colorless atmosphere of the Dreamscape. She could see Shinso's indigo form moving along swimmingly when he suddenly stopped, waving an arm at her. Knowing that to be their signal, she descended to land on one of the many wiry frames.

Letting down her Quirk, she got a good look at what -- or in this case, who -- Shinso waved her down for from atop a broken building. A strong, doggish-looking man in a mostly-red hero costume was standing on the ground, looking around. Nodding at her teammate, Ayuma reached out with her Quirk to call upon the man's nightmare. A familiar large, light olive humanoid cat appeared at her side, gnashing its teeth and licking its lips.

"So he's Vlad King, and he's... scared of cats?" Looking up at her teammate, Shinso looked just as surprised past the glow of his image in the Dreamscape. In any case, he sent out the scarf while Ayuma sent down the cat, who dropped on him with a loud snarl. The man instantly looked up at the attack only to almost take a swat to the back from the cat's claws.

"Impressive, but you'll have to do better than that!"

The man quickly grabbed the scarf and yanked Shinso down, punching him as he sent out a wave of blood from his glove that solidified around her teammate. He swung it around to barrel him into the attacking cat, who was knocked aside by the living wrecking ball. The prison shattered and clearly badly hurt Shinso with the impact. He sent out his scarf as the cat got up and leaped at the hero again. The Pro hero dodged both attacks by jumping toward Ayuma, sending out another crystallizing blood wave that knocked her off the scaffolding. The cat caught her before she hit the ground, and she faced the "villain" who was holding her teammate up by his scarf.

Ayuma growled in frustration, fear flitting over her blackened eyes. "Get Shinso away from him," she ordered the cat, forming the ribbons around her wrists. The cat snarled and surged forward, grabbing Shinso and swatting off Vlad King's hand off his scarf. She sent out the ribbons to strike, but he dodged both of them. He suddenly rushed forward, grabbing Ayuma's arm and swinging her into a wall, adding a punch to the ribcage. Blood poured out of his glove and solidified around her. The blow did not help the growing headache.
"Ayuma!" Shinso called from somewhere a ways away.

"Nice try, little hero," Vlad King said, looking pleased with himself. Something in his eyes and voice stirred a familiar feeling of helpless terror in Ayuma. To her opponent, every bit of emotion in her face and eyes drained into a visage of clear possession. A few seconds later, the cat tackled him in a whirlwind of claws and teeth, and shattered his second prison. Ayuma stood up tall with her stone cold gaze, and the cat's eyes were alight with a new fury as its claws dug into her pinned-down opponent. Several scissor blades began to appear, ready to surge out and shred their target.

"Ayuma?... Ayuma! Ayuma, say something!" Shinso called out, but the other teen was unresponsive. He shakily stood up and limped towards the two. "Dammit... I should've known this would happen. Haven't you heard about the worst part of Ayuma's Quirk?" Vlad King gave no answer. "She can't fully control it. If things get especially bad, the Quirk itself attacks on its own. I've seen it for myself, and like plenty of other heroes, you should have, too. Now you see exactly what possibly once saved you, and what you've now made your enemy."

"I can see that!" Vlad King exclaimed from under the cat before Shinso's Quirk took effect.

Shinso put a tentative hand on Ayuma's shoulder, and she turned to look at him with her deadpan eyes as the blades marginally receded. "Ayuma -- no... Nightmare -- please listen to me. Just give the cuffs to me, call off the cat, and let Ayuma -- the real Ayuma -- take back control."

The girl in front of him was silent, studying him. After a few silent, palpably tense minutes, she pulled the cuffs out of her pocket, setting them in his offered hand. The cat backed away as he clamped the cuffs on the brainwashed Vlad King. The click of the cuffs resounded the capture, and Shinso stood up to just barely catch his teammate as she dropped from exhaustion and injuries. Everything caused by Nightmare disappeared around them. He released the teacher, not even paying attention to their declared victory as he painstakingly led his partner away.

They were just outside the gate when he collapsed as well.

Recovery Girl was not very happy with what Vlad King and All Might had done in the exams. Midoriya and Bakugo may have won their battle, but like Ayuma and Shinso, they got hurt pretty bad. As far as Shinso could tell, the nurse was fuming about it. He and Ayuma were lucky to have only gotten cuts, bruises, a few stress and hairline fractures, and a sprain. Midoriya's back was nearly shattered, as were Bakugo's arms; the latter also had a bit of a concussion, and was unconscious like Ayuma. (The medic bots that were wheeling them in were particularly smart-mouthed.)

Aizawa had decided not to have training that day, for both of his proteges' sake. Instead, he let Shinso call home to tell his parents he'd be home late from recovering his stamina. So there he was, lying in a hospital bed, with her lying on his side in a bed beside him. Recovery Girl had to keep her on her side because of her hip and shoulder, and he was nearby to ensure she didn't lose control the second she awoke.

He couldn't help turning to look at her even through his own exhaustion from Recovery Girl's healing. She looked very peaceful and... kinda pretty... in the light of the sunset, even without her circlet and collar. Did she always have that coppery glow to her hair in this kind of lighting? That golden-red color looks so...

Shinso shook off those kinds of thoughts before his cheeks heated up too much. We're just friends. No need to think about how pretty she is... His eyes wandered back to Ayuma as she sighed
softly, and a strange feeling bloomed in his chest. He turned back up to the ceiling and closed his eyes. *We are just friends...*

*Right?*

Chapter End Notes

I don't know. Are you just friends? What do you guys think? Also, I lowkey think Vlad King would have inability-to-hold-back-syndrome almost as bad as All Might, and Recovery Girl would get pretty ticked about it every time he overdid it.
A dark, wiry silhouette loomed in front of Ayuma. Its face held two black pools with bright violet irises. Silver lines dropped from under those eyes to the jawline. Its body was barely visible; the only thing that she could actually see were the spirals of ribbon wrapped tightly around its wrists.

"I've been able to help you for this long. Why is it that you and everyone else in the world wants me to stop?"

The voice of the creature in front of her was warped, but feminine. It almost sounded like Ayuma herself, but stronger, with more of a temper. But what did it mean by helping Ayuma? Was this what Nightmare turned itself into when she couldn't control it?

"Yes! And everyone wants me to stop helping you! Even you have been telling me you don't want my help, even though you need it! How else have you been able to survive almost being slashed, crushed, and burned alive?! I was there with you, and because you didn't bother gathering up your confidence and taking control of your own power, I had to do it myself!"

But that wasn't Ayuma's fault; she couldn't control Nightmare because she'd be punished severely for it like the other orphans. Just because Nightmare was protecting her didn't mean it couldn't still hurt other people. The only reason Vlad King wasn't badly hurt was because of Shinso telling Nightmare itself to stand down; and it listened. They couldn't go on like this forever with this split personality, and they both knew that. Why couldn't the Quirk just let itself become one with its owner like everyone else's Quirk?

"I kinda have to hurt other people! I can't protect you otherwise, can I? I only listened to that mind-controller because he was at least decent, considering his Quirk is as bad as hers. I realize we're two halves of the same person, but do you know how we can fit together again? I sure don't! I'm what you can become if you let me take the driver's seat! I'm the one who's been cultivating our power all this time; you'd be a hero if you let me be there!"

But it's also what Ayuma can become if she herself isn't there anymore. If she let Nightmare take full reign, she'd be... she didn't even want to think about what she'd turn into. But what's she supposed to do? She wants to be a hero that people aren't afraid to come up to. A hero that people would genuinely be glad to see. But she also wants to have full control over her abilities, like her friends all do. A real hero is someone who both makes friends with the world, and protects it without causing it harm.

"So then find a way to make us return to being one again, if you must. But I swear, if anyone tries to hurt us like that bloody bulldog again..."

The next day, Ayuma went to class to find the failed teams from yesterday wishing everyone good times at camp. Midoriya was trying to calm them down, but Sero knew it was hopeless to try. Kaminari even poked the poor kid in the eyes. Mineta looked pretty pleased with himself as Sero talked about how Midnight knocked him out with her Quirk and his teammate did all the work. (That did not help at all, by the way.)
Thankfully, Mr. Aizawa surprised them by saying everyone was going to camp. Apparently, they’d only have to take summer school classes if they failed the written part (which no one did). Unfortunately, he did say two teams failed the practical pretty badly, as did Sero. The teachers all had to make sure there was a way to let the students pass (because if they didn’t, the students wouldn’t have had a prayer). They wanted to observe how good their teamwork skills were against the task at hand, and the camp is supposed to help them build their strength.

And that whole thing about the teachers not holding back? Or the summer school threat? That was all a logical ruse. (More like logical rude, in Ayuma's opinion.) The truth was those who failed the practicals would need the camp the most. Tenya seemed pretty furious, bluntly pointing out that it could set their teacher up for losing his students' trust, big time. But the lessons Aizawa would be giving the five failures was supposedly going to be far tougher than summer school could ever be.

At the end of the day, everyone was given a pamphlet for the camp. A full week in a forest to train their Quirks. That said, quite a few of her classmates were talking about how they needed quite a few things for the trip, like suitcases, bathing suits, etc. Since exams were over and they had the day off tomorrow, Toru suggested they all go on a class shopping trip. Unfortunately, Bakugo and Todoroki weren't coming; Bakugo straight up refused, and Todoroki explained he was going to visit his mother tomorrow. Ayuma rolled her eyes at Mineta's retaliation, knowing she'd have to tell Shinso about all of this if her teacher hadn't already told him.

The next day at the Kiyashi Ward Shopping Mall, Ayuma couldn't have felt more out of place. She met the rest of her class at the entrance, and Mina was raving about how amazing it was. Midoriya was on another muttering spree even though Tokoyami was telling him to stop before he scared any children around. Some people even recognized them as 1-A students from the Sports Festival.

Kyoka and Momo were going to look for new duffel bags to bring to camp. Kaminari and Toru were planning on getting some hiking shoes, though Tenya warned him they were told their shoes would have to be broken in first. Ayuma knew she'd need a sleeping bag and probably bug spray, among a few other things. Kirishima suggested they all split up and meet back at the center around 3:00 pm when they were done. Everyone agreed and parted in groups of two or three. But just when Ayuma was going to head off, an invisible hand tried to bring her along. Key word: tried.

"Come on, Ayuma! We all know you need new shoes, too!"
"Toru..."
"Leave her be, Hagakure," Shoji told their invisible classmate, separating the two. "You shouldn't force her." Ayuma looked up at Shoji in thanks as he led the protesting girl away from her, leaving her to be on her way. He simply nodded in return.

Ayuma went to one of the stores that sold the camping gear she was looking for at a decent price range. She got bug spray, sunblock, a sleeping bag, and a flint fire-starter for campfires. She also went to an apparel shop for some more clothes. Somehow, Mina had found her there and made her get quite a few "exposed shoulders" outfits. To the pinkette, that particular look -- along with the lack of shoes -- somehow "suited" Ayuma. The redhead then headed over to get a suitcase for the trip, meeting up with Kyoka and Momo in one of the shops.

"Oh, hey there Ayuma," Kyoka greeted her before seeing the bags hanging on her arm. "You look like you've been busy."
"Are you looking for a luggage bag as well?" Momo inquired.

Ayuma nodded. "I figured I'd need one, along with the rest of what was on my list. Can I join you two?"

"Of course you can!" Momo replied with a joyful grin. "By the way, we saw your match in the practicals with your teammate yesterday."

"Shinso?" Light pink dusted Ayuma's cheeks as they searched the shelves of bags and suitcases.

"Yes, him! You see, you had us rather scared when you suddenly started acting strangely. Particularly with those strange flames and blades appearing around you. And the way you collapsed after handing him the cuffs to apprehend your opponent."

Ayuma cringed at the memory of hearing Recovery Girl relay what happened when she lost control. "Recovery Girl says it must be... a side effect... of not having any control over my Quirk all my life. I-it's like it's formed a mind of its own that takes over under the right conditions. I can never remember when it happens, as I've already told you. At least Shinso was able to talk Nightmare into standing down."

"Whoa... That sounds like a split personality caused by your Quirk," Kyoka commented, choosing a duffel bag from the rack.

"That's what Recovery Girl and Hound Dog said," Ayuma replied, pulling a good-sized auburn suitcase off the shelf to inspect it. "They suspected it for a while... but the exam confirmed it. Hopefully, something at the camp will be able to help."

"I'm sure it will be plenty of help," Momo assured her as they went over and paid for their finds. Ayuma eased the load on herself by putting a few of her other goods in the suitcase. "We might need a database of edible plant life. I'm sure there's something in a nearby book shop we can purchase before 3 o'clo--"

BLEEP! BLEEP! BLEEP!

Ayuma almost leaped out of her skin at the alarm. Had Kyoka not used the vibration from her earphone jack as a calming frequency, she's sure her Quirk would've gone off the walls. Security guards started racing all over the mall, and a loud speaker declared the mall was being temporarily locked down. The three of them rushed down to their class' meeting place, joined by everyone else in 1-A as the police and a lot of Pro heroes showed up. Some questioned the kids, but most of the others rushed through the entirety of the mall.

Scared, but slightly comforted by the proximity of Momo, Kyoka, and soon Koda, -- also seeking comfort from the chaos -- Ayuma hesitantly stuttered out her answers to the officers' questions. The officer seemed satisfied with the clear evidence she had no idea what was going on, and let them be with Koda's large hands comfortingly on her tense, shaking shoulders. They instead took particular interest with Midoriya and Ochaco's answers, and soon took the green-haired boy away for some kind of interview. Ochaco explained that the leader of the League of Villains -- Tomura Shigaraki -- confronted Midoriya, spoke with him with the threat of the lives of everyone in the mall over his head. He left not long after Ochaco went up to him, but it didn't look like the police were able to find him.

_They didn't come here for me,_ she told herself, trying to calm down. _They were just doing their job. No need to panic. They're going to leave me be, and send everybody home. I hope._
Turns out, that was exactly what happened. Once the police were done sweeping the mall and left with Midoriya, the students were allowed to call up their parents and return home. The Pros stayed around and continued searching. Ayuma was on her way out with all her things when one of the heroes -- dressed in all denim fabric -- walked up to her. He towered over her, and carried the kind of air of authority that made her feel smaller than she already was compared to him.

"Pardon me, miss, but have we met somewhere before?" the tall man inquired, his eyes hidden under his long, blond fringe. "Best Jeanist, if you don't already know."

Confusion joined Ayuma's nervous expression as she backed up a step, adjusting her grip on her things. That did sound familiar, but she was a little too jittery to look into it further. "I-I d-don't think I know you... w-why d-do you ask?"

The man bowed down to the level of the trembling girl, allowing her a glance of his moss green eyes as they stared into hers. "Hmm... Yes, one of the few U.A. students from Class 1-A I hoped to recruit. A hero far more like felt than the untamed polyester who interned with me."

Ayuma's confusion only grew as she took another step back. Best Jeanist? Felt? Polyester? What is this guy talking about?

"Put your mind at ease, young hero," he said to her, returning to his full height. "Felt may not be woven and exact like others, but it is soft and warm, as well as strong. I believe that with enough hard work, you will one day become such a hero." With that, he walked past her, leaving her confused as she continued her way home.

"I still don't see why either of us have to do this."

Nightmare's physical form -- no more than a wraith compared to in her actual dreams -- stood over Ayuma in the Dreamscape inside her apartment. It took a lot of concentration, but she was able to somewhat manifest the creature. The suitcase was packed and ready for the camping trip, of course.

"We both know we have to, Nightmare," Ayuma asserted in a stern tone. "The name we have to share can either be linked to the word for demon or dream. Which would you prefer?"

"...Touche. I admit, I've been getting pretty sick and tired of the demon title, too. But how do you think we'll be able to join together? Did you already have your first idea to try?"

"Maybe. But only one way to find out." Ayuma formed the ribbons like before, one wrapped a couple of times around each wrist, with the ends dangling off her palms. "I think you know what I'm thinking with this."

Nightmare's eyes rolled as it held out its ribbon-wrapped hands, unraveling the ribbons around its own wrists till only a couple of layers were around each. Ayuma cautiously stepped closer, entwining the ribbons around the other's wrists. The opposing ribbons mirrored her action, and the cold hands of Nightmare wrapped around hers. The ribbons suddenly lit up with black flames and started burning, like Endeavor's flames had taken the form of cloth strips that constricted around their arms. In a panic, both of them wrenched away from each other.

"OW! And I had the feeling it was actually going to work! But you hesitated! You don't have enough confidence in either of us!"

Ayuma inspected her wrists for burns, glancing up at the dark form raving in front of her.
"And I have the feeling you don't trust me enough to control you properly." Nightmare didn't bother meeting her eyes as it tightened its own ribbons. That meant either a denied yes or a blunt no, considering this manifestation of her Quirk acted suspiciously like a slightly tamed version of Bakugo.

"The least you can do is learn a little confidence. But can you blame me for not trusting you to half-decently control the power we hold? You never tried to as a child, and you've just barely started now."

"Maybe that's because the rest of the world made me legitimately scared of you. And by very short extension, myself. And being scared of yourself is nothing fun, believe me." Nightmare huffed before it and the Dreamscape disappeared. Ayuma sighed and looked down at her miraculously unharmed hands, wrists, and forearms.

Nightmare may not be very kind, but that doesn't excuse the fact that it has a point. Being scared of my own power and even myself... It does sound pretty silly, if you really think about it. And it doesn't excuse me not even bothering to try learning control of my power at the first chance I had to do so. How can I build up my confidence to gain full control of Nightmare? Better yet, how can I figure out a way to get Nightmare to learn to trust me?

It wasn't long before the closing ceremony of the first semester took place at U.A. Everyone in the school had been gathered into the auditorium as Nezu gave a long speech about how proud he was of everybody. Many didn't seem to be paying attention to him, or at least didn't look that way. Ayuma, from her own seat on the end of the row beside Shoji, was drifting in and out herself.

Overall, a lot had happened in the amount of time since she started going to the Hero Course. She made plenty of new friends in her class and outside of it. She finally knew for sure, whether they be right behind her or shooting across the sky, there was someone no different from her. She managed to gain at least a little control over her Quirk, and was working on full control. She was even on her way to finding her own identity as a hero, and letting go of the past she lived with. Soon, it would be her first time not spending the summer alone. All her friends and classmates would never let her do that, even if she wanted them to. *It's just like the family I always wanted to be adopted...* Her train of thought stopped with a sudden touch of dread from the word. She'd never even thought of being *fostered*, let alone *adopted*, for a long time. She surprised herself in how casually the word breezed through a passing thought.

Yes, she may have had such a dream when she was young and hopeful of being adopted by a good family that genuinely cared for her. A lot of the orphans did. But a lot of times being hurt for something she couldn't control dulled such a dream, especially ever since the system blacklisted her. And along with it went all hope of ever finding a family. It was instead replaced by a mix of desperation for freedom and a small amount of general fear and resentment towards adults. And ever since the escape, being adopted had become such a foreign concept to her.

But now, surrounded by friends that all care for her regardless of who she is, that hope of finding a family had started to come back, without her even realizing it. Before she knew it, the closing ceremony was over, and she and Shinso were following Mr. Aizawa once again. Midoriya waved at the two, but only Ayuma waved back, mouthing a "sorry" for Shinso ignoring him.

*Adopted... is there still a chance I can be? By any of the friends around me? Is there even a ghost of a chance that one of these people around me... will take me in as their own?... And if there is... would I allow them to?*
So many questions. I guess being a dream manifesto is starting to show how problematic it can be. Now, I've got a serious question for you guys. As with any orphan character, it has to be up there. If Ayuma were to be adopted by the family of anyone in the Hero Course, who would it be and why? Or do you think Ayuma should stay free?
Finally reached 300 hits! Now that's a real milestone. And like I said before, feel free to give me any tips on how to really get this show on the road!

RIIIING!

Ayuma jolted awake and sat up with a start, realizing it was her phone ringing. It turned out to be a notification from Midoriya on the class chat; an invitation to come to the school pool for endurance training, to be exact. Though they could only be there until 5 pm. She vaguely recalled the girls discussing going to the pool, since it was basically all they could do until they went off to camp.

She yawned and stretched a little. "Why not? It's been a while since I last went for a swim."

After getting ready for the day, she gathered her phone, student ID, and a towel, as well as a couple of hair ties. She put on her school-issued swimsuit under her large purple shirt, throwing on a pair of loose shorts. She went over to the school and met all the other girls in the locker room, changing into their school swimsuits.

"Ribbit! Hi there, Ayuma!" Tsu greeted her. "Did you come over to go to the pool, too?"

"Yeah. I figured I might as well, before we head off to camp," Ayuma replied. "Considering I don't really get around all that often otherwise."

"Better than being all cooped up in our houses all summer," a voice said from somewhere behind her. Ayuma jumped and spun around as she saw one swimsuit on a body she otherwise couldn't see.

"Don't scare me like that, Toru," Ayuma hissed, backing toward her usual locker as she slipped off the clothes over her swimsuit.

"Oops! Sorry I didn't realize I would've startled you," the invisible girl apologized.

As soon as Ayuma had her cover-up clothes tucked away, she took out one of the hair ties she brought. "Hey, um... does anybody mind helping me with... my hair? I can't really, uh... braid it all that well on my own..."

Surprisingly, Momo was first to answer the call. "Of course. I'll gladly help you, Ayuma." She plopped down on the bench and set the chestnut-haired girl in front of her. "Normal, French, or twintails?"

"Normal, please," Ayuma replied, handing her the black hair tie. She felt her classmate's slender fingers comb through her hair, pulling it straight and separating it into three. She could tell Momo was trying not to pull too hard as the three locks of hair were twisted around one another. She waited patiently until she heard the snap of the hair tie being looped around the end. "And done. I'm so glad I practiced with my dolls as a little girl!"
"Thank you, Momo," Ayuma smiled at the black-haired girl as they joined the other girls at the pool. As they all stretched in preparation, the boys in their class soon joined on the other side of the water in their own school-appointed swimsuits. Apparently, Midoriya had invited everyone to come for some endurance training at the pool. And it wasn't long before Mineta and Kaminari showed up. However, Kirishima and Bakugo hadn't turned up yet.

Kaminari looked doubly betrayed for some reason, but Mineta was creepily staring at the girls. Ayuma was tempted to lash out at him with her ribbons, but kept herself reined in. In any case, Tenya gladly welcomed them in thanks to their suggestion for more training, wearing prescription goggles and a *swim cap*, of all things.

The girls all started playing water polo with a beach ball as Tenya essentially coached the guys in swimming laps. Ayuma was able to land quite a few hits, making sure the ball didn't get too close to the boys. At one point, though, she realized a small blur of purple under the water's surface. It soon started going up Momo's leg, trying to push her swimsuit up her thigh. This in turn was responded to with a kick, and the purple blur soon went for Mina. She responded to the same treatment with a dive and attempted to grab the source. The girls all knew exactly who that blur had to have been.

"Mineta attack!" wailed Mina as soon as she surfaced.

The girls immediately scrambled to grab the speedy little swimmer, shouting in outrage when they missed. The boys all took notice of their notorious classmate harassing the girls. It wasn't long before Ayuma felt him sneak up and down her own body. She squeaked in alarm at every touch she felt trying to grab him. The empty cavity Toru left in the water got poked a few times as well.

Kyoka managed to snag him with one of her jacks to stun him. Ochaco grabbed him to make him start floating. Ayuma used her Quirk to form the ribbons. Tsu caught up with him under water, binding him further with her tongue. Kyoka stuck an earphone jack into his head. The girls triumphantly lifted their catch, all with near-murderous looks on their faces. Tsu and Ayuma were especially fighting the urge to tighten their grip and *strangle* the scumbag.

Momo turned up her nose at the little perv, who was red-faced and drooling in satisfaction. "Boys, do with him as you wish."

"No problems here!" Sero grinned as the two girls tossed Mineta into the clutches of his tape.

"We'll do our best to make sure he doesn't bother you girls again," Tenya notified, shaking hands with Momo like the Class Rep and Vice President they were.

It was a little longer until Tenya finally called a break for the guys, bringing out a cooler filled with orange juice cans. Considering the fact that Ayuma was violated by the shameless short-stack, -- he lingered around her more than the other girls -- she went up and sneaked a can for herself. She drank quietly in the safety of the shade and tried to calm her nerves. Huddled with her knees folded against her, she watched as the boys resumed their little break.

"Mind if I sit here?" a voice drew her attention to the side, where Ojiro was standing not far away.

"Go ahead," she consented in a low voice. "Better you than Mineta."

He laughed softly. "Yeah. One would think he'd learned his lesson the first time you showed up in class. He looked like you'd turned into some really scary ghost right in front of him."
Ayuma chuckled despite herself. "How loud did he scream?"

"Hmm, not far off from when Jiro got him in the eye. At least, we think it was Jiro, considering only Midoriya could see from that angle."

"It was," Ayuma affirmed. "Mina did say she was happy to meet someone who could scare him to the point of silence on my first day. Still... He got what he was probably trying to get... from me, anyways."

Ojiro sighed. "Fair point. Might have to redouble our efforts to keep him off your girls' backs."

"Please do."

"The next time I beat you, you'd better be at your strongest, you damn nerd!" Bakugo's growl came from the entry door. Everyone looked to see him stomp toward Midoriya, Kirishima attempting to hold him back. Apparently, he did get Midoriya's message, but took the couple of hours of time to convince Bakugo to come out and join the class. "So, Deku, you want to settle who's the best of us right now? Huh?!" he demanded, arms sparkling with firecrackers.

Tenya seemed to ponder for a second or two. "Actually, you know what? We could make this training a contest. Hey everyone! I propose we see which one of the boys can swim 50 meters the fastest! A friendly race!" All the boys seemed to happily agree.

"Iida, why don't you let us help you out with this?" Momo suggested.

"And Quirks. Can we use them?" Ojiro added.

"We're at school, so there shouldn't be a problem with that," Tenya answered. "However, we cannot cause damage to our classmates or the building." All but Bakugo seemed to agree to the terms, and Tsu and Ayuma were the set "lifeguards" in case anything accidental happened.

The first group was Mineta, Tokoyami, Koda, Bakugo, and Kaminari. Momo stood at the side with a whistle. As soon as she blew it, all the boys but Bakugo dove in. The ash blond boy instead propelled himself over the pool with his explosions. Kirishima and Sero loudly disapproved, but couldn't go much further than that. The explosive boy called it "freestyle swimming." Ayuma was not convinced it could be considered as such.

The next group was Kirishima, Sero, Sato, Aoyama, and Todoroki. As soon as Momo blew the whistle, three of the guys took a different route. Sero shot his tape to the opposing fence, and Aoyama used the repelling force of his laser. Unfortunately, the latter ran out of time with his laser and bashed into Sero. Todoroki skated along the water, turning it to ice to win the race. Kaminari and Mineta heavily protested against it, even though only Ayuma realized Sero had done basically the same thing that he berated Bakugo for last round.

Unfortunately, that wasn't Sero's only problem. Aoyama quickly became a dead weight due to his Quirk's drawback, sending him veering off the side and straight into Sero's stomach. The poor guy had the wind knocked out of him while winding back his tape to get across the pool. The two guys were soon tangled up in the sticky ribbon and sinking in the water. Tsu and Ayuma had to go in, untangle the two of them, and bring them up and out of the pool. Sero was held up by the chestnut-haired girl's ribbons, and Aoyama was supported by Tsu's tongue. Sero was hacking water, and it looked pretty painful. Not surprising, as it looked like he almost bruised a rib in that collision with their French blond classmate.
"Okay, maybe not so fun," Sero coughed, holding his ribs. "Just need a little -- Ow! -- rest..."

"Slow and shallow breaths, Sero," Ayuma advised as she led him to everyone else.

"Ribbit! You need to go to the bathroom, Aoyama?" Tsu inquired as her own charge clutched his rumbling stomach.

"...Oui... Merci beaucoup, mademoiselle," Aoyama replied in a strained tone as they vanished behind the door.

The last round was Tenya, Midoriya, Ojiro, and Shoji. Tenya skid over the rope between the lanes to earn another protest from Kaminari. But Midoriya started to spark with green electricity and surged forward, keeping up with him. Despite the disadvantage, Midoriya won the round, using his Quirk in a way that seemed to appease the class perv and class flirt.

After Midoriya helped Tenya out of the water, Todoroki looked at both of them, and then at his left hand. The two other boys shared a knowing look with them. Ayuma walked over, and all three of them shared that look with her. They were remembering the Hero Killer; she could tell.

_Don't you worry, guys. When I become a hero alongside all of you, I'll show the truth. One day, the world will one day know the truth behind every lie, and they'll remember you the same way they remembered me. I'll become a hero that people won't have to be afraid of; a hero who people would be truly glad to see. One day, Nightmare; one day we'll be someone all orphans will be proud of._

A small silhouette appeared in the corner of her eye as they prepared for the final round. She went in closer to realize Mr. Aizawa was there. _Have we hit the deadline already? Time flies. Oh well; maybe next time._ She picked up the pace behind the crowd, quietly jogging inside and exchanging a curt nod with the teacher as she went to the locker room. She pulled out the braid and dried herself off with her towel before putting her clothes back on; by then, the other girls had joined.

"Darn. I was so ready to see the final round!" Mina protested. "Not nice, Mr. Aizawa."

"Perhaps another day, everyone," Momo said in relent.

"Ribbit! Maybe we can try making it a race for us girls next time!" Tsu commented.

"That's a great idea, Tsu!" Toru exclaimed in agreement. "What do you think, Ayuma?"

Ayuma looked back at everyone from checking the time on her phone, mildly surprised they'd ask for her opinion. "I -- I guess it would be nice to do this again sometime... despite you-know-what."

"Yeah," Ochaco nodded with a smile. "But we'll all be ready for it next time. Just you wait! See you girls tomorrow!"

Ayuma waved goodbye to all the other girls as she took her leave.

The main sign something was wrong was the emergency vehicles. They went by quite a few times. And they were all going in the direction of Ayuma's apartment building. Police cars, a few ambulances, even a firetruck. Whatever kind of accident may have happened to require such a gathering of emergency vehicles was beyond Ayuma. She thought little of it.
Until she actually got to the apartment building.

It was one of the strangest things she'd ever seen. Everyone she knew who lived in the building was outside. All the emergency vehicles she saw were right in the parking lot. Some people were being led out, many of them very dizzy or throwing up as the EMT's looked them over, giving them oxygen. Some weren't even awake, being loaded onto gurneys and into ambulances. The exhausted-looking staff of the apartment building were standing guard over a pile of luggage somewhat sorted into groups. And Ayuma's was in one of the groups.

Ayuma was in utter disbelief. She just stood there, frozen in the time span of her own mind. She even slipped into the Dreamscape for a few seconds to see the entire building picked clean of people. What was happening? Why was everyone and their stuff outside? Why were these people - some of which being her neighbors -- being led out in such awful condition? I don't see anything out of the ordinary. What in the world is going on?

"Excuse me, miss," one of the officers said. She quickly stepped aside in case she was in the way, but the officer didn't go towards the building. His eyes were trained on her. "Are you one of the residents of this complex?"

"Y-yes..." she responded quietly. "W-what happened?"

The officer sighed. "Miss... I'm sorry to tell you... there's been a large gas leak in the building. Everyone who was living there has to go somewhere else for the time being. The staff collected all of the tenants' belongings. You were lucky you were out and about when it started."

Gas leak... No wonder the building looks perfectly normal... If I went in there...

"...Thank you... officer... for telling me..." she barely got past her trembling lips.

"I'm sorry for your home, once again," the officer bowed before continuing to his comrades. Ayuma, eyes on the ground, went over to the piles of luggage. She found her packed belongings among one of the piles before pulling out her phone, selecting Tenya's number on speed dial. After a ring and a half, she heard it pick up.

"Hello? This is Tenya Iida."

"Hey t-Tenya, i-it's me." Her voice sounded broken and she hated it, along with how much her chin quivered. "I-it's Ayum-ma...

"Wha -- Ayuma?! What are you -- I.. Is something the matter?"

Ayuma's voice was uneasy and slow in her response. "T-Tenya... someth-thing hap-pened... to the apartment b-building I live in... there was a g-gas leak... I-I-I don't have anywhere else to go...

"I... I see... Wait... Is there any suspicious-looking vehicles or aircraft near your location? Like a helicopter, drone, truck, or van."

Ayuma looked up. Sure enough, there was indeed a helicopter above a nearby building, with something coming out of the side. "Yes... Why?" She answered her own question the second she asked it.

"I can see you on TV; it's already on the news," Tenya answered. There was a short sound of his phone vibrating, "What's thi-- Oh. Ayuma, Yaoyorozu's already sent me a message on the chat. She's coming to pick you up and bring you home."

Just hearing the name left Ayuma's head spinning. "Mo... mo...? She... she wants to take me
Tenya sighed, and she almost thought she heard a quiver in the exhale. "Don't sound so surprised, Ayuma. We all help each other out in some way. Regardless of where we come from or what happens. Thanks to Midoriya and Todoroki, I've learned that myself. Now it's your turn."

"Ayuma!" Momo's anguished voice cried out as long arms flung around Ayuma. She was instantly pulled into the embrace of her black-haired friend as the taller girl said sweet nothings into her shoulder. Things like Momo's relief for her being safe and thanking the stars she was with the class that day were mumbled into her ear. Ayuma could barely take it all in. Someone was actually concerned for her. Someone who was willing to drive far away from the safety of their home to see if she was safe.

Someone cared.

"Um... Thanks..." Ayuma said softly into her phone before hanging up the phone. She was blinking away the tears forming in her eyes as she returned Momo's hug.

"Come on, Ayuma; let's get you home," Momo said, taking her suitcase and bringing it to the big black car she came running out of only a little while prior. "I already had Mother prepare a guest room for you not far from mine."

"But... are you sure... you want me to... stay the night with you?" Ayuma asked, wiping her eyes as her suitcase disappeared into the vehicle's trunk.

Momo stared at her, dumbfounded. She shook it off and smiled before she urged her into the car. "Of course! Orphan or not, no one deserves to sleep on the streets. Now bring us home, please," she spoke to the driver before they started to drive off.

Ayuma watched out the window as the apartment building that was normally her home disappeared behind one of its many neighbors. The inside of the car felt almost foreign to the overwhelmed girl. She felt a hand on her shoulder and glanced back at Momo, who was smiling in reassurance. Like an older sister. "Don't worry about a thing, Ayuma. My parents will certainly enjoy meeting you. You'll have a lovely time staying at my residence until your apartment building is clear for you and your neighbors to return. It won't be a bother at all."

Ayuma smiled slightly in thanks, nodding at her black-haired classmate. Tenya's right; everyone really does help each other out. Be it someone from high society, or someone plucked off the streets. Someone who can fully control their Quirk, or someone just starting to get a handle on it. A Quirk the world will be all too happy to fawn over, or a Quirk that the world would prefer to scorn or forget about... I guess I did once try to console Momo back at the Sports Festival... These guys really have become a sort of family for me...
Oh boy, now we're getting close to You-Know-What. Hope you guys are as excited as I am! One arc to go and we'll be onto the Big Bad Boss!

At school the next day, everyone seemed to have heard about the incident concerning Ayuma's home. They were all asking about it, especially if she was okay, as much as she tried to tell them she wasn't around when it started. Tenya and Momo were sure to push them all away before they all got too close and overwhelmed the poor girl before the teacher showed up.

"Now that you've finished up your first semester at U.A. High, it's time for summer vacation to officially begin," Aizawa began. "However, don't think these will be months of rest for you heroes-in-the-making. At this camp, we'll push you to go beyond your limits. You're aiming to become Plus Ultra."

"Yes sir!" Class 1-A replied.

The rest of the class broke up into mingling with each other before the buses arrived. A certain someone -- who rented out one of the gyms the same way 1-A rented the pool -- dropped by when the Hero Course students were gathered in the courtyard. She went up to where her friend stood in a less populated part of the courtyard to talk.

"Heard about the gas leak; you alright?" he asked.

"I'm fine, Shinso; I was nowhere near it when it started," Ayuma replied.

His tense shoulders relaxed. "Good. I was a little worried when I thought I saw you on the news. But now you're going away for a week with the class infamous for attracting trouble."

She only shrugged. "Life has told me that I was no different long before I got here."

An all-too-irritating voice broke though the rest of her class' voices. "I heard some of Class 1-A is taking extra courses! Does that mean they actually failed the final exams?! That must be so embarrassing! Especially since you're supposed to be so much better than my class! ALL OF YOU MUST BE WALLOWING IN SHAME!"

Monoma's most recent tirade was chopped short as Kendo knocked him out, again. "Don't mind him," she said as she dragged him off. Class 1-B wasn't far off, but they seemed a lot friendlier and less competitive than at the Sports Festival. "Time to get on the bus!" she called out, dragging the unconscious blond boy onto the bus; the rest of her class followed after.

"Attention Class A, our bus is here!" Tenya announced, arms waving about. "Everyone line up in seating order!"

Ayuma shook her head before turning back to her purple-haired training partner. "Point is, don't worry about me, Shinso. If anything happens, I promise I'll come flying back. I just hope you'll be able to keep up the training while Mr. Aizawa and I are gone."
Shinso cracked a smile. "Trust me when I say I won't slack. Meet me in the TDL when you get back?" he asked as he held out a hand.

Ayuma shook his hand with a nod of agreement. "Deal. I'll see you then." She lifted up to her toes and hugged him briefly before running off into the bus, right behind Momo. She took a seat in the back, behind Sero and Ojiro before they headed off. Aizawa told them the bus ride would be about an hour before the other students started chatting with each other. For whatever reason, Aoyama stood up, and Tenya got up just to berate him back into sitting down.

"You're still hanging around that mind-control guy?" Mineta fumed. He climbed over the seat and tried to straddle her on the seat. "And you HUGGED HIM?!"

"He's a far better person than you are," Ayuma glared. Before he could respond, her knee shot upward and collided with its target. Mineta cried out in agony as she shoved him off into the alley. Sato picked him up by the shirt and set him back in his seat, giving her a small bow of apology. Ayuma sighed, looking over all her classmates chatting with each other on the bus before she pulled out her phone.

"An hour-long ride?... I think I can deal with that."

The second the bus stopped, everyone started filing out, stretching their muscles that had gone stiff on the long ride. Mineta was shouting about how he had to go to the bathroom. But Ayuma wasn't sure there was a rest stop anywhere on the cliff they parked on. Come to think, Class B didn't follow them either, and wasn't with them on the fenced ledge. There was also a suspicious-looking black car on the side, and Ayuma almost thought she saw cat ears inside.

"You don't really think we stopped here just so you could stretch your legs, do you?" Aizawa asked the group.

The doors to the black car suddenly swung open. "Heya, Eraser."

"Long time, no see."

Two women leaped out of the car, with a young boy leaving the back. "Your feline fantasies are here! Say meow," said the first one who spoke, who was wearing red.

"Purr-fectly cute and cat-like girls!" the blonde lady in blue continued.

"You can call us the Wild, Wild Pussycats!" they said in unison. The boy didn't seem to want any part; not that Ayuma could blame him. Everyone just gave their introductory display a flat deadpan.

"These are the Pro heroes you'll be working with at the summer training camp," their teacher explained.

"They're a four-person hero team who specialize in mountain rescues!" Midoriya exclaimed in excitement. "The Pussycats were founded when we were kids, like forever ago!" The two ladies didn't sound too fond of the time-related comment. "This marks their twelfth year working as a--!

He was cut off when the blonde lady grabbed his face with her clawed paw glove.

"I'm pretty sure your math must be off!" she growled with a nasty smile on her face. Ayuma jumped back at her tone. "I'm 18 at heart." Midoriya muffled out that he understood before Aizawa had everyone greet the Pros.

"We own this whole stretch of land out here; everything you can see," the red-wearing brunette explained, gesturing out into the forest below. She pointed to a certain direction in said
forest. "The summer camp you'll be staying at is there, at the base of the mountain."

"Uh, then why did we stop all the way up here instead?" Ochaco inquired.

"I'm afraid we both know the answer to that," Tsu answered Ochaco's question.

Ayuma's eyes widened in realization. Wait a minute... Okay, no big deal. I can find the place through the trees while flying, right? Will someone be there who I'll be able to spot in the Dreamscape? All the other students started to realize what they were going to have to do, and some of them decided to get back on the bus.

"The current time is 9:30 in the morning," the dark-haired Pussycat added slyly. "If you're fast about it, you might make it there by noon."

At that point, Ayuma didn't have much choice. She called upon her Quirk to summon her wings and soar off the ledge. "Fine! Be that way! I'm not getting swept up in another Pro hero's Quirk!" Good thing she took to the air; her classmates were being swept up by a wave of soil that tossed them off the ledge. All sorts of blobs of faded blue littered the forest. Something told her that wasn't a good sign.

"Ayuma!" Tenya called up to her. "Go on ahead and find the camp! Then you can guide us there! Keep any fighting on your end to a minimum!"

Ayuma smiled at that plan. "Got it!" She took off above the forest, looking for anything that stuck out from the faded blue blobs. She saw a few of them flicker and blur out completely behind her. Most of them didn't look like they were able to fly, but some of them definitely could.

Like the one that shot up in front of her!

Ayuma barely dodged the lunge and blindly sent out her ribbons. They wrapped around the snout and neck of the dragon-like creature before she swung it around, off-balance, into one of the earth-bound creatures. Smiling at her success, Ayuma continued searching until she saw a small sea green image on the ground, and the shadow of a building was just barely visible in the Dreamscape.

The camp! Now to tell the others I found it. She turned to head back to her class when a group of flying creatures surrounded her. Uh-oh... She sent out her ribbons again, grabbing some of the creatures and bashing them into others to take them down. A couple of smaller ones took a couple of blows from her wings. She started to cradle her pounding head as soon as the last one in the minor ambush attack flickered out.

And then another surprise attack slammed into her, eliciting a loud, albeit cut-off scream.

Ayuma came to sprawled on the forest floor. She felt awful. Like she'd just been stuck a couple of meters underground. Headfirst. And then yanked back out of it. And hit her head on a rock in the process. There wasn't anyone around as far as she could tell, and her head was pounding almost too much to move. She also felt something vaguely off about her arm; the one without the burn scar on it.

She mustered the strength to get to her feet. Despite the headache, she slipped her vision into the Dreamscape and concentrated on the face of the woman in red from getting off the bus. A trail of ruby-colored stardust appeared, and she slowly started to follow it. Step by step. Trying to ignore the dizziness. Trying to ignore the pain. Trying to ignore the looming fact that there could still be creatures in the forest that she couldn't see. Trying to ignore her rumbling stomach. All
while still following the trail.

She didn't know how, but she somehow held out long enough to reach her classmates. They looked no better than she did, but she was glad to see them all. She gladly let down her Quirk before it got any worse and returned to her friends.

"You said it would only be like three hours!" Sero protested.

"I guess we timed it based on how long it'd take us; sorry," the lady in red answered in embarrassment.

The blonde lady seemed delighted. "I thought it would take you kids even longer! But you did much better against my dirt monsters than I thought you would! You guys were seriously great. Especially... the five of you!" She pointed a claw at Midoriya, Todoroki, Ayuma, Tenya, and Bakugo. "It seems you've had quite a bit of experience!" She licked her lips a split second before she lunged. "I call dibs on these kittens! I'll groom them myself!"

Ayuma and the guys could only block her pouncing around them. They all kept telling her to stop such behavior and back off. *Get back,* she wanted to tell her. *Please, haven't you tortured all of us enough? One of your creatures knocked me out of the sky!*

"Hey, speaking of people's ages," Midoriya began only to be grabbed on the face again. The blonde lady was clearly warning him to be careful what he said next. "I've just been wondering since we got here earlier; who's that kid and what's he doing here?"

"Oh, this little guy?" the dark brunette gestured to the boy. "He's my cousin's son; he lives with us now. Don't be shy, Kota. Say hi to everyone; you're gonna be around them for the next week."

After the blonde in blue let him go, Midoriya went up to the kid. "Hey there. My name's Midoriya. I'm from the U.A. High School Hero Course. It's nice to meet you." He bent down for a handshake only for the little guy to put his full weight into a punch to the crotch and walk away. Ayuma winced at the following wheeze from her classmate as he was ready to fall from sheer shell-shock.

"What a low blow!" Tenya cried out, catching the poor guy. "You fiend of a child! A punch to the scrotum is unforgivable!"

The boy momentarily stopped and looked back menacingly. "The last thing I want is to hang with some wannabe heroes."

"Wannabe?! How old are you, kid?"

Bakugo gave the boy an almost brotherly smile that left Ayuma rather surprised. "That brat's got spunk."

"He's like a mini version of you," Todoroki added, only for the blond boy to tell him to "shut your mouth before I blast you all the way to Hell." His reaction was near-nonexistent.

"Enough playing around," Aizawa told everyone. "Get your stuff off the bus. Once your bags are in your rooms, we'll have dinner in the cafeteria. After that, you can bathe and sleep. Tomorrow, your training starts in earnest. You better get a move-on."

As soon as everyone got their stuff inside, they went to the cafeteria for dinner. There were plates of food all along the tables, and Ayuma was more than happy to eat her fill. It turned out that
was the only time they'd be actually given food. That was fine by her, though; living on her own meant she had to learn to cook her own meals.

Everyone took the chance to bathe in the hot spring, which was separated by gender thanks to a huge wooden wall. All of the girls were glad to be able to wash off all the dirt and grime from going through the forest. Ayuma was up to her collarbone in the warm water, every so often submerging entirely to rinse out her hair. She felt a little strange being around a bunch of other girls, all without clothes on.

Ayuma hummed softly to herself as she poured water over the long thin streak on the side of her forearm. A scrape from a tree branch after getting knocked out of the sky, most likely. She kept her back turned toward the other girls, considering Mina was shameless enough to simply sit on a rock and dip her feet in the water. Without so much as a towel for modesty's sake. It could've been something far off in her past catching up to her; or a bad effect of Mineta finally copping a feel of her at the pool. Perhaps it was her own self-consciousness about her body and numerous but faded scars of her life in front of her classmates. Maybe it was just plain shyness and/or modesty that she's always had and never realized. But Ayuma wasn't one who liked to show off in such a way, even with people she knew.

And then she heard Tenya shouting from the other side of the boy/girl wall about something being demeaning and shameful. And a bunch of small thumps going up the wall itself, which got the other girls' attention. She ducked in up to her chin in the water before Mineta got up to the top. Thankfully, before his hand got over the wall, little Kota, his back to the girls' side, appeared from within the wall. He smacked something, presumably Mineta, as the little perv's voice started screaming.

"I'll get you for thiiiis!" was what was heard before a loud splash came from the other side, indicating that the little grape-head ended up back on the floor.

"Mineta really is the worst, isn't he," Tsu commented.

"Thanks so much, Kota-babe!" Mina shouted up the wall. He turned around to see the shameless pink-skinned girl giving him two thumbs-up on the rock. "We owe you one!"

Of course, Kota jumped backwards, losing his balance. Uh-oh. He soon dropped over the boys' side of the wall.

"Look out!" Midoriya's voice shouted. A thud was heard.

Ayuma swam up as close to the wall as she could while still in the water. "Midoriya! Is Kota alright on your side?" she asked through the wall.

"He's out cold, but seems to be otherwise alright," she heard him reply. "I'm gonna bring him to Mandalay, just in case."

"I hope he's going to be alright, Ayuma thought as she heard his footsteps run away. She glanced back at Mina with a stern eye. This was all on you, Mina. You got his attention and made him look back while you were shamelessly sitting up there.

"Well... that happened," Mina only rubbed salt in the wound. "So, who's up for talking love stories? Because I know we all saw one with a certain two people back at school." The pinkette gestured in Ayuma's direction, and the redhead simply swam back to her spot underwater to avoid the unwanted attention.
The next morning had everyone meet outside the camp building in their PE uniforms. It was legitimately 5:30 AM when Mr. Aizawa had everyone outside. Everyone was still half-asleep and many of them couldn't even run a brush through their hair. Ayuma was rubbing her eyes, with her hair tangled around the back only enhancing the uneven cut of her hair. She could definitely tell the general thought of her classmates was wishing they could go back to bed for a couple more hours.

"Good morning, class," Aizawa greeted the students. "Today we'll begin the training camp that will increase your strength. Our goal is to increase your skills exponentially so that each of you earns a Provisional License. This will allow you to face the dangers that continue to fester in the darkness; proceed carefully. Look alive, Bakugo," he said before tossing some kind of baseball with a ring of censors on it to the blond boy in question. "Try throwing that for me."

"Yeah, sure, like in the fitness test," Bakugo recalled.

"That's right," confirmed the teacher. "When you first started school, your record was 705.2 meters. Let's see if you've improved."

"Oh, I get it! We're checking our progress!" Mina summarized.

"A lot's happened to us the last three months," Sero pointed out. "Maybe he can throw it a whole mile now."

Ayuma rose a brow at that statement. Nightmare definitely wouldn't help in something like this. It can only affect other people and their Quirks. Maybe it could do more if I had more control... Actually, scrap that, because it couldn't affect anything besides people and Quirks whenever Nightmare itself was in control. But still, Nightmare is pretty skeptical about allowing me to use it to its full potential.

"Come on; get 'em, Bakugo!" Kirishima cheered.

Bakugo circled his arm a few times to prepare. "I've got this. No one blink." He recoiled backward. "GO TO HELL!" he bellowed as he launched a huge explosion that sent the ball flying into the forest. A little shockwave went over the rest of the class.

"That was 709.6 meters," Aizawa reported, showing some sort of device with the number on it.

*Only about a 4-and-a-half-meter increase? After at least a few months? Yikes.*

Aizawa could tell they all now saw his point. "You've had a single semester at U.A. And due to your various experiences, all of you have definitely improved. But those improvements have mostly been limited to mental prowess and technical skill, with a slight increase in stamina thrown in along the way. Your Quirks haven't really grown that much stronger; not on a fundamental level. That's why we're now going to focus on improving your powers." He flashed them an almost manic smile. "This'll be so hard, you'll feel like you're dying. Let's hope you all survive."

Ayuma gave a fear-touched glare to the dark-haired man; the first one to see her power and part of the reason she was even at U.A. *I have for this long; I probably will.*

Chapter End Notes
Oooo, tempting fate, are we? Won't this be interesting. Wait... Where's Class 1-B when all this is happening? Oh right! SLEEPING.
Chapter Notes

About an hour after training starts on 1-A's side, Aizawa starts getting impatient and has one of his students go get 1-B. And guess which unlucky kid with a semi-tracking Quirk winds up with that duty...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ayuma couldn't believe she was legitimately sent on such a menial task. And after an hour or so of trying to form scenic illusions in the Dreamscape with no luck. Basically, she was given the Class B attendance sheet and sent to wake them up and lead them to where her class was training. Not even their homeroom teacher Vlad King was up yet! Thankfully for the violet-eyed redhead, a few rounds of bashing a large stick against the door was all she needed.

"How embarrassing to require the same Hero student who defeated me to wake me and my class," Vlad King muttered in shame as he waited for his class upon getting outside.

Ayuma impatiently tapped on the stick she used. I just can't believe I was the one sent to get you guys. Possibly only to test out my stardust trail trick. You can't use the dream if you can't find the dreamer.

It took a while, but the whole class soon came out of the dorms in their PE uniforms. Most of them looked rather taken aback at seeing Ayuma standing there. But they were all too tired to say anything biting to her considering she was sent to lead them to the training area. (Thank the stars for that, since not even Monoma could come up with anything.) Ayuma saw quite a familiar sight compared to her own class a while ago: plenty of yawns, rubbing eyes, and slumped postures as the teacher instructed what they were going to do. One of the girls -- Komori, she recalled from the attendance sheet -- was practically falling asleep on her feet.

Kendo made sure to catch Komori by the arm before she dropped. "We're focusing on our Quirks?"

"According to our little guest and guide, Class A's already training," Vlad King explained, gesturing to Ayuma. "You all need to catch up. Let's go."

Ayuma nodded and activated her Quirk, concentrating on Aizawa's face to form the silver stardust trail leading to him. "Follow me," she ordered before following the trail. Vlad King mostly droned about how Class B was going to overshadow Class A next semester.

Setsuna Tokage spoke up. "I get you want everyone to improve our Quirks, but we have 20 unique powers in our class. What kind of training will help all of us get better?"

"Yeah, can you be more specific?" inquired the boy Ayuma believed was named Rin. Vlad's response sounded suspiciously like Bakugo's argument concerning Quirks being compared to physical prowess and muscles... He ended off by saying the class would have to "break themselves."

"That's a rather harsh way of putting it," Ayuma commented aloud, to the agreement of the
students behind her. They stopped at the large clearing where all of her classmates were training.

Bakugo was switching between sticking his arms into boiling water and setting off large explosions toward the sky. Todoroki was in a cauldron of water that he surrounded in alternating ice and fire. Sero was continuously sending out tape, possibly crying out in pain because of his skin drying out. Kirishima and Ojiro were sparring with each other; tail against hardened skin. Kaminari was letting off lightning with that giant battery he was training with. Koda was loudly shouting his vocal exercises off the top of a mountain.

Aoyama was chain-blasting his laser to the sky. Tokoyami was trying to keep hold of Dark Shadow in the pitch darkness of one of the mountain caves. Ayuma would normally be in another one trying to talk to Nightmare, as well as try to alter the scenery around her to enhance taking advantage of her opponents' subconscious fears. Ochaco could be seen bouncing and rolling around in a plastic bubble. Tenya was racing around the whole place. Tsu was visibly climbing a mountain, with her tongue as the safety rope.

Sato and Momo were both continuously eating at a table; Sato was lifting weights and Momo was producing her nesting dolls. Kyoka was honing her headphone jacks on a mountainside while Mina was constantly creating acid. Mineta was in a pile of Pop-Off balls that he just kept pulling off his head. Finally, Shoji was using his Dupli-arms to try and find a stealth-practicing Toru. (They could tell because an old chip bag was blown up against her by the wind.)

"Oh man, this is pretty intense," Rin muttered. To Ayuma's minor amusement, his expression only got worse as Vlad continued, to the point of almost looking like he was dying on his feet.

"Operative types will be raising your limits, maxing out your power," the teacher instructed. "The rest, you'll mostly be focusing on body parts related to your Quirks. Now normally, these changes happen gradually as you grow..."

"But we don't have time for that," Aizawa completed, approaching the group. "Your class has a lot of work to do."

Someone tapped on Ayuma's shoulder, and she turned to see Kendo and... Yanagi, if she recalled correctly. "Once we team up with your class, there'll be over 40 students here. That's a whole lot of Quirks for our homeroom teachers to manage on their own." Ayuma nodded in agreement.

"Which is why we called them," Aizawa remarked.

"That's correct!" a girly voice exclaimed as a green-haired woman appeared in front of him. "Four kittens in one litter!"

"Your feline fantasies are here! Say meow," the dark-haired lady from yesterday began.

"Allow us to lend a helping paw!" grinned the greenette.

"We're champions serving justice, with our tails," added a large man in the same uniform as the three other girls.

"Purr-fectly cute and catlike heroes," finished the blonde in blue.

"We're the Wild, Wild Pussycats! Full version!" they all said in unison.

The green-haired girl started the actual introductions. "I'm Ragdoll, and my Quirk is Search! I can look at up to a hundred people and know everything about them, like their location and
Then came the blonde, who said her name was Pixie-bob. "With my Earthflow, I can create the ideal training ground for every student." She formed a passing wave of rock to emphasize.

"And my Quirk is called Telepath," said the dark-haired lady Ayuma remembered as Mandalay. "I can give advice to multiple people at once."

"The name's Tiger," the large man introduced in an intimidating manner. "And I'm here to beat you guys to a pulp."

Ayuma couldn't help a shudder. No thanks. But unless you want Nightmare to turn that offer back on you, be my guest.

"I have questions about him..." Rin said hesitantly. Ayuma gave the poor guy a helpless look and a shrug; there was no telling what the big guy's deal was.

"Ayuma, you can head back to your training," Aizawa instructed his student.

"Yes sir," she obliged, all too happy to be able to get away from Tiger. She turned and tried to head off with a little dignity. But then she heard shouting, and then a loud CRASH! She froze in her tracks and turned to see Midoriya falling from being punched into a tree. The scenery flickered, and instead of Midoriya on the ground, it was Ayuma's younger self, paralyzed on the basement floor. And it wasn't Tiger standing above the initial sight, it was Madame Kirai, scissor blade in hand ready for sharpness testing. She vaguely heard a voice, not unlike her own, calling out to her.

Aizawa's eyes narrowed at the strange look in those of his petrified, chestnut-haired student. Frozen in place, staring at Midoriya in wide-eyed terror as Tiger stood over the boy, barking at him to get up. Kendo cautiously walked into Ayuma's line of sight, severing her view of her struggling classmate and the cruel-looking hero above him. She blinked as if waking from a daze, then shook her head, spun around and hightailed it back to the caves. That was odd. I wonder what seeing Midoriya like that could've reminded her of...

As soon as Ayuma was safely in an unoccupied cavern, she slid down the wall in relief; Nightmare's appeared in front of her, wasting no time with beginning a lecture.

"UGH!! You're lucky I didn't pummel that so-called hero! I was trying to get you to come back! Get. Over yourself! Stop seeing something deadly or from the past in every little thing you experience!"

Ayuma glared at the bright eyes. "Well, thanks. You're admitting that you've become protective of my friends, but all the more insensitive to your own host." The ribbons around Nightmare's wrists went straight.

"WHAT?! NO! I'm not protective of anyone! Especially not your weak classmates."

The redhead rose a brow. "Try again? I possibly have PTSD because of Madame Kirai and heroes like Endeavor, Aizawa, and Midnight; Tiger triggered a miniature attack. If I can admit things like that, surely you can manage to admit your own traits."

"...It's the two big guns you keep hanging around with. Tenya and Momo. Their Class Parents status has just rubbed off a little. I mean, first time we had any friends remotely resembling the family you were always looking for, right?"
Ayuma nodded, in begrudging agreement, but glad that at least she was making progress. She concentrated on trying to make the pitch-black cave look like something else. Nothing happened; not even an extra light in the Dreamscape. *Of course it wouldn't be that easy...*

By evening, everyone was called back for dinner. Pixie-bob held true to what she said yesterday about not serving them any food. Instead, they were instructed to make their own, despite their exhaustion. Ayuma was still walking off the post-Nightmare headache, but she knew from experience how to make her own meals. Especially with the curry ingredients they were being given. Ragdoll's high laughter was no help for her head though, and neither were Tenya's words of encouragement, welcome as they may have been.

At the stoves, quite a few people were set up in teams of two while the rest prepared the ingredients and dishes. Todoroki was mostly being asked to light fires for everyone else with his Quirk. Bakugo tried to light his with an explosion, but instead wound up throwing in too much concussive force and blew it up. Momo made a small butane lighter to light hers with Kyoka overlooking. Ayuma was glad she bought that flint fire-starter; a few spark-bearing scrapes and the wood was soon glowing orange.

"Smart of you to bring one of those," a voice commented. Ayuma looked up to see two of the guys from Class B. They were at the fire across from hers, part of the group that Todoroki helped lighting fires on. "At least you didn't need someone else's Quirk to help you out," the smaller of the two added to his previous statement.

"Jurota Shishida and Sen Kaibara," the big brown-haired male introduced, gesturing to himself and the other boy. "Forgive us for not properly introducing ourselves this morning."

"Oh, it's no problem," Ayuma waved it off. "You were all probably too tired to think much of anything back there. I know we weren't when we woke up," she chuckled, depositing the fire-starter in her pocket. "It's better in the morning, if you ask me; Monoma's at least too tired to taunt."

"Brutally true," Shishida agreed. "He's usually far more tolerable when he doesn't insult people and require Kendo's discipline."

The cooking went a lot smoother than Ayuma expected it to go. A little after sundown and all the lanterns around the picnic tables were lit, dinner was ready. She sat with her plate of curry at the table with Koda, Sato, and Todoroki. Most of them were quietly eating, but Ayuma thought she heard the word "poop" from a neighboring table and almost choked. A split second later, Kyoka slugged Sero, telling him to apologize for something.

"You okay, Ayuma?" Sato asked as she was coughing on whatever went down the wrong pipe. Koda's hand was rubbing her back.

Ayuma took a deep breath when the coughing fit stopped, looking up at them in gratitude. "I'm fine. I just can't believe what I think I just heard."

The next day kick started the training once again. For Ayuma, that meant more attempts to warp the Dreamscape, and talk therapy with her own Quirk. The class was reminded to keep on training, and that tonight there was going to be a special test-of-courage tournament between the classes.

"Revelry in the dark," Tokoyami intoned before he and Ayuma entered the caves.
"I get the feeling everyone is really starting to not like these cats. Such awful words of 'encouragement' from the four of them."

"You're telling me," Ayuma remarked in turn, trying to make any changes to the Dreamscape. "I feel lucky I managed to get any sleep last night. You'd think these people would actually allow psychological warfare."

"Very true. That could be useful in the test-of-courage tournament. But seriously, I actually want to help you here with our power."

Ayuma had her hands thrust out into the darkness, concentrating on forming a single light in the Dreamscape to no avail. "And exactly how can you help me? You're so different compared to me that I'm thinking we're not even the same person here. You're just something my own Quirk somehow created to be its own face and voice." Nightmare was silent, until responding in a humbled voice.

"...Actually, I was a part of you once. You could even say I'm your subconscious mind. The braver part of you that secretly honed our power. You know, the reason why you always seem to have better control when you yourself aren't the one at the wheel."

Ayuma halted for a second there. "Wait. You're telling me that after all the trouble I went through to even tap into my subconscious, I still haven't fully unlocked it?"

"No no, you have unlocked it; just not by much. Only enough for me to make myself known to you. I don't know much about the whole conscious-subconscious deal either. I'm no neurologist; just the part of you that controlled our power for you and protected your life. But trust me when I say I want to help."

"Trust you? And you said you couldn't bring yourself to trust me when we first tried to fuse back together."

"Who's that you're talking to?" a voice asked behind her.

Ayuma jumped and spun around to see little more than a white shock of hair in the darkness. She was really starting to hate the fact that she couldn't form anything from the Dreamscape. With a low growl of frustration, she flung out her hands in hopes of just creating something.

What appeared was a vicious shock to both of their eyes. A glaring spotlight just appeared, fixed on the black-silhouetted boy in front of her, who was starting to act incredibly panicked. Under the light, even the boy the silhouette was coming from was black, all except for the uniform and hair. He dashed around in the confined space, and the spotlight stayed literally right on top of him, leaving him helplessly trying to shield himself in the light. Ayuma was shading her eyes as well as her eyes got used to the light.

"Well, that was easy."

"What did you just do?!!" the boy before her demanded in a freaked out tone. "And who is that by you?"

Ayuma looked at her hands in wide-eyed shock. "I have no idea what I just did, but it might've been what I was trying to do." She shook her head. "Anyway, I'm this here is the... personification of my Quirk... Nightmare." She concentrated on getting the light to fade into something manageable; it gradually dimmed to a reasonable glow. By then, the boy looked at least a little
more relaxed.

"Shihai Kuroiro," the male introduced himself. "Ambassador of the Abyss."

Nightmare replied mockingly, "Ayuma, daughter of the Dreamscape. Also your morning wake-up call."

Ayuma glared at the wraith-like creature, snapping a ribbon at it in warning. "I apologize for her. I'm Ayuma... no last name given, though."

He raised a brow. "Where's Fumikage Tokoyami? I must properly meet my rival."

"I think he's in one of the other caves," Ayuma answered, keeping a straight face despite the growing pain. "Sorry; you'll have to keep looking."

"Of course; thank you, though," the boy bowed before hurrying out of that cave and into another, the light vanishing as soon as he left her line of sight. Nightmare just made itself comfortable leaning on Ayuma's shoulders, its hand ribbons twining around Ayuma's wrists.

"You think his skin color has something to do with his Quirk?"

Ayuma unknowingly wrapped her own ribbons around Nightmare's arms as the dark wraith-like hands slid into hers. "Maybe..."

What happened next, neither one could remember.

That evening had everyone back at camp with their jobs switched out for others for making stew. Ayuma changed into a dark green tank top and deep orchid shirt with a pair of grey sweatpants and black socks, if only to escape the sweaty PE uniform. This time, she was on food prep, peeling vegetables with some of the Class B guys. There was Shouda, a rather plump young man who seemed to get along well with Ojiro. Another was Kamakiri, a green mantis-like character who used blades formed by his Quirk to peel the vegetables, but didn't seem to want to talk. And last was Kuroiro, the boy who Ayuma met in the cave. Every so often, Tenya would come over and inspect how he could join them (Has he never used a manual peeler before?).

At one point or another, Ayuma heard the name "Kota" coming from behind her, where she saw Midoriya and Todoroki at a stove and dish sink, respectively. "...doesn't like heroes," she heard from her green-haired classmate, freezing and listening carefully. "...hates... concept... super humans, Quirks... tried to talk to him... think... made it worse... just wondering... All Might... he were here... What would you..."

Todoroki turned to look in the distance, and his response was far easier for Ayuma to hear. "It depends. To have a complete stranger try to change your mindset sounds like a pretty irritating conversation. What matters are actions; you have to show him what you're trying to prove, right? If you're going to rely on words alone, then they'd better be incredibly powerful. What you say doesn't matter nearly as much as what you actually do."

So... this Kota boy... hates Quirks? A pang of memories hit her in her mind's eye as she resumed peeling, Tenya contemplating joining her and the three other guys. That's right. A lot of the kids at Madame Kirai's didn't like their Quirks either; me included. To us, Quirks were just something that ensured we could never be adopted; especially for those who couldn't control them. A Quirk was something that could get you out of a house and into the basement because we had to feign Quirkless to get a family.
That was when Tenya yelled at Midoriya and Todoroki to get back to work. He was also somehow peeling vegetables faster than any of the four in front of him or the one behind. (Aoyama was begrudgingly helping.) Ayuma could only look at the confused Class B students and shrug in embarrassment. "Sorry; he's always like this."

Their faces were varying degrees of, "You don't say..."

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After dinner and cleanup, it was time for the test-of-courage. Unfortunately for those who were most excited, they had to head off for remedial lessons with Aizawa again. (Mina shrieked in dismay, to the teacher's quiet, unapologetic apology.) After those unfortunate souls were dragged off, Pixie-bob explained the rules of the challenge.

"Class B is going to start out as our scarers; when they're in place, Class A will leave in pairs every three minutes! There are tags with your names on them at the far end of the route; your goal is to collect those! Now, those who are scarers aren't allowed to make physical contact; use your Quirks to terrify the others! Got it?"

"Revelry in the dark," Tokoyami intoned again.

"The winners are the creative students who make the most people piss their pants!" Tiger added.

Ayuma cringed in disgust, alongside Kyoka. I wish I was one of the scarers, considering this is Nightmare's MO, Ayuma admitted to herself. Everyone was randomly assigned partners with numbered tags. To her relief, Ayuma was assigned as Midoriya's partner. (One of the nicest guys in the class? No complaints here.) Bakugo wanted to switch partners with Ojiro to get away from Todoroki, and Mineta wanted to swap with Aoyama to get his hands on Momo. Neither one agreed, and Ojiro was sure to grab his perverted teammate with his tail.

The next 12 minutes was essentially a waiting game. Screams resounded from the forest as each team was jumpscared by the opposing class. After Ochaco and Tsu were sent in, Ayuma started to smell something burning. Uh, last I checked, nobody in either of our classes has a Quirk based around smell. She looked up to see a faint blue light over the trees. That's not Todoroki; or Endeavor, for that matter. "Uh... Pussycats? We may have a problem..."

Pixie-bob was suddenly glowing red, and being yanked backwards by some invisible force. The other Pussycats freaked out when they saw her fly back into the trees. There was soon a large person standing over the hero, who bashed her in the head with a large parcel over their shoulder. Alongside that one was a lizard-like man armed with large swords.

"No one was supposed to find us!" Mineta screeched. Midoriya tried to rush to Pixie-bob's aide when he was blocked by Tiger, and they all soon realized something.

"Don't think that matters now," Ayuma fired back. "Whether we wanted any villains to find us or not, they did."

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Chapter End Notes

Well $#!%. Time to commence the episodes of the POV bouncing around the battlefield and some real issues down the line, folks. Just try to keep up when that rolls..."
around here.
Alright, we're nearing 400 hits! Given my record here on AO3, that's a milestone! Anyway, to my fellow My Hero theorists who say Dabi and Touya are the same guy... Well, you'll know it when you see it :D

"How are you this evening, U.A. High School?" the lizard man inquired. "We are part of the Vanguard Action Squad of the League of Villains."

The larger of the two positioned their huge weapon over the unconscious Pixie-bob's head. "I could crush this kitty's head so easily. How about it, dear, should I?"

"You get away from her!" roared Tiger.

"Now now, big sis Magne," the lizard stepped between the two. "You too, Tiger, calm down. When deciding if someone should live or die, we must be careful that we're abiding by Stain's principles."

_Stain; as in, the Hero Killer?_

"So you're the ones he ended up inspiring," Tenya glared at the two, confirming her suspicion.

"At your service; that's us. And you, four eyes, I believe I recognize you. You're one of the self-righteous brats who attacked Stain in Hosu City." He reached back to grab the handle of his sword and pulled it out, the cloth sheath falling off to reveal a multitude of heavy blades belted together. "Let me introduce myself; call me Spinner. I'm here to make Stain's dreams a reality!"

"I don't care who you are," Tiger growled. "You're criminals! The woman lying there is named Pixie-bob. She's a Pro hero who saved countless lives! She's giving her all for these young heroes, pushing them to reach their full potential. She's looking for a mate, but otherwise she's content." He unsheathed the claws of his gloves. "WHAT GIVES YOU THE RIGHT TO CUT SUCH A HAPPY LIFE SHORT?!"

"Didn't anyone ever tell you it's not a hero's job to be happy?" demanded Spinner as he charged.

"Tiger, I've talked to everyone," Mandalay notified. "Trust the safety of the other students to Ragdoll. You and I will stay here; we'll hold them back." She turned to the students. "You return to camp. Class Rep, you're in charge on the way there; do _not_ engage anyone."

A part of Ayuma desperately wanted to run back to camp. But something was telling her not to follow the heroes' orders to head back. She wanted to protect her newfound family, and take out her first group of real villains to save them. Her wings formed around her as she took to the air, ignoring Tenya calling out to her as she surveyed the landscape from above.

There was a lot of blue fire on one side, and a huge stationary cloud of some kind of mist on the other. Literally all the flickering trails went to the latter, and Kendo and Tetsutetsu's...
trails seemed to be going straight to the center of the mist, but most people in other parts of it were motionless. Out in the fire, she could just make out a bluish silhouette, and another speckled black and white.

Ayuma soared over the blue-painted hellscape, switching between normal and Dreamscape vision to get a fix on her targets while avoiding the cloud of black beneath her. There weren't any kinds of attacks from either one below, but she wasn't sure if they were waiting for her to get in close range or if they could even see her flying above a roof made of carbon black smoke. She circled back to glide in behind her targets, landing on a carbonized tree and trying not to alert them as she dispelled her wings. The heat somehow was able to suck every bit of moisture out of the air.

The smoke and night sky makes it hard enough for me to differentiate the Dreamscape from reality; these guys probably can't even tell. I'm a safe enough distance away, so I can call up their nightmares and attack with them. Reaching out with a shaky hand, Ayuma gently pulled at the subconscious of each of her two enemies. The one from the cause of the blue flames was far easier than the other. It was a distorted figure of a man armored in scarlet fire, but kept quiet despite being directly behind its source. From the man in the black-and-white bodysuit, she conjured a group of identical, twisted blond-haired men, each with a different unconventional weapon in clawed hands. All of those guys chafed at her control, but she managed to hold them in.

Not yet, boys. Have to wait for the right moment before you can all let loose.

The boy who started the fire only rested his hand against one tree for it to suddenly implode in a cerulean blaze. The black-and-white man started talking in the voice of a ticked college student. "Ugh! C'mon, Dabi! You got your ass handed to you! By a magic scarf!" Ayuma figured that meant Mr. Aizawa.

"How weak; that happened fast," the one called Dabi groaned.

The other spoke in a far more mature tone. "Don't say that. Better to frame this as the Pro being too strong; it's important to mind your self-esteem even on a perilous mission."

"Whatever, Twice, just make another one of me. We need to keep those Pros occupied."

Twice flipped him the bird in the teen voice. "Another small-fry coming right up!" The mature voice added with a thumbs-up, "Leave it to me."

Ayuma watched as Twice touched Dabi's shoulder and pointed outwards. A perfect copy split from the guy with the blue flames, which started walking off into the forest. It took awhile after the copy disappeared until they realized any foreign presence, though.

"Pee-yew! What's with the extra helping of -- OH GOD!" Twice screamed at seeing what was waiting behind him.

"What now?" Dabi asked in exasperation as he too looked. He was cut off by shock at what he saw.

Ayuma's first command to her summoned puppets? "Get them."

The blond group immediately surged forward in a human wave around Twice, like wolves against a deer. They quickly had him on the ground, weapons against any available vital arteries. The twisted fire-man formed claws of fire on his hands and swung at Dabi with unnatural speed. Dabi could barely dodge the creature he was fighting, and seemed taken off-guard simply because of what he was seeing. He locked eyes with Ayuma for a split second. His eyes narrowed
and he aimed a hand at her, preparing to send out a blaze, but his Nightmare-formed opponent got between them and repelled the blast.

*Everyone in Class A and Class B! In the name of the Pro hero Eraser Head, you're granted permission to engage in combat! I repeat, use your training; you may fight these villains!*

*That sounded like Mandalay. Mr. Aizawa's letting us fight these guys; it must be serious for him to let us do so.*

Dabi was trying to engulf his opponent in walls of blue fire only for it to jump nimbly between the carbonized wildlife. Ayuma also made sure that her creations were getting them both away from her and the direction of the other students. Dabi started to pick up the pace along with the twisted fiery creature in front of him, which started to look more like a combination between a wolf and a human being, still covered in red-orange fire. He got his hands on the creature's blazing head and shot flames into it, vaporizing it from the inside. He sent a wave of flames to get rid of Twice's convoy of opponents, despite setting him on fire as well. Ayuma, with a growl of frustration, prepared her ribbons.

"That was a pretty clever attack," he commended the redhead. "We didn't see you or your little friends coming."

"You moron! You could've killed me!" Twice screamed in the teen voice. "That said, even though you aren't on the list, you do look familiar," the mature voice threw in as he pulled out a measuring tape from something on his wrist.

Ayuma quickly sent out her ribbons like snakes, tying them around her two opponents. Both of them started pulling against the ribbons; harder than she expected, too. She dug her sock-covered heels into her ashen perch, even anchoring herself on the bough. True to its usual power, the ribbons phased through the wood, allowing her a better position.

*Listen, we've discovered one of the villains' targets: it's a student named Kacchan. Kacchan, you should try to avoid combat, and stick to a group. I hope you can hear me.*

*Kacchan is Midoriya's long-running nickname for Bakugo. "So you guys actually want one of my classmates. I wonder why."

"Aw crap! One of our guys opened their big mouth and talked!" Twice lamented. "Such a travesty they all now know why we're here."

"Shut up, Twice, before you spout any more of it," Dabi scolded, suddenly both running towards Ayuma's perch. The girl released the ribbons around them and took to the air as blue fire lit up where she once stood.

*I need some better cover than a bunch of burned-up trees. And better weapons to keep these guys away from my friends.* She dodged one of the surprisingly sharp measuring tapes and a blast of fire. She reached out with her Quirk to Dabi and yanked at his subconscious. Out came a setting of training gear most would find in gyms, but all of them were distorted into various torture devices. She doubled around the two villains up in the smoke, and hid behind one of the bigger sets of equipment as they argued over where she went.

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cover lit up in blue fire behind her, and she soared upwards to gain the high ground.

"You think a few safety scissors are going to do you any good?" Dabi asked in mild amusement.

"They're stronger than you think," Ayuma replied before sending down the barrage of blades. The two of them ducked only for the blades to cut apart the blue fire. They were all called back when Ayuma had an idea. She formed her ribbons again and threaded them through the handles of some of the scissor blades, like a bunch of sewing needles. She launched another attack that knocked them both down and tied them up, anchoring the blades by sticking them in the equipment around them.

"Damn you," Dabi hissed, writhing against his bonds. "How are you able to do something like this with a Quirk like yours?"

"My Quirk isn't very fond of physics," Ayuma answered. She dispelled the remaining blades to lessen the toll on herself. Unfortunately, that turned out to be a mistake, when she heard something behind her. She jumped to the air as a man in a huge coat and a mask jumped out and tried to grab her, only plucking a singed strand of her hair. She landed on another piece of Nightmare-formed equipment. Her gut was telling her to stay away from this new guy, and definitely not let him touch her.

"Quite the impressive act you performed back there, young miss," the man commented, leaping after her only to be dodged again. "Do you mind teaching me that trick? Or even all of us in the League of Villains?"

Ayuma soared upward on her wings to decline. She noticed the cloud of gas was gone from the other side of the forest. Like I'd ever become one of you, she mentally replied as she took off. She needed to make sure that Kendo and Tetsutetsu were alright. The villains obviously weren't following her, so she was at least safe in that regard. She followed Kendo's teal trail and landed in a clearing where she and Tetsutetsu were hovering over a beaten-up boy in a middle school uniform.

"Hey Ayuma; glad to see you're alright," Kendo said with a smile. "Our little friend here was the guy who created the gas, so we took him out."

Ayuma poked at the unconscious boy with her toe, looking over the pieces of what looked like a couple of gas masks on the floor. One of them was just like the one Kendo had in her hand. "Not bad. Uh, let me guess... Wasn't immune to his own Quirk? That's the reason for the gas mask?"

"Yup," Tetsutetsu nodded. "One of your friends made us a few masks to use, too. She went off with Awase back to camp for help... I think..."

Ayuma nodded, figuring that to be Momo. "Can you two keep an eye on this guy until the dust settles? I'll keep looking for anyone who needs help."

"Leave it to us," Kendo agreed. "Good luck out there, Ayuma."

The indigo-eyed redhead nodded as she flew off once again. She noticed the very dark blue-violet image of Dark Shadow looking much larger than usual, and swamping the more magenta image of Tokoyami. That's right. Dark Shadow must be running wild since it's so dark. She saw a green image swirling with other colors running straight toward it, stopped by a cobalt blue one that wrapped it up. Midoriya! Shoji!
She tore through the air and landed right by them. Shoji had strapped Midoriya to his back with his tentacles, and the smaller boy seemed to have some pretty severe injuries to his arms and torso. Shoji also must've had a chunk of tentacle cut off somewhere before, because red blood was dripping off the tip.

"Guys, what happened?" she asked in worry. "I saw Tokoyami and Dark Shadow from the air, and the latter's going crazy! Not to mention your injuries, Midoriya; you should be back at camp!"

"I know, Ayuma," Shoji agreed, nudging her behind a tree to keep her out of the rampaging Quirk's line of sight. "We were ambushed by villains, and I covered us, but it triggered Tokoyami's Quirk, even though he was desperately trying to hold it back. After Mandalay told us what was happening and we shouldn't engage, we were both on high alert. Still, one of the villains got the drop on us. I hid in the bushes and tried to cover Tokoyami, even though one of my arms was cut off. It looks bad, but it's not like it's lost forever; my Dupli-arms are capable of making duplicates upon duplicates. One of those was cut off."

"At least that means the injury's a scratch compared to what your Quirk can take," Ayuma sighed in relief. "But whether or not he shows it, Tokoyami tends to get extremely worried about his friends, especially if they're hurt or in danger. The degree of injury wouldn't mean much."

Shoji nodded. "He couldn't stand seeing me injured. The Quirk he'd been suppressing began to rage and take over." They saw Dark Shadow effortlessly tear up a large tree.

"The darker it is, the less control Tokoyami has," Midoriya recalled. "I had no idea his Quirk could explode like this."

"I had a feeling," Ayuma countered, "considering mine had a hair-trigger temper growing up."

"It's probably fueling his righteousness and regret," Shoji continued. "He's trying to hold it back, but they made it wilder." He accidentally stepped on a twig, and rushed to escape a swatting claw. "It started lunging at any sound or movement. A beast lashing out with indiscriminate attacks."

"Forget about me!" Tokoyami called out from the midst of his Quirk. "Go! Find our classmates! Help them instead!" He strained against his Quirk to almost no avail. "Stop this! Calm down, Dark Shadow!"

"His Quirk has a weakness to light," Shoji recalled. "If we can lead him to a fire or back to camp, we can contain it. Midoriya, Ayuma, I know these are strange circumstances, but I can't just leave a suffering friend behind. If you want to save Bakugo, I'll distract Dark Shadow for you, and you can run." Dark Shadow attacked their hiding places again, and both had to dodge. She could barely make out Shoji asking Midoriya to decide on whether he'd help Tokoyami or Bakugo. Thankfully, when they regrouped, Midoriya had a plan.

"If Dark Shadow reacts to sound, then Shoji can make duplicate arms to bait him. So he'll follow us without attacking our actual bodies. We can lead Dark Shadow to Kacchan. He can weaken him with an explosion. I don't want to choose one or the other; I want to save them both. Tokoyami will have to lose control for a little bit, but it'll be worth it if we can find them. Ayuma, aren't you able to track people with a side effect of your Quirk?"

Ayuma nodded. "Good idea." She looked through the Dreamscape and formed the trail to Bakugo. "Over that way."

Midoriya nodded. "Go. Lead us to him."
The redhead immediately soared on her wings and followed the trail, hearing Midoriya, Shoji, and Dark Shadow following her while calling out to Tokoyami. She followed the army-green trail until she saw a strange faded white silhouette looming above those of Bakugo and Todoroki.

"There! It's Todoroki and Bakugo! They're fighting one of the villains!" To her horror, she also saw Tsuburaba from Class B on Todoroki's back.

"Bakugo! Todoroki! One of you, give us some light!" Sho ji called out to them.

"More flesh!" the villain cried, sending out a thin blade that Ayuma twisted to dodge. Dark Shadow soon had the villain in one of its claws.

"Kacchan!" Midoriya called out.

"We need some light now! He's out of contro--!" one of Sho ji's Dupli-arms shouted before it was severed.

Ayuma slipped Tsuburaba off Todoroki's shoulders in her landing, holding him up herself so he could help. "He's attacking blindly; I'll use my fire."

Bakugo held out an arm before the dual-colored boy could rush in. "Not so fast."

The villain pushed himself up with blades extending from his own teeth. He tried to attack Dark Shadow only to be grabbed. "You don't matter, insignificant bug!" With a crush of his claws, Dark Shadow shattered the tooth-blades and completely demolished the villain. After he was viciously thrown aside, both Todoroki and Bakugo attacked with a blaze of fire and an explosion, forcing the sentient Quirk to diminish around its host. Tokoyami dropped to his knees, heaving as his Quirk disappeared into his body.

"And once again, I'm a terrible match-up for you, bird-boy," growled the explosion boy.

Tokoyami took a deep breath. "Thanks. You saved me."

Todoroki gazed in the direction of where the villain got tossed. "We could barely defend against that guy, but you beat him instantly."

"My friend, are you okay?" Sho ji asked in concern. "You did what we needed you to."

"Shoji, I apologize," the bird-headed boy said softly. "You too, Midoriya, and Ayuma. I'm still far too immature. Anger consumed me, and I let my Quirk take over. The influence of the darkness combined with my fury... it spurred Dark Shadow into a frenzy. Until... it got so strong I couldn't contain it, and I ended up hurting Sho ji."

"We'll deal with that later," Sho ji stated kindly. "That's what you'd say if our roles were reversed. Or if it were anyone else prone to losing control."

Ayuma chuckled mirthlessly, her head starting to pound. "Get the user all riled up and their Quirk suddenly has the power of a Super Move. Happens to the best of us." Tokoyami stood up, regaining his usual expression as he nodded.

"Okay, I don't know if you heard Mandalay, but I found out the villains are after Kacchan," Midoriya notified.

"Bakugo... Are they trying to kill him? Why?" Tokoyami asked.

"I'm not sure, but I think we should get to camp. It's the safest place now, so long as Vlad
King and Mr. Aizawa have regrouped there."

"I understand. So our mission is to get Bakugo to safety by serving as his protectors."

"It's possible the Pussycats are still fighting in the clearing. Going that way would draw the attention of the villains, plus it's longer. We should cut straight across."

"I've mostly been looking all over the forest since those villains first got here," Ayuma commented, getting Tsuburaba back on Todoroki. "Even fought two of them, but had to make a run for it when a third showed up. Kendo and Tetsutetsu took out the guy who made the gas cloud. So that added to the two from the clearing and the one Tokoyami took out would make seven."

Midoriya nodded. "And the one I took out makes eight... We can bring Kacchan back to camp, Ayuma. You keep searching for the others. They might need help, and you're the fastest one who can find them."

"You got it. Once all is said and done, I'll meet up with you guys back at camp."

Chapter End Notes

*looking ahead* Are you sure you'll be fine without her, guys? Anyways, looks like Ayuma's own adrenaline from this whole ambush can temporarily hold off the post-Nightmare headache. But hey! At least her endurance and overall power is starting to improve!
Upheaval

Chapter Notes

How fun! We're back with Ayuma soaring through the forest, and I think we all know what happens soon enough.

Ayuma hovered above the forest, switching between trails to get a relative location on everyone she knew. Most of Class B haven't moved since last I looked; neither have Kyoka, Toru, or Aoyama, or anyone back at camp. Ochaco and Tsu seem to be alright, considering Midoriya and the others are getting close. And Dabi's almost on top of Aoyama and the girls, but he seems to be walking away, so he probably hasn't seen them. So that still leaves Momo. She looked down the pale pink trail to see a large green one flecked with other colors tearing through the forest.

Oh no... Ayuma shot off down Momo's trail to see her being linked to a pale navy image by the arms. That must be Awase, the guy Kendo and Tetsutetsu said was with her. The green image turned out to be a giant, bare-brained monstrosity with mainly a bunch of frighteningly large tools on the ends of six arms. Awase was running while carrying Momo, who seemed awfully limp in his grasp. And the creature was catching up with them, fast.

"Momo! Awase!" she called out. She sent out her ribbons to tie up the weaponized arms before they could cut the two apart. The creature let out a muffled roar and strained against the binding ribbons. The arms were yanked backward, away from the creature's small targets. But in the grasp of the ribbons, the monster froze, the arms vanishing into its back. It started walking away, back the way it came, as Ayuma deactivated her Quirk and dropped to the students below.

Awase was stunned at the close call and the sudden 180 in the creature's behavior. "It's just... gonna leave us here...?"

Momo clenched her fist and seemed to create something in her palm. "Awase, use your Quirk to attach this to that monster."

Awase looked at the curious device as he handed Momo to Ayuma. "What is it? A button?"

"Just hurry up and do it before he's gone," Momo commanded, her voice strained. She was leaning on Ayuma's shoulder, where the redhead could inspect the bleeding wound on her head. The cut seemed fairly shallow, especially compared to Pixie-bob, but Momo still clearly had taken a pretty brutal blow to the head.

"I don't know what's going on, but okay!" Awase ran over to the departing monster and stuck the object on its back. "No way he's getting that thing off."

"Thank you so much," Momo said softly as he sighed in relief. "You too, Ayuma."

"That was scary. Hey, you're Ayuma from yesterday morning, right?" he asked the girl holding Momo.

"Yes," she nodded, handing Momo back to the boy. "Glad I stopped that thing before it got to
you two with those chainsaws. Awase, the camp building is over that way, but be careful of any villains. Don't go on the path to the clearing; the villains fighting Mandalay and Tiger could still be over there. Instead, cut straight through the forest."

Awase nodded, shifting Momo until she was secure on his back. "I'll try; thanks for the tip."

She nodded as he headed off in the direction she showed him. She suddenly had a feeling something was very wrong and was soon back in the air, seeing the man with the huge coat and mask jumping over the forest. Bakugo's trail led right up to the magician-like man, which meant he must've somehow captured him. Maybe it was his Quirk that somehow made Bakugo practically undetectable as an image. Out of nowhere, Shoji, Midoriya, and Todoroki were flying toward him, and Ayuma beat her wings hard to follow them. She found an opening to poise herself directly above the magician's stovepipe hat. As the trio slammed into the masked man, she dropped on his head and sent him falling headfirst into the ground.

Right in front of Dabi, Twice, and a blonde-haired girl.

"Whoa whoa, what's this?!” Twice's teen voice asked. "Oh hey wait, I know these kids."

"Give Kacchan and Tokoyami back to us!" demanded Midoriya.

"Out of the way, Compress," Dabi ordered, preparing a fire attack.

"Got it," the man under the students affirmed before he suddenly vanished. Ayuma barely had the time to conjure the scissor blades to slice the blue inferno, but the sheer heat still hurt Midoriya and Shoji as they scrambled out of the way.

"The beat-up little boy and you," Twice said to Todoroki as he pulled out the measuring tape, "you're on Shigaraki's kill list." Todoroki sent him back with an ice barrage.

Midoriya and Ayuma barely dodged a pair of cylindrical syringes as the blonde girl charged up to them. "Hi Izuku! My name's Toga!" She tackled Midoriya and pulled out a knife. "I've been thinking since I saw you, that you'd be so much cuter if you just bled a little more!" She was quickly knocked aside by Shoji and grabbed by Ayuma's ribbons. "So that's how it is... You want to come between us. To be honest, you're not really my type." The look in her eyes was murderous as she clutched her knife tighter. "But I'll cut you anyway."

"Not tonight, pretty little psycho," Ayuma hissed, yanking the girl around with a pivot and sending her into a tree, forcing her to drop her knife. Todoroki was fighting Twice with chains of ice. In Ayuma's peripheral vision, Compress appeared from the hole in the ground from Dabi's attack. Speaking of whom, he seemed to ask Compress if he "got" Bakugo, and the magician reached for his pocket.

"Midoriya, Todoroki, Ayuma!" Shoji called out. "We're done. He gave away his best trick." He turned to the magician villain. "I'm not sure what your Quirk is, but it had to do with those little marbles, right? The ones you stashed in your pocket. So I'm guessing these are Tokoyami and Bakugo," he stated, holding up two marbles in his hand. Ayuma begrudgingly released the blonde and ran along with her classmates.

Compress laughed. "Well, color me impressed. Just as I'd expect from someone with so many hands. How splendid."

Midoriya gasped when they all saw the monster Ayuma saw chasing Momo and Awase. "A Nomu!"
"Quick! This way!" Todoroki led them in another direction when they were stopped by a wall of black mist with glowing yellow eyes. Something about the cloud sent a shivering tingle of fear down Ayuma’s spine.

"Not this guy," Shoji murmured.

"He was at the USJ," Todoroki recalled.

"The warp villain," whimpered Midoriya.

*They know this... thing?! From the USJ before I came along? What does Midoriya mean by "warp"?*

"It's been five minutes since the signal," the cloud said in a booming voice, and Ayuma noticed portals of the same black fog appearing around the villains. "Let's go, Dabi."

The blonde girl disappeared into one of the portals, and Twice leaped through another. "Hold on; we're not leaving without the kid," Dabi commanded as Compress was about to join them.

"Don't worry. They were so proud of themselves for rooting through my pockets, I thought I'd let them gloat." The fact that Compress didn't sound worried made Ayuma's eyes widen in realization as he took off the hat and mask. "But allow me to explain a basic tenant of magic. If I'm flaunting something shiny, it's because there's something else I don't want you to see." He opened his mouth to show two more marbles, and Tokoyami and Bakugo were inside them.

With a snap of his fingers, the marbles Shoji had expanded instantaneously into chunks of Todoroki's ice. The four of them started to charge back, Ayuma pulling ahead.

Compress theatrically shrugged at them as he backed into the portal. "A little bit of misdirection. Forgive me; I do so adore a twist ending. One last bow, and the curtain fall--!" He was cut off when a glittering beam hit him in the face from the side.

"Aoyama," Midoriya and Ayuma realized as Compress coughed out the marbles. Shoji lunged and grabbed Tokoyami's marble, but Todoroki and Ayuma missed Bakugo's when Dabi snatched it, both of them sent sprawling on the ground.

Dabi smirked. "Well isn't that a tragedy. Poor little Shoto Todoroki, and his little fear-forming friend." He turned back to Compress as the two tumbled into each other. "Confirm it now; release them."

"That laser ruined my finale," Compress grumbled, snapping his fingers as he ducked into the portal. Tokoyami and Bakugo reappeared, and Dabi's fingers closed around the latter's throat.

Midoriya made a final desperate lunge towards Bakugo, crying out to him.

It was like slow-motion, as the blond boy vanished into the disappearing portal, his desperate blood-red eyes fixed on Midoriya.

All of them were left watching helplessly, staring into the remnants of Dabi's forest fire. Everyone but Midoriya was holding back their own tears as Shoji picked him back up, leading the other boys back to camp and soon joined by Ochaco and Tsu. Ayuma clenched her fists in despair, but turned and ran in the direction of the laser that saved Tokoyami.

"Aoyama? Aoyama!" the redhead called out when she caught a glimpse of his hair behind a bush.
The French blond lunged out and threw his arms around the girl, who froze in her tracks at the surprise hug. "Pardonne-moi, mademoiselle," he apologized in French, crying against her shoulder. "I needed a little comfort... from un visage amical... after being so close to such méchants horribles..."

Ayuma hesitantly returned the hug, gazing at the unconscious forms of Toru and Kyoka. "Alright... You did your best, given the circumstances... so I'll give you that much... Aoyama, do you mind if I use one of your nightmares... so we can help everyone hurt by the gas attack?"

"...Oui."

Ayuma activated Nightmare as she pulled away from the hug, forming a giant spider the size of that Nomu from Aoyama's subconscious. The two managed to get their classmates securely on the spider, which formed a sheet of sticky silk on its back to hold them in place. Ayuma helped the blond boy onto its neck before climbing on herself. With a small kick, they went on searching the forest, Aoyama gripping his classmate's shoulders as he tried not to look down.

They found quite a few other unconscious passengers before Ayuma was sure the headcount was complete; all of them were from Class B. They found Kaibara and Bondo lying in a patch of leaf litter, and they helped Kodai onto the spider along with her charges, Ibara and Honenuki, though Mr. Aizawa insisted he take Tsuburaba back to camp himself. Aoyama, Ayuma, and Kodai managed to fit all the unconscious members of Class B on the spider, before they rushed back to camp where everyone else was, including a huge number of emergency responder vehicles.

Ayuma could only watch the controlled chaos around her from the medic station set up at the camp. The forest fire was being put out and contained by planes and firefighters. The students she and her companions rescued were taken by the EMTs, one by one. Many of the remaining kids were checked and treated for injuries. As it turned out, she only had some minor dehydration, minor burns, and quite a bit of singed hair from fighting Dabi and Twice. She was lucky, considering she did so much in the course of only about an hour or two. She was glad to give her Quirk a rest, too, after using it so much even though its physical form never once showed up.

As soon as they let her go, she went inside and managed to get down a bottle of water. Aside from Bakugo being kidnapped, it was a whopping fifteen students that were in serious condition because of the gas, plus ten more with various injuries. They managed to capture a few villains, including the one who caused Midoriya's injuries: Muscular, a man notorious for killing Kota's parents, the Water Hose heroes. But it didn't take a genius to know the green-haired boy was in a bad state himself, as he was wheeled into an ambulance like the gassed students.

"Don't worry about me, Shinso. If anything happens, I promise I'll come flying back..."

Ayuma's own words echoed in her mind; her promise, especially prominent. The rest of the school needed to know about this, but she didn't want to just leave all the people she rescued. Shakily, she retrieved her phone and typed in a message to the class chat. The message was long and wordy, but it was the best she could come up with to tell them where she was going and where she'd be next time any of them looked at their devices, but promising she'd be back. She also sent a message to the U.A. faculty that she'd be coming back to the school because "something bad happened."

Sneaking out until she was far enough away from everyone, she activated her Quirk, forming her wings and the trail to Nezu. In a way not so different from the first time she ran away from police and the like, she disappeared into the night.
She couldn't tell how long she'd been flying, but Ayuma knew she had to have been getting close. No heroes stopped her flight, and neither did any villains. She was only focused on her own little mission. Too upset and worried about all her fellow Hero Course students to care about who saw her. Too overwhelmed to care about anything else around her. She needed to get help. She needed to get away from the disaster that was the summer camp. It was all too much to handle at the moment.

She saw the images of Midnight and Present Mic standing in the courtyard of the school, waiting for her. She descended toward where they stood, barely able to hold herself steady through the pain pounding her entire skull. She must've looked awful, covered in ash and soot, hair badly singed and windblown, tears building in her eyes. They both held her up when she almost fell in her landing.

"There there, little listener," Present Mic comforted her as they led her inside. "Let's get you cleaned up so you can tell us what happened."

Nezu, Snipe, and a skeletal blond man were waiting with Recovery Girl and Hound Dog in the faculty lounge, where Ayuma was seated on one of the couches. Over a cup of tea and a batch of cookies, Ayuma told the teachers and principal all about the villain attack. She gave them as much detail as they needed to know, even though she could barely register her own voice. Midnight, being uncharacteristically motherly and gentle, combed out her hair and cut the singed parts. None of the adults said a word as she relayed the attack, including all the victims and about Bakugo's abduction.

As far as she could tell, none of them dared interrupt her retelling. All of them listened, and Hound Dog wrote down every word that tumbled out of her. Once she had concluded telling them about the attack, they all spoke to each other for a little bit, leaving her with her numbed mind. After a while of staring off into space, she somehow managed to drop off into a dreamless sleep.

Ayuma woke up the next morning in the infirmary, lying in a bed with a single sheet over her. Her head had finally managed to clear up from the jarring ambush attack that was the night before. Even so, her memory of last night was very fragmented; presented to the smallest detail in some parts, just a huge blur in others. She felt that the burns on her skin were gone, reaching back to feel a good few inches taken off her hair.

"Finally up?" a voice asked, making Ayuma freeze. "Glad you made good on your promise. Doesn't mean I wasn't still worried, though."

...Shinso?

She lifted her head to look around, sitting up when she saw her usual training partner. He was on a folding chair not far from her bedside, Ayuma's phone sitting on a side table. His capture scarf was in his lap, along with his notebook. No emotions crossed his face, aside from the usual tiredness.

"Where's Recovery Girl?" she asked softly. "Why am I in the infirmary?"

"She left about an hour ago; going to see what she could do about Midoriya's injuries since he was in some hospital," Shinso answered. "Hound Dog said you were brought here because you fell asleep in the faculty lounge last night. I got here early this morning and he wanted me to keep an eye on you, since you had a long night back at that summer camp."

Ayuma pressed her palm against her forehead. "Yeah... All of us did..."
"...How many?"

The redhead looked up at the purplette. "...What?"

"Badly injured, hospitalized, kidnapped, etc. How many quote-unquote 'casualties' did you guys have?"

Ayuma hesitated, all the faces of the gassed students running through her mind. They were soon joined by the faces of Midoriya, Momo, and Pixie-bob, the splatter of blood where Ragdoll used to be, and Bakugo's face vanishing into the portal. And that was without all those with minor injuries. "Almost half the entire Hero Course -- 18 out of 41, to be exact... plus two Pros."

Shinso's eyes widened. "And... how many villains did you encounter?"

"...Nine human villains... and a Nomu... You know, like the monsters of the USJ and Hosu incidents... Only three of the human villains were captured... and they took Bakugo..."

"Ten enemies..." Shinso looked as shocked as he sounded. "They must've all packed quite the punch for them to get away with... that much damage... Mr. Aizawa probably isn't too happy that you took off."

Ayuma sighed. "Maybe not... but better here than another interrogation room." At least here, Midnight can't chain me up like that weird tooth-blade creep from last night.

Shinso nodded in understanding. "Yeah. You told me about being one-and-done with those during our after-school training sessions... Think you'll be able to handle breakfast? I thought I smelled cinnamon last I went by the cafeteria, and you should regain your strength after fighting those villains, and if you want to head back."

Ayuma weighed her options in her head. I would need to eat something to keep my energy up on the way back to everyone else. And I'll definitely need to clean up before I do. But I want to tell Shinso about what happened, unless he already knows. I can tell him while we eat, just like back at the Sports Festival. But what would Lunch Rush think when he sees us? Will the other teachers let me go back? Are they even here? If I want to avoid Mr. Aizawa's wrath, I'll have to be quick. But I'll also need to deal with everyone else making a fuss over how I flew off on everyone...

Eventually, she decided on taking him up on his offer. "Yeah. It might be a good idea to get something to eat."

She slipped out of bed, thankfully still with her clothes on, as Shinso stood from the chair. He wrapped his capture scarf around him like layers of sashes, carrying his notebook. She stumbled a little only for Shinso to steady her with an arm around her. (She almost thought she saw him blush for a second there.) Without a word, the two went off to the cafeteria, side by side.

"Should I tell you about what happened at the camp last night?" she asked out of curiosity.

"Don't have to," Shinso replied. "It's gotten all over the place. The press have also flocked outside the barrier wall again, so you'll probably want to take off directly from the courtyard if you plan on going anywhere. I barely managed to beat the usual morning swarm. They know they'll trip the alarm if they try to get in like last time, so they basically camp out at the entrance all day."

He pointed to the window for Ayuma to see all the people with the cameras and microphones just in front of the gate. He was right in how they didn't look like they were going anywhere anytime soon. "So... have you come up with any ideas for your hero equipment? I was thinking of sending my ideas of altering my costume after the camp."
"...Actually, I do have at least an idea for something besides the scarf." Shinso flipped open the notebook to show some makeshift designs for a sort of mask as they entered the cafeteria. "I was actually planning on taking the plans to Power Loader, too. Figured I'd take your voice-altering idea from the Sports Festival into account..."

Chapter End Notes

You did your best, Ayuma; you really did. At least you made it back to tell U.A. what happened.
Memory

Chapter Notes

How beautiful the night can be~! I'm never getting any sleep~!... Oh wait, wrong fandom. My bad.

Anyway, as well as you-know-what and you-know-who, we got something especially on Ayuma's side in this chapter! She may not know about the Bakugo rescue, but you can bet she has a good reason to be around there when it happens. Wish her luck!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The day after waking up in the infirmary, Ayuma was back in the air, heading to the hospital where her fellow Hero Course students were held. She was sure to give Shinso and the faculty a proper goodbye-for-now before heading off, dodging the media before they could get a hold of her. She soared over the world beneath her, her mind transfixed on the image of the main student of Class B she was sure she knew, who was also in the hospital: Ibara. The mellow green trail was her main surefire path to whichever hospital she and the other gas attack victims were in.

Eventually, the path leading to Ibara shortened, and the other side of it became visible in the Dreamscape. A large building filled with many people. Fear crept through her mind with how she'd have to speak to the ladies at the desk to visit the unconscious students, but she could see the images of Kendo, Tetsutetsu, and Monoma. Midoriya and her other classmates flocked in another room, which also was a comforting notion. At least in her lavender shirt, jeans, and gray socks, she didn't look like she just escaped a wildfire.

After landing in front of the hospital doors, she went inside and asked the desk clerks about visiting the other Hero Course students. They thankfully recognized her as one of the students and gave her directions to the rooms they were in. She headed over to the ward containing the gas attack victims, already prepared for whatever taunts the psycho would throw at her.

"Oh, what's this? Class A's infamous ward of the school!" Monoma clearly wasted no time. "You know, your class is probably the reason why a whopping thirteen of our classmates are bedridden at the moment. I hope you're all proud of yourselves for having more people still up--"

"No I'm not," Ayuma said quietly, sending Monoma into silence. She brushed past them, standing above her two unconscious classmates. "There are plenty of things I'm not proud of just in the attack. Including, but not limited to, not being fast enough to save Bakugo from the villains, and not being able to take out any of those said villains."

"But there was still a lot of good things you did, Ayuma," Kendo pointed out. "You got everyone downed by the gas attack out of the forest. Kodai told us all about it. And Awase said you saved him and Yaoyorozu from the monster villain."

"Besides, you were jumping all over the forest the entire time!" Tetsutetsu added. "You did a lot back there and barely took a few scratches."

Monoma crossed his arms at his two classmate. "Come on. You two aren't seriously helping a member of Class A, are you? She doesn't deserve half of what she gets. She shouldn't
even be this upset considering she has less people to be grieving over in the hospital--" He was cut off when Kendo chopped him and threw him to Tetsutetsu.

"Please just get him out of here, Tetsu," Kendo said with a sigh. "He's done enough damage already."

"Roger!" grinned the silver-haired boy as he hefted the blond over his shoulder and left the room.

Once the boys were gone, she went over to Ayuma. "Don't listen to Monoma's stupid insults. He's a lot better with the rest of our class, believe me. He even said he was grateful to you for helping everyone in the forest before you came in here."

"Wish he could've told me himself," Ayuma sighed. "It's just... I'm so sorry, Kendo. I can't believe more than half of your class became like this and I couldn't even... I wanted..." A tear welled up in her visible eye. "I wish I could've been more significant in helping all of you... But after all's said and done, we'll probably go back to the one-sided rivalry... and we'll be hated by the rest of your class all over again."

The ginger's eyes wandered over all other laid-up students. "Trust me, they'd never be like that. To be honest, I just want everyone to get along like the fellow heroes-in-training we all are. We could all be friends. Should be, even!"

Ayuma hummed, her finger feathering over the wire between a monitor and Toru's wrist, before seeking out and clasping the invisible hand. "Yeah. That would be the day. It'd be nice to learn alongside one another and not always have one at the other's throat."

Kendo nodded in agreement before her phone chimed. She looked at it, growling under her breath. "Ayuma, something came up; do you mind doing me one selfish favor?" The chestnut-haired girl turned to look at her in confusion. "Promise me you'll keep an eye on everyone in here. Knowing all of them but your two classmates, they'll have a lot of questions as soon as they're awake enough to start asking."

Ayuma gave a tiny smile. "Sure. It shouldn't be too hard."

The ginger grinned. "You're a lifesaver. See you later!" She waved as she hurried out the door, leaving the other girl with all the unconscious patients.

Ayuma managed to pull herself away from Kyoka and Toru, heading to the window. She sat on the windowsill, her gaze shifting between the silent group and the other side of the glass. Her only company was the steady beeping of each machine and the faint sounds of breathing around her. Something about the city outside was oddly familiar. She looked down at the crowded roads, and the skyline, searching through her mind for why the scenery would make her feel like she'd somehow been there before. She had no luck, unfortunately.

She turned her attention back to the other students, eyes sweeping over each of them. There was Kaibara and Shishida from the first time cooking dinner at camp. Ibara from the Sports Festival. Komori and Kuroiro laying in beds right next to each other. Kamakiri from the second camp dinner. Tsuburaba, the boy who switched hands between various people in Class A in the ambush. Tokage, the girl who gladly welcomed being with Class A for the training camp. The massive Bondo, who seemed so similar to Koda, lying still as stone. Fukidashi, whose speech-bubble head sported nothing but a single ellipse. Yanagi, who seemed almost like a sister to Shouda. Rin, short braid of hair partially undone on the pillow. Honenuki, levels seeming a little higher than the others', but only slightly and in a few areas.
But it still couldn't drive off the lingering guilt she felt. Ayuma couldn't even protect her own classmates from something so pale in comparison to everything Nightmare did on its own. Let alone the entire Hero Course. She wished she could've been able to do more. She wished she could've defeated the Vanguard Action Squad the same way Nightmare could level a legion. She felt her tears starting to flow, unable to look at the patients but somehow unable to keep her eyes off them at the same time.

"I'm sorry I couldn't save you..."

Ayuma was in that ward for just about the entire day, watching every student between going on her phone or getting something to eat. Her only company was the few nurses that dropped by over the course of the day to change the IVs and check for any changes in their conditions. None of them found anything significant or of any concern. For the most part, though, she was left with her thoughts and her unconscious peers.

As the sun slowly began to set and the sky dimmed, an image passed over her mind. Running. Running over the street. Blind terror. A desperate need to get away. Running from sirens. Running from police. Searching for safety in abandoned buildings and alleys. Her vision trailed as far away as she could see, and an explosion echoed with screams tore through her memory.

That... that can't be right... Can it?

The ruined building. The crudely engraved chunks of debris. Different objects piled inside the darkest place in the building. The one part of it that remained fully intact. Even if it made her feel sick, it was the only place she knew where those objects could be safe. If her memory wasn't playing tricks on her, she'd been in this town before, when her only focus was escaping the foster home.

If that's true... how could I have not realized it sooner?

Her intuition started to kick in, pulling at the back of her mind. She needed to go to the old building, now. Something big and bad was going to happen there, or at least somewhere close. Whatever it was, it was going to be worse than any worst-case scenario her mind could ever hope to make up on its own.

Her eyes turned back to the others as the sun went down, darkness overtaking the sky. She had to be there at whatever she was being called to. But she didn't want to leave the students she promised Kendo she'd watch over. It would give her at least something to do since she was basically in the hospital for the entire day. But the question was if she'd listen to her "gut feeling" even though it might not be safe for her.

Get over yourself, something akin to Nightmare's voice echoed in her mind. You were able to stand up to her, weren't you? You successfully used items from your nightmares without problems, right? If you can stand up to the person and utilize the objects, you can face down the place.

But... But that was different!

How? You could've used any other object pulled from your opponents' nightmares, and you still used Madame Kirai's scissor blades and Eraser Head's scarf. You could've abandoned all memory of Madame Kirai herself without facing her one last time, but you still went right to her and gave her the opportunity of forgiveness. What difference would it make that you return to the foster home, get your stash from the basement, and say farewell forever? As opposed to just leaving it all there to rot with the rest of the building? Maybe save a life or two while you're at it!
But what about the Pro heroes? The police! The U.A. staff! If any of them find me... and realize exactly who I am and what I was a part of...

Don't think like that right now. The Pros and police aren't focused on you; they obviously haven't been for years. You're the last thing on their minds, and they only know about a few things either of us did anyway. Turn that disregard back on them. You may be blacklisted by the foster system, but you're a known hero to the media and otherwise invisible to the world. Remember what Hawks said: sometimes it's better to do what's right than just follow the rules. U.A. is as safe as we are; they'll never be able to touch us.

...I really, really don't want to do this...

...You know you have to...

Ayuma was silent for a while, hearing the echoes of that last sentence. She soon sighed in relent. "Yeah. I know I have to... so I will." She got back down to the floor and opened the window. She spared a glance back at all her unconscious peers, her eyes teary indigo rings on black spheres. "I'll be back, everyone... Promise."

She formed her wings and took flight.

It was just like Ayuma remembered it, all the times she came here before. It was pretty much a shambles, just like all of the other buildings around it. It was the only building that had any police tape on it, only now it was all a bunch of faded, torn ribbon-like flags waving pitifully in the breeze. She stepped on a chunk of debris that she found out to be a sign: **Yokohama Foster Home**.

Ayuma fought back a shiver in the evening chill and the aura of sickening fear and dread. She clenched her fists so they'd keep still from shaking. With silent steps, shod in only socks against the rocky ground, she entered the building. The floors and walls were stripped bare, bleached by dust and passing time, and every window was shattered. Everything else had at least a few cracks of their own, or lay in chunks on the floor. The metallic reek of rust and rancid, musty stench of mold and mildew lay thick in the air, compelling Ayuma to lift the front of her shirt over her face.

Memories washed over her mind at every turn. Kids she grew up alongside, playing together. Madame Kirai, always sharpening a scissor blade in hand, scrutinizing their every move. Ayuma's younger self hiding behind the big sister of the great troupe. A messy, platinum blonde braid, silvery blue eyes, a smile shining down at her. And along with that young woman was a name: **Suru Funsai**.

_I wonder... where Suru and the others are now..._

She stopped at a single, cold, foreboding door on the first floor. This was the door. The one she and any orphan was led to for punishment. Before Madame Kirai's Quirk pounded the base of the victim's skull and sent them sprawling on the ground. Unable to move, talk, or fight back; just blink, and watch as she tested the sharpness of her blade. It may have never caused them any physical harm, but it definitely served as a hefty threat to the children, and was still very traumatizing.

Ayuma had to remind herself that this was no punishment. Things that belonged to her were inside; things that deserved to see the light of day beyond the ruined slum. Pushing open the rusty red door let loose a long, loud **SCREEECH!** against its equally rusted hinges. The cold, dank air of the basement rushed out to greet the disturbance. A yawning black void greeted the girl who dared open the door. Ayuma reached for her pocket only to realize her phone was missing, so she'd be
going in there without a light. She knew the basement like the back of her hand, but that didn't make the looming blackness of the cave any less ominous. She shook her head to dispel any frightening thoughts, and dove into the darkness.

Ayuma counted the number of stairs leading down in her mind, shuffling her feet along the floor to make sure she didn't skip any and risk falling down. 11 steps, and her foot reached the bottom. Her hand skimmed over the walls, the sliding noise echoing all over the black space, while the other searched in front of her. Sadly, that didn't prevent her from tripping over a couple of rolled-up rugs on the floor.

She eventually found (and accidentally kicked) something that wasn't the wall. She crouched and felt it over to get a sense of its shape. Plastic. Smooth for the most part, but more bumpy after a lip by the top. Carefully, she found the gap between the lid and the rest of the container and lifted it up, keeping a hand on it as she reached the other inside. Thin wires met her practiced fingers, also meeting small droplets of glass. Smooth rectangular frames with panes of glass embedded inside. A wooden box with a slit in the front and back with a small handle of curved metal. The handle echoed with the sound of a ratchet when turned. Several long strips of paper were tied together not far from the box, around something made of metal.

Ayuma smiled to herself at her success, placing the lid back down to reseal the container. She picked up the storage bin and started sliding along the wall the way she came. She flipped the bin behind her once she got to the stairs, dragging it up step by step. She reached the first floor with her find and proudly set it on the floor outside the metal door. While she was at it, she went back down and got the rug that seemed to be in the best condition. After she reached the light of the outside, she saw it was the familiar dark navy rug patterned with stars of several pale colors. She rolled it up and rested it atop the storage bin.

She suddenly heard the loud, distant crash of an explosion. Vibrations of it rustled the ground. Growling, she slid her stash just onto the first couple of steps of the staircase, and flew to the top of the building to find a huge explosion site shrouded in miles of smoke. That blast radius definitely wasn't Bakugo. The Dreamscape showed that the source was an image of a thousand warping colors, floating above the scene. But this was far from the carefully blended rainbow mix that was Midoriya's image. No, this was a bunch of clashing colors lumped together into a single mass.

Ayuma kept crouched behind a chunk of debris on the roof. She couldn't let the person emanating those colors see her. Something about that person made it far too dangerous to get anywhere near them. There was a second blast, and far more smoke and dust poured over the slums. She had to have been at least a few miles away from the edge of that last blast, but soon it would take out all surrounding buildings and possibly the foster home, too. Then she'd be found out no matter what she did.

Another blast, and something started coming towards her. It veered off to the side at a safe distance. A while of watching the battle later, an icy spike shot from the ground and aimed for the moon. A few small, familiar images flew off of it. Then another one blasted out of the clearing and joined up with them, flying toward the lights of the city.

Is that... It is! Midoriya, Tenya, Kirishima and Bakugo! And the one who created that glacier had to have been Todoroki! They saved Bakugo!

But that was when she saw something else on the ground. The Dreamscape showed it was three of the villains from the Vanguard Action Squad, and the orange image of Compress started flying towards them. Ayuma's wings formed in an instant as she flew towards them, ribbons ready to grab the magician. But she also saw the magenta-colored image of Mount Lady expanding
until she and Compress headbutted each other.

Despite helping Ayuma’s classmates, the giant Pro clearly already took a beating and immediately started to fall. Ayuma saw her head was aiming right for the sharper portion of a broken building. *Broken concrete and metal is far worse to fall on than broken glass, especially on the head. And Mount Lady's already hurt.*

The redhead flying towards her, while possibly only the size of the giantess’ finger, decided to make use of her ribbons. One wrapped around her head and the horns of her mask, while the other wove around her shoulders. Ayuma strained to keep herself in the air while guiding the gigantic hero into a safer fall. She even saw a near-unconscious orca-like hero by a mortally wounded Best Jeanist on the ground. It took what felt like a long time, but she managed to set Mount Lady safely on the ground. Ayuma landed on the ground in front of the passed-out heroine's face, looking over the start of the bruise forming on her forehead.

"Looks like the child *saves* the giant this time, Mount Lady," Ayuma said softly as she deactivated her Quirk. "That's another Pro saved."

"Ah, there you are." Black-and-red angular tendrils pierced her wrists and ankles and yanked her backwards. She was strung up like a puppet in front of a man in a suit and skull-like mask, the tendrils coming from his fingers. She couldn't see his face behind the mask -- not even his eyes -- but he looked downright terrifying. Something about this man sent millions of mental images of people dying in a thousand different ways through her mind. He made her feel *death*; No, even worse, he *was* death. She didn't need anything like Madame Kirai's Quirk to freeze her in place; she was paralyzed in a silent panic!

"A rather finicky and demanding Quirk; certainly not for me or for him. But, a perfect potential villain otherwise." His voice only made Ayuma's terror that much worse. "Finally, after so long. Such a shame Tomura Shigaraki never got to properly meet you... Little Nightmare."

Chapter End Notes

So much for staying out of sight! And just why did he go and call her Little Nightmare?! Isn't that what Madame Kirai called Ayuma? Whatever, WE GOT TROUBLE!
Hero of Heroes

Chapter Notes

So last time, we heard that All for One somehow knows Ayuma's not-so-friendly title given by her former caregiver. And there was a certain nighttime event in her youth that she deems as her worst memory. Let's see what else we can find out...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Little Nightmare...

Ayuma hadn't been called that by anyone other than Madame Kirai. It made it that much worse that a total stranger -- comparable to All Might, who was calling out to her from behind -- knew that "title."

"One of the children of the Yokohama Foster Home," the deadly-terrifying villain continued. "You must've come back because of something that happened in your past. Particularly, within the broken walls of that old home. I remember it quite well. The night when only rage was enough to level a building. When fear was enough to almost kill. All in a desperate effort for freedom."

"All for One! Release that child immediately!" All Might shouted. "You don't know what you're talking about! And she doesn't either!"

"Oh, but we both do, All Might," All for One countered. "Ask her yourself. Tell them... show them the truth about your power... Akuma..."

As if calling me Little Nightmare wasn't enough...

Ayuma's fear -- or at least a part of it -- turned into burning, red-hot fury. Her eyes turned black as a shadow passed over her face. The world turned black before flashing into vestiges of the children Ayuma grew up with on the building's first floor. Armored, giant police officers were holding each one captive as they writhed in their grasp. In All for One's stead was a much bigger officer. And in Ayuma's place was a smaller version of herself, stuck in the officer's grasp. One of his hands clenched the collar of her shirt; the other fisted her hair and was yanking her head back, producing what must've been hellish strain on her neck.

Every child's eyes were on All for One and the image behind him as they struggled to get free. The glowing in their eyes made it hard to tell exactly what they were feeling, but the rest of their bodies and faces clearly conveyed their crazed desperation and anger. All of them let out a single collective shriek. All of their untamed Quirks activated simultaneously. Sound, glass, light, fire, wind, blades of all kinds of materials. All of it exploded outward in a tsunami of rage that swept everything up and tore it all asunder, before the Dreamscape returned to black and disappeared.

With the end of the sequence, Ayuma was on the ground, blood dripping from where the tendrils pierced her limbs. All for One looked quite surprised that his little captive escaped. "Very interesting. I never would've guessed using Forcible Quirk Activation would trigger such a violent sequence." He applauded as if he saw a performance, his tone not unlike that of Compress. His fingers turned to the color of the tendrils that started to streak towards her again.
"Ayuma, get out of here!" All Might cried.

She didn’t need to be told twice. Her wings formed and carried her above the tendrils as she soared back to Mount Lady and the other heroes near her. She barely managed to throw off All for One, and she didn't want to get grabbed again. She landed right by Best Jeanist, feeling his faint pulse before wrapping her ribbons around his torso where the injury was. His body was secured to ensure he wouldn't fall from her grip.

"What are you doing?" the orca hero demanded. "Get out of here!"

Ayuma only looked up at him for a second. "That's what I'm going to do, with him." She held up the badly injured Pro and took off into the sky, Best Jeanist remaining tethered to her. Following the green stardust trail leading to her unconscious peers, she flew as fast as she could, not once daring to stop.

*Come on, Best Jeanist, just hang in there... Don't die on me...*

The hospital staff was in a whirlwind as soon as Ayuma landed with Best Jeanist. With the vicious hole in his torso, he was rushed to the ICU. After briefly having the wounds on her wrists and ankles bandaged, Ayuma was left where she was. She quickly went out and flew up to the room where Kyoka, Toru, and the 1-B students all were, back through the window. Her phone was sitting there on the windowsill as she got in, which definitely explained why it was missing back at the foster building.

"I'm back, everyone. At least I wasn't too badly hurt while I was out."

As soon as she picked up her phone, she saw that All Might's battle with One for All was being filmed by some news choppers. All for One's mask was shattered, and his face was showing clear as nothing more than a mess of scar tissue that even filled in the space where his eye sockets and nose should be. The scenery around them for at least a mile or two around was nothing more than a decimated clearing. Keeping the volume up loud enough to hear but not enough to attract attention, she listened to the reporter while sitting on the windowsill.

*"The scene below's straight out of a nightmare! Half of Kamino Ward was demolished in a single, horrifying instant! All Might is currently fighting the villain who appears to have caused the blast. I can't believe it! How is one person so powerful?! He's destroyed the city and is more than holding his own against the Symbol of Peace!"*

Ayuma's horror and guilt was overwhelming. All for One was *demolishing* her Heroics teacher and that friend of his, and she couldn't do a thing to stop him! They already saw her -- she jumped to save Mt. Lady, All for One yanked her out of the dark for all to see, and she took off with Best Jeanist -- so they'd probably know if she went back. And she had this awful, sinking feeling that All Might was only going to take a lot more hits from the villain.

She watched as All for One sent out another powerful attack. All Might countered it, but when the smoke cleared, Ayuma sealed a hand over her mouth so no one would hear her shocked gasp. Standing there was a beat-up version of the skeletal blond man who she saw at the Sports Festival, and -- possibly -- while she retold the Vanguard attack to all the U.A. teachers.

*"What's wrong? Is... Is everyone else seeing this?"* the reporter asked. "*It looks like... All Might's been shrunk somehow!*"

All Might... is that who you really are?... Is that what you hide behind your stronger
For a short while, it looked like All for One was having some sort of twisted conversation with All Might. The blond man shouted in distress to the skies above, before turning still as stone where he stood.

Don't give up, All Might... Don't let All for One run free... You have to stop him... I could barely stun All for One with the worst part of my past... But only you can truly beat him and win...

All Might's arm swelled to the size of his stronger form's arm. All for One lifted into the air in preparation for the strike. All for One prepared an attack of his own only for it to be stopped by a fiery vortex. The reporter gave the name of each hero that appeared on the scene. There was Endeavor and Edgeshot, the fiery Pro and a ninja-like hero that kept All for One from dealing another attack. Kamui Woods turned up as well, using his wooden limbs to retrieve Mt. Lady and Gang Orca from the debris. The latter, though unconscious, had shrunk to normal size, and Kamui kept her fastened to his side. Tiger, holding a blanket-wrapped Ragdoll on one arm, was pulling a woman from the debris as well with a rubbery free arm.

All for One was fending off Edgeshot's nimble attacks while his own attacks were thwarted by Endeavor's flames. She was silently cheering on every hero, done with her fear of heroes. The whole city was voicing her encouragement; possibly the rest of Japan along with her.

And then came an attack from All for One that scattered all the heroes. His arm began to swell and break the sleeve of his suit, just beyond the shoulder. A massive monstrosity bound to deal even more of an attack than it looked like it could. The villain lunged at the Symbol of Peace. Their fists collided in an outburst of pure power that sent All Might being pushed backwards. The power of his right arm switched sides, allowing him to get All for One in the face. All Might sent it back to his right arm as his opponent prepared another attack. He punched All for One a second time into the ground, this time with enough power to send the helicopter in a tailspin! A gargantuan cyclone visible from the window soared into the sky.

After that last strike, the world was dead silent. The smoke and dust cleared, and the cyclone dissipated. All Might was standing above All for One, out cold on the ground. He slowly, painfully, raised a triumphant fist in the air. The reporter was crying into his microphone as he declared the victory, and Ayuma couldn't help letting a couple of joyful tears fall herself. He swelled into his muscular form, even though he staggered. The world was cheering in victory. Their Symbol of Peace won the battle.

With the coming morning, Ayuma was flying back to the scene, dodging helicopters all the way there. She discreetly passed by the Pro heroes and found her foster home, cut down to half its original size. The first floor was, thankfully, still intact, and allowed her to rush back in and retrieve her things. She could finally bring them back home and return to the hospital. She was carrying them away in a path of shadows and debris, praying not to be noticed. When she was almost in the clear, she saw All Might pointing his finger at one of the cameras littering the outskirts. But he wasn't turning to face the camera himself.

"Now... Now... it's your turn..."

The solemnness in his tone brought a blurring curtain of tears to Ayuma's eyes. Just in the Dreamscape, she could see the underlying truth of his message. His previous golden, color-flecked glow was gone, replaced by a dim sandy yellow shade. It was time for the upcoming generations of heroes to take up his torch after him. While the world cheered for the supposed warning towards other criminals that they were soon to be beaten down along with All for One, Ayuma saw the truth. She continued her way home as she finally let the tears fall to her crippling realization.
A pair of dark eyes fluttered open, followed by a soft groan. They were met with the tiled ceiling of a hospital room. He turned his head to see quite a few of his classmates in hospital beds. He also noted the wire and tube in his arm leading to the heart monitor and IV. What happened? The last thing I remember was that smell until...

"Ugh... Poison gas..." Wow. His voice sounded like cinnamon was poured down his throat, it was so dried out.

"Hmm? Oh, good, you're waking up."

He turned in the other direction to see not only more of his classmates, but a few from Class A. Two girls were in beds like those from Class B, but there was one other sitting on the windowsill. It was that girl Kendo and Shiozaki had made friends with that one time, looking up at him from her phone. She had noticeable dark circles under her eyes.

The girl quickly went to give him some water. "You're Honenuki, right?"

The bare-toothed boy gratefully gulped down the water. "Yeah. And you're, um... Ayuma. Mind telling me what we've missed?"

Her eyes lowered with a sad glitter for a second or two. "...Sure. That was what Kendo asked me to do."

*Kendo asked this girl from Class A to keep an eye on everyone, even though all but two are from Class B... What kind of sense does that make?*

The girl eased herself back onto the windowsill. "I'll start off with what knocked all of you guys unconscious. To put it simply, the camp was ambushed by a lot of powerful villains that somehow found us. One of the villains had some sort of gas emission Quirk that knocked out everyone here. Kendo and Tetsutetsu were able to defeat him, and it looks like you weren't as badly affected, so I shouldn't be surprised you were up first."

"Okay, so I was right about the poison gas. But what other villains were there?"

"Well, there was... Dabi, who could generate blue fire, sort of like... Endeavor. Twice, I think he was able to make copies of himself and other people; I only saw him use it once, though, so I'm not entirely sure. Compress, a magician who could... turn anything he touched into some marble like thing, including people. Toga, a crazy schoolgirl around our age; I didn't see her Quirk, but I think it has something to do with blood since she's obsessed with it. Magne, who was able to basically make people into magnets. Spinner, I didn't see his Quirk but he's obviously a fan of Stain. A death-row inmate called Moonfish, who could extend his teeth into blades. The guy Midoriya beat up, who had some weird muscle Quirk, and I assume was the guy who killed the Water Hose heroes. And that Nomu who was chasing Momo and Awase."

Honenuki almost shivered at more than a few of the villains she mentioned. They really did miss out on all the fun. Someone not unlike the Number 2 Hero; a magician who could turn people into tiny objects; a crazy bloodthirsty girl around their age; one of those Nomu monsters; people who've killed Pro heroes?!

"While you guys were out, they took off with their target: Bakugo," Ayuma continued. "Since there was nothing else we could do after the villains escaped, I, Aoyama, and Kodai collected all of you from the forest. Tsuburaba was being switched between people from Class A the whole time..."
until it was all over. And after bringing you guys back to the paramedics... I secretly flew back to U.A. to tell the teachers about what happened.

"While you were here, the police and Pro heroes were planning on saving Bakugo. I found out as it happened last night after I promised Kendo I'd keep an eye on everybody. Since I had a feeling something bad was going to happen, I left out the window. I soon discovered a few classmates went to save Bakugo on their own. They managed to do so without any confrontation, though I had to jump in and save Mt. Lady before she impaled herself. Once I had her safe on the ground, the big boss of the League of Villains... grabbed me with these tendrils... and pulled me right in front of All Might..." She paused for a bit, running her fingers along the bandages Honenuki noticed on her wrists.

"Was that where the villain caught you with the tendrils?" Honenuki asked somberly.

She nodded. "Wrists and ankles; strung up like a puppet. The villain knew everything about where I came from... He was death itself... I had to use the nightmare of my worst memory just so he'd drop me long enough to run. Somewhere before... I think he directly attacked Best Jeanist... and... he was hurt really bad. Even though the other Pros were telling me to run, I took Best Jeanist and flew back here with him. I watched the rest of All Might's battle with that villain thanks to some news reporters streaming from helicopters. But now... I'm pretty sure All Might's too weak to be a hero anymore."

Honenuki's eyes widened at that statement. The invincible Symbol of Peace?... Too weak to be a hero? Those two things do not belong together by any means! Sure, All Might's been a Pro hero for a really long time, but the thought of him retiring is something almost unthinkable! "Are... Are you sure?"

She nodded. "It's true... I saw it myself. He somehow lost all his power in that fight, turning into a literal skeleton of what we normally see." She covered her mouth to stifle a yawn. "Sorry. Guess that's what I get for staying up all night doing so much these past few days. Being someone known to rescue 'untouchable' Pro heroes can come at a cost. In all honesty, I was pretty upset that so many people left the training camp in ambulances. We have our class problems, but I assure you Class 1-A isn't your enemy. Overall, we don't want to be, either; like Kendo, I just want us to get along."

Honenuki could believe that. "Guess Monoma really got to us back during the Sports Festival. He's a lot better with the rest of us, believe me. Who knows? Maybe at some point he'll learn to be halfway decent with Class A." She gave a rather skeptical shrug before yawning again. "Hey, I can tell everyone what you told me. If you were running around without rest, you should get some sleep."

Ayuma nodded slowly, laying down on the windowsill. "Yeah..."

As soon as it looked like she fell asleep, Honenuki heard rustling and looked around. A couple of his classmates were waking up, heart monitors accelerating as they stirred. Well, guess that means I can start quickly...

That evening, Ayuma was back in her apartment as she opened one of the letters she got in the mail during the day. The first one was a long thank-you letter from Best Jeanist's agency and his many sidekicks. The letter verbosely expressed their sincere gratitude for rescuing Jeanist, and even claimed she was the reason he didn't die. The corners had evidently also somehow gotten wet, presumably from tears. Those sidekicks must've been crying in joy that their employer was safe.
The other was a similar letter of gratitude from Kamui Woods for helping Mt. Lady. Gang Orca had apparently told him about the building she was almost impaled on. Kamui was clearly very glad that Mt. Lady was safe thanks to Ayuma. It would've been awful if they lost a Pro hero in such a way, especially with the circumstances of All Might's retirement.

However, both letters shared one specific phrase: Hero of Heroes. That was a pretty... regal title for them to be giving her. Why were they calling her that? What kind of title was that supposed to be. Did they actually make some kind of special epithet for her because of how often she saved Pro heroes? Were they... actually grateful for her helping them?

Ayuma's heart swelled in pride and joy. Just seeing the way that Pro heroes and their accomplices were thanking her was such a stark contrast to what she had to live with. She never really gave much thought to saving Pro heroes in the past, but now she realized the impact it gave. It was just like how all the 1-B students in the hospital promised to remember her. As the person assigned to wait for them to wake up, and as one of the three who showed them that 1-A truly didn't want to be their enemy.

She heard knocking on her door, turning her attention away from the third and final letter. She stood up and went to answer, being met with All Might's strong bandaged form waiting outside the door. "Hello, young Ayuma. Principal Nezu sent me to --" his body deflated into his scrawny form -- "...talk with you about something..."

Ayuma's heart dropped in fear, but she stepped aside to let him in. "O-o-of course..."

Once she and All Might were on opposite sides of the couch, All Might explained the situation. "We're planning on implementing a dorm policy at U.A. for all the students. As a necessary formality, Aizawa and I have been going to all the 1-A students' homes to ask for their parents' permission; we sent the original notice in the mail. You were the last one."

Ayuma felt a small bit of relief. "Oh, that must've been the last letter I didn't open. And there's no parents to ask with me, so..."

"I'm aware. There's also something else... About the night of the hideout raid..." All Might's voice dropped another bombshell. "I wanted to ask... What were you doing there?"

Ayuma gulped, eyes darting over to the plastic container and rolled-up rug she retrieved. "It was... my old foster home... I remembered I stashed a few things there... and my intuition was telling me... something big was going to happen... I-I didn't know exactly what, honest!... Honestly, I didn't want anyone to see me at all..."

The recovering teacher nodded in understanding. "I've heard you're quite intuitive. I should've remembered the Yokohama Foster Home; no surprise he knew all about it. And that weird scene you used to make All for One let you go?" That only made it worse. "You don't have to answer that if you don't want to."

Ayuma's fists clenched at the ends of her arms pulled taut. "I... I can't tell you... not yet... You don't deserve to get pulled into that at this point in time. All I can tell you now is... it's the root of many fears I have. Of authorities and Pro heroes... most adults, really, in a way... Kids just don't trust adults the way they trust other kids; betray them, and they never will. We feel safer with our own kind. Remember that... when I finally find it in me to tell you..."

The blond man stood up, patting her shoulder. "I'll give you all the time you need, young Ayuma. Thank you for that, and for saving us when we were the ones who needed a hero of our own. Being a hero is dangerous work and many often die young, so being saved is the best thank-
you any hero could ask for." He went to the door and was about to leave, but looked back one last time before he left. "You'll make a great hero someday. Look at you; you're a hero of heroes already. Anyways, get all your stuff ready for the new dorm system; your training as a U.A. student is far from over."

Ayuma relaxed, nodding with a smile as he closed the door.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry All Might, but you won't be hearing about Ayuma's past quite yet. That'll take a bit to gather the courage to tell. But she's not wrong about trust, given her own experience. Anyways, I'm pretty sure you know what'll come next time. This is going to be good.
Today was the day it would happen. Ayuma checked out of her apartment building and was on her way to the brand new U.A. Heights Alliance dorms. About a five minute-walk from the school's main building, she and her classmates -- Kyoka and Toru included -- converged en route to the building. Aizawa was there at the entrance to their dorm.

“Given everything that has happened, I’m glad we were able to bring Class A back together,” the teacher commented.

“So we all got the go-ahead to move on-campus,” Sero grinned.

Toru sighed, “It took a lot of convincing for my parents.”

“I was pretty concerned about mine,” Kyoka admitted, twirling her earphone jacks.

“It makes sense,” Ojiro commented, “you got the worst of the gas attack.”

“We’re glad to see the teachers got to come back, too,” Tsu added. “I was afraid you wouldn’t be allowed. The people at the press conference seemed pretty upset with you guys.” Ochaco nodded in agreement.

“I was surprised as well,” Aizawa agreed. “But circumstances have changed. Now then, I’ll explain how your dorm assignments will work shortly. First, however, we haven’t forgotten about the Provisional Hero licenses you were supposed to get during the training camp. This is important; listen well. Kirishima, Yaoyorozu, Todoroki, Midoriya, Iida; you five were the ones who broke the rules and went to rescue Bakugo that night.” Everyone but a few suddenly shrank back.

“Based on your reactions, I assume the rest of you were at least aware of their plan. I’m going to set aside a number of issues and just say this: if it weren’t for All Might’s retirement from the hero scene, I would expel everyone here, except Bakugo, Jiro, Hagakure, and Ayuma. The five of you who went, of course, but also the remaining twelve who didn’t stop them. You betrayed our trust, even if it was to keep your friends from getting into trouble. In order to regain our confidence, you’ll need to obey every rule to the letter and live as model students. That’s all. Now, look alive; enjoy your new home.”

Ayuma was shaking when he turned on his heel and walked inside. She was suddenly pulled from her thoughts when Bakugo grabbed Kaminari and pulled him behind a bush. Out came a lightning strike, and the honey blond was soon walking out waving two thumbs up with a brain-dead grin. Ayuma cracked a smile with a few others, and Kyoka full-on laughed. Bakugo then went to Kirishima and gave him a wad of cash. Kirishima freaked out and asked if he shook down
Kaminari for it, but Bakugo said it was his own, to pay him back for a pair of night-vision goggles.  

“Oh man... What a moron... You’re so hopeless!” Kyoka burst out in a guffaw, and everyone soon was laughing along with her because of Kaminari. Kirishima offered to take everyone out to eat, to which everyone cheered.

Everyone was soon introduced to the first floor of their new home, and Aizawa explained everything. “Each dormitory holds one class. Girls are on the right, and boys are on the left. The entire first floor is a common area. That’s where you’ll find your kitchen and baths and laundry rooms.”

Ayuma browsed around the common area, looking around the first floor. She discovered Mineta possibly thinking despicable thoughts concerning the baths. Aizawa (hopefully) shot down any of those thoughts by adding they’re separated by gender.

“Living quarters start on the next floor. Four boys and four girls on each level. Everyone gets their own room. You should be comfortable. You’ve got your own AC, toilets, fridges, and closets.” Ayuma found the room very familiar compared to her apartment, and figured she could do fairly well in it. They were soon also showed where their assigned rooms were in the building, and told their belongings were already waiting there. They could spend the day unpacking and getting themselves settled; lessons would continue tomorrow.

To Ayuma’s relief, not only were there absolutely no occupied girl dorms on the second floor where Mineta was, but she herself was on the fifth floor right beside Tsu and two doors from Momo. The boys on that floor were Sato, Todoroki, and Sero; no problems with any of them as far as she was concerned. Nice! Far away from Mineta’s room, five friends all around, and a perfect access to the roof as an escape. This will all work out; no problem!

That evening, Ayuma seemed pretty satisfied with her work and went downstairs to the common area. Everyone else but a few were gathered there, boys on the couches and girls at the tables. Mina and Toru were clearly up to something as they went over to the guys and stated their idea.

“Let’s go around and see who has the coolest room.”

Midoriya was crying out not to look in his room until they opened the door on the second floor. All Might merchandise was everywhere. Posters, figurines, and even the curtains carried the theme of the Symbol of Peace. Poor guy was so embarrassed when Ochaco called him out as a fanboy. He was red as a cherry!

Tokoyami was next, and he carried a similar opinion towards everyone seeing his room. He stood in front of his door as a human roadblock, but Toru and Mina still shoved him aside and got in. The room was completely dark with blackout curtains, gothic objects all over, plus a sword; the only lights were a few purple candle flames, a purple crystal ball, and more purple light coming from some decorative skulls. Ayuma tried to be a good friend and gave the humiliated boy a few comforting pats on the shoulder.

The next one was Aoyama, who was all too eager to show his room. Mirrors and glittering objects galore, with even a full armor set in the corner! Even the ceiling and all the cloth in the room sparkled brightly. Everyone pretty much expected that to be the case. Ochaco was finding it a lot of fun to see everyone’s rooms... until they all realized who the last room on the second floor belonged to... They all decided against looking there, not interested in the slightest at what he was so eager to show.
Next up was Ojiro. There was almost no difference compared to the introduction room they were shown that morning. The other girls were wondering if he just didn’t unpack or something. Ayuma told him she could relate to having nothing more than what she was already given, and that she secretly figured Ochaco -- resident learned cheapskate -- was no different.

Then there was Tenya’s room. There were quite a few bookshelves and stacks all over one side. Ochaco laughed when she saw the shelves full of glasses identical to his usual pair. Tenya defended that he expects them to break during training, and keeping so many spares was simply planning ahead.

Kaminari’s room was… interesting, to say the least. A few animal patterns here, a cluster of wild colors there, maybe a couple of large pairs of shoes and other random paraphernalia. There was a shirt framed on the wall alongside a dart board, and even a couple of souvenir license plates on either side of the AC. Kyoka called it “the store in the mall I’d avoid,” to Kaminari’s dismay.

Koda’s room undoubtedly had an animal theme befitting of his Quirk and love for fauna mixed with the green and yellow color scheme. He had a couple of plushies, animal cutouts with framed pictures pinned to a corkboard, and he even brought a pet white rabbit. Kaminari tried to call him out for “buying the judges’ love” while Mina and Ochaco fangirled over the animal. Ayuma managed to slip by and pet the warm, soft body of the rabbit.

It seemed that Kaminari, Tokoyami, Ojiro, and Aoyama were pretty offended by how the other girls had judged their rooms. Their mood didn’t seem to improve much, and then Mineta stepped up. “The boys are the only ones who are getting picked on. They said it was a contest to see who has the coolest dorm room. So what about them? We have to see the girls’ rooms to tell which one’s best! Their interior design skills should be held at the same standards as ours! Maybe even higher! Show us those dorms!”

Somehow, his argument actually managed to get through to everybody. To Kyoka and Ayuma’s shock, Mina happily agreed. Even the most uninterested students were involved, who Ayuma quickly found herself edging towards. “Okay, so like, what are the rules? Are we figuring out who has the best taste in the class, or just the overall coolest?”

“I’d go to bed if I could, but I can never get to sleep somewhere new on the first night,” Ayuma muttered, checking the time on her phone.

“Let’s see, who else is on the fourth floor?” Ochaco asked herself. “It’s Bakugo, Kirishima, and Shoji, isn’t it?”

“Where is Bakugo?” Tenya inquired.

Kirishima answered, “He thought this was lame, so he went back to his room to sleep. I could use some Z’s too.”

“Then we’ll do your room next!” Toru chirped.

“You can sleep all you want after!” Mina added.

Before letting everyone in, Kirishima said he didn’t think everyone would get what he was going for. The room definitely had a hard-to-place theme, but it was definitely intrepid. There were all sorts of posters around the room, and the red curtains had a fire pattern on them behind a punching bag. Even the clock had a pair of decorative strong arms, and a couple of boxes were still scattered on the floor. He called it “a den of manliness,” which made it all make sense, given how manly was his favorite word. Ochaco said it was so bold, it made her want to work out, which
delighted the sharp-toothed boy. Clearly, she understood what Kirishima was getting at.

Shoji warned everyone they wouldn’t find anything interesting in his room. Which turned out to be more like nothing at all. He couldn’t have been more honest! There was only a sleeping bag, a low-lying table, and a seat cushion in the whole room.

“So you’re a minimalist, huh?” said Todoroki.

“I’ve just never understood why someone would want to fill their room with junk,” Shoji’s extra mouth replied.

Everyone piled into the elevator to head up to the fifth floor, aiming on seeing Sero’s room. Once up there, it was revealed that his room had a lot of exotic things in it. All sorts of earthy tones that looked oddly nice put together. A lot of wooden things were all over the room, with even a hammock in the middle. Ochaco and Mina loved the exotic “native tribe” feel of the room.

“Sero, I didn’t peg you for someone who’d like this stuff,” Kyoka told him.

Sero grinned, “That’s me! Always the wild card!”

Next up was Todoroki, and everyone was really eager to see it, even though the room’s owner just wanted to sleep. The room looked like a traditional Japanese room, and bore the smell of the bamboo and small flowers he brought. The door to the balcony was entirely changed, and there were even more comfortable floor mats he got from home. He worked really hard to make it exactly like his house, even though Kaminari and Mineta blew up in his face about it.

“Beautiful job, Todoroki,” Ayuma commended as she took in the decor of the room. “I’m impressed.” Her comment earned a small smile from her classmate.

Then, it was time for the last of the guys: Sato. He admitted his room was a little boring, but Kirishima brushed it off since all of their rooms were, compared to Todoroki’s. Ayuma was immediately hit by the smell of a baking cake, and saw all sorts of cooking supplies and utensils in the room, even a miniature oven. Ojiro also commented on the sweet smell in the room and asked about it, and Sato panicked about forgetting about something. “I finished unpacking really early, so I started to bake a chiffon cake. I thought we could all eat it together. It hasn’t been iced yet, but… want some?”

All the girls, including Ayuma, jumped at the chance. (And Kaminari and Mineta freaked about it in the back.) He cut the cake and put the slices on sticks as he handed them out. All of them really enjoyed the light, delicious pastry, and happily complimented his baking skills. He definitely wasn’t expecting such feedback and instantly blushed. He said the sweets he needed to fuel his Quirk could get expensive when store-bought, so it made sense that he learned how to make his own. (“Very practical and something you’re good at,” Ayuma remarked.) After they were done with the surprise snack, everyone went back to the third floor to start introducing the girls’ dorm rooms.

They all started with Kyoka’s room, which had a lot of music equipment and music-related things. A few electric guitars, possibly an electric bass, a keyboard, a drum set, a lot of sets of headphones, and a few speakers. Ochaco asked if Kyoka could play all the instruments, who humbly said she could, “at least a little.” There was also a lot of checker patterns in the room, mostly being red and black. Kaminari commented that Aoyama’s room was more girlish than hers, which the French boy agreed with as well as saying he had style. Unfortunately, that issued an earphone jack and ensuing sound-shock to both of them while the others looked on in horror.
Toru was next, and she possibly had the girliest room in the whole building. All her belongings were soft pastel colors, mostly being pink. Stuffed animals were all over, with a particularly large one on the bed. Mineta went over to her drawers and started wafting the smell from them, though Toru yelled at him to get away. Ayuma whispered to Sero while pointing at Mineta, and he nodded with a determined grin and a thumbs-up.

Mina gladly showed off her “cute” dorm room. A lot of things in there were patterned with dark pink, black, and purple, especially animal patterns and faux fur. Ochaco was up next, but didn’t have very much stuff compared to her previous classmates; only a few more of her own things than Ojiro did. Speaking of whom, he and Tokoyami were kind of embarrassed at seeing the girls’ private spaces.

Ayuma looked back to see that Sero had Mineta wrapped up in tape and had the brunette make it float. She was grinning to herself in triumph at the fact that he did what she asked. Tsu was up next, but she wasn’t around; Ochaco said she wasn’t feeling good and was in her room, and the others agreed not to bother her. Ayuma and Ochaco lingered at her door for a few moments of curiosity before the others called them back over.

That was when she realized she was next.

Ayuma almost thought she was shaking as she opened her door. To start off, it was pretty dark, sort of like Tokoyami’s room. But there was a long string of tiny lights hung on the dark ceiling, casting a starry shower of light over the room. The curtains and even bed sheets followed the same night sky theme of very dark blue dotted with white. There was even a dark navy rug on the floor with pastel-colored stars, with the table on top. A few photos were framed on the wall, and a music box with a stack of hole-punched paper strips was on the dresser; the metal hole-puncher itself was hidden in a desk drawer. A black laptop sat on the desk, and a scarlet feather lay suspended between two pushpins on a corkboard.
“I always had a stash of things I got over the years for whenever I got my own place,” Ayuma admitted as everyone voiced how pretty it was. “I figured this would be where I… tested it out. The rug’s just something from the old home... Want to see how the music box plays?” At everyone saying yes, Ayuma slid one of the long paper strips inside. She wound up the hand crank for a bit before pushing it inward, letting it play a soft melody as the paper went through the box.

“It definitely makes you feel like it’s safe to sleep here,” Todoroki commented. His eyes glittered at hearing the lullaby that echoed the room’s general feel. “The kind of safety any young child needs.”

“Aw, is this you, Ayuma?” Momo asked, looking at one of the pictures. It was a little girl with long, chestnut hair; it was taken while she was in the middle of a spinning motion, giving the camera a laughing, closed-eyed smile. Another picture had the same girl, grinning with glittering indigo eyes, beside a blue-eyed, brown-haired young man in an All Might hoodie. Everyone flocked to the pictures, the girls squealing about how cute she was.

Ayuma chuckled in embarrassment. “You actually think I looked… cute? I was usually told I was terrifying.”
“You looked adorable!” Toru exclaimed. “And this guy here seems like some kind of big brother, too!”

Last but not least was Momo’s room. She warned that it was a little cramped and she may have miscalculated a few things. Sure enough, she brought her own bed from home, and it took up most of the room! There were a few paintings, but the bed alone seemed to be the big fish in the tiny pond in that room. She thought it would fit, but she didn’t realize how small the dorm rooms really were.

Once back downstairs, Everyone cast their votes on pieces of paper placed into a box. Mina counted up all the votes. “Alright everybody, has everyone got their votes in? Remember, you can’t pick yourself, guys. Now, without further ado, here are the results of the first best room competition, minus Bakugo and Tsu. Drum roll, please!… With a total of 5 votes, the overwhelming winner of this totally awesome contest is… Rikido Sato! By the way, all girls voted for you, because… that cake was delicious. I want some more.” Kaminari and Mineta exploded at poor Sato for unintentionally cheating.

By then, Todoroki really wanted to go to bed. But before he left, Ochaco called him back to the group. She wanted him, Midoriya, Tenya, Momo, and Kirishima to come with her for a minute for something important. She also asked Ayuma to come with, since the orphan girl "deserved to know." They were all brought outside, where Tsu was standing in front of the building. Apparently, she had something to say to all of them.

“Tsu!” Kirishima burst out in tears. “I’m sorry! Thanks for telling us how you feel!” Tenya and Momo joined in with their own apologies as Tsu started to let it all out. Tenya and Momo agreed with that promise as Ayuma joined them in a group hug.

They didn’t know how long they were out there as Tsu cried in her friends’ arms. But they soon began to feel her sobs start to quiet down. The poor frog girl looked entirely exhausted; she cried herself almost to sleep. In whispers, they all agreed to head to bed and exchanged their
goodnights, Momo and Ayuma guiding the smaller girl between them. Todoroki joined them in
heading up to the fifth floor before splitting off, leaving the two tallest girls to put their classmate
to bed before they went back to their rooms.

Chapter End Notes

Oh yeah! I forgot to mention that we have a cameo in this chapter. He's from a spin-off
of My Hero Academia in Naruhata City. If you know who it is, feel free to tell in the
comments.
Alright, my little shades, we're nearing a whole other milestone in our beloved orphan heroine's story. And 500 hits has finally been reached, so thanks for that! I'm sure you know the drill by now, so let's get onto it!

Ayuma was standing in the U.A. courtyard, hand in hand with Shinso after a long day of training. Shinso was really starting to get the hang of the capture scarf, and Aizawa was proud of how far the two had come. She really hoped he'd be able to join the Hero Course soon. He really deserved it for sticking it out this long!

"I wonder what kind of hero name you'd come up with when you get into the Hero Course," Ayuma wondered aloud.

"Hero name? I, uh... never really could think of one that could fit," Shinso admitted in embarrassment, scratching the back of his neck in his usual sweet, dorkish way. "At least... nothing that didn't sound villainous..."

She squeezed his hand in reassurance. "Maybe we can brainstorm ideas sometime. There's gotta be something that'll work for you."

Shinso smiled. "Here's hoping." He looked toward the front gate. "Hey, who's tha--" he was cut off when his eyes suddenly glazed over and he dropped to the ground, his hand falling slack from hers.

"SHINSO!" Ayuma cried in alarm. She knelt at his side and tried to shake him awake, but nothing happened. He wasn't moving, but she could feel he was still alive. His eyes were alight with terror, but he was barely able to look around, much less move; his whole body was paralyzed. She knew what this was, and it was the absolute last thing she wanted to see happen to her friend. "No... No!... Not you!... It can't be you!" Looking up just through the front gate only confirmed it.

Madame Kirai.

She was a little girl all over again, kneeling beside a paralyzed Suru as the woman stood looming over her. Her scissors were in her hand, a sick light in her eyes.

"Your time has come, Little Nightmare," she hissed. A white flash lit her pupils, and Ayuma felt herself shatter from the inside, falling to the floor as the woman's Quirk stabbed the center of her skull. She was a loose sack of flesh and bones, watching helplessly as the scissor dropped towards her head--

Ayuma jolted awake, sitting up in bed. There was absolutely no sign of Madame Kirai or Shinso being hurt. Just her dorm room, with all her things, and all her friends around her. She was safe. Shinso was safe. Madame Kirai's all alone in her mental hospital room. Everyone was safe.
Thank goodness... it was just a dream... Only a nightmare...

The chestnut-haired girl went down to the common area for breakfast, joined by everyone. Everyone was chatting together at the tables as they were eating. They were greeting each other and inviting each other to tables like they'd been doing it forever. She went to the kitchen and made herself some blueberry pancakes with honey. It was comforting to be surrounded by so many people, and the atmosphere was safe and content. It was like everyone had become more of a family than they already were.

In class, things seemed to have also gone mostly back to normal, until Aizawa reminded them of something. "I believe I mentioned this already, but your main focus this summer is obtaining Provisional Hero Licenses."

"Yes sir."

"Do not take this lightly. A Hero License means that you're responsible for human lives. You can imagine that the exam to receive one is very difficult. Only 50% of students pass the test required for these permits each year."

"It's that hard to get a Provisional License?" Mineta repeated.

Aizawa's eyes narrowed. "In order to prepare, today you'll concentrate on creating something new." The door opened, and in came Midnight, Cementoss, and Ectoplasm. "Two Ultimate Moves." Excitement started to spread over the room among the students.

"When we say 'ultimate,' we mean a move that will ensure you win against your opponent," Ectoplasm explained.

"An action so unique to your identity that no other person can hope to copy it," continued Cementoss. "Simply put, you must learn to lean into your strengths."

"Your moves represent who you are," Midnight stated. "These days most Pro heroes have an Ultimate Move. Those who don't are fools."

"This may sound abstract, but we'll explain more as the day goes on," Aizawa promised. "For now, change into your costumes and meet at Gym Gamma." Everyone rushed to get ready, putting on their costumes and heading to the building. Ayuma -- having been there plenty of times before - - led the way. "Gym Gamma, also known as the Training Dining Land, or TDL," Aizawa introduced the class.

Cementoss pressed his hands into the ground, forming a small tower of blocks. "This facility was my idea. We can prepare unique terrains and obstacles for each student. Here, you will learn to serve up justice, hence the name."

Tenya raised his hand. "Please allow me a question! What is the advantage of having Ultimate Moves for our Provisional Exam? May we know your reasoning?"

"That's two questions," Aizawa deadpanned. "Calm down. The job of a hero is to save people from all sorts of dangers: crime, accidents, and natural or man-made disasters. Of course the Licensing Exam analyzes how well you're able to deal with such things. It won't just be fighting; your ability to gather information and make quick decisions will be judged. In addition to how well you communicate, cooperate, and lead others. Every year a new test is used to evaluate these qualities."

"One thing is especially important," Midnight stepped forward. "If you want to be a Pro hero,
you must be able to prevail in battle. If you're prepared, you won't have to worry, and those of you with an Ultimate Move will have stronger results."

"Your circumstances should not dictate the results of your future battles," Cementoss pointed out before he smiled. "Learn to be consistent and you'll be a great asset on the front lines."

"Your Ultimate Move doesn't necessarily have to be an attack," Ectoplasm added. "Take Iida's Recipro Burst for example. This sort of temporary boost in speed is valuable in a fight and falls into the category of excellence we're looking for." Tenya was clutching his chest in delight, amazed he's been using his own Ultimate Move the whole time.

"So it's basically our secret weapon," Sato summarized. "Something that gives us the edge so we can win no matter who or what we're facing."

"There's a smart boy," Midnight winked. "For example, how Kamui Woods is able to use his Lacquered Chain Prison to capture opponents in an instant. That's exactly what we want to see."

"The training camp was interrupted," Aizawa recalled, "but the practice you did get in to develop your Quirks was part of the process needed to create these defining abilities." Cementoss started forming huge concrete platforms all over the building as Ectoplasm formed clones of himself. "Now that you're caught up, you'll be working hard to develop powerful moves of your own for the next ten days or so," Aizawa continued. "This is how you will spend the remainder of your summer vacation. Prepare for intensive training. In addition, you should think about how you can improve your costumes. Especially now that you have a better understanding of your Quirks. I expect each and every one of you to go Plus Ultra. Do you have it in you?"

"Yes sir!"

"I am so charged up for this!" Kaminari grinned.

Ayuma was sent to one of the higher platforms with the Ectoplasm clone assigned to her. "During my internship with Hawks after the Sports Festival, I apparently used a sort of black tentacle attack when saving him from a fire. But I don't remember because... technically my Quirk was the one who used it, on its own. Even so, I think that'd be the best place to start."

Ectoplasm nodded, "Your Quirk is quite interesting in how at one point it formed a split personality. Now, it appears that that part of it is gone, and it's become part of you. Recreating something your own Quirk had independently developed could prove useful."

Ayuma concentrated on the video Shinso had shown her concerning that fire. The long, raisin black limbs exploding from the building. Following those tentacles down to its source, being somewhere on or around her. Something that was pouring out energy that was flailing around in the air as if from a sprinkler.

A sort of circle appeared on the ground around Ayuma in the Dreamscape. The surface of it bubbled as if the tentacles themselves were fighting to get free. She tried to force the tentacles to appear from the circle. Her head started to blaze with a migraine that forced her to deactivate her Quirk, swaying from dizziness. "Ouch... Well, that's one part of it down..."

"With a bit of practice, you might soon be able to conjure those tentacles that were trying to appear," said Ectoplasm. "Once the rebound pain has dissipated, let's continue by seeing how you've otherwise improved."

After training, Aizawa instructed everyone to head to the Development Studio for anything
about their costume that had to change. After Ayuma and Shinso finished their after-school training session, they went to the Support wing together. He was hoping that his own voice-altering hero gear was finished like she hoped her new costume was ready.

"I should've realized recreating my Quirk's self-made Super Move would be hard," Ayuma sighed, circlet in hand as she massaged her forehead. "But I didn't think it'd be hard enough to cause a dizzying migraine after a few seconds of trying. That's what I get for thinking Nightmare's short stamina was done and over with since the camp."

"Hopefully the overhauled costume will help with the rebound headaches and dizziness," Shinso remarked. "Anyways, you think the voice-changer will even be compatible with my Quirk's limitations?"

They both stopped at the door. "Only one way to find out," Ayuma replied as they opened the doors.

KA-BOOOM!

It was literally a split second after the doors were open. A blinding light, a horribly loud boom, and a massive shock wave littered with metal threw Ayuma backwards, into Shinso, and onto the floor.

Power Loader coughed on the other end of a smoke cloud. "This is why you need to make sure that all of the failed prototypes are off! To make sure they don't overheat when they're all piled together like that!"

A girl's laughter came from within the smoke, and soon dissolved into coughing. "Sorry, Mr. Power Loader! Guess I must've forgotten all about those booster engines."

Ayuma slowly came to, groaning in pain with Shinso coughing briefly somewhere nearby. With a jump in her chest and a fire in her face, she felt a person lying behind her, with a single strong arm looped around her waist. As the smoke cleared, she turned to look up as best she could. The arm shifted as Shinso propped himself up behind her, and froze in realization at how close he was hovering above her, faces only a few inches apart.

"I -- uh... Um... I, uh... You, um... You okay?" Shinso managed to ask through the embarrassed blubbering, face pink from their proximity.

Ayuma was also frozen by their situation, to a point that she almost didn't respond. "Uh... Yeah... Thanks..."

After scrambling onto their feet and silently apologizing to each other, the violet-eyed duo turned to the girl on the floor in front of them. "Sorry about the explosion!" the pink-haired girl apologized, grinning as she jumped up. "So, uh... Yeah, I don't think I know either of you. Oh well! Mr. Power Loader says I've made enough babies for today. I'm heading off to plan some more so SEE YA~!" She skipped down the hall like the explosion was entirely normal.

Power Loader sighed. "I'm sorry about her, you two. Eraser Head's personal prodigies, right?"

The two nodded. "I'm here to ask if my new costume was ready yet," Ayuma stated.

"And I came for the device I sent plans for," Shinso added. "We both sent them in around last week."

"Ah, of course! Come on in," the helmet-wearing Pro graciously allowed them inside. He
went to his desk and pulled out a cardboard box that he handed to Ayuma. "Eraser Head told me about your costume requiring a complete overhaul and the new moves. It was fairly easy for the company to make all the changes you asked for. It should be more durable and flexible now."

"Thanks a lot," Ayuma thanked the Excavation Hero.

Power Loader nodded with a smile before turning to Shinso. "As for the voice-changer you sent the plans for, Hatsume took the responsibility of creating the device, which she finished not too long ago." He plucked a black mask-like device from under a few pieces of scrap metal on the table and handed it to the young man. "The Artificial Vocal Cords. It took a lot of work to make it so it doesn't make the user's voice artificial. With a bit more development, we might even be able to amplify it without turning the voice into electronic signals."

"I'll test it out with my Quirk, just to be sure." Shinso put on the device, clasping it behind his neck. After putting it over his face, he turned the small dials on either side. "So does it work alright, Ayuma?"

Her eyes widened. "It does if it sounds exactly like me." Her body froze as her mind filled with static again. The effect of Shinso's Brainwashing lingered only a few seconds before he let her "wake up" from his Quirk. "Yup, definitely works, both in altering your voice and still allowing your Quirk to take effect."

Shinso took off the mask, smiling. "That's what I was hoping for. So, how many other times did Hatsume blow up the studio?"

Power Loader winced. "A couple of times. Earlier this afternoon, she mixed up everything she could find; another Hero Course student was caught in the blast while two more witnessed it. And then she blew up a modified powder keg on the same three. She needs work when it comes to people, but I tell you true, her love and talent for inventing will one day prove invaluable to any Pro hero."

As they left the Development Studio with their new items, Ayuma added, "Maybe one day we'll be those Pro heroes relying on her."

Shinso smiled wistfully at her. "Yeah. One day..."

Ayuma's redesigned costume was like a dream. The compression stockings and arm sleeves were now black with indigo borders, and now fully reached her knees and elbows, respectively. The main part of the costume was now a short-sleeved shorts bodysuit with a connected waist cape. It was a mix between dark purple and grey, and violet formed borders on the sleeves, bottom of the cape, and a sort of waistband. On the waistband were two pouches -- one on either side -- that carried disinfectant and pain medication. The circlet and collar had darker, stronger metal and the same light purple tightening pins. Overall, it was also more comfortable and easier to move around in than the last one. It'd definitely be more help in a fight.

For the next handful of days training her Ultimate Move, Ayuma tried to recreate the tentacle attack. A lot of times her attempts ended with a migraine, or just didn't even try to appear. The migraines would leave her completely unable to try anything with Nightmare until they dissipated.

"Young Ayuma," All Might greeted her on her platform. "I heard you were having trouble with recreating your Ultimate Move. You remember how you always had trouble with how hard it was to control your Quirk, right? You're still holding it back as hard as you can even though now you don't have to. Forcing your Quirk to act while subconsciously restricting it is only fighting
Ayuma was surprised that even All Might would suggest cutting her Quirk some slack. So I should put less effort into making Nightmare do what I want it to do?... It's worth a shot. It might even work this time. Ayuma closed her eyes and formed the circle on the ground, which was bubbling even more ferociously than ever. She wanted to force it to create the tentacles as usual, but stopped for a second and relaxed, reducing her mental grip on her power.

Ayuma opened her eyes, thrusting her hands toward the Ectoplasm clone. A group of snake-like tentacles exploded from the ground, clawing at and phasing through the roof. Each one was as thick as her leg, and tore at the air as they dove onto her target, shredding the clone into mist. Ectoplasm created more clones to form a circle around Ayuma, and the tentacles grabbed and wrung all of them before they disappeared.

"That's what I'm talking about," All Might smiled. "Well done, young Ayuma." He went down to Kaminari to discuss his control over his electric Quirk.

Ayuma smiled at Ectoplasm. "I'll call it... Night Terror."

In the couple of days after, Ayuma was having trouble thinking up a second Ultimate Move. She was able to easily demonstrate Night Terror to Midnight, who approved the name and the technique. She even saw some of her classmates' new Super Moves and fighting styles. She already knew her fighting style would rely on medium and long-range attacks, with a bit of psychological warfare using what she can create using Nightmare. It might not be much, but it's as consistent as her Quirk's going to get.

Considering my Quirk is only as consistent as my targets can be similar, maybe I can find a sort of common nightmare in everyone I see. What's something among a person's subconscious fears that I can find in anyone on earth? Fears can differ from person to person. One can be only a little bit scared of spiders while another is deathly afraid of heights. What's something no one ever wants to happen, to themselves or anyone else in the world, but still happens?

Only one possible, valid answer stood out in her head. The only way to test it out would be to draw upon that subconscious fear in everyone in the TDL. That might negatively affect all of them, including herself, but there was only one way to find out. She concentrated on that lone word, tapping into the subconscious of every image in her line of sight in the Dreamscape. Sure enough, now matter how deep inside it was or how small it could be, that lone fear was always there. It was what drove survival instinct in all of nature, and possibly the first fear in the world: the fear of death. The power of that single, common fear manifested in a growing black typhoon around Ayuma.

A bright flash of light came from Bakugo's platform, drawing Ayuma's attention. Mina, on the next one over, took the brunt of the flash in the eyes while shooting her acid. A blob of the corrosive liquid, at its highest solubility, was flying straight toward the platforms where Ojiro, Kyoka, and Koda were. Not to mention a stray chunk of rock fell from Bakugo's platform and straight towards All Might. "Uh-oh! LOOK OUT!" Mina cried to her classmates as Bakugo called out to the teacher.

Ayuma felt the spike of her targeted fear from all of them. She was the only one on her platform, high above the others. She was the only one with the right angle to stop the stray acid attack. In a forceful, horizontal swipe of her hand, Ayuma released the typhoon's energy in a black vacuum wave that rattled even the Dreamscape. It raced over the heads of her classmates and slammed into the acid blob, absorbing the milky liquid before both attacks disappeared into the air,
leaving behind a tiny, but semi-noticeable shock wave. The three near-victims immediately looked to her, and all of them shouted their thanks. Back near the teachers, Midoriya used a single hard kick to shatter the rock.

*That's what I'm talking about, for both me and Midoriya. Now I have a second Ultimate Move, that taps into everyone's degree of a universal fear. The most powerful and primal fear of them all: the fear of death. This... is Dying Dream.*

Chapter End Notes

Aw, isn't it a beautiful thing? Ayuma and Shinso have a moment together, and now the girl has her new Super Moves! Finally, we can put a name on that attack she used back with Hawks in the fire. And I have a special surprise next chapter. See you there!
Ayuma quickly glided to her classmates to ask if they were all okay. Thankfully, Koda, Kyoka, and Ojiro said they were fine. Then she went down to All Might as Midoriya asked if he was alright, who confirmed he had no further injuries. Even so, Ayuma caught Mr. Aizawa's eyes narrowing in their direction.

"Dude, Midoriya, what was that?" Kaminari asked. "You swooped in and wasted that rock."

"I always thought you were more of a puncher," Kirishima added alongside him, obviously referring to Midoriya.

"I am," the boy in question replied. "Or, I was. It's these new soles; Hatsume suggested them and I think they'll really up my game. Plus, Iida's been showing me how to use my body better so my fighting style has changed. I've only just figured out what direction to go in. I still have a lot of work to do; nothing I'd call an Ultimate Move yet."

"You sure about that?" Ayuma inquired.

"I don't know," All Might countered. "Based on that kick, I'd say you're further along than you think. So, you should be ready for this test."

"You too, Ayuma," Kaminari added. "Saving those guys from that stray acid was pretty awesome, too. Is that your second Ultimate Move already?"

"I'd call it more of a fluke under the circumstances," Ayuma admitted, scratching the back of her head.

"Hey All Might, it's dangerous in here; you should be careful," Aizawa warned his colleague.

"Yeah, I know." All Might looked up at the ledge where Bakugo was. "Sorry for the scare, young Bakugo!"

He was silent for a minute or so, before an explosion not unlike a volcano almost blew off the top. "Just watch yourself, All Might!"

Kyoka came down from her platform in front of Ayuma as the boys talked to Midoriya. "Maybe I should be here for the rest of the training session, just in case."

"That would probably be a good idea," Ayuma agreed. "Hey, are those headphones and speakers new?"

"Oh, these? Yeah. The headphones are supposed to help channel sounds I hear through my ear jacks. These amplifiers pretty much do the same thing as my boots, but can make my heartbeat even louder. I've been thinking of using them to perform some kind of seismic attack. What about your costume?"

"Well, it's sort of needed an overhaul ever since the whole fiasco at my internship. The materials are supposed to be a little more sturdy against things like fire and give more freedom of movement. The new costume also helps the post-Nightmare headaches a lot more than the last
"That's enough, Class A!" Vlad's gruff voice turned attention to the door, where he, Kendo, and Monoma were standing. Kendo was in a teal qipao with a black corset, shorts, and mask, along with a satchel attached to a belt and navy-and-white ankle boots. Monoma was wearing a tailcoat-sporting tuxedo with two belts, -- one of which crooked and containing three small clocks -- a pale blue, black-dotted tie, and glaringly white shoes. "Class B is scheduled to use this training room every afternoon."

"Man! Crap timing!" Kaminari protested.

Don't we have a little time left, too? Ayuma asked herself.

"Eraser, get your kids out of our way," Vlad commanded.

Aizawa made no such move. "You're not trying to kick us out early when we have ten whole minutes left, are you?"

"Hey, did ya hear? The License Exam has a 50% pass rate!" Monoma exclaimed something the class already knew. "That means your entire class might fail!"

Kendo simply brushed right by him as Monoma cackled, and Kaminari approached her. "Wait, is that Monoma's hero costume?"

"Well since his Quirk is Copy, he said he didn't need anything too eccentric," Kendo shrugged.

Kaminari cringed. "This is him toned down?"

Nothing too eccentric? Ayuma repeated. I say he's just trying to play a showoff. How is he supposed to fight in that thing?

"Unfortunately, his observations are correct," Tokoyami pointed out. "If we're taking the same exam, then we'll crush each other. That's the hand fate has dealt us."

"And why we won't be in the same location," said Aizawa. "Our classes applied to different spots."

"There are two exam days," Vlad added, "in June, and in September. And the tests are held in three different places. We don't want students from the same place fighting; we split you up. Each school has at most 1 class at a single location."

Ayuma took note of Monoma's following sigh of relief. "How sad we won't be able to face each other directly!"

"Man, this guy's nuts," frowned Kirishima as the blond psycho cackled.

"Yeah, I think he's officially gone off the deep end," Kaminari agreed.

What else is new?

Sero was also drawn away from his training. "All those other schools; huh, interesting. I didn't know that was the case; so we'll be facing kids from other places."

Midoriya nodded. "And on top of that, we're taking the test earlier than most other students."
"That's true," agreed Aizawa. "Very few first-years in the country try for a Provisional License. In other words, the test will be made up of student's who've trained longer than you, and with Quirks you don't know about; ones that are powerful. The actual content of the exam is a mystery, but you can expect you're going to have a rough time. Try not to get hung up about that, but keep it in mind."

"Yes sir!"

That evening back at the dorms, all the girls were on the couches. Ayuma was punching pencil-marked holes into some fresh music box paper, a trash can in front of her. Tsu was drinking some strawberry milk, while Ochaco was having plain milk; Ayuma had some chocolate milk on the center table herself. Mina looked exhausted, not that anyone could blame her.

"Does it have to be this hard?" the pinkette groaned, head falling against the backrest.

"Well, it's not called intensive training for nothing," Toru pointed out.

"That's true," Momo agreed. "But it's strange to think there's only a week before the exams."

"Yaomomo, how's your Ultimate Move coming along?" the invisible girl asked.

Momo looked a little conflicted. "There's something I want to do, but my body just isn't ready yet. I need time to develop my Quirk and improve my general endurance."

"How 'bout you, Tsu?"

"I've perfected a move that makes me even more frog-like than before. I'm sure even you'd look surprised, Toru."

"What's your story, Ochaco?"

No reaction. Until Tsu poked her shoulder and made her scream loud enough to startle Ayuma. "You seem a little tense," she commented.

"No, it's nothing! Everything's going awesome!" Ochaco grinned. "I'm just getting started!"

All the girls looked at her in confusion. "At least... that's how I'd usually be. The thing is, recently my heart's been pretty stirred up about something..."

"IT'S LOVE~!" Mina sang.

Ochaco freaked out again and tried spouting out words that rhyme with love, to play it off like she didn't hear. The bright red blush on her face begged to differ. Mina asked who it was, assuming either Midoriya or Tenya based on how often she was with them. Ochaco straight-up denied, covering her face in shame and making herself float. By then, Toru and Kyoka were also telling her to spill it since they won't let up. However, Tsu and Momo were trying to get them to cut it out and call it a night.

"What? No comment from you, Ayuma?" Mina pouted. "Oh wait! I've got just the thing." She dug out her phone from her pocket. "Honestly, I first thought it would be Todoroki or Tokoyami for Ayuma. At least, until I got this." She flashed the screen to show a picture of Ayuma and Shinso, chatting and smiling in the lunchline.

Ayuma was glad she swallowed her milk, a blush appearing across her own face. "How'd you get that?!"
"Oh, it was about a couple of days before the Final Exams," Mina grinned mischievously. "And there's also this." She swiped a finger across the screen to whip out a picture of when Ayuma and Shinso hugged before the class went to camp, only making the blush worse.

"I remember him!" Toru piped up. "He's the guy you watched a good part of the Sports Festival with, and your teammate for the Final Exams." That sent all the girls asking her about him. Kyoka even had to go and bring up when Ayuma blushed at the mention of his name at the mall. Now they *really* weren't going to let her go anywhere, even with Ochaco still on the ceiling staring out the window.

"Shinso's a close friend, guys," Ayuma defended. "He's really determined to get into the Hero Course in spite of his Quirk and those who don't like him for it. Contrary to popular belief, he's actually a pretty nice guy who I think deserves to be a hero."

Mina hummed, a skeptical look on her face before she sighed. She and the other girls went to the elevator. "Don't think you're off the hook just yet. Rest assured, we'll come back to this after the License Exam."

Ayuma sighed in relief that the matter was temporarily dropped. *But really, I'm *not* in love with Shinso... Am I?*

The day of the exam, all of Class 1-A was brought to a place called the National Daboga Arena. Everyone had their usual backpacks, satchels, or messenger bags along with the cases holding their costumes. Ayuma, along with a few of her classmates, were starting to get a little nervous about it. She clutched the strap of her messenger bag and the handle of her costume case.

Aizawa came to offer some last-minute reminders. "If you can pass this test and get your Provisional Licenses, then you novice eggs will hatch into chicks. You'll be semi-Pros. I expect your best."

"Alright! I can't wait to be a heroic chicken!" Kaminari rode off the analogy.

"Let's call out the usual, you guys!" Kirishima grinned. Ayuma noticed a guy with a weird hat just slipping past her and Sato. "Go Plus--"

"ULTRA!" the new guy shouted. Todoroki blinked in surprise, as if he sort of knew him from somewhere.

"You know, it's pretty rude to barge into other people's huddles like that, Inasa," a purple-haired boy commented, alongside a few other people. All were wearing the same hats as the first guy.

"What? Pardon me," Inasa apologized. "I AM SO. VERY. EXTREMELY SORRY!" He bent down in apology, his crown hitting the pavement pretty hard.

Kaminari, like everyone else, was a little horrified. "Hey, look at their uniforms," Kyoka pointed out.

"They're from that famous school on the other side of Japan," Sero realized.

"U.A. in the east, Shiketsu in the west," Bakugo intoned.
"I wanted to say it just once!" Inasa exclaimed, head bolting up from the ground. "Plus Ultra! You see, I really love U.A. High School! I am extremely honored to compete against such incredible students! I'm SO looking FORWARD to it!"

"Come on, bro. Let's get inside," one of the other students suggested, his voice familiar to Ayuma's ears as Inasa followed him.

"Inasa Yoarashi," Aizawa said softly. As he explained that Inasa was apparently someone to watch out for, Ayuma was concentrated on the boy who called him away. Blue gray hair tinged with purple under the hat. Bright, clear, sea foam green eyes. He looked familiar somehow.

*He looks like... But that can't be right, can it?... He looks just like him... But shouldn't she be with him?... But she didn't want to be a hero, right?*

"Eraser?" a familiar lady's voice asked, that made Aizawa suddenly tense. "I know that scowl anywhere! I saw you on TV and at the Sports Festival but it's been a while since we were this close in person." A woman with green hair and darker green eyes walked up to the teacher, grinning from ear to ear. She looked sort of like a clown with her puffy striped shorts and smiley faces on her costume. Ayuma -- as well as Midoriya -- also found her familiar, and upon looking to her teacher, she could see Aizawa bearing an expression that clearly said *No, no, please no, GOD no, NOT YOU! "Let's get married,"* the lady suggested.

"No," was the instant reply, even though Mina instantly jumped up in glee at the sight.

The woman burst out laughing. "You're a real laugh riot, buddy!"

Aizawa rose a brow during her fit of laughter. "As usual you're impossible, Joke."

"Oh, that's Ms. Joke, the Smile Hero!" Midoriya realized, grinning. "Her Quirk is Outburst. She forces people around her to laugh, which affects their ability to think and keeps them from being able to move! Her fights against villains are always full of insanity!"

"C'mon, imagine it!" Joke continued with their teacher. "If I was your wife, you'd have a future full of constant laughter!"

"That sounds like an actual nightmare," Aizawa deadpanned, Ayuma suddenly stiffening as Ms. Joke burst out in another guffaw. "No offense, Ayuma."

"None taken," the chestnut-haired teen sighed. *Besides, I think she was one of the Pro heroes that commented on Shinso's match in the Sports Festival.*

"It seems you two are close," Tsu commented, finger on her chin.

"Our agencies were near each other," Joke explained. "As young heroes striving to make a difference in the world, a mutual love bloomed--"

"No it didn't."

"I do, Mr. Quick-retorts! You're my favorite person to tease, future husband!"

Aizawa sighed. "So Joke, if you're here, then that must mean..."

"That's right!" Joke waved over a group of older students. "Over here everyone! This is U.A.!" She turned back to her colleague, smiling proudly. "Second years from Ketsubutsu Academy. This is Class 2; they're my students."
"I don't believe it... Ayuma, is that you?"

Her eyes widened in realization at the voice and its owner. "Zu... Zuanshi?..."

He looked like a completely different person compared to last time she saw him so long ago in Yokohama as children. His pale gray hair was combed and trimmed. Golden eyes were glittering like the morning sun. Even the crooked scars trailing down from his eyes did nothing to downcast the joy on his face. "It's been way, way too long! Look how much you've grown!"

**Shadowgeist: Zuanshi Kessho! His Quirk: Crystallize! His body secretes liquid that he can consciously harden into extremely strong crystal at the cost of water and salt in his body. He can use this crystal to form armor, weapons, and even traps! Unfortunately, growing up with a lack of control meant he scratched himself up quite a bit by unconsciously hardening the crystal liquid, especially when things got in his eyes.**

"I know," Ayuma agreed, smiling back at him as his classmates greeted the rest of 1-A. "You actually made it into a hero training academy?"

"Yup! And I could see on TV that you're still as famous as ever, so it's no surprise you did, too. I've been happily adopted for about, oh... six, seven years now."

"Six or seven years? That happened fast, after the escape."

Zuanshi nodded. "Ketsubutsu's been a blast so far, and Miss Fukukado's a great teacher. I hope you've gotten better with your Quirk like I have, 'cause we won't be holding back."

"You're on," Ayuma accepted the challenge. "By the way, I think I saw Hansha in one of the other classes, so keep an eye out."

"Hansha, too? Great! Maybe at some point we can catch up."

"Hey, get your costumes and head to orientation," Aizawa told his class. "There's no time to waste."

"Yes sir!"

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Once everyone had their costumes on, they were called into a crowded room full of other students with a huge screen looming on the wall. A very tired voice rang over the loudspeakers. "Ugh... Okay then, let's do this exam thing... I'm from, uh... the Heroes' Public Safety Commission; name's Mera. My circadian rhythm is so screwed up..." He drooped over his podium causing mic feedback. "I've been so swamped lately and I haven't gotten much rest. We're too short-staffed, I'm sooo tired. With that confession, I'll now begin orientation."

"Maybe you should just go back to bed before you collapse, Ayuma thought."

"So, about the content of this license thing. Basically 1540 examinees compete in a free-for-all exercise or whatever we're calling it this year. See, we've got a lot of Pros around, and since Stain was arrested, many people have expressed doubts about the status of heroes in society. But, when you really think about it, getting paid makes sense. If you're going to risk your life to save someone, why shouldn't you ask for a reward? That's just the way the world works..."

"Anyway, whether they're in it for compensation or out of a sense of duty, we've got too many heroes working together in the streets these days to keep villains at bay. Honestly, the time between
when an incident begins and when it's resolved is ridiculously short. You're all here to receive Provisional Licenses so you'll be swept up in this tiresome mess yourselves pretty soon. Those of you who don't have the speed, frankly, just won't cut it. Which is why that's what you'll be tested on. The first hundred students to fulfill the requirements will pass today."

Ayuma's eyes widened. That's definitely not 50%; more like less than 1. The basic rules for the exam were essentially some form of tag. Everyone was given a set of 3 targets to put on their bodies and 6 balls to hit those on other students. If all three targets are hit, it's a fail; whoever lands the final target claims the "kill." At least two people have to be taken out by each student to pass. Upon getting her set, Ayuma put one target on her collarbone, another on the middle of her back, and the last one on her side. Then, the building opened up into an enormous terrain of all sorts of landscapes. Mera promised he'd keep all the students updated on whenever someone made it to the next round.

"Everyone! Stay close together, we'll fight them as a group!" Midoriya called out to the class.

"Yeah right," Bakugo scoffed. "This isn't a field trip!" He took off in another direction, Kirishima and Kaminari rushing after him.

"I'm going on my own, too," Todoroki said. "It's hard for me to use my powers safely when there are big groups around."

"Todoroki," Ayuma and Midoriya groaned before the girl flew after him.

"Don't worry about me, guys! I'll be fine!" Ayuma assured her class as she followed Todoroki's red-and-blue trail. A loud horn and female computer voice announced the start of the test.

"Why are you following me, Ayuma?" Todoroki demanded when he realized she was right behind him. "You should be with Midoriya and the others. You might get hurt out here."

"I've gotten out of worse unscathed, Todoroki," Ayuma countered. "Besides, it's better to stick together. If all these students saw us at the Sports Festival, that makes all of us prime targets."

"All of us except you!" he countered. "Cameras can't pick up the true extent of your Quirk, and you were out of the Sports Fest just after one event. Besides, anyone who remembers you might only remember your lack of control over your Quirk. The last thing they want is to set you off, so they won't fight you if they can avoid it."

That was... quite a few good points. "But that's exactly why you might need my help!" Maybe it was a blessing in disguise that my Quirk's always been so hard to pin down. Not even the others from my foster home know how much better I've gotten with Nightmare. They only remember how Nightmare would take control of my body and curb-stomp my enemies.

Todoroki suddenly stopped short, and Ayuma quickly landed beside him and dispelled her wings. She instantly found the reason why he stopped when she felt the ground tremble under her feet.


Ayuma soared above the buildings to see chunks of rock at the center of the arena being tossed this way and that. Must be an Ultimate Move, too. She looked through the Dreamscape to see several large groups of students before dropping back down. "It wouldn't be a good idea to rush into the fray with all these schools teamed up in groups of at least ten people each. There's a spot
over there where we can hide until things get a bit more sparse. It'd be a good idea to get to cover before one of the other schools finds us."

Todoroki nodded, and they both headed off through the metal-and-concrete labyrinth.

Chapter End Notes

Todoroki made a very good point in saying Ayuma is basically Class 1-A's secret weapon. And the Icefire and Nightmaiden combo are back, baby! Yes, I called him Icefire; that's my personal hero name for him. I tried, Bakugo! Anyways, what's more, Ayuma's got old friends over here, folks!
Ayuma didn't know how long she and Todoroki were hiding in the maze of buildings and pipes. They were simply waiting as Mera told them how many people passed, how many spots were left, and how many examinees had failed. Where they hid, it was only tense silence interrupted by distant explosions; no one was around except Mera's voice over the loudspeakers all over the arena. Speaking of which...

"Let's see; where're we at now? These have been moving a lot more quickly... Looks like 52 -- make that 53 -- have passed. And looking on the other side of things, it seems 230 examinees have failed. Less than half the spots are open; now's the time to move. Don't dally, kids."

Todoroki growled in frustration before he rushed out of his hiding place. "We don't have the luxury of waiting around, Ayuma. We need to get enough points to pass, quickly."

"Wait up!" she whisper-yelled, running after him while staying in the shadows of a lower path. "You'll be taken out really quickly if someone catches you alone."

She saw a glimpse of color, and Todoroki stopped and unleashed a fire attack to burn down one of the orange balls.

"That was pretty good!" a boy called out as a group of ninja-like students appeared from the buildings above them. "Just what I'd expect from the runner-up of the U.A. Sports Festival. The name's Todoroki, right? I can't believe you're wandering around all by yourself." That was when Ayuma realized they couldn't see her. "You must be really confident."

"But even if he is from U.A. High, acting alone is just asking for trouble," another one countered.

"A 10-on-1 fight? He doesn't stand a chance," snarked yet another.

"This is great," Todoroki said. "Now we don't have to find opponents."

In the next second, all of them pounced, balls flying at him. Todoroki used an ice wall to bounce them off, sending them tumbling onto Ayuma's path. She pulled out a couple of her own as Todoroki even froze some of the ninjas' feet to their perches.

"You're surprised? I thought you said you watched the Sports Festival," Todoroki taunted.

The red ninja took out something shiny from his pocket. "Don't get cocky! We're prepared!" He threw the object only for it to grow enormous; a simple bolting nut enlarged by his Quirk, Ayuma realized. Todoroki used another ice wall to stop it before another one and a few enlarged nails were thrown, impaling in the ice. More were thrown against the icy wall before it shattered. Ayuma knew he was probably going to be in trouble soon, so she took out one of her target balls and weaved through the shadowy lower levels.

Another bolting nut was thrown, and Todoroki used a fire attack to try and stop it. But it didn't melt or even scorch, and he had to jump out of the way. Ayuma was just under the ledge one of them was standing on. Shattered ice shards were falling away from it.
"Your fire won't work against my tools! Tungsten has a super high melting point!" the red
ninja declared proudly. He proceeded to free all of his friends. "I'm afraid I told you so, Todoroki! Even if you're a top U.A. student, if you think you can pass this exam alone... well then, your pride will be your downfall."

Then it's a good thing he didn't come alone.

"Do it!" The ninjas in black and blue leaped up and sent jets of water and soil. The two in yellow tore off pieces of piping to throw. All of them were attacking non-stop, and Ayuma knew her friend couldn't hold out for very long. She tripped a couple of them up here and there by grabbing their feet (particularly the two guys in yellow). She was about to really attack when a collision of the muddy water joint attack and fire stream formed an especially large misty cloud.

Using their obscured vision, Ayuma chased them all down flying through the Dreamscape. She summoned shapeless monsters that pursued all of them through the pseudo-factory. They were all pinned between her and Todoroki, soon to be surrounded. She even swatted a couple of them herself as they all panicked about there being another "problem."

"There's another one with Todoroki!"

"What?! Who is it?!"

"I don't know, but I don't like what they made to fight us!"

"How could you not know?! Get them!"

"WE CAN'T! They're too fast!"

A flame soon appeared as if to guide all of their opponents towards him, which meant Todoroki must've had a plan. Ayuma was all too happy to ensure they got there quickly, joining her classmate on a pipe. The ninja students fought the creatures that continued to attack, to little or no avail. They were pushed closer by the monsters to the flaming danger sign he used as a decoy, and the huge tank it was plastered to, punctured by Todoroki's ice.

As soon as they were close enough, Todoroki sent a blast of fire into the hole he punched into the tank. It immediately exploded, vaporizing the nightmares and tossing the ninjas. With a shared nod of satisfaction, the two went down the their defeated opponents to collect their prize.

"Well, it looks like the commission kept the force of the explosion from being too damaging," the dual-colored boy commented.

"You bastard!" hissed the one in red. "You should've said so if you weren't alone!"

"Apologies, but we simply cannot afford to fail," Todoroki replied, target ball in hand.

"Besides, telling you I was around would've made it that much harder on both of us," Ayuma added. "Maybe you guys should learn not to be so afraid of monsters."

After getting all of those guys out of the exam, Ayuma and Todoroki were walking out of the factory area. "If only I could use both sides at the same time," he said to himself. "Switching slows me down; I need to practice more."

"Maybe you can figure out how to even out the body temperature on the inside," Ayuma suggested. "I'm not all that sure. You're the only one I know with a Quirk like that."
The two stopped when their targets blinked and lit up white. "Students who have passed the exam should congregate in the anteroom. Chop-chop!"

Todoroki and Ayuma blinked in surprise. "Well that's convenient," the latter commented. "At least there's a place to wait out the rest of this round, and maybe get these targets off."

"And not be mistaken for targets for the remaining examinees," Todoroki added. "It's probably somewhere along the perimeter of the arena. Come on."

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Once at the anteroom, Todoroki and Ayuma found a large group of people waiting around inside. Tables of food were set up all around and most of the students were socializing. Mainly in groups based on common schools or old friends going to different schools catching up.

"So they've all passed?" Todoroki murmured in slight surprise.

"Sure seems that way," Ayuma replied as they sat down on a couple of chairs along the wall.

"Seriously?! I'm a huge fan of Stamp Man!" Inasa yelled from across the room. "I love a hero who's super passionate! I want to be like..." His voice dwindled for a second, and Ayuma saw him turn ever so slightly towards her and Todoroki. "Wait, what were we talking about?"

Ayuma rose a brow in Inasa's direction, but turned her attention towards something else. She couldn't see anyone she knew around the anteroom. No sign of Zuanshi or Hansha. But there was a sign in the back that said targets had to be removed and returned. "Come on, Todoroki, let's go get these targets off."

In the back was a sort of metal doorway, flanked with boxes of targets and balls. A small sign said the doorway itself was the key, and they had to walk through it so their targets could be removed and returned. Sure enough, as Ayuma walked through, her targets shut off and harmlessly dropped off. Todoroki did the same before they returned the balls and targets to the boxes.

After a short while, she saw two guys come in through the doors. One was clearly Zuanchi, in a sleeveless coat held shut by a small tie at the top just under the neck, and white shorts with stripes that almost looked like bandages; all he had for shoes was a layer of crystal under each foot. The other had a dark gray trench coat belted shut around his waist with black pants and shoes. He wore shoulder pads, knee pads, wrist guards, and even had plates on the belt and tops of the shoes, as well as bands around the ankles; all reflective. The hat still kept Ayuma from seeing his whole face, though.

Zuanshi caught Ayuma's gaze and grinned as he pulled his friend over to her, Ayuma running over to meet them. With a quick swipe, he whipped off the other's hat and, lo and behold, it really was Hansha. "We ran into each other while our classes were at each other's throats," the silver-haired boy explained. "Managed to take out some kids from another school until one of Hansha's 'buddies' got us with his Quirk. Not something either of us want to relive."

"Cheap shot from Shishikura; calling us vulgar, dumb, street urchins while we were stuck as his playthings," Hansha grumbled, taking back his hat and putting it on with a huff. "At least we managed to pull ourselves together and head on over here. So, how are things on your end, Ayuma?"

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**Shadowgeist:** Hansha Miru-Yoarashi! His Quirk: Twofold! He can reflect all sorts of attacks back at his assailants with a certain factor of it doubled, like duration or any degree of power. It's a bit hit-or-miss, and he doesn't know what part will be doubled in the
reflection attack until it happens.

"Things are going great, for the most part," Ayuma smiled. "U.A.'s been a blast so far, and I've been fairly well received by my class and teacher. No adoption like Zuanshi, though."

Hansha hummed. "My sister and I got adopted, too, though I don't really remember how long ago. Shiketsu's about the same as U.A. on our end; the only issue being Shishikura. Inasa's family took us in."

"You and Kagami? Adopted by that guy?" Ayuma was fairly surprised. "Neither of you act at all like him though. Was it tough?"

Hansha chuckled. "Yeah. We've been hoping to get him to cool down enough so he doesn't wind up scaring somebody with that passion of his. And just recently, I guess I've realized how much Suru's impact on us started to show."

"No kidding," giggled Ayuma. "Anyways, I was with my friend Todoroki. He and I teamed up during this round."

"Isn't he Endeavor's son, though?" Zuanshi recalled, looking towards the red-and-white haired boy. "I thought Endeavor attacked you somewhere before you joined U.A." His eyes found the red splotch under her sleeve. "And that's probably what he did to you."

"Inasa isn't very fond of Endeavor, or his son," Hansha warned. "Bad experiences with both; you understand."

Ayuma sighed and nodded, rubbing the scarring of her arm. "Well, Endeavor did attack me about a month before I entered U.A. But the thing is, on my first day, Todoroki actually apologized for his father. He's actually a nice, albeit quiet guy who's trying to get out from under his father's shadow."

Zuanshi nodded thoughtfully. "That's understandable, and rather noble. One other thing: how's Nightmare been coming along?"

"Almost no problems anymore, as far as I'm concerned. The Quirk possession seems to be pretty much taken care of. What about your Quirks?"

Zuanshi flashed an ok sign with his hand. "I'm all good with mine. At least now I don't scrape myself up anymore. Hansha said he and Kagami are doing just fine with their Quirks, too."

"Ayuma!" Momo called out, waving her over alongside Tsu, Shoji, and Jiro. She was calling Ayuma over to them and Todoroki, a wide and relieved grin on her face.

Hansha gave a miniature smile. "You may not have been legally adopted, but I can tell those U.A. students were all too happy to take you into their fold."

"Just like what we used to be... before the escape..." Zuanshi's voice grew wistful. "You've found a good family, Ayuma."

Ayuma smiled at the two of them, nodding as she headed back to her classmates. Yeah... I have...

"I'm so glad to see you and Todoroki passed," Momo said as soon as she reached them.

"I didn't doubt you," Tsu remarked.
"Have you seen the others?" Kyoka asked.

Todoroki gave a small shake of his head. "No. So far, we're the only ones here. We arrived not too long ago."

"We can't count them out," Shoji defended.

"Didn't Midoriya have everyone working together?" Ayuma asked them.

"That was the plan," Momo shrugged. "But someone from Ketsubutsu Academy split us up with his Quirk."

"Just 30 spots left," Kyoka repeated after Mera's most recent update.

Tsu looked at the door with a vaguely fretful look in her eyes. "I hope everyone in our class passes."

Momo staggered on her feet, almost falling on Ayuma. "Sorry. Dealing with the group we defeated took more out of me than I thought."

"Good thing there are plenty of food tables here," Shoji commented as he and Kyoka led her to the tables, the rest of the group following. "Come on, Yaoyorozu; let's see about getting your strength back."

After Momo had eaten a steamed bun or two, Ayuma noticed a handful more of their classmates. Midoriya, Ochaco, Bakugo, Kirishima, Sero, and Kaminari. "Hey guys, we got some more classmates to add to the headcount!"

"Oh hey! What a relief," Momo smiled. "I was starting to get so worried."

"No need to worry about us, Yao-Momo!" grinned Kaminari. "What's up? When did you guys pass? You been here long?"

"We just finished as well," Shoji answered. "Todoroki and Ayuma beat us."

Jiro walked over with a glass of water. "I was kinda shocked Bakugo wasn't here already, but I get it now; it was because you were with him." Ayuma laughed as Kaminari got ticked at the comment.

"Looks like only 12 from our class have passed," Todoroki observed.

Midoriya frowned in worry. "So 9 more to go."

"And the announcement said only 18 spots are left," Momo fretted.

_Uh-oh..._ "All we can do is wait... and hope they all make it."

Unfortunately, eight spots were soon taken all at once, all by Zuanshi's classmates. One of them, the guy who greeted Ayuma's classmates while Zuanshi approached her -- Shindo, if she recalled correctly -- suddenly had a calculating, almost manic look of satisfaction on his face as he led the group. Zuanshi glared at them as they went to get their targets removed. It was justifiable, as Shindo quickly approached Ayuma when she hovered by the door waiting for her classmates. The dark shadow on his face was clearly not going anywhere, making Ayuma all the more tense.

"Ah, you must be one of the kids Kessho grew up with," he presumed. "You're definitely not
someone I expect to see in a foster home. Are you sure you were one of the kids in the Yokohama home? Aren't you supposed to be something scary? What was your name again? Akuma?"

Just hearing the word sent anger spiraling through Ayuma’s eyes. The world was painting itself black before Ayuma stopped herself from activating her Quirk. Her head was tilted down as she glared up at Shindo, noting that he was about as tall as Shinso; not far away, Hansha and Zuanshi were starting to close in behind him. "That's Ayuma, to you, and I'm not the only one here also from Yokohama." Shindo looked behind him to see the two boys, glaring at him.

"Back off," Hansha warned. "Just because Ayuma doesn't look scary doesn't mean she can't be."

"Leave that topic alone, Shindo," Zuanshi added. "We don't want to fight, but we can if provoked. And just a forewarning, our Quirks are nothing to sneeze at."

Shindo's smirk became an irritated frown as he stalked back to his class.

"Glad he's not my adopted brother," Zuanshi scowled. "Not cool, to pick on a classmate's old friend like that."

"Some people just don't know when to quit," Ayuma sighed. "Just because we never had 'normal' lives doesn't make us any less deserving of becoming heroes."

Zuanshi nodded in agreement. "Now, if you excuse me, I need to make sure my classmates know I'm not down and out."

"I'm pretty sure Shishikura's out of the competition, but I'll go check the board to make sure," Hansha added before they headed their separate ways. By then, Mera started the final countdown as people filled up the last group of spots. 8... then 7 and 6... 5, 4, 3... 2... and then the last two students passed.

All but one of the last ten spots were Ayuma's classmates.

The rest of 1-A cheered at their group's victory. It wasn't long before all the 1-A students who made it came in, all exhausted but triumphant as Ayuma led them to the others after their targets were removed. Hugs and congratulations were exchanged all around the class. Koda hugged Kyoka as she berated him for having them worried. Tenya and Momo were clasping each other's hands. Kaminari and Mina gladly hugged each other.

"Alright, for the 100 of you who passed the first test, please turn your attention to the screens." Everyone looked to the massive screen as they showed all sorts of places in the test arena. All of them suddenly exploded and fell apart, as everyone looked on in horror. "There's only one more round for the exam. Your goal is simple: undertake rescue exercises and save the bystanders who are trapped in these disaster sites."

Ayuma's eyes narrowed in determination. Rescue, huh... Well, if I've done it before, I can do it again.

Chapter End Notes

That's the spirit, Ayuma! Show them your stuff! The Pros didn't give you the title Hero
of Heroes for nothing! Also, could you see Shishikura pulling that crap on people like Ayuma and her old friends? I know I can.
Alright! Onto 600 Hits, ladies and gents! And only about a month till Season 4 comes out!

"Save the what-now?" Mineta and Kaminari asked. Ayuma managed not to facepalm in reaction.

"Bystanders," Toru repeated. "We learned about them in class, remember? They're people at a disaster scene."

"It can also simply refer to innocent citizens on the street," Momo added.

"Use this time to show us how you will carry out successful rescue procedures once you receive your Provisional Hero Licenses," Mera continued. "Treat this as though it were the real thing."

Something moved on the screen, rising from the rubble of one of the buildings. There were people in that arena! Elderly people and children, to be specific! "Hold on, what?! I didn't see them in the Dreamscape!"

"These specialists have been trained as professional persons in need of rescue. They're very popular. Introducing the Help Us Company, also known as HUC for short." One of the guys on the screen held up a can of fake blood, grinning at the camera.

"So they're basically actors, I guess?" Sero presumed.

"It's the kind of job you never think about," Tsu remarked.

"Yeah, but a necessary one in our world, since they support our hero training," Ojiro pointed out.

Okay, that's at least a decent point. They were probably just planted there after we were done with the first round.

"The HUC bystanders have dressed up like injured victims and will be located throughout the disaster sites. We'll be judging how well you keep them safe as you go about your mission. Oh, by the way, we'll be scoring you on a point system. If you have more points than the benchmark at the time the exercise comes to an end, then you pass the exam. We're starting in ten minutes; take care of any necessary preparations now."

Tenya and Midoriya, were muttering about Kamino Ward, wondering if that was the basis for this exercise. Their only goal back then was saving Bakugo, and Ayuma was preoccupied by her foster home, Mt. Lady, and Best Jeanist. But she did remember the heroes saving civilians from the rubble as she went to retrieve her belongings.

Ayuma turned around when she heard footsteps, and saw Hansha and Zuanshi. "You guys
know what that means, right?"

"Oh yeah," Zuanshi nodded. "Time to bring out our inner Suru."

Hansha and Ayuma stared blankly at him. "Wait, what?" the other boy asked.

"Our inner Suru! You said she had influenced you and Kagami to some extent, right? Well guess what, it's in all of us, stemming from when she was our big sis. We need to use that influence in this rescue exercise."

"I was going to say we'll have to cooperate regardless of school, but I guess that can go with it, too," Ayuma shrugged. "But I don't think anyone outside of us will know what you mean."

Zuanshi looked about to argue, but stopped himself. "You got me there."

"Oh hey, it's Shiketsu," Kirishima noticed, talking around a mouthful of bread as the students approached him, Bakugo, and the three former fosters.

"Bakugo," the big hairy guy addressed. "I think you met Shishikura in the test. My classmate with a flesh-molding power."

Say WHAT?!

"Yeah, I took him out," Bakugo affirmed.

"I thought so. I'm guessing he may have acted rudely or perhaps offended you. He has a tendency to try and push his own values onto others. He probably couldn't help it in your case since you're pretty famous. I apologize for him. I'd like to build a good relationship between our schools." He looked over at Ayuma, Hansha, and Zuanshi. "That means you too, Miru, and your old friend. It was quite uncalled for that Shishikura attacked you both for something you couldn't control." Hansha quietly nodded in acceptance.

"Just try to avoid any more 'uncalled for' occurrences and there'll be no trouble," Zuanshi waved off.

"Thank you; that is all." The students turned to leave, when Todoroki called for the one with the collar: Inasa.

"Did I... offend you somehow?" Todoroki asked as he approached.

Inasa noticeably glared at Todoroki as the two stopped and stared at each other. Hansha and Ayuma looked at each other knowingly, and with matching worried looks.

"Oh no, I'm sorry, did I hurt your feelings?" Inasa asked mockingly. "Well, the thing is, son of Endeavor, I just can't help but hate both of you. You've changed a little bit since the first time our paths crossed, but you definitely still have your father's eyes."

Ayuma knew the look starting to grow in her classmate's eyes; they were turning glazed and distant, never a good sign. She and Hansha quickly slipped between them, the latter bringing Inasa back to his classmates. As for Midoriya, that Camie girl was bidding him goodbye-for-now, and Kaminari and Mineta prepared to hound him before Momo shot them both down.

"Todoroki?" Ayuma asked, getting no answer. "Todoroki." Nothing again, even when she snapped her fingers a couple of times. She sighed and went to Midoriya, shoving Kaminari and kicking Mineta aside as she pulled the green-haired boy over. "I need your help for a second. You
"Of course," Midoriya said gratefully, stopping in front of their classmate. "You alright, Todoroki?"

The gray and blue eyes quickly cleared, and he looked down at his classmates. "What is it?"

**RIIIING!**

"Villains have performed a large-scale terrorist attack spanning all of insert-city-name-here. Since most buildings collapsed, there are many injured." Ayuma presumed that was the background story as the anteroom started to open up like last time. "Due to heavily damaged roads, first responders have unfortunately been delayed for the time being. Until the emergency services arrive, the heroes in the area will lead the rescue efforts. Your task is to save as many people as you can and help the injured. And with that... begin!"

Ayuma formed her wings and soared through the Dreamscape, keeping up with Inasa and the other fliers. She already could keep track of everyone she knew, and she saw Hansha and Zuanshi following her from the ground. Some of the others from Ketsubutsu were even with them.

"Over between the city and mountain areas!" she shouted when she saw an unattended cluster of images. "There's a group of people that need help! Follow me!"

All of the students behind her, regardless of school or age, followed her on the ground as she led them to the victims. It was a couple of families and an elderly couple trapped in the rubble. The heroes-in-training quickly spread out, checking over the injuries and freeing victims from the debris. They checked over their injuries, making sure they weren't severe before bringing them to a first aid area they set up.

Ayuma was carefully lifting an elderly woman free since she was the best fit for getting in and out from under there. She brought the adult out from below the slab of concrete and steel beams, handing her over to Zuanshi's friend Makabe. "Alright, that's the last one trapped in there," she said once she got herself out.

"One of the victims said their grand kids are supposed to be around here somewhere," Makabe notified. "Think you can find them?"

Ayuma looked around, locking her focus on a couple of motionless images under a pile of rubble and beams. "There! Zuanshi, can you make us a couple of braces?"

"Way ahead of you," the white-haired boy replied, already forming and hardening broad-ended sticks of crystal. Shindo took the crystal beams and shoved them under the largest concrete slab like girders.

"You, with me," she said simply to the one called Toteki before crawling into the darkness. She moved carefully so as not to topple the stony pile, followed by the Ketsubutsu student. He was the only one besides her who could get in and out without catching on something. She glanced back for a second. "Can you see me alright down here?"

Toteki's image showed him shaking his head. "Not quite. It's too dark to see very much."

Ayuma should've figured as much as she crawled onward. "Okay, just follow my voice. The kids aren't very far ahead, so we'll be able to find them soon."

"How are you able to tell?"
"Well... it's a sort of side effect of my Quirk," she replied. "Stop; they're right in front of us. One of them is just about a foot forward from your right hand. Once you have the child, carefully retrace our steps."

"Right." Ayuma heard Toteki carefully go back the way they came after he took the child. She picked up the other one and followed after, back out of the rubble with the little girl she saved. The little girl had a clear bleeding wound on the back of her head and wasn't responding to any movement; there was also a cut or two on her back and legs. "We need to get them to a safe area and treat them, quickly."

"Nakagame helped set up an evacuation zone over that way," Shindo instructed. "Bring these two kids there; you'll know it when you see it."

"Got it," Ayuma nodded as she carried the child. She ran through the disaster site, following Toteki and the little girl he was carrying. Eventually, she found an area marked by a white flag and crowding with people; Midoriya came from another direction. A girl with pale blonde pigtails quickly went up to her and Toteki.

"Let me see these two," she ordered as Ayuma laid her charge on the ground.

"These two were found under the rubble. This one's unconscious and has injuries on the head, back, and legs."

"This girl started to wake up while we were coming here," Toteki notified, seating the girl he was carrying on the ground. "She has a gash on her arm and appears to have a broken ankle."

The blonde scanned over the second girl briefly, wrapping up her ankle and cleaning and taping a gauze patch to her arm. "That should take care of her injuries." She then wrapped and placed an ice pack on the girl's head, bandaging her back and legs. "And that's good for the other. Take them to the space on the far right where the other children are."

"Got it," the two students affirmed before bringing the girls to the designated area.

Once there, Ayuma started hearing a strange, whining, whirring sound from the walls of the arena. She immediately got the feeling something was about to happen. "Get down!"

A series of explosions tore up the walls of the arena as she bowed protectively over the little girl who was barely waking up. "A villain has completed another large-scale attack."

"Is everyone alright?!" Ayuma shouted over everyone's panic as she stood up.

Toteki looked beyond her, eyes widening. "Gang... Orca..."

Ayuma couldn't have spun around fast enough. She knew exactly who he was, and she was sure he'd recognize her, too. But this time, he was here with a boatload of mooks behind him. All of them were armed, and all of them looked terrifyingly familiar. The soldiers soon charged at the evacuation zone. "The terrorists have appeared and are beginning to sweep the area. Hero candidates at the scene should continue their rescue efforts while also suppressing the newly-arrived villains."

"How are we supposed to take out that many people in one shot?!" one of the other students cried out.

Ayuma saw Shindo head towards the villains and quickly went after him, flying above as he pressed his hands on the ground. The land started to splinter and toss the attackers. But then Gang
Orca got in front of him and used some sort of sonic attack, sending him sprawling on the ground. Ayuma's eyes grew wide and full of terror as she clutched her head against the repercussions in her own skull.

*Did he just... Is that... It can't be... It's just like... Please... No... Tell me that isn't...*

*...Like her...*

But it was. Shindo was paralyzed by Gang Orca's ultrasonic attack like she and her fellow orphans were paralyzed by Madame Kirai. Only her Quirk could telekinetically attack the cerebellum of the brain with a meeting of eyes, stopping all movement and leaving the victim trapped miles deep into their own body. She remembered that feeling of being trapped in a near-dead state all too well, and the Pro just brought all those memories back. Being stuck there, on the cold hard floor, unable to move, unable to talk, unable to do anything to defend herself. When she couldn't even cry out for help, because her body was a numb prison, that anyone who didn't know the truth would mistake for death.

This is why you can never truly trust a Pro hero...

...Because they'll turn against you with greater force than any villain in your life...

A surge of ice brought her out of the flood of memories. She saw Todoroki through Gang Orca's sound waves that rattled the air, using his ice to furiously attack him. The wind started to pick up and toss her around, as well as the henchmen below. It was Inasa, coming to help the attack. Ayuma soon noticed they were starting to argue and snapped out of her daze, rushing to sever their view of each other.

"Focus, guys!" she shouted over the wind. "We need to fight off the villains!"

As Ayuma prepared the black hurricane of Dying Dream, Todoroki sent out a stream of fire, and Inasa sent off a vicious gale. Unfortunately, one cancelled out the other, and neither one connected. They started arguing about cancelling each other's attacks on purpose. Inasa was even taunting Todoroki as Endeavor's son!

"Stop it! STOP IT!" she screamed. "FIGHTING EACH OTHER WON'T HELP THIS SITUATION!"

They wouldn't listen. Todoroki suddenly got hit by a lump of clay from one of the henchmen. They all started barraging the three of them when Ayuma finally released the black vacuum wave, tossing a bunch of them backwards. Todoroki blocked the clay gunshots with his ice as Inasa and Ayuma dodged them. She could barely hear either of them talk over the wind and clay shots tearing through the air.

Ayuma was the only one attacking the villains. Scissor blades, ribbons, monsters from all of the soldiers' nightmares. Dodging every shot and sonic attack. When they both sent a fire and wind attack at the same time, they repelled each other again, one even heading towards Shindo. She almost panicked until a green blur grabbed him and got him out of the way. She watched as Midoriya turned back to the arguing boys.

"What are you two DOING?!"

They all went into a standstill of silence. She was in such shock that they both stopped at Midoriya's voice, she almost got struck out of the sky by Gang Orca's sonic attack. In a matter of seconds, both Inasa and Todoroki were paralyzed by the sound waves. Ayuma rushed to wrap
Inasa with her ribbons to soften his fall out of the air. She saw the henchmen were about to charge again, but Shindo somehow got up and used his vibrating Quirk to send them flying.

Gang Orca dropped Todoroki and was stalking towards Inasa and Ayuma. Determined to help her friend and Hansha's adoptive brother, she rushed at the Pro hero, scissors flying towards him. But before they could reach him, she felt a surge of heat and wind tossing her and her weapons upwards of a firestorm. Gang Orca was trapped inside the whirling blaze, and she was hovering at the top.

The blaze of red and white in the Dreamscape was almost impossible to see Gang Orca's navy blue image inside, but she could send in her scissor blades and ribbons to help with the trap they both formed. She threaded her ribbons through the blades like with Dabi and Twice, sending them down into the fire. The Pro at the center of the firestorm was soon tied up by blades lodged inside the storm of two combined Quirks, and victory looked like it would be assured.

Until a truly vicious sonic wave stopped all three Quirks at once.

It was everything Ayuma remembered and more. A heart-wrenching, buzzing shriek tearing into her head. Her own scream echoing the din of the sound attack, only to fall silent as if her vocal cords were cut. Something at the center of her brain shattered at the continuing noise. She fell straight down towards Gang Orca. In a sudden stop, her lifeless rag doll of a body was being held up by only the collar. The Pro hero was replaced by the officer of her nightmares. She could tell his hand was reaching for her hair, ready to break her neck like a songbird in a falcon's talons. Her memories formed a far stronger flood that swallowed her trapped mind, sending her falling down into a black abyss.

Gang Orca heard it be announced that the Provisional Hero License Exam was over. His sidekicks lamented their lacking aid during the attack, particularly during the firestorm and added bonds. And even moreso when young Midoriya kicked his arm hard enough to break the brace on it, making him drop the girl he caught onto the ground. But the Pro hero accepted the loss with dignity, as it was a good sign that the young heroes worked together.

He knew that he recognized the girl who flew above the center of the storm. The child who saved his colleagues on the night of the villain hideout raid. Whether or not she knew, she was something to fear. She was still paralyzed, unable to move, but something was very unsettling about her eyes. They were blank and distant, like she was an old soldier reliving the trauma of war. Despite her eyes being wide open, she didn't look like she could see anything. That's not normal, especially for a child. What's happening? What's wrong with her?

Two young men soon rushed over, the older of the two picking her up. Their matching grim faces and minor glares to the Pro said they knew exactly why she was like this, and she was quickly carried away, the other two boys by a couple of others. Off to the infirmary, Gang Orca assumed. That's good. That means they care for each other. I'm glad I don't have to harm her or any more of these young heroes.

"Please forgive me..." he muttered in her direction, "Hero of Heroes..."

Ayuma was just barely able to change back into her uniform. Even at the closing ceremony, her body was so weak and numb that Shoji insisted on making sure she stayed upright. Zuanshi and Hansha were obviously worried about her, being paralyzed and falling into an attack. The rest of her class was concerned as well. Not that she could blame any of them. She could barely talk through her strained voice, hoarse from all the shouting.
Ayuma barely paid attention to Mera thanking everyone for participating, or to his explanation of the points system during the second round. A grid of names appeared on the enormous screen, and Ayuma could just make out that those who passed would be on the board. She scanned the names, looking for her own. She saw Zuanshi and Hansha's names on it, and all but two from her class as well.

And then she saw those three characters of her name. Her heart soared at the realization: she made it.

The printouts of everyone's scores were soon handed out. Ayuma saw on hers that she got 61 points. The issues were that she took off from the victims when they needed her, she froze after Gang Orca showed up, even screaming for a good duration. I don't remember that. Did that happen while I was getting flooded by memories? The fact that she had displayed such clear symptoms of untreated psychological trauma wasn't much help. And there was still 10 deducted points that weren't explained. So I just barely made it... Well, you can't stop PTSD. At least Nightmaiden is one step closer to going Pro.

"Ayuma, you sure you'll be alright?" Zuanshi asked his old friend.

"Yeah, Gang Orca got you pretty good with that sonic attack," Hansha agreed. "And your voice is probably shot at this point."

"I'll be fine, guys," Ayuma waved off, her strained voice no higher than a whisper. "Just say hi to Kagami for us, Hansha. Here. We can get each other's phone numbers to keep in touch."

The three of them exchanged numbers with each other, glad that they'll be able to contact each other again. Hansha promised to say hi to his twin sister for Ayuma and Zuanshi before the boys left. Once on the bus back to U.A., Ayuma traced the edge of the new card in her bag before she leaned back to rest her eyes. I'll become part of the Pros soon. I passed the exam, and boy, was it worth it.

Chapter End Notes

Hey, Gang Orca! Welcome to the list of Ayuma's not-so-favorite heroes, effective after causing her a PTSD attack via paralysis. Way to mimic Madame Kirai and get on all the Yokohama foster kids' bad sides. WHOOPS! Hope you can find it in you to face her down as something besides Drill Sargent Nasty or Faux Villain next time.
Mystery

Chapter Notes

Okay, apologies for that issue in programming last time, guys. Don't worry, we're back in business with the real chapter after "Rescuer." Here's food for thought: Manga Fukidashi possibly knows plenty of tips and tricks from experience on how to heal a strained voice.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Alright, dear, it looks like your larynx was simply strained from shouting so much during that big exam," Recovery Girl told Ayuma after examining her throat. "And I doubt you were the only one to have such a problem." Not a moment too soon, the door opened for Fukidashi to come in. "Did you overuse your Quirk again, young Fukidashi?"

The speech-bubble of a head nodded solemnly. Kanji appeared on his face reading, 'She lost her voice, too?'

"Unfortunately," Recovery Girl affirmed. "But unfortunately, I'm afraid both of you are likely to be too drained for my Quirk to help. Thankfully, both of you will be able to heal fairly easily if you make sure not to speak for 12-24 hours."

Fukidashi slumped in disappointment as Ayuma's face fell. But then the boy perked up and took out a notebook and pencil, scribbling down on a page before tearing it off and giving it to Ayuma. It turned out to be a list of things like a few different kinds of tea, honey, and even herbs. 'These should help your voice,' the appearing writing on his head stated. 'They helped me when I was young. I overused my Quirk and lost my voice a lot.'

The girl smiled and nodded her thanks to the Class B student before they were sent back to the dorms.

Ayuma let out a wheezing sigh of relief when the tea kettle started whistling. She went to get a potholder to grab the kettle, before pouring the boiling water into a mug with a chamomile tea bag in it. She mixed a couple of spoonfuls of honey into it. She then carefully took it out to the common area, sitting at the table to have her drink as her classmates talked by the couches.

At least Recovery Girl said my voice will be better by tomorrow. That's what I get for suddenly putting that much strain on my larynx, normally being so quiet and then shouting for that much during the exams. Thank goodness for Fukidashi suggesting this, since he had the same problem after the Class B License Exam. Must be related to his Quirk, since he said something about almost always wearing out his voice as a kid.

Koda took a seat next to Ayuma, his pet rabbit in his arms and Kyoka beside him. "Hey Ayuma, did you get any good news from Recovery Girl about your voice? Will you be able to talk again soon?" the girl asked. Ayuma nodded, petting the white rabbit.

"I'm glad," Koda's deceptively high-pitched voice murmured with a grin. "I hope you feel better."
Ayuma smiled back at him. *You and me both, Koda.*

"Anyways, we're turning in for the night," Kyoka stated. "Will you be alright staying up all by yourself?"

The other girl took a sip from her tea and gave a thumbs-up. *It's not like I haven't stayed up late by myself before.*

Kyoka nodded in understanding. "Alright. See you in the morning." Ayuma waved as they both headed for the elevator.

Only, she couldn't fall asleep.

Ayuma tossed and turned in her bed, the tug at the back of her mind stubbornly refusing to let up. It was uneasy and tense, a mixture of both the traumatic flashback from the license exam and her intuition telling her something was going to happen. She knew she could easily be caught if she sneaked out past curfew, and certainly didn't want to face Aizawa's wrath for doing so. She was also already exhausted as is, and didn't want to deal with staying up all night and fall asleep on her desk (like Kaminari did almost daily even before the dorms).

*Fine, if it has to be that way. One look outside, and then maybe it'll let me get some sleep.*

Just to satisfy the restlessness, she got up and went out to her balcony. She looked out at the whole area, looking through the Dreamscape and normal vision, and saw nothing out of the ordinary. Everything was totally normal, even as far as she could see of the U.A. barrier wall.

*Just as I thought. There are no problems here; everything is just fine.*

Satisfying her intuitive drive, Ayuma went back inside, closing the sliding door and curtains. She went to her music box, got the sheet music of a particular song. A song that, strangely enough, reminded her of the kids she once thought of as her siblings. Zuanshi, Hansha, Suru, Kagami, and the rest of their troupe. She wound it up enough for it to play all the way through. She set it on her dresser before pushing the lever in and returning to bed.

The soft lullaby of the music box soon lulled her to sleep, leaving her oblivious to the coming battle between two of her classmates.

A young woman was wandering through the alleys. Platinum blonde hair was braided along the sides to connect and form a rope down her back. Baby blue eyes glittered upon a pale face, darting every which way. She wore a pale blue cropped short sleeve shirt, with a teal gray scarf around her neck. A pink web of scarring marked both ends of her right forearm. Around her waist was a mint green wraparound skirt with black shorts underneath. Her brown slides patted the shadowed asphalt as she walked.

*It has to be here somewhere. What could it have been? None of the others had a Quirk that could cause anything like that. So who was the cause?*

She stop short when a wall of searing blue flames lit up her path. She heard screaming as a cluster of black at the base of the blaze turned to ashes. In the face of her being startled by something so terrifying, the windows of the buildings around her cracked with a faint, pale blue pulse of light.

"Stay down. You make good fuel. Allow my flames to consume you."
The flames gradually died down to reveal a miniature forest of carbonized corpses. Standing behind it was a man around her age, perhaps even a trifle older. In the light of the fire, his skin was a ghastly mix between a doughy pallor and gnarled purple scarring, crudely sewn together with glinting metal. His clothes were dark blue, only a few shades off from black wherever it had no silvery sheen. His eyes were the same cerulean hue as the oppressively hot flames, gleaming in their light.

And even moreso as they looked up at her.

"And what are you looking at?" the man asked, the blue flames suddenly curling off his hands.

While the woman gave no clear reaction, a light pulse cracked the windows more, a few shards flying loose. "Just looking at you, and what you just did to those people."

The man only hummed and walked closer, kicking aside his victims. "Just some dumb thugs. Not what the League of Villains is looking for."

League of Villains. The people who attacked those children? Whose captured leader was only a few miles from our old home?

"I thought your group was disbanded when your mastermind was captured."

"Yeah? Well, we don't go down that easily." He stood there, only about 3 meters away from her. "This is normally the part when you run screaming for the cops, and I kill you because you just saw me kill these guys. Actually, you should've run for it the second you saw my flames at all."

Her mind momentarily returned to that awful, yet triumphant night. Being held with her arms twisted behind her back. Force that could break them as she and the others ached for freedom. And especially the people who forced all of their hands. More glass fell from the windows with another pale blue pulse. "I and my friends have little regard for the Police Force. Bad experience, you understand."

Surprisingly, the man dispelled the flames in his hands, shifting to a more relaxed stance. "Yeah, I can understand." His gaze lazily traveled up and down the alley, seeing all the breaking windows. "Does your Quirk have something to do with glass or something?"

She nodded. With a wave of her hand, the broken glass tore from the window frames, wrapped in a pale blue glow reflected in her eyes. The shards floated around her in a shower of transparent knives, forming broken wings behind her back. "It's called Hyalokinesis: the ability to freely manipulate all sorts of glass, including break it and put it back together. A flick of a finger, and all of the lethally sharp shards were pointing at him. "But I'm warning you now, if you think I'd join something like your league, you'd sooner find broken glass that doesn't cut you."

The man put his hands up. "Alright, no need to get all worked up. But the League of Villains might be the only place that will accept you. If you change your mind, feel free to join us."

"I already chose the group that I'd be with; the group that helped me gain control of my Quirk. A group that will one day allow all Quirks to be freed as human right. That way, orphans will be given the chance to counsel their powers. They'll no longer need to endure their own lack of control alongside the other horrors of foster care or living all alone... The horrors I and the others lived through..."

A glint of interest found the man's eyes. "Really? Maybe at some point, our respective groups
can be friends. Present society is our common enemy, and together, we'll be able to crumble it in its entirety."

The shards pulled back an inch or two. "Perhaps. But what if our groups can't come to a consensus? What if, instead of becoming allies, we become enemies."

"Then it'll just be between you and me. No one else in either of our groups has to know. The name's Dabi." He held out a hand to shake, free of flames.

The shards retreated to their windows, sealing back into place. The woman's hand soon met his in their private agreement. "Suru... Suru Funsai..."

Aizawa was searching through news articles. As many as he could find concerning what he was looking for. Ever since he heard All Might mention the Yokohama Foster Home, he's been scrambling to find any reports on it. It hasn't been very easy, and he still had yet to find something. He was sure he knew about it, but he needed to find proof to present it to Nezu.

The word skimmed over his vision on the screen, and he clicked on the article. **Foster Home Caretaker Incarcerated for Mistreatment.** The article explained, in short, that a woman named Mahira Kita had been arrested for harming the children within her foster home as discipline. She was careful enough not to leave scars most of the time, but all of them did have at least a few scars resulting from her going to far. During a struggle between her and police, quite a large group of both the kids and the cops were paralyzed by her Quirk and/or were non-fatally impaled or stabbed with scissor blades.

The next article was called **Yokohama Foster Kids Gone! Home Attacked?** After Miss Kita was deemed innocent via insanity and sentenced to a mental institution, (the picture of her hardly made her look insane; instead, she looked almost smug) a new caretaker was assigned to the kids. The police had custody of the children until then. But the night before the new caretaker arrived, there was evidence of an explosion at the foster home. When emergency responders and Pro heroes arrived at the scene, the entire police unit was injured, and all of the children had disappeared. When none of them were found, the whole scene was eventually declared a villain ambush, and all of the children were declared missing. But still, some officers reported the kids attacked them unprovoked. Something didn't sit right with the teacher in that regard.

Ayuma's Quirk would only ever activate exactly when provoked by circumstance or emotion. We've seen it for ourselves, and Ayuma herself even said so. But that was about seven and a half years ago. Odds are, none of those kids look like what they used to back then, if they're even alive. If it were villains, and all of those kids' Quirks were as unstable as Ayuma's, they all would've gone off and left the villains hurt, not the police. Unless... the police were the villains.

That was when it all made sense, and made even more sense with a second look. According to the court transcript, none of the kids said a word in the entirety of the trial. The police either consciously forbade them to take the stand, or they weren't able to. Thus, their caretaker was given a weak verdict and sentence; the mental hospital sentence will be set to release her this winter. The children may have thought the police were holding them captive while waiting for the new caretaker; even more so if they'd done something even remotely wrong in their eyes that set them all off. Then, while the cops were down, the kids ran off into the night.

Unbelievable. The police outright lied about everything. If the children were allowed to give their input, Kita might've been put in jail at the mercy of what other prisoners do to child abusers. But the kids would've still had to deal with a new caretaker after such a grueling series of events.
The police probably made the children think they were being held captive somehow; possibly by hurting at least one of them. It must be why Ayuma has that problem with authorities Iida told me about.

"Hey, Eraser Head. Your students are loitering at Ground Beta," the security AI in his room reported with a sudden beeping. "You're responsible for rounding them up."

Aizawa growled, "Are you kidding me?" He sighed as he got up and went out. Who would be stupid enough to sneak out? But before he could head to Ground Beta, he saw a certain retired Pro at the base of the steps.

"Sorry to interrupt," All Might apologized. "But I know which students have snuck out: young Bakugo and young Midoriya."

"Midoriya and Bakugo," the dark-haired hero sighed, continuing down the steps. "Why am I not surprised to hear that? I understand they're at the training field?"

"Yes. I wanted to catch you before you went." The look in what could be seen of All Might's eyes was serious. "I've known these two since before I came to U.A., and have given the pair quite a bit of thought. Will you leave them to me for now? I'll bring them back."

Aizawa paused to contemplate the blond man's suggestion. He did have a valid point. Midoriya and Bakugo were All Might's proteges like Shinso and Ayuma were Aizawa's. Only neither of the two have been able to get along. He should've seen it coming that the living grenade would challenge the problem child to a late-night brawl. ".Fine. I leave it in your hands."

All Might nodded as he went back towards Ground Beta, and Aizawa returned to his office.

I'll have to face those two down once All Might brings them both back here, and definitely punish them. But for now, I have to get back to Ayuma's past. He quietly sat back down at his computer. After all, if this Mahira Kita has a Quirk that causes paralysis, that would explain quite a few things. Particularly, what happened to Ayuma during the Licensing Exam with Gang Orca. It's time Nezu had a look at this.

After all, this evidence proves she'll need a special course in her own way. She needs to overcome her fear of heroes if she's to become one.

That didn't make him any less angry with the two troublemakers when All Might brought them back.

The man was quiet, in the hospital bed, as his colleague came in to visit. He was still hooked up to the machines, but he looked at least a little better compared to before. He even had a surgical mask on to cover his face in the stead of his usual costume. But even with his covered face, his old friend -- just under a year his senior -- clearly conveyed his emotions to the visitor.

"Kugo," the patient addressed the orca-like hero, his voice touched with surprise. "I didn't expect it to be you who would come and see me."

"I know, Tsunagu," Kugo replied quietly, sighing as he sat on the chair at his bedside. "It's been... difficult ever since the hideout raid..."

"Something's on your mind, isn't there." As always, Tsunagu never failed to read his old friend. "And it isn't the raid."
Kugo's shoulders lowered. "I was asked to volunteer playing as a villain, for the Provisional Hero License Exam in Daboga. And during that exam, among the students training to be heroes... I saw her..."

"Saw her?" the blond patient repeated. "Who?"

"...The girl who saved you during the raid." Kugo could see a blank look in Tsunagu's eyes. "Ah... you don't remember... It was the girl from ten years ago, now a young lady. On the night of the raid, she saved Mount Lady and brought you here for your injury. She was one of the students in the License Exam... and I might have done something terrible to her. I came to you because you're more experienced with youths such as her."

A hand cupped over his shoulder. "Tell me what happened."

Kugo was already seeing the image of her paralyzed form and distant eyes, the piercing sound of her scream ringing in his ears. "While I was playing a villain, the girl and two boys were fighting me. They managed to trap me into a fiery cyclone lined with threaded needles. I used my hypersonic waves to nullify the attack... and she was flying above it. I caught her by the collar before she hit the ground, but one of the other students knocked her from my grasp just before the exam itself ended."

The hero called Gang Orca could already feel himself rattle. "It was her eyes, Tsunagu, while she was paralyzed by my sonic attack. They looked like those of a traumatized soldier reliving a war. Those kinds of eyes don't belong on a child. And before she and those boys were fighting, when I first showed up and used my sound waves against the students... she stopped where she was, and clutched her head... and she screamed."

Tsunagu hummed in sympathy. That did sound very troubling, especially for his old friend. Kugo was a Pro hero known to look very villainous, but he had a soft spot for troubled children and hated to put one in distress. He was already guilty ten years ago after watching the poor girl getting dragged off in chains. "My old friend, it couldn't have been your fault if you didn't know before it happened."

"I wouldn't be surprised if it were PTSD that I had accidentally triggered," Kugo added mournfully. "She'd truly make a good hero someday. In some ways, she already is; we've even come to call her the Hero of Heroes. But since I'm now one of the heroes that hurt her, along with Endeavor and possibly Eraser Head and Midnight... I can only hope I didn't make her not wish to be one anymore."

Tsunagu was silent for awhile. "Look me in the eyes, Kugo." The other man looked up at the green eyes in front of him. "As much of a mystery as this girl may be, I don't believe she will cease to try to become a hero. The best you can do is wait for a chance to apologize for your actions and prove yourself to her as a kind-hearted hero. Once she realizes you're not the villain you pretended to be in the exam, she might let you in."

He could see the smile in Kugo's scarlet, ringed eyes. "That sounds like a good idea, Tsunagu. Thank you."

Chapter End Notes

Honestly, I see Best Jeanist and Gang Orca as an older version of Shoji and
Tokoyami's friendship. And I love Gang Orca's hidden heart of gold for the kids he normally hides. But I wonder if you guys know what Suru's become a part of... You think she'll be able to get through to Dabi on her own? Or will she need some help from a certain bird of prey?
Let's see, we have the pretty, still-considered-new girl of the Hero Course, and an aspiring Gen Ed student who desires to join her class. The two have been training under a Hero Course teacher as training partners for at least a few months, and formed quite a close bond in the process. So what do you think happens when their respective classmates see said close bond in action?

Ayuma woke up to quite the surprise the next morning. Not only did Midoriya and Bakugo get into a fight last night at Ground Beta, but they were both now on house arrest. Midoriya only had three days while Bakugo had four, but they were both set to cleaning up the dorm in the meantime. The rest of the class was going to some kind of assembly, and the two boys were to be completely locked out of the loop until their house arrest periods were over.

Quite a few of the others ridiculed the two of them for sneaking out and fighting unsupervised. Kaminari thought it was hilarious, Aoyama lamented their situation, and Sero and Tokoyami basically called them stupid. Bakugo visibly hated that last one, speeding up his vacuuming in frustration. It didn't get much better when Todoroki mentioned the extra classes he and Bakugo needed to take. Tenya reprimanded his green-haired friend, saying they were lucky they got away with house arrest, as opposed to suspension or outright expulsion.

"Listen up everyone! Stay in line and move promptly into position! I want to see order!" Tenya barked to the others, hands alternating chopping the air.

"Uh, you're the only one who's not in line," Sero pointed out, to Tenya's dismay.

"The dilemma of a Class Rep..." he moped.

"I heard a little rumor about Class 1-A," Ayuma could see a blond head of hair by the wall in her peripheral vision. She fought down her immediate desire to choke him with a ribbon. "TWO PEOPLE! YOU HAD TWO PEOPLE FAIL THE LICENSING EXAM, YOU LOSERS!"

Monoma cackled, Ayuma already getting annoyed.

Sero obviously remembered him, and Kaminari noted him being as unhinged as usual. "Bet you were the only one in your class to fail. Just like in the final, huh," Kirishima challenged.

Monoma snickered at the accusation, not giving a clear answer and turning his back. "Ha! Actually..." He spun into a dramatic pose as the rest of his class came. "EVERY ONE OF US PASSED! We've pulled ahead of you, big shots!" To Ayuma's marginal relief, none of the other Class B students looked to be in a gloating mood. Komori and Kuroiro were together as usual, Tsuburaba was just behind Bondo, and Shishida was by their Class Rep. And you could bet that Kendo's face was all that was needed to convey her apologies for Monoma. Tetsutetsu was even
waving at Kirishima like a long-lost brother.

Todoroki bowed his head in dismay, apologizing for it being his fault. Kirishima attempted to console him because Class B was making it a competition. Ayuma was right there to also comfort her dual-colored friend.

One of the girls of the other class approached the group with more benevolent intent. "According to teacher Vlad, we'll have classes together this semester. Doesn't that sound like it'll be fun? I'm looking forward to it!"

Pony Tsunotori; hard to forget her from the attendance sheet at camp. An American exchange student, and one of the few 1-B students not hit by the gas attack. Seems friendly enough. Kaminari was already blushing, though Ayuma noticed Monoma whispering something to her.

"Touch me an' I'll pummel ya till yo' mama doesn't know ya!" she suddenly exclaimed. Kaminari and Kirishima were stunned in absolute horror, and Ayuma sighed as Monoma cackled with a thumbs-up.

"Stop filling her mind with crazy!" Kendo scolded, the following karate chop promptly cutting off Monoma's laugh.

"Hey, we're trying to get through back here," a voice called as Class 1-C started coming in. Suprise surprise, Shinso was leading the pack. Tenya rushed to apologize and urge along the others for clogging up the halls. "I honestly can't believe how uncool you are."

"Shinso..." Tokoyami said slowly.

"Oh right, the guy who fought Midoriya at the Sports Festival," Kyoka recalled.

"You sure that's the same guy?" Sero asked. "Looks like he's bulked up a bit since then."

Ayuma bit back her retort to that last comment. "Shinso!" she greeted, keeping step with her training partner. "Sorry I didn't get to talk yesterday. We were all pretty exhausted after the Provisional License Exam, and I kind of lost my voice."

Shinso turned to her, smiling softly. "Don't worry about it. I wouldn't blame you for being spent after being out all day doing such an important test."

"That's fair. Hopefully, we'll be able to catch up after this assembly."

He chuckled, taking her hand in his. "Yeah; probably later, though."

They didn't notice the Class A girls and Class C boys watching it play out, and looking at each other knowingly as they continued through the halls.

All the classes of U.A. were assembled outside the building. They were set up in columns depending on classes. In front of them all was a small stage where Principal Nezu was standing on a stool in front of a mic. As he talked, Kaminari busied himself by petting Ojiro's tail. Ayuma herself was by Ibara, who seemed more than welcoming to the company. Besides, a lot of Ibara's vines were pretty tangled up -- rather painfully, it seemed -- so she was thankful when Ayuma offered help. It let the redhead keep herself busy during the long speech.

"Hi there! It's the adorable small mammal you all know and love, the principal!" he greeted to start off. "You may notice the fur I'm so proud of has deteriorated in quality lately. I haven't
been taking care of it. This is something that can happen to humans, too. Even if you eat a balanced diet full of vitamins and minerals, you won't have a mane of luscious locks unless you're getting lots of sleep. That's the secret. Disturbances in your normal resting patterns are terrible for your hair, so if you want to improve your fur's strength and sheen, make sure you're getting plenty of hours in bed."

Nezu, that last part sounded so wrong on so many levels, Ayuma thought in response, eyes darting towards Mineta in paranoia.

"My own sleep cycle has been upset by the incidents that took place over summer vacation, which I'm sure everyone here knows about already. We lost a pillar of hope, the ramifications of which have appeared faster than I could've ever imagined. And there will likely be even more chaos throughout our world in the near future. In particular, this will be most apparent to those of you studying in the Hero Course. You must approach extra-curricular activities, like the Hero Work Studies available to second and third-years, with a greater sense of caution and attentiveness than before.

"The air always feels heavy when we talk about gloomy subjects, but rest assured your teachers are working hard to remove this weight from your shoulders. I'd like all of you to learn from their diligence and remember that hard work will help you develop into capable heroes. Whether Hero Course, Support, Business, or General Studies, I don't want any of you to forget that you're the ones who will inherit our society."

"Well spoken," Vlad King commented. "Thank you, Principal Nezu. Now we'll hear from the Extra-curricular Guidance teacher. Please give Mr. Hound Dog your attention."

"Yesterday..." Ayuma could hear the anger in his voice, which soon dissolved into enraged barking and a long wolfish howl that left everyone in the first handful of rows paralyzed with fear. She sweatdropped and cringed at the Guidance Counselor suddenly going feral. Ibara's vines also went rather tense with fear between her careful fingers.

"Alright..." Vlad King took back the mic. "As you just heard, there were students fighting last night. I know you're not used to life in the dorms, but let's all be a little more respectful moving forward. That's it. Back to the classrooms starting with the third-years."

Guess Mr. Hound Dog's canine behaviors become more apparent when he's angry, Ayuma figured, not too surprised. I still remember before I first came to class that he was chewing on his pen during our interview, and he somehow didn't notice. At least I pointed it out before it could explode in his mouth. I'm starting to think it's more than 'a bad habit.' How did Vlad King manage to get that out of all that barking anyway?

"Midoriya and Bakugo were doing well, but now they're being treated as problem children," fretted Momo.

"Bakugo probably couldn't care less about that, Momo," Ayuma pointed out, finally done with Ibara's vines. "Midoriya... well, I guess it would be a kindness to block him out in that regard."

"Uh... excuse me..." a small voice asked as a hand tapped Ayuma's shoulder. She turned to see a dark indigo-haired, elfish fellow hiding his eyes behind his hair. His shoulders were hunched over in a non-confrontational manner that left him at eye-level with her, noticeably shaking with his hands in his pockets. "W-would you m-mind telling me... where m-Mr. Hound d-d-Dog's office is?"

Ayuma took a moment to recall. "It should only be a few doors to the right of the cafeteria,"
she replied softly, as to not startle him, "on the other side of the hallway."

The young man gave a curt bow of thanks and speed walked away. He took shelter in the shadow of a blond-haired boy who stood much bigger and taller than his lanky apparent friend. Ayuma simply shrugged off the situation, wondering what that was all about.

"Okay," Aizawa began, "starting today, we'll resume our regular classes and training schedule. I know a lot has happened recently; however, you need to switch gears and focus on your school duties. We're lecturing today, but this semester, you'll have even harsher training than before." Mina turned to whisper something to Tsu, and the teacher immediately glared at her. "Like to share, Ashido?" The pinkette squeaked in alarm.

"Excuse me sir, may I ask a question?" Tsu raised a hand. "What were those things the principal was talking about during the Opening Ceremony? I've never heard the term 'Hero Work Studies' before."

"I know, right? That had me pretty confused, too," Sero agreed.

"I also have concerns," Tokoyami added.

That's a good point. What are they, I wonder?

"He said that's something the upperclassmen participate in, correct?" Momo inquired.

Aizawa groaned in exasperation, "I was planning to talk more about those at a later date, but... I guess telling you now is more logical. To put it simply, it's work outside of class; like the internships you did at Pro hero agencies before, only closer to the real thing."

Okay, that makes sense. It doesn't sound so hard.

"WAIT THEN WHY DID WE WORK SO HARD AT THE SPORTS FEST!" Ochaco suddenly shouted, slapping her desk. Poor Sato had to try and calm her down as she panicked about it not making sense. Ayuma could see why she'd be freaking out, since Ochaco worked especially hard against Bakugo in the Festival.

"She has a point," Tenya pointed out. "If we have Work Studies, those who weren't scouted at the Sports Festival still have career paths."

"You'll be using your connections from the Festival to secure a Work Study," Aizawa explained, "it's basic networking. This isn't part of your normal classwork, it's discretionary for each student. That means those who weren't scouted at the Sports Festival will have a hard time lining one up. I'm afraid. Originally, individual agencies recruited on their own, but there was lots of competition as people tried to recruit U.A. students. So this is how things ended up. Good enough, Ochaco?"

She nodded slowly and sank back into her seat. "I'm sorry I jumped to conclusions, sir."

"Now that you have your Provisional Licenses, you can assist in real ways for longer periods of time. Until now, there haven't been many first-years who've received their licenses. With the increased activity of villains, we're currently exploring the idea that you can participate in Work Studies as well. We'll explain more about the Work Study positions and what that program entails at a later date. But for now, we've got other things to worry about." He turned to the door. "That's all. Sorry to keep you waiting, Mic."
The door slid open for Present Mic to let himself in. "FIRST PERIOD IS ENGLISH! IN OTHER WORDS, IT'S STEM TIME! BEEN AN AGE SINCE I STOOD ON THIS STAGE! YA MISS ME?! WE'VE GOT A LOT TO COVER TODAY! LET'S GET ROLLIN' WITH IT, YA DIG?"

Ayuma's skull vibrated at the sheer volume of his voice as Aizawa simply walked out. *Oh boy, won't this be fun...*

As soon as the 2-on-1 sparring match began, Aizawa immediately activated his Quirk to keep the Dreamscape from appearing. Loops of his scarf were sent out, and the teacher's two opponents dashed away in a split. Aizawa's scarf chased after Ayuma until Shinso's scarf grabbed his, letting her vanish into the rocks. The world soon easily turned black and Aizawa yanked Shinso to the ground. But just when he was about to claim the win, he vanished from sight, as if devoured by the darkness of the Dreamscape.

Shinso was confused at seeing the teacher looking around blindly in the midst of the dark, translucent cloud. (At least, it was translucent on his end.) Before he could ask about it, he was silenced by a careful hand on his shoulder. "One of his nightmares," Ayuma's voice whispered, leading him away from the teacher quietly. "Being unable to see his enemies coming. Actually, losing his sight entirely." She pointed at the cloud. "He probably won't see either of us coming while he's in that cloud."

"Got it," Shinso replied just as quietly, tuning his AVC mask to mimic her voice. "You bait him until he responds, and then I'll get him. I can also help if he sends his scarf out."

Ayuma nodded and rushed back with practiced, sliding steps along the floor. Evidently, she knew how to move with low traction. "I'm pretty sure you know what this is, Mr. Aizawa," she began, dodging a strip of his scarf that Shinso's weapon snapped off. "I mean, I had a feeling that a Quirk like yours would lead to a fear of being blind."

He didn't say anything in reply to her, still fighting blindly with Shinso through their scarves that are doing nothing to the cloud around him. *So that means I'll have to try harder.*

"What? If there's something you want to say, spit it out. In all honesty, this really isn't the most visibly scary thing my Quirk can do in the face of bystanders. It's really only a parlor trick compared to all those things my Quirk could do on its own." That was a couple of more scarf attacks dodged, and a near miss on her arm. "Really, though, I'd never expect you and Mr. Present Mic to be such good friends."

"It's true," Ayuma asserted. "You two are just so different. You're quiet, a little gloomy, borderline antisocial, and a little overly severe in more than a few ways. I've seen more than a few tabloids that don't think too highly of your appearance and how creepy you come off as. And not to mention you might've robbed your entire class of believing any adults have a sense of humor."

"Present Mic, on the other hand, is incredibly loud, eccentric to an obnoxious degree, and according to everyone else I know, it never works to excite his audience if he has one. He's so much more like a radio host than a Pro hero that, as I distinctly remember during the Final Exams, Kyoka only saw him as an announcer and nothing more. And did I mention the absolute *migraine* he gave all of us when you walked out and left us all with him this morning?"
Shinso seemed to notice the livid look on Aizawa's face and took that as his chance. "You never do that, as far as I've had you for a teacher," he said in Ayuma's voice. "So, care to explain yourself?"

Aizawa's rage had him sending his scarf out in a tempest of bandages. "That's classifie--!" He stopped short, scarf falling to the floor around him.

Shinso took the mask off and left it around his face. "Close your eyes." Aizawa's red eyes snapped shut, hair falling. She grinned at her training partner before they both proceeded to tie him up with a mix of Shinso and Aizawa's scarves and Ayuma's ribbons and scissors anchored in the outer edge of the cloud. Only when they were sure there was no getting out did the violet-haired boy release the teacher.

Aizawa's eyes flew open and he momentarily struggled against his bonds. But he realized he was held down and promptly captured. He stopped struggling and sighed. "You got me. That was pretty impressive teamwork between you two. Both of your Quirks give a sort of advantage in a battle of minds. But now, you need to release me, because we still need to work on close combat."

Shinso let the teacher out of his scarf as Ayuma deactivated her Quirk. They were more than ready to start training.

"So how was classes without Midoriya and the living grenade?" Shinso asked his training partner after their training session. They walked side by side to the dorms, his arm casually around her shoulders.

Ayuma winced at the memory. "Let's just say Present Mic was a worse replacement... I wasn't kidding that he gave all of us a headache, in more ways than one..."

Shinso's eyes softened in empathy as they approached the 1-A dorm. "That bad, huh..." Shinso was incredibly grateful she wasn't looking at him, meaning she couldn't see the blush on his face. "Well, I'll see you tomorrow, Ayuma." Then, quickly enough that she wouldn't be able to react, he kissed her cheek and rushed to the 1-C dorm.

Ayuma's face burst into flames as she froze, eyes wide with shock. She looked to where Shinso had taken off, but he was already going inside his class dorm.

"HAHA! Toru totally owes me 1000 yen!*" Mina grinned, phone in hand as she grabbed Ayuma's shoulder and led her inside. "And you, my dear friend, owe us the full deets on that adorable side-show. Why didn't you tell us that purple mind-control guy could be such a lovable dork?" Ayuma groaned in exasperation, blush growing over her face. "Hey, I told you we'd get back to talking about him after the Licensing Exam!"

Ayuma groaned, hiding her red face in her hands. She could already see the coming interrogation, as she was brought inside. They completely brushed off Bakugo shaking with rage as he sent Midoriya off to take out the trash.

"Hey Toru! I won the bet and I have proof!"

"What?! No fair! Show it to us!"

Meanwhile, off at the 1-C dorm, Shinso was having a similar reaction from his classmates. "Ay! Nice job, Shinso!"
He looked at the other boy leaning against the wall. "What are you talking about, Yamato?"

"Oh, you know exactly what!" Another of the guys jumped in and slung an arm over his shoulder. "I mean, kissing that redhead Hero Course new chick? The merciless ward of the school?! You've gotta tell us how you tamed that beast after the Sports Festival!"

Shinso sighed. He already saw the hours-long grilling session that was to come.

Chapter End Notes

* About ten dollars

Double oof! Mina the shipping queen strikes again, and this time, she's made allies. Sorry, you two; probably shouldn't have pulled that right in front of the dorms. (But you can't deny that was cute! ♥‿♥) At least we have one more thing to look forward to. God knows what their classes are going to do with them to further it along.
And now, for a random lesson in psychology, courtesy of Matrix: your mind makes it real. The most lethal part of Ayuma's Quirk, and it tends to throw all kinds of physics out the window. The most prominent example of this is her ability to sprout wings and fly. But there is something else...

When Midoriya was able to return to class, he was more than ready to catch up on what he'd missed out on. He loudly apologized for the trouble he caused and for disappointing Tenya as the Class Rep. Tenya was a bit taken aback, but Kirishima was rooting for him. At least, until their teacher sneaked up on him and ordered everyone to their seats.

"Morning," Aizawa greeted. "Now that Midoriya's back, we'll go into more detail about what the Work Studies entail." He turned to the door. "Go ahead and come in. I'll have people who've experienced them firsthand explain. I suggest you listen carefully as they point out how Work Studies differ from internships." The door slid open for three bigger, older students to come in. It was the blond-haired guy and small elfish boy from the ceremony, along with a girl with long, blue hair and eyes. "These three are third-years at U.A. They rank at the very top of our student body. You may know them, as the Big Three."

All of Ayuma's classmates remarked about how these three particular students were famous among the students. The best in all of U.A.; bearing the strength of Pro heroes despite still being in school. Midoriya seemed to recognize one of them from somewhere; the big blond boy, she noted after following his gaze.

"How did these guys get a joint title like the Big Three? Are they really that powerful? Are they the kinds of high-strung boasters I don't like? Could we even make friends with them?"

"Get to it; introduce yourselves briefly," Aizawa ordered. "Let's start with Amajiki."

The elfish boy fixed the whole class with an intense gaze. His expression scanned over every student individually. Ayuma could even tell when his eyes specifically locked on her; a staring contest she welcomed to maintain. He started to shake again, too. He can't be cold in here, can he? Is he just... nervous?

"It's no good," he said, rattling. "You two go; I just can't. Even if I try to imagine them as potatoes... I can see their human bodies... I know that they're still people... No words are coming out; my mind's blank, and my mouth's dry. I can't say anything... I wanna..." He spun around to face the wall in dejection. "...Go home..." Ayuma rose a brow, unimpressed at the display.

"Okay, so um... are you really one of U.A.'s top heroes?" Ojiro asked in understandable confusion.

The girl giggled. "Come on, Amajiki! You need to have the heart of a lion, not a kitten! You know, even though you're human, get what I mean?" She turned to the class. "This is our kitten, Tamaki Amajiki. And hi, my name is Nejire Hado! I'm supposed to talk about Work Studies; you first-years have a really exciting time ahead of you." Her eyes fixed on Shoji. "Hey wait, hold on.
Why are you wearing a mask? Is it 'cause you're feeling sick? Or just trying to look cool?"

"Uh, well..." Shoji was about to respond, but she moved on to something else.

"Whoa, you must be Todoroki, am I right? Yeah! How'd you get that big burn on your face?"

Todoroki tensed. "That's none of your --"

"And Ashido, if your horns break off, you think you'll grow new ones? Oh, and can you wiggle them? Mineta, are those balls your hair or what, I don't get it! Try and get a haircut. Oh oh! Asui, you're a tree frog, not a gross toad, right? And you over there, isn't your name Akuma or something? Oh my goodness, there's so much I want to know about every one of you! Let's have a Q&A!"

Ayuma already had a list of problems. 1: A lot of that Hado girl's questions were way too personal for comfort to the class. 2: A couple of her comments could count as rather insensitive toward her friends. 3: She's an older girl that expressed an open curiosity about Mineta; big nope for any girl who knows what's good for her. 4: Ayuma wanted to tell her that this girl got her name wrong, but she was talking too fast to keep up! 5: For someone so high in the school hierarchy, she's easily sidetracked; to the point of attention-deficit. 6: Aizawa is clearly getting irritated, which is a mistake in and of itself.

"Hey Ojiro, can you support your entire body weight with that tail of yours? Come on, tell me, I really want to know!"

Aizawa gave a bright red glare to the blond. "This is completely irrational."

"Oh, there's no need for you to worry, Eraser Head!" he tried to put the teacher at ease. "I'm up next and I'll get the audience refocused." He turned right for the students, cupping his ear in anticipation. "THE FUTURE'S GONNA BE...?"

No one answered. "Gonna be what?" Kaminari asked.

"AWFUL! That's your part, guys! Aw crap! My call-and-response was a total fail!" As he laughed at his own joke, Ayuma could hear her desk neighbors commenting on how weird these guys were.

"Let's see, one's got a painful case of stage-fright, and another basically called me a demon, Ayuma mused. And this guy failed horribly with his little gag. What next?"

"Okay, you guys look like you have no idea what's going on," the blond observed. "I guess we are third-years who just showed up in your classroom to explain a program that's completely voluntary. I can see how you'd be confused by that. Hmm... You guys got your Provisional Licenses as first-years, right? This batch of new students has proven to be pretty darn energetic! So the problem is... you must not have a sense of humor, that's why my joke didn't land."

"Um... no, I'm pretty sure that's because our teacher's lack of humor rubbed off on us."

"Don't do it," Amajiki warned.

The blond pumped a fist in the air. "Heads up! The rad new plan is all you first-years fight me at once!" All of 1-A clearly voiced their surprise at the sudden challenge. "Well, if you want them to experience our experience, this is a pretty rational way of doing it then," the young man grinned. "Right, Eraser Head? Rational!"
Aizawa was quiet for a bit, and then sighed, "Do whatever you want."

The whole class and their guests were made to change into their PE uniforms and meet in the TDL. The first-years were all still incredibly confused and even nervous. Only in a chastise from Amajiki did they even learn the blond guy's name.

"Mirio, you're impossible. It would've been simple enough for us to just tell them. This is what it's like, here's what we learn from it. Not everyone has your level of drive. Plus, think about how bad it'll look if some of them can't recover after fighting you. No one wants to spend the next few years in a hospital bed."

"Hey, listen up, it's storytime," Hado said, playing with Mina's horns. "Long ago, a student got frustrated in class and decided to quit being a hero and it was terrible for everyone. Did you know that? So Togata, I know our job is tough, but you better make sure you know what you're doing. Be careful, okay?"

"Let's think about this," Tokoyami came forward. "You're obviously much further ahead than us, but we've fought Pros before."

"Not to mention we took down some legitimate villains," Kirishima pointed out. "I don't think you need to worry about hurting us. We're not a bunch of wannabes."

Ayuma elbowed the faux redhead and muttered, "Don't encourage him, Kirishima."

Togata nodded. "Heard, but you're gonna have to show me that's the truth. Now who's gonna start this party?" Kirishima was about to, but Midoriya volunteered first.

"View this as a learning experience," Aizawa called. "It's a good opportunity for you."

Ayuma secretly backed away, not wanting to be noticed by the hefty third-year. Her feet were only covered in socks, muffling her footsteps. I can move faster without shoes. I've lived without them. But I can't let this guy take me out, however he does it. Is this what I think it is? Aoyama, Sero, and Mina attacked with similar results, but he was gone the second the smoke cleared.

"I think I'll start by taking out the long-distance fighters!" Togata grinned, popping up behind a panicking Kyoka. All of the others started rushing at him. Ayuma quickly made sure to get out of his sight, heading to where Todoroki was standing on the sidelines with Mr. Aizawa. She watched as he punched all of her classmates in the stomach, one by one all in quick succession. The sight of it hurt her as she hid herself, behind her teacher and friend on the sidelines.

Don't let him get close. Don't become part of the fold. Don't let him see you. Don't draw attention. Don't get hurt.

Togata gave a dramatic pose as his victims were left sprawling on the ground. "POWERRRR!"

"Mirio Togata," Aizawa mused. "In my opinion, he's the person who's closest to taking the
Todoroki was awestruck. "He got more than half of them in an instant. A student, but closer to being Number 1 than most heroes."

"You're not gonna fight?" Aizawa inquired, noticing the hiding girl. "You two must be interested in taking the top spot yourselves."

"I didn't even get my Provisional License, though," Todoroki defended.

"And did you not see how he demolished the others?" Ayuma hissed. "Not yet. We're the only long-range attackers still up. While I do want to fight, I don't know how I can without getting hurt myself."

"Think that's it for the long-distance fighters," Togata presumed before turning to those who remained. "All that's left are those who specialize in close-quarters combat." The others thought his Quirk had something to do with warping as well as phase-shifting; Ojiro even called him unrivaled.

"Whatever happens, I'm sure you'll know when to step in," Todoroki said softly. "You and Midoriya are our dark horses, Ayuma. No one knows how strong you are until they see it in person. If anyone can take out the enemy when least expected, it's the two of you."

Ayuma looked up at him, seeing the sincerity in his eyes, and nodded. She watched as the third-year charged at her remaining classmates, phasing through the floor right out of his own trousers. So this Togata really does have an intangibility Quirk. He can make himself literally untouchable, anywhere on his body. Even phase through the floor if he has to! That's how he lost his clothes and could sneak up on everybody. He can phase through the floor and jump out of the ground at a different angle. Like Toru, not only does his Quirk not affect his clothes, but he relies on the element of surprise.

He appeared from the ground right behind Midoriya, who apparently also saw it coming. In response, Togata made a move to poke his eye before spinning into a gut-punch. He called it his Ultimate Move: Blinder Touch Eyeball Crush. After Midoriya was down, then came Tenya, then Kirishima, then he rushed through the others to get Koda. Then went Sato, Ojiro, and Ochaco and Toru. Ayuma rushed into the rocks as Togata shouted "POWERR!" once again. "...Hey, where'd that last one go?"

And then, the world turned dark.

"Looks like our last fighter has finally made her move," Aizawa commented. "As Todoroki called her, our dark horse."

Ayuma instantly pulled out Togata's nightmare: a cloud of oblivion that surrounded her. A fear of the unknown, I see. Specifically, not being able to know where his enemy is; somewhat like Mr. Aizawa's. They couldn't see her as she rushed from one end of the battlefield to the other. I'm sorry I couldn't come in sooner, guys, but I promise I'll make up for it! She quickly tapped into her own nightmares and summoned a gigantic killer whale, swimming through the Dreamscape as easily as if it were the ocean. She directed it toward Togata's golden orange image. He spun towards it and probably tried to make himself intangible. Unfortunately...

The whale charged him into the rocks for his monumental mistake.

Under the cover of the black cloud around her, Ayuma worked up the courage to stalk closer. She had enough of this guy thinking he could break her class so easily. If he really was that
"How... How did that..." he strained as he escaped the rocks. The whale barreled towards him again, only this time he was smart enough to duck.

"You're not unrivaled," Ayuma growled, the orca's shrill cries echoing the raging undertow of her voice. "I will make sure of that." Togata turned to her voice and dove into the ground. Ayuma could see his image in the ground, following it with her eyes as she prepared her wings in place of the whale and cloud. He launched from the ground right in front of her as she flew upwards, grabbing her arm as the cloud dispersed. She flew higher, fighting to pry his hand off her forearm as he yanked at her, trying to force her down. He grabbed the sleeve of her jacket with his other hand and accidentally tore it off, revealing the red splash of scarring it concealed.

Tears streaked from Ayuma's black eyes as Togata continued to try pulling her down, searing pain pouring over her shoulder. He was probably intangible everywhere else, so she couldn't target him anywhere besides his hand to make him let go. When the pain really started to increase, she finally used her fingernails, sinking them into the back of his hand and clawing at it as hard as she could. It even drew blood under her nails.

"You're not unrivaled," she repeated, her tears as black as her eyes on her shadowed face. "You're not!"

The blood-drawing claws forced him to let go, sending him falling into the ground. She prepared her scissor blades to launch a wave attack as he launched all the way back up. But as she sent them on him, reopening more than a few of his scars, his hands closed over her shoulders. She was falling backwards at the extra weight and pain on her shoulder. Her feet shot upward to flip him off, but that only succeeded in putting him on her back as she continued to fall, landing on her stomach on the ground, sending pain spiraling through her torso. Togata was standing over her, knee on her back and her good arm twisted behind her, the unblemished shoulder already starting to mirror the pain on the other.

"That was pretty impressive, bypassing my Quirk with yours," she heard the boy compliment. "But not quite enough to beat me."

"I tried to make it so you wouldn't see my willy; sorry if you got a peek," Togata apologized after the battle. "But anyway, that's a taste of what it's like to fight me."

"We all just got punched in the stomach without ever knowing what was going on..." Midoriya groaned at the forefront of the shuddering class. Ayuma was beside Todoroki, silently suffering the pain in her torso and arms.

"Right, so what do you think? Isn't my Quirk strong?" All the others complained that it was too strong, but Ayuma knew better. Please. He's the one who's too strong; that intangibility Quirk just rubs salt in the wound. Hado said his Quirk's called Permeation, which Togata explained allows him to pass through anything around him, even air, light, and sound. Whenever he deactivates his Quirk underground, he gets repelled upward; he can adjust his angle to launch at different trajectories. Mina compared it to a glitchy video game. It took a lot of concentration to even do simple things like walk through a wall.

He had to think about every movement, and experience as much as he could to gain better control. He learned to predict each movement and make combat decisions. In the Hero Work Studies, the students are treated as sidekicks or even Pros, rather than guests. It's dangerous, scary,
and Pros can end up watching people die, but Togata gained experiences that allowed him to take the top spot. That's why he decided to show rather than tell by fighting. Everything someone goes through is an important experience that classrooms -- even those at U.A. -- can't provide. All the others applauded at his pep talk.

"Let's get back to class now," Aizawa ordered. "Say thank you." Everyone did so. "Ayuma, Togata, go to Recovery Girl for your injuries."

"Yes sir," the redhead coughed weakly as she left the TDL, followed by the hulking blond.

"Don't be so down," Togata said warmly as he patted her back. "You and that problem child were amazing! He got past my element-of-surprise strategy and predicted my moves, and you gave an element of surprise of your own when you made yours! I never thought anyone in Class 1-A had a Quirk that could counter mine so easily! I bet Sir would love to meet you both!"

She said nothing in reply as they went to the nurse's office. But behind her eyes, a small spark of warmth hid in the midst of her pain. *Mirio Togata... you're quite the interesting fellow, aren't you...*

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Suru was in a new town at nightfall, searching like usual. This new city of Kyushu was famous for housing the Number 2 Hero Hawks. A far kinder soul than Endeavor, and even around her and Dabi's age. And according to neighborhood gossip, there was something very interesting in the city park.

So, she searched the city for the park. That green clearing in the cold jungle of concrete and steel she's seen all too often. It was truly a thing of beauty when she found it, lit by lanterns all over. Now to find what she was looking for within it. The crystal blue lake was gorgeous, as were all the trees and grass around the dirt biking path. The birds were lovely, too, some sleeping in nests while owls and nighthawks soared around. Crickets chirped within the bushes as well.

And when she found it, she gasped in shock.

It was a marble pedestal, a few feet tall, with two life-sized bronze statues standing on it. A man and a woman, side by side. The tall, thin man sported a long fringe pinned up by a pair of goggles on his forehead. He wore finger-less gloves and a belt with two small pouches on it. He also had on knee guards and strong boots, with a long cloak over his body. Strange thin tentacles curled from his fingertips on one hand, while the other was compassionately held out, matched by a gentle, shy smile.

The woman beside him had hair just past her shoulders, a forelock swept to the side and a mask over her eyes. She wore a T-shirt and cropped hoodie, and disconnected sleeves. There was also a miniskirt covered by a longer waist cape, and ankle boots planted firmly on the platform. Despite being a little shorter, the woman seemed far more empowered than the man, one hand on her hip with the other also held out, and a far more confident smirk on her face. They were in a gentle light from the lanterns around them, glinting off the bronze.

Suru couldn't believe what she was seeing. He... she... both of them looked just like Ayuma! Or... was it that she looked just like them. She looked down at the plaque on the pedestal, reading the names of the two people.

**Homara Akune Kuroga; Mirage Hero: Fever Dream; Quirk: Heat Mirage**

**Ichiro Kuroga; String Hero: Phantom Thread; Quirk: Puppet Strings**
Both 32 at Death; Gone, but Never Forgotten

Suru looked up at both of their faces again. She concentrated on the face of Fever Dream for a minute, then Phantom Thread. Slowly, her mind melded the two of them together. The image was almost familiar, so she thought of the hair being longer. It uncannily resembled the image of one of her beloved "younger siblings" on TV. But... can it really be true?

"You know these two?" a voice asked. Suru turned to see the Winged Hero himself, lazily sitting in a tree. "They were apparently U.A. alumni; Endeavor's own classmates. They also died in the line of duty when I was just a kid, around fourteen years ago."

Fourteen years ago? That could mean... "I was just wondering... they look so much like someone I know... Could they have had a child before they died?"

"No one knows," Hawks shrugged. "I wouldn't be surprised if they did though. I had an intern come here from U.A. a while back. Nice girl; a fellow dark horse if I ever saw one. She even saved my life. Endeavor doesn't like her much, though..." He looked at the statues' faces for a while, his gaze wistful. "After noticing how similar she is to these two, I've dropped by here more often than usual."

A U.A. intern? Does that mean she was here at one point? "Who was this intern, if you don't mind me asking?" He gave her a suspicious look. "Was her name... Ayuma, by any chance?"

Hawks' eyes widened. "Yeah... You know her?"

Suru chuckled sadly and nodded. "She was like a younger sibling to me... One of many..."

"Well I'll be..." Hawks' gaze turned back to the two heroes on the marble block. "If these two really are her parents... I wonder why they didn't say anything about her..."

Suru nodded slowly in agreement, staring at the two statues in awe as tears dropped from her eyes. "Yeah... Fever Dream... Phantom Thread... If Ayuma really is your daughter... why didn't you say something?..."
The wait is over, ladies and gentlemen! Season 4 is here, and with it, a lot more to see! Boy, was it worth the wait! Now allow me to stop wasting time, and help you jump on in!

"Our world... the world I grew up in... is a lonely one. Only the lucky, happy few can escape it unscathed. But the rest of us feel pain that we can't escape. For most, the Quirks given to us by human evolution are forcibly sealed away. But as they say, give an inch and they'll take a mile; the slightest crack in control, and the Quirks will make nukes out of themselves, causing their hosts to be sent back as soon as possible.

"Most people in the world hate us. We're as low as any Quirkless. In response, we grow up to dislike adults who can't be bothered to do us justice, and that includes the laws that they created to make us this way. They make orphans into living mines, a hair's width from exploding at the lightest graze. And yet, they do nothing to help us, but watch us become slaves controlled by our powers. At least, such was the case for me.

"My name is Ayuma, and I was enrolled into U.A. High School to prove the world wrong about kids like me. And I've found out that more of us -- more kids in the family I grew up and escaped alongside -- are doing the same. Along our classmates and new families, we're working to a goal of becoming heroes. To save people, take down villains, and to introduce the world to the lost truths that were hidden from them.

"Yes, our shared early home may have been cut down, but the kids who grew up in its walls are rising higher than they could ever reach. We're rising with all of those the world thought they had cut down forever. We are orphans, and we are outcasts... but we are awakening our dreams!"

Ayuma woke up to a message for everyone to come down to the first floor of the dorm. When she and everyone else was gathered in the common area, Mr. Aizawa explained what was going on. There was apparently going to be some journalist coming to the school -- particularly Class 1-A -- to do a feature on the class for a newspaper or something. More than a few were getting pretty stoked about it, only for the teacher to shut them up again.

"It's nothing too exciting. The article's about how you're settling in, adjusting to dorm life, that kind of stuff," Aizawa elaborated. "Principal Nezu thought it would be a good idea. This'll show your parents and guardians that you're happy here; maybe set a few minds at ease..." Ayuma couldn't hear part of it over Mineta starting to dig his own grave in front of the teacher. In perfect unison with a rage-filled Erasure glare, he was tied up in Aizawa's scarf, wiggling like a fish on a hook. "...I expect you all to be on your best behavior today."

"Don't worry on my account, Mr. Aizawa," a man's voice reassured as an easygoing-looking guy strolled in, the lens of his camera and glasses glinting in the morning light. "I want to get a feel for what dorm life is really like, so there's no need for them to act any differently than normal."
"I didn't say you could come in yet..." grumbled the teacher.

"I was told I have from 8 am to 6 pm," the man smiled, pointing to his wristwatch. "So unless my watch is wrong..." Aizawa sighed and released Mineta as the reporter stepped to stand next to him. Despite her unease, Ayuma noticed he seemed to at least be a decent guy. The mismatched black-and-white pupils of his hooded blue-gray eyes paired with his laid-back smile and slouched posture -- more relaxed than the tense pose Aizawa was regularly in -- made him come off as an easygoing, friendly kind of person. "Hello everyone, my name is Taneo Tokuda. I'm looking forward to learning more about you all."

"Nice to meet you," the class greeted him.

"Now, as I said, you don't need to do anything special. Just go about your day exactly as you normally would. The camera will do most of the work. I might ask an occasional question or two, and I hope you'll answer." Ayuma heard Mina comment on his smile. Mineta was disappointed the reporter wasn't a woman, and Aoyama was "worried" he'd draw the camera in too much towards him. (Which Ayuma sincerely doubted; this guy might have an ulterior motive.)

Mr. Tokuda turned his attention to Aizawa. "Principal Nezu has probably already spoken to you about this, but I want to make sure you don't interfere in any way. No offense."

"I understand," the teacher complied with a sigh. "If you need anything, just let me know."

"I'm sure I'm in very capable hands. This is Class 1-A after all. Every student here is a promising hero candidate."

Aizawa and Ayuma silently noted the strange look in the reporter's eyes before the teacher returned his attention to the students. "Iida, if there's a problem, let me know immediately, got it?"

"Of course, sir!" Tenya agreed. "As Class Representative, I will carry out my duty to ensure the safety of all my fellow students, no matter what--"

"That's great, thanks," Tokuda cut him off. "So what would you normally be doing this time of day?"

"Having breakfast!"

"No need to be so formal. Just pretend that I'm not here and go about your business like usual."

Ayuma's eyes narrowed at the man. There's something weird about this reporter. He's probably hiding something, but I'm not sure what. I don't feel anything around him beyond general unease because he's a strange adult on campus. I hope that means he genuinely means no harm. Hopefully I don't really need to worry.

So Ayuma did her best along with the others to simply ignore the reporter as she and the others had breakfast as usual. Nothing too eventful happened aside from being photographed while eating and even cooking. She was at the table with Tokoyami, Shoji, and Todoroki, and were unfortunate enough to get a full view of Aoyama getting in theirs and the photographer's faces. And it didn't get much better when the reporter got too close to Bakugo and Kirishima had to come to his rescue.

"Why am I not surprised that happened?" Ayuma cringed, waiting for the elevator with Todoroki.
"Because Bakugo's always like that, according to Midoriya," Todoroki replied.

Aside from that little mishap, the morning routine went pretty much undisturbed, and Tokuda was sure not to go beyond the first floor. He took a few shots of them walking to school and working in class. He even took notes on the students in a notebook. He recorded everyone's seat number, name, and Quirk description. During lunch, he also caught Dark Shadow getting Tokoyami's food from the other side of the cafeteria, and might've even got a shot of Ayuma talking to Shinso in the lunch line. During hero training, he also barely missed one of Bakugo's AP Shots.

"Aw, looks like my camera can't quite capture your Quirk," Tokuda remarked, his camera fixed on Ayuma and the big spider behind her. "I probably should've expected it, though."

"Sorry, my Quirk is more meant for human eyes than for technology to see," Ayuma apologized. "It lets me manifest nightmares of all kinds to fight with."

"No problem, I'll find a workaround," the man waved off. The girl simply shrugged and returned to training.

When it was time for everyone else to head back to the dorms, Ayuma saw it was pretty rainy outside. And she forgot to bring her poncho. Thankfully, to remedy the situation, Momo used her Quirk to create an umbrella for Ayuma to use. "The forecast says it's going to be stormy for a while yet, Ayuma. Train well and come back safely."

"You're a lifesaver, Momo," Ayuma thanked her classmate before she headed to the TDL. A white cat that sneaked onto campus (possibly courtesy of Aizawa or Shinso) followed her to the building under her new umbrella.

After training was completed, Ayuma and Shinso shared her umbrella on the way back. "So Shinso, you remember the afternoon when second semester first started?"

Shinso already grew uneasy. "Um... yes... why?"

"Well, I was wondering about something..." Ayuma felt her cheeks heating up at the thought. "Shinso, do you, uh... l-l-like..."

"Oh, uh, we're here at the dorms. Time for me to head inside, so I'll... see you tomorrow," Shinso said before vanishing into the 1-C dorm. As for the distance, no, they weren't be in front of the dorms; there were 100 meters or so yet to walk, and Shinso simply let himself go through the rain.

What the... Did he just dodge the question?

Laughter came from the 1-B dorm, and Ayuma's shoulder's rose as she turned to see Monoma cackling under the awning. "How clueless! Of course a 1-A student wouldn't know what's going on through that guy's head! Especially the socially inadequate ward of the school that Eraserhead has so foolishly taken on as his second--!"

"Shut up, Monoma!" Ayuma and a certain other voice scolded as a ribbon wrapped around his mouth and a hand chopped the back of his neck. Ayuma dispelled her Quirk as soon as Kendo poked her head out and grabbed the blond's collar.

"Sorry, Ayuma!" the 1-B Class Rep apologized. "He was too fast for me to grab before he could try anything."
Ayuma sighed, her shoulders falling as she went to her class dorm. "Don't worry, Kendo. It's nothing I'd hold against you or your entire class. Monoma's only bringing it on himself. Oh, and can you remind Tetsutetsu not to run me over during lunch? I barely dodged becoming roadkill again this time."

"That's fair," the ginger agreed as she pulled Monoma inside. "I'll see what I can do about Tetsutetsu's lack of restraint."

Ayuma met with All Might -- sorry, Mr. Yagi on the way back, and he was holding a bag as he greeted Midoriya training on the porch. She noticed Tokuda watching the three of them from outside, and a smell coming from the bag Yagi was carrying.

Ayuma vaguely heard the blond teacher say he stopped at a convenience store for a snack after a hospital check-up only for the store owner to give him the entire supply. The extra buns were for the rest of the class, and the rain seemed to be finally clearing up as Yagi went back to the school.

"Getting late," Tokuda remarked as he stepped outside. "Squeezing in one last workout, you two?"

"Oh, um, yes," Midoriya affirmed.

"Just got back from one, actually," Ayuma replied.

"Hmm?... Ooh, something smells good."

"They're meat buns," Midoriya explained. "Either of you want one?"

"Yes, please," the reporter replied with a smile.

Ayuma politely said she'll wait on it and minded her own, vaguely listening to the conversation between Midoriya and the reporter, who in turn talked as if she weren't around. She heard Tokuda say his father was rescued during All Might's debut battle. He unknowingly took a picture that was put in the newspaper, of All Might holding two construction workers, with one reaching for the photographer that was his son.

Ayuma wished she could understand the kind of spark that people like the reporter and her classmates carried. Maybe she already could, but that spark was for someone entirely different. Not an indestructible idol of a hero that the world saw, but the kind heart of a parent put into the body of a teenage girl. She felt All Might's retirement as a hero before he announced it, but she still only saw him as a teacher.

Everyone's wondering what will happen to this hero society. But even as it cracks, kids like me are starting to slip through them and resurface. Quirks like Nightmare are being seen.

Tokuda soon handed Midoriya a photograph that totally freaked out her classmate. She looked up to see it was Midoriya and Mr. Yagi talking to each other, like a father and son. She was about to head inside before Tokuda stopped her. "Hang on a sec. I wanted to give you this, too." He took a picture from his pocket and handed it to her. "Told you I'd find a workaround."

When Ayuma looked at the picture, it turned out he wasn't kidding. It was a picture of Ayuma, Shinso, and Aizawa in the TDL, with the setting being abnormally dark. Ayuma was properly introducing Shinso to her orca. Both of them were being nuzzled by the black-and-white killer whale, smiling like they never knew Quirk discrimination. "Wait, how did you take these two pictures. You don't have your camera on you, or a printer nearby. Is it..."
"It turns out my Quirk is a pretty handy one to have when you work in journalism," he replied as a camera lens appeared from his palm. He made even more appear on the rest of his arm, his leg, and even his face. "I can produce them everywhere. You remind me of a certain late hero couple, Ayuma, and one of their Quirks needed the same treatment as yours."

That explained how he caught Ayuma's Quirk on camera. His own Quirk makes his entire body a camera, so he didn't have to worry about the same problem real cameras deal with concerning illusion Quirks like Nightmare. But what hero could he be talking about that's like me? Who would I remind him of.

"Everybody heard All Might's last words after the Kamino Incident," Tokuda stated. "And I think he was saying that to you," he gestured to Midoriya. "My investigation found plenty of similarities between you two. The Quirk you manifested is a power-type like his, and in middle school you tried to rescue Bakugo when he was captured by a villain despite the odds.

"All Might was the one who saved you both that day. And after you enrolled in U.A. High, at the same time, he became a teacher here. I visited the Pussycats' Agency; I met Kota there. That's when my suspicions were truly confirmed: Midoriya, I believe you are All Might's successor. What do you think about that?"

Midoriya was stumbling over his words in front of the reporter and his classmate who was there through the whole thing. "That definitely explains all those times All Might asked to speak with you privately," Ayuma remarked.

"You can't lie, can you," the reporter commented. "That's good. After all, heroes speak the truth." Midoriya was still struggling for a means of response. "You don't have to worry, kid. I'm not writing an exposé even if I did have evidence."

"And your secret's safe with me, too, Midoriya," Ayuma added. "I understand that you didn't want any of us to know. That's a pretty big secret to keep."

"To be honest, I should really be apologizing to you. You see, I was never planning to report on dorm life. I apologize, but I just had to know... that there's still light in this world... I feel better, after our conversation here. And now I can encourage others. I won't be lying when I write that there's still hope in the world, even if All Might has retired." He held out a hand to the two students. "I'm sorry if I caused you any stress, but... thank you."

They both smiled as they shook hands with the reporter. Ayuma and Midoriya met eyes, and nodded with reassurance to each other.

"One more thing..." With a quick yank, both students were pulled to either side of the reporter as he took a picture of the three of them. He gave a short laugh as he went down the path. "I'm gonna cherish this picture. I'll keep it under wraps until later. When I publish my books about both of you. I think I even settled on a good couple of titles: When the New Symbol of Peace Was Young, and The Hero of Heroes' Humble Beginnings. What do you think?"

"I'll try my best," Midoriya replied, "and I'll live up to that name."

"You can count on me to do the same," Ayuma added.

"I'm sure you will, heroes." Tokuda waved as he headed off.

"Hey Deku, Ayuma, are you on your way in for dinner?" Ochaco asked, poking her head out.

"Oh, sorry, we're coming," Midoriya apologized.
"By the way, what was that reporter talking to you about just now?"

"Well... he was asking me..." Midoriya started with uncertainty.

Ochaco's sense of smell threw her attention. "Something smells super good."

"Oh yeah, All Might brought by some snacks for everyone earlier. I almost forgot about them."

"Yeah, they're meat buns," Ayuma elaborated.

"Seriously?!!" Ochaco grinned before leading them in. "Let's get 'em on the table before they get cold! You guys! All Might brought us a yummy surprise!"

"AWESOME!" everyone else cheered.

Ayuma smiled at the minor celebration of the snacks that were brought, and Todoroki helped Midoriya pass around the meat buns. Everyone was eating, chatting, and laughing together like always, even as the reporter left without a real goodbye to the rest of the class.

The red-haired girl laughed, ate, and talked right along with her classmates. Her classmates who've become like family. To her, it was good to have brothers and sisters like her classmates of 1-A, quirks of all kinds and all.

Chapter End Notes

Oho, if she only knew what's to come. I hope I'm not spoiling anything if I'm saying Ayuma might be adding a new baby sister to her new 1-A family. Definitely pertains to the chapter title, if you know what I mean.
Connections

Chapter Notes

And here's where the Hero Work Studies really start coming into play. And yes, this is the same chapter where the preview of the same name comes from. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Slim fingers flew and danced over a keyboard. A pencil was vigorously being picked up and put down while jotting scrawled words on a notebook. Baby blue eyes darted between a computer screen and lined paper. All within the shelter of a dark office.

We only have a handful of months left... Not much time. I've barely found anyone at this point. I've checked the student lists in every school in Japan and only found Ayuma, Zuanshi, and the twins. The Police Force doesn't suspect anything -- they probably don't even remember us -- but it's only a matter of time. We'll all be hunted down the second she's free. The world still doesn't know what happened, and probably won't believe it, either.

Come on, Suru, you're an apprentice to a journalist! It shouldn't be this hard to scope out information! I have to at least be able to find some of the others that could be wandering Japan. Himei, Raiko, Tenkijo, Kinzoku, anybody would suffice. Should I try to find Dabi again and ask him if he's seen any of them? Or should I scope the cities of notable vigilantes to see if any of them show up. They might not be on the census, so I'll have to ask her if she'll allow me to go out in the field solo again. Or maybe I can ask some of the others in the army if they've seen anyone remotely like them... But what if that doesn't work?...

Frustrated tears started to build in her eyes. The pencil felt like it was going to break in her hands. The web of scarring on her forearm stung at how tense she was.

If I can't find them when she's released... she might kill them and I'll never know it. I need to know if they're alright. That they're prepared for what might be coming. We all know what she did inside those walls, but being outside them might mean she'll do even worse things to all of us! And nearly everyone being hidden in shadows where I can't see them is a huge disadvantage for me. It has been since the escape...

"I gave you the order to disappear that night," she whispered tearfully, "whether or not I actually said it... But now, I beg all of you... let me see you again..."

She was interrupted when she saw an update in the logs of a hero agency. A warehouse had been torn through and showed invisible evidence of spilled blood and two bodies: one exploded from the waist up, and the other completely turned to dust. The dusted victim definitely fit the M.O. of the villain Tomura Shigaraki. Which meant the League of Villains must've been there.

And one of the corpses could be one of Dabi's friends.

She shot from the chair and left the office. "Miss Kizuki!"

"The Hero Work Studies are a more serious version of your internships," Mr. Aizawa explained. "They entail helping Pro agencies on the streets and with investigations. Your teachers
and the principal discussed them at the faculty meeting. And we all agree: it's too soon; they should really be canceled."

After a beat of total silence, there was an outcry that Ayuma was surprised didn't topple the school.

"But we already met about them!" Kirishima whined.

"I guess, when you think about why we had to move into the dorms, it kinda makes sense," Kaminari reasoned, petting Ojiro's tail. Bakugo slammed his desk with a triumphant look, which Ayuma chalked up to him not being able to do one to begin with.

"But," Aizawa continued, "some people think we won't be able to raise strong heroes with that sort of protective outlook. And with that in mind, the compromise is to be selective about participating agencies. So choose one with a proven track record. Otherwise, you won't be taking part." Bakugo paled and shrank back into his seat, brooding in jealousy before exploding with an angry shout.

Proven track record? So, someone known to be good at taking on students for Work Studies. Kind of like a family who's well-known in the system for taking good care of fosters... Ayuma locked eyes with Tokoyami, who was looking back at her. With a wordless conversation, they already knew who they'd most likely work under.

After lunch, Ayuma heard Togata get called to the guidance office over the PA system, because Mr. Yagi supposedly wanted to speak with him. Midoriya was strangely missing from the group that period, something Todoroki definitely noticed. He was pretty suspicious about it and quietly commented on Togata being called up and Midoriya's absence possibly being connected. Ayuma would be lying if she said she didn't agree, especially after remembering Togata say someone he called "Sir" would want to meet her and Midoriya.

Training with Aizawa and Shinso went a lot slower than Ayuma would've liked. All she could really think about was seeing who she'd be interning for as her Hero Work Study. She told Shinso who she was planning on working under, and he told her he'd be routing for her no matter who she'll be working with. That said, he still dodged the question and bolted when she tried asking him about the start of the semester. (A kiss on the cheek is kind of hard to forget; and in Shinso's case, apparently hard to explain, too.)

Ayuma and Tokoyami already had an idea for their Work Studies because of their internship with Hawks. She was pretty eager to start working with him again. After returning to the dorm, Ayuma rang up the Wing Hero, who was thankfully on break.

"Oh! The Hero Work Studies came early to your class, huh?" Hawks said over the phone after he heard the whole story.

"Yeah, it sure has," Ayuma agreed. "Mr. Aizawa told us we were going to use our connections from our internships to find a Work Study. Tokoyami and I both thought it best that we work under you again, despite what happened last time…"

"Well, I'm honored to hear you were both thinking of me! But this time, I can only take Tsukuyomi, I'm afraid."

Ayuma's heart dropped. "W-wait… What?"

"Don't take it personally, Ayuma; I had a blast having you beside me. You had a chance to be
my third wing last time. Now will hopefully be your friend’s turn.”

“B-but… what will I do if you don’t take me?! How will I get a Work Study?!” Was this really happening? Was the one hero Ayuma thought she formed some kind of bond with really cutting it off that quickly?

“Easy there, little falcon. I already had a couple of ideas after you first interned with me. I mentioned you to some other Pro heroes who’d be better suited to take you on. A Quirk like yours deserves the attention of someone more experienced; Someone who also had issues with their Quirk in their younger years. And remember, I’m not much older than you guys, so I don’t have as much experience as more veteran Pros. Make sense?”

“I… suppose it does… But who else would take me?”

Who else would take a lowly orphan girl? Especially one with a Quirk that causes and relies on fear and trauma?

“Hero of Heroes be damned, I’m just an orphan girl plucked off the streets because Endeavor picked a fight with me out of nowhere. Nothing but a lowly gamine turned ward of U.A.”

She heard a hum. “Sounds like you sell yourself short. Remember what I told you back on our midnight flight?”

“Yes…” She took a moment to recall. “You said I was… a lot stronger and faster than I think I am… and I should use the past to reach my goals instead of let it keep me from them…”

“Exactly. Now, if I remember your Quirk, it’s all about fear. Any fear you have is a weapon, and you can use other people’s fears, too. There are heroes known for being scary-looking, like Gang Orca, and they use fear in their own way. Speaking of, Orca’s a good example.”

“How? Gang Orca… He’s only proved to U.A. how easily I can become… Well, afraid of a Pro hero.”

“I see… Hey, want to know a secret?” He paused for what felt like dramatic effect. “Scary as he can be, Gang Orca actually has a real soft spot for kids, especially the troubled cases. He tries not to show it, but he can’t fool anyone; especially not his pal, Best Jeanist. I assure you, Gang Orca’s a real dolphin at heart; just give him another chance.” An alarm went off on the other end. “Aw, time to go on patrol again; anyway, I’ll make sure to send Gang Orca a recommendation to take you on. Gotta fly, Ayuma!”

Ayuma was soon met with the beeping tone that meant Hawks had hung up. With a shaking hand, she ended the call as well. She was finding it hard to believe that Gang Orca could… pretend to be the bad guy so easily; enough to inspire genuine fear. And at the same time, he’s also supposedly extremely fond of kids; kids like her in particular. And if that were true, he’d have to have been beating himself up since the Provisional Licensing Exam.

Give him another chance, her mind echoed Hawks’ words. Easy for him to say. Obviously he’s never been traumatized by his fellow Pro heroes. Gang Orca was only pretending, but he still gave me the nightmare that showed my fear of Pros to everyone. Then again… She could recall the vague look of regret in those red, ringed eyes; a silent apology that reached out from deep within their owner. I never actually met him like other heroes have. If I come to really know him like they do… I might not have to be afraid of him anymore…

And she’d like nothing more than that.

At dinner, Ayuma went to get her food only to meet with Tokoyami in the kitchen. "I called Hawks a while before you did," he stated. "He told me he unfortunately won't be taking you on this
time."

Ayuma nodded. "He told me that not long after I got back. He's recommending me to Gang Orca. I probably would be better under someone like Best Jeanist; but of course, he's... you know, still in the hospital."

"I wouldn't be surprised," the shorter boy remarked. "But we all know what happened at the Licensing Exam, along with how it affected you. Do you think you'll be alright under Gang Orca after... what happened?"

Ayuma was silent for a minute. "If what Hawks told me concerning Gang Orca is true, I might be able to manage. Considering his role in the Licensing Exam, he might also be involved in the Special Course Todoroki and Bakugo are in. If he is, I'll at least be around people I know, just in case. If not, then... we'll see. As long as nothing particularly bad happens... I think I'll be okay."

Tokoyami nodded in understanding, giving a slight, but proud smile. "In that case, Dark Shadow and I will bid you good luck."

Ayuma smiled, holding out a hand. "And I'll wish you luck in gaining Hawks' favor this go 'round. Like he said: I was his third wing after the Sports Festival; now's your turn."

Tokoyami nodded, and, along with Dark Shadow, shook hands with Ayuma on it.

"...So Hawks recommended you to Gang Orca for your Work Study," Aizawa summarized during lunch period when Ayuma told her teacher about it. "His reasoning seems logical enough. And according to reports, Gang Orca's track record seems good enough... It's most probable that yes, you will be interning under him for your Work Study."

Ayuma discreetly sighed in relief. "Thank you, Mr. Aizawa."

"Gang Orca, hmm?" Midnight remarked as she slid in to look over the girl's shoulder, her high heel almost falling on Ayuma's foot. "Very interesting choice, but understandable. Sounds like you're in for quite a thrill."

"Nemuri..." Aizawa warned as Ayuma shuddered at the teacher's proximity.

"Oh, whoops!" Midnight soon backed away. "My bad!"

"Anyways, you can head back now, Ayuma," Aizawa said evenly. "Until next class."

"Of course," Ayuma bowed slightly as she hurried back to the cafeteria.

"Do you think she'll do well under Gang Orca, Shota?" Present Mic asked him once she was out of earshot. "I mean, you did say that her most recent addition to her arsenal of terrors is a killer whale. Which, in your exact words, 'most likely came from what Gang Orca did at the Licensing Exam in Daboga.'"

"He's right," Thirteen agreed. "Do you really think she should intern under a Pro hero she has such an obvious fear of?"

"If Ayuma's to become a Pro hero herself, she'll need to face her fears of those who wronged her," Aizawa answered matter-of-factly. "Nemuri and I have it fairly easy as she's been around us for a handful of months at this point, even if she still has her moments. She also might have a minor dislike of Kan after the Final Exams, which should also be an easy hurdle. But Gang Orca
had triggered a traumatic reaction for something even we didn't know of. And given its aftermath only a matter of days after the Licensing Exam, she'll need to face him again in order to overcome her fear."

"That reminds me of something," Yagi pondered. "When I went to young Ayuma's apartment about the new dorm policy, I asked her why she was at Kamino Ward..."

Nemuri turned full attention to the retired hero. "And...? What did she say?"

"It had something to do with her old foster home, but she also had the feeling something was about to happen," Yagi recalled. "She wasn't ready to give the full story, and I doubt she is now. But she told me that her fears towards Pros, and even adults in general, does have a single root; possibly in that foster home." He could still remember Ayuma's simple forewarning, to keep in mind to the day she finally bares her full story.

"Kids just don't trust adults the way they trust other kids; betray them, and they never will. We feel safer with our own kind. Remember that..."

Aizawa hummed in response. Yokohama... What do you hide?

When it was finally Saturday, Ayuma prepared to go to the Orca Agency. She took the train over to the city where the agency was. The building was tall and imposing, just like its founder. She had to remind herself that there was no turning back the whole way there.

Ayuma couldn’t lie to herself that she wasn’t shaking when she walked into Gang Orca’s agency building. While there was no surprise snatch-off-the-sidewalk treatment like Hawks’ agency, this was still a hero that brought her fear on himself whether or not it was his intent. The sidekicks were people she could at least vaguely remember by voice, even though their costumes were a far cry from the armored bodysuits they wore in the exams, and no cement guns were in sight.

In fact, there weren't a lot of them in the building at the moment. After consulting a map of the building left for newcomers, she simply had to go up an elevator to the third floor, where Gang Orca's office was. His code name was on a small plaque beside the door, telling her she was at the right room. But just when she was about to grab the doorknob, she hesitated, starting to shake.

She’ll be walking straight into the lion’s den, for better or worse. At least with Hawks she didn’t have anything to fear because Hawks was a fairly young hero, and she was with a friend. But here, she was all alone, surrounded by adults she mostly didn’t know, and the only one she did know gave her nightmares since the Licensing Exam!

I don’t want to be afraid of the heroes I’ll one day be working alongside... but like so many adults in my life, heroes have hurt me, whether or not it was their intent. I have scars because of what they did to me. How can I overcome a fear that's as deep-set as my own trauma toward paralysis?... Come on. The Work Study and forgiving Gang Orca are each a door that I have to open on my own. I can't be afraid of heroes if I want to be one of them.

She took a slow, deep breath, as quiet as she could, and opened the door. "Hello? Gang Orca?... I'm Ayuma, and... I'm planning to intern with you for my Hero Work Study."

Gang Orca was sitting at his desk, looking up at Ayuma with an even gaze. He stood up slowly and walked around his desk. Ayuma remained still, subconsciously ready for whatever may come as he came closer. He was already over a foot taller than her, and she couldn't help feeling
nervous.

"The young hero that Hawks had recommended to me," he remarked. "Dreamscape Heroine: Nightmaiden; known as the Little Falcon of his agency, savior of Hawks, Best Jeanist, and even match for the new Number 1 Hero. And most notably to the Pros of Japan... the Hero of Heroes."

Her shoulders rose in tension. *Just don't hurt me. I don't know what I'll do if you hurt me again.*

A large, black hand was held out to her. "It is an honor and privilege to properly meet you, Ayuma, and upon a fellow hero's recommendation, I accept taking you on. I hope that we can get better acquainted with each other while you're here at my agency."

Ayuma looked back up at the ringed, red eyes. Slowly, a shivering cold hand was placed against the pad of leathery skin, in a simple hand shake; Ayuma noticed how dainty and pale her hands were in comparison. This giant of a Pro seems just as eager as her to start over, hard as it may be.

Maybe, just maybe, she won't need to fear him as much as she thought.

Chapter End Notes

Thank god. That first impression could've gone better on both sides, but it seems we have at least some kind of agreement. Maybe Gang Orca will manage to get himself off Ayuma's not-so-favorite heroes? Considering she knows a small part of him that just might help things along. Thanks for showing the Hidden Heart of Gold, Hawks!
Now let's see how Ayuma's first time as a Provisional hero goes with Gang Orca's agency. I'm sure this one's going to be the kind of thrill Midnight was talking about!

"I understand that you're here for a Work Study," Gang Orca said as Ayuma set down the approval contract. "But might I ask why you specifically believe working with me would be helpful to you?"

"Well..." Ayuma began. "It mostly has something to do with my... tense relationship with most heroes I'm familiar with. Yes, I'm known for saving Pro heroes from situations where their lives are at stake. But in events where any adult -- especially a hero -- has caused me any form of harm I can recall, I'd grow legitimately afraid of that particular individual. Sometimes leaving entire areas to avoid a single person, hero or otherwise." She lightly rubbed her left sleeve. "For example... Endeavor."

"I remember that event," Gang Orca commented. "And I also believe I saw the scarring it left behind... when you rescued Best Jeanist and Mt. Lady. But tell me... is there something you can bring to the table that I still need to be aware of? There's your Quirk and physical prowess, as well as the speed you undoubtedly earned under Hawks' tutelage. But is there any other strengths that can help you as a hero?"

Ayuma took a deep breath. "One of my biggest strengths is... intuition. More than a few times, my intuition has alerted me to various things so I could seek it out and help with it any way I can. But I can also avoid being detected by opponents in battle. I'm able to turn any sort of disregard back on an opponent by catching them unawares."

Gang Orca hummed in response. "I have noted that we are lacking in several departments concerning long-range. And intuition -- despite often being ruled out as an ability by most -- is more useful than most physical abilities. But are you aware of the challenges of becoming a sidekick in my agency?"

The redhead nodded. "I know I'll need to work hard to keep up with my classmates, and that I'll be working here for at least a handful of months. But I'm prepared to bear whatever I have to." To make up for everything my life forced me to miss out on.

The Orcinus hero bore an expression reminiscent of a smile. "I'm glad that we can come to an agreement, then." With a small stamp, he sealed the contract. "You will now be able to work alongside professionals. Consider yourself a part of the pod."

"Thank you, Gang Orca," Ayuma bowed as she gratefully took the contract. "I look forward to it."

When Ayuma returned to U.A., it turned out Midoriya was also able to secure a Work Study with the hero Sir Nighteye. Midoriya and the others were glad to hear of her own success with
Gang Orca, many offering their congratulations. Tenya considered the two of them as great examples for the others to follow. However, the others did say most of their previous internships weren't available to be Work Studies, as much as they hoped to be. The school's requirements had ruled out a lot of heroes pretty easily.

"We can't really blame them," Ojiro pointed out. "Unlike the internships, we'll be directly involved. So if anything were to go wrong, then --" 

"Then the Pros would have to take responsibility for whatever happened," Aizawa finished. "Only Pros who are the real deal will take on rookies like you guys knowing the risks involved. Tokoyami, looks like you've got an offer from one of them: Hawks has offered you to work with him in Kyushu, the same way he recommended Ayuma to Gang Orca."

"No way!" Kaminari gasped.

"Dude, he's the Number 3 Hero!" Sero added. "That's awesome!"

"Well? What do you say?" Aizawa asked.

Tokoyami replied. "I respectfully accept."

"Alright then. I'll make sure you get the relevant paperwork later. Just let me know when you're expected in Kyushu. I can sign off on your absences."

"Congrats Tokoyami; you psyched?" Shoji asked.

"I'm grateful of course," the bird-headed boy replied.

"Good luck; I hope you can keep up with him this time," Ayuma added.

"Also, Kirishima," Aizawa addressed the faux redhead. "Apparently Amajiki from the Big Three wants to talk to you about something." Kirishima pointed to himself in confusion. "Uraraka and Asui, you've got your own Big Three summons from Hado. You can track 'em down sometime tomorrow or whatever. That's all for now." He simply turned and left after making the announcements.

"Amajiki? That's crazy," Kirishima remarked, surprised at the mere thought of the shrinking violet of the Big Three wanting to speak with him. "I wonder what he wants."

"Considering the timing, it could be about the Work Study Program," Tsu considered.

"No way! That'd be too good to be true, right?!" Ochaco exclaimed, perking up ever since saying Gunhead wasn't an available Work Study.

"I have to wait until tomorrow?" Kirishima got up from leaning over the backrest of the couch. "Nope! I'm going over to the third-years' dorm right now."

"I don't think I can wait either," Tsu agreed, looking at Ochaco, "let's go with him!" The brunette quickly agreed, the three of them soon rushing out the door.

"Ayuma, go and keep an eye on them," Tenya advised. "We can't risk them getting into trouble with the upperclassmen."

"Got it," Ayuma nodded as she went out to head for the roof, just when Bakugo started raging after Todoroki noted how behind they were. She kept an eye on her friends through the
Dreamscape from the dorm roofs, watching as Tsu, Ochaco, and Kirishima went to the 3-A dorm. The upperclassmen seemed to know what they were talking about. One of the guys brought Kirishima to where Amajiki supposedly was while one of the girls brought Ochaco and Tsu to Hado.

*Looks like that went pretty well. At least there was no trouble getting to Amajiki and Hado. Though I wonder why they called them over. I guess I'll find out soon enough. But one thing's for sure: I'll start working with Gang Orca -- and Midoriya most likely starts with Sir Nighteye -- tomorrow.*

And then, from one of the windows of the 3-B dorm, she heard three different, but hopeful voices. "WHAAAAAT?!

"Hey!" a cheery voice greeted. Ayuma turned around to see Togata and Midoriya, the third-year having spoken. "Ayuma, right?"

She nodded in reply. "You boys heading to Sir Nighteye, I'm guessing?"

"Yeah," Midoriya affirmed. "And you're headed to Gang Orca, right?"

"Right," Ayuma confirmed as they continued. "Good luck, guys!" She was about to continue, but paused when she felt something on her leg and looked down. Two bright blue eyes blinked back at her. "Ah, of course." She knelt down to the cat and picked it up, and it tried crawling up her blazer just to paw her hair. "Hey, girl. You came to say goodbye, too?" Ever since the snowy-white feline showed up on campus, it tended to keep following her, Shinso, and even Mr. Aizawa.

"I swear she somehow thinks the three of us are family or something," Shinso commented as he approached. "So you're really headed out to your Work Studies, huh. Gang Orca, if you told me right."

"Yes to both, Shinso. And again, I promise I'll come back as quick as I can if anything happens."

Shinso smirked as he took the cat from her arms. "At least I can count on you with that. I'll keep an eye on Yuki while you're gone."

"Yuki? If that's what your calling the cat, I've heard better names than the word for 'snow'."

"Fine, fine. It's a work in progress. Anyways, good luck; now head on out before you miss the train."

Ayuma chuckled, giving a short wave as she went off.

"Ah, good. You made it, Nightmaiden," Gang Orca greeted Ayuma when she arrived in her costume. "I've already distributed orders to the other sidekicks. Today, you'll be with me and those already designated for patrol and surveillance." He set down a file on the desk.

Ayuma's neutral countenance quite successfully hid her confusion. *Surveillance? That means keeping an eye on a group of people; namely, villains. Is there a group in some kind of investigation that Gang Orca's a part of?*

"This is the main Yakuza group in this particular prefecture," Gang Orca explained, "Yoake-Oni." He gestured to four pictures; an older man, an older woman, and two middle-aged men.
"These individuals are the head family. Hiryu Akune, his wife Ikumi, and their sons, elder Hinise and younger Taimastsu. Ever since there has been a fair bit of restlessness in the syndicate of another city, the Yoake-Oni have grown restless."

Yakuza. I remember them, from the unit on organized crime. They're considered an endangered species, even among villains. Most have disappeared since the rise of heroes like All Might, so it would make sense that they're started to bounce back now that he's retired.

"Unfortunately, we've been having trouble keeping a proper eye on them for a while now," Orca continued. "We have reason to believe that they have made contact with another syndicate, though there hasn't been solid evidence of which, nor has there been any proved connections to recent criminal activity. The objective is to at least track down one of these four individuals, to find out their recent activity that we may have missed. But be careful, and try not to cause any suspicion that will make them further withdraw."

"Yes sir," Ayuma responded, following Gang Orca as he led her down.

Once united with the set group, Ayuma was teamed with a couple of the aforementioned sidekicks for the actual patrol. She mainly followed behind them, staying in their shadow to avoid attention. They were fairly quiet, simply strolling the streets while she discreetly watched the alleys. Little did they know that her senses were all on high alert around the strangers.

This is how a lot of Pro heroes patrol, but they don't know how often it doesn't work. It would be more effective to go into the dark networks of alleys and channels where no one else really looks. Most heroes obliviously pass right by when something bad is happening hardly ten meters away from them.

I know how bad people hide from and skirt around the law. They hide themselves and/or their victims in dark nooks and crannies where no decent person would dream of exploring. Heroes that don't venture into the underground can walk right past anything from muggings to murders, none the wiser until some poor sap stumbles upon the aftermath.

"Kenni?" a masculine voice pulled Ayuma out of her thoughts. She turned to the voice to see a rather masculine-looking person with blonde pigtails and a pink dress on a bench. The person was looking directly at Ayuma as she paused. "Oh. My mistake, little miss. I thought you were a... an old friend..."

Ayuma's brows furrowed. So this person saw me even in shadows, but thought I was an old friend?... Oh, I see. This is a woman who was born in the wrong body... sort of like Tenkijo... "An old friend? How so?"

"It's the hair," the woman replied, smiling shyly. "I've been worried for her safety since... something happened a ways away... I just hope she's alright..."

Ayuma nodded in understanding as she resumed walking. Of course, that makes sense. I'm a little worried about my friends, too. From my class and my early home. She must be very close to this friend of hers; maybe I can find her. Kenni... I wonder who she is...

She was back in the shadows of the sidekicks, still watching her surroundings closely. The patrol up to that point wasn't at all eventful. The two sidekicks simply kept on walking, making short conversations every so often like it was perfectly normal. Even though they were supposed to be looking for upper Yakuza members and other crimes in this city. Did Gang Orca or one of the other teams find one of those four already?
Her mind gave a hard tug as the sidekicks drew near a certain alley. A faint sound was in her ears.

_Is that... running?_

In a split second, she sent out her ribbons at the two and yanked them backward just as a blur shot from the alley in front of them. She saw that the two still had some kind of slash wound, but it wasn't as lethal as it could've been. The attacker stopped to show he had a good-sized blade on him, and a bag of what appeared to be stolen cash. He seemed to be a fairly young man with a strange scar on his face, and his hair was tied in a ponytail. She was able to let go of the sidekicks and get a good look at the culprit's face before he took off again.

_Oh no you don't!_

Ayuma shot into the air on her translucent wings, using his face as a tracking device in the Dreamscape. His bronze trail of stardust wouldn't be able to hide from her. She caught up with the man when he stopped, and he seemed rather annoyed that he was being followed. He threw his blade at Ayuma (which she dodged fairly easily) and rushed to retrieve the weapon and take off again. But this time, she was able to keep up. Unfortunately, anything she sent down at him was also evaded.

Eventually, she was able to chase him into a corner. The man managed to finally stop, apparently unable to see that Ayuma was still almost literally on top of him. Just when he seemed to relax from believing he lost his pursuer, she proved him very wrong. She descended on him like an owl on a mouse, tying him up in ribbons and pulling him up into the air.

"Why... You little..." he growled, panting from running and straining against his bonds. "The hell... is this...?"

Ayuma simply snatched his weapon and his cargo. "You're coming with me," she said simply, flying him back to where she left her colleagues. They must've called Gang Orca over, since he and the team he was patrolling with was there.

"Well, you came with quite the speedy catch, haven't you, Nightmaiden?" the hero said.

Ayuma nodded dutifully. "And here is the weapon and cargo this thief here had with him. I'd advise against putting him on the ground, or he'll run off again."

"I see. In that case..." He turned to the criminal. With an incredibly high-pitched hum, he used his ultrasonic attack to paralyze the villain. "That should hold him down until the Iron Maiden comes for the criminal, and the ambulance for these two. In the meantime, we managed to find one of the Yakuza members we were tasked to find. A criminal has been caught, and our mission has been accomplished."

Ayuma nodded, relieved that the day could be considered successful. "The only problem was that I needed to tire out the villain before I could catch him."

"You were still able to exploit the villain's weakness and capture him," one of the sidekicks pointed out.

"...Hey, I-I think I recognize this guy..." one of the other sidekicks said. "If he was that fast and needed to be run into the ground... he sounds like... The High-Speed Hero: O'Clock. But I thought he somehow lost his Quirk and disappeared quite a few years ago."

Ayuma's eyes widened. _This villain has a hero's stolen Quirk? How? It defies all logic on_
Quirks as a whole! No one can just lose their Quirk and suddenly find someone else using it! No Quirk I know is anything like a tool that can be passed between people; a Quirk is something you're born with. Whether or not you want it, it's a part of you that only you can use; or at least, should use.

"We can discuss these matters further another time," Gang Orca waved off. "After you two have those injuries looked at properly."

Ayuma nodded in agreement. She was glad to say that her first day had gone fairly well. Eventually, they'd be heading back to the Orca Agency to get ready to return home to U.A. Her classmates would be proud of her.

Speaking of classmates, that reminded her of something. Oh right. Didn't Tsu, Ochaco, and Kirishima land their own Work Studies thanks to the Big Three along with Midoriya? I think Midoriya's probably still with Togata at Sir Nighteye's agency... I wonder how they're doing...

Chapter End Notes

Hmm... Interesting question, Ayuma. Very interesting. Anyways, can any of you guess the cameos that were shown here? Who's that woman who mistook who Ayuma was? Who was that villain she just nabbed? How very interesting, no?
Lost Ones

Chapter Notes

Thank god, that week-long standstill is finally over. No idea where that even came from or why that had to happen, but we're back in business!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Back at the Orca Agency, Ayuma did as much research as she could about the thief she managed to grab. Apparently, he was a wanted fugitive for not only various accounts of burglary, but also blowing up the Tokyo Sky Egg with suicide bomb monsters. Fat Gum had tried to stop him from bringing in a massive shipment of Trigger, but it was all destroyed and the guy got away.

On that note, she turned to whatever she could find out about O'Clock. He was well-known for being incredibly fast in the physical and even mental field. But at some point, he got into a fight with a powerful villain and was declared missing and presumed dead in the aftermath, last seen with a grievous facial injury. But since there wasn't any body to speak of, some still had hope he was alive somewhere. It wouldn't be far-fetched if he just went into hiding after losing his Quirk in that last fight.

*Or even became a Quirkless vigilante or something.*

“Considering that your contract states you’ll be with us on weekends, I plan to have you be my little helper with the Provisional Licensing Course,” Gang Orca stated when it was about time she had to leave. “As far as I know, a couple of your classmates are part-taking in it.”

“That’s right,” Ayuma affirmed. “Bakugo and Todoroki. But is there any reason why you want my help?”

“You’ll be helping me train them and the others in the course, so they’ll gain their licenses like you did. It’ll be an especially big help in the event that I have to split the students into groups. You’ll also be helping me monitor their progress.”

*Oh, so he needs an extra set of hands and eyes so things can be moved along more efficiently, with less probability of trouble. Shouldn’t be too difficult to keep watch, especially with people I know. In that case, I’ll gladly help you.*

The Pro hero seemed to smile behind his high collar. “I’ll be seeing you next Saturday, then.”

Ayuma nodded before clocking out and heading back to the train station.

A strange man was watching Ayuma wait on the platform for the train that would return her to U.A. He made sure not to draw any attention, especially not hers. She was obliviously fixed by mulberry slits, gazing under faded, wine-colored hair. His eyes glittered with love; a sad, mourning love. His mind failed to keep two faces out of his mind as he watched her. One was a face as pale as his, with similarly-colored eyes and hair, a sidetail held by a dark pink ribbon. The other face was peachy, with a white blotch over the black right eye, framed with burnt orange around dark powder blue irises.
She looks just like him… She’s grown so much…

As the train pulled in and before Ayuma boarded it, she felt his eyes on her and looked around. She didn’t see anything out of the ordinary, but her eyes narrowed in suspicion as she walked through the doors. The man had left the station before she could see him, calling someone on the phone. His hands shook in fear and excitement as the pale face flashed in his memory.

Homara… my dear little sister…

“Taimatsu. Is something wrong?” a man’s voice called on the other end.

Taimatsu took a deep breath. “Hinise, I saw her. I saw our niece boarding the train.” And she looks so much like her father.

“Our niece?” Hinise repeated incredulously. “Don’t be ridiculous, little brother. You’ve been obsessed with finding her ever since they died. You probably just saw some other random stranger again.”

“Hinise, I’m sure of it. She looks exactly like Ichiro when we first met him. She was wearing a U.A. uniform, for god’s sake!”

“Again, Taimatsu, that could be anyone. You can’t just use a U.A. uniform to say you’ve found her. She disappeared into the system years ago; she might not even be alive. We already have our hands tied with these Precepts of Death trying to have us join them to destroy humanity. We shouldn’t concern ourselves with long-missing family members.”

Taimatsu kept himself from growling. “If you won’t believe me, then I’ll show you. The moment she comes back here, at the train station. You’ll see her the way I just did. But we can’t have Father knowing about this. We can’t burden our niece if she’s training to follow her parents’ path, knowingly or not. She doesn’t deserve to know that our kind is a part of her.”

His older brother sighed. “Fine. But this had better be the real her instead of you simply crying wolf.”

Taimatsu smiled to himself in relief as he hung up. After being left in his own guilt for so long, he was finally going to find closure. In seeing the wonderful hero his niece was growing into.

Next Ayuma was in class, she found that Todoroki and Bakugo were pretty messed up, most likely from their Provisional Course training. Some of the others were freaking out about how it was running them ragged. Both of them had at least one bandage and one gauze patch on each of their faces, with a few noticeable bruises. Bakugo didn’t seem to like the attention, and Todoroki mostly ignored it. She also saw that Ochaco, Tsu, and Kirishima were all missing, too. Momo told Tenya they were excused absences, leaving the redhead to assume it was their Work Studies.

"Hey Ayuma, we heard you managed to nab a speedy little thief on your Work Study," Kaminari commented, showing a news article on his phone. Alongside a picture of Ayuma with the tied-up thief, there was a headline that said Hero Hopeful Nightmaiden Tracks Down Elusive Number 6! The article itself mentioned her Hero of Heroes title and how she saved Gang Orca's sidekicks from the perpetrator of the Tokyo Sky Egg Bombing, who had gone into hiding for at least five years. "You must've been going as fast as Hawks to keep up with this guy!"

"It wasn't really the hardest thing in the world," Ayuma admitted. "He had a time limit to how long he could go so fast. I kinda had to force him to run himself into the ground before I could get
him. It's kinda strange how he has such a Quirk, since it reminds a lot of people of a Pro hero who disappeared a long time ago."

"A hero who went missing?" Momo inquired. "Who?"

"The High-Speed Hero: O'Clock," Ayuma explained. "He's about Endeavor's age; way older than that thief. We think he somehow lost his Quirk around the time he was last seen, alive or dead. How this Number 6 guy ended up with it, I'm not sure I want to know. Midoriya might know more about it than I do."

Midoriya didn't react to Ayuma addressing him. In fact, he didn't react to most questions he was asked. He was in a near-daze staring down at his desk. It wasn't at all like him. He must've had a lot on his mind from his Work Study.

Things weren't looking much better for Midoriya over the course of the day. He was tripping over himself during classes, almost drowned himself in rescue training, and Aizawa threatened to make him quit his Work Study if he didn't get himself together. He didn't really stay around long after he finished his lunch, either.

During the class lectures, the two unlicensed boys were doing mostly okay. Bakugo was rushing through it with sheer force of will to not fall behind any more than he already has. Todoroki was chugging along as usual, but did start to doze off a couple of times from exhaustion and boredom, leaving Ayuma to tap him awake. But it was nowhere near Midoriya's extent.

"Sounds like you had a pretty eventful weekend," Shinso commented after training. "Catching a thief and bomber on your first patrol on the Work Study."

"Yeah, I'm a little surprised it went so easily," Ayuma replied. "He must've thought he'd be able to get away like he probably used to."

The purplette smirked. "Well, he probably didn't take into account that a certain speedy little Provisional hero could stop him."

The redhead giggled. "Little? I'm a cool 167, thank you very much. You're only 10 centimeters above me."

"And almost five months older."

"That's besides the point!" Ayuma lightly shoved him, still laughing as he chuckled in response.

Watching from the dorms, Mina watched the bantering students as they approached the dorms. She wiped a happy tear from her eye. "Ah, young love; such a beautiful thing."

"Wait, isn't that the guy who brainwashed Ojiro and Aoyama?" Kaminari asked in a double take. "Shinso, I think? What's he doing with Ayuma?"

"Shush!" Mina hushed him, bringing him to the window. "Just watch. And be amazed."

So he watched. Kaminari watched as the two coming to the dorms continued their usual small talk. Whenever they laughed, Ayuma was almost leaning on the young man as she collapsed in giggles. They paused and looked behind them, and Ayuma briefly dipped down and stood up with a white cat in her arms. The feline seemed very interested in the loose white wrappings over Shinso's shoulder, pawing them like it was yarn.
"Oh no, it's cute," Kaminari whimpered. "I can't believe that guy's got more game than I do. It hurts how great they look together!"

Mina giggled, shaking the blond's shoulder. "I told you! They're perfect for each other!"

The white cat jumped onto Shinso’s shoulder, suddenly interested in his purple mess of hair. He tried to bring the cat down into his arms, but the animal instead jumped down and took off in the other direction. Both of them shrugged at each other before going their separate ways. Mina dragged Kaminari away before Ayuma noticed them at the window.

The pinkette was squealing in delight. "Isn't it amazing?! Ayuma's had her own little love story going on ever since the Sports Festival!"

"Think we can get them together at some point?" Kaminari asked.

"You kidding?! I've been hoping to talk about it with the guys from 1-C!" Mina grinned. "It's going to be awesome!"

"You bet!"

The two of them high-fived each other in agreement.

Ayuma broke the news to Bakugo and Todoroki at dinner, about how Gang Orca’s having her come to the Provisional Licensing Course as his assistant. Needless to say, she got two very different reactions. Bakugo was flipping his lid, angrily ranting about how “COPPERHEAD’S GOING TO BE BABYSITTING US FOR THE NEXT FEW MONTHS!” Honestly, Ayuma had a feeling she’d get that kind of reaction, and Kirishima was already coming to calm him down. Todoroki was a whole lot more agreeable to the change, grateful that she’ll be around to counteract Bakugo and Yoarashi’s loud personalities. (Not that she could blame him; Yoarashi might not hate him anymore, but he’s still a very… boisterous person.)

For a change in topic, and out of curiosity, Ayuma asked about the “Copperhead” comment. Not that it was particularly unwelcome compared to “Akuma” or “Little Nightmare” or other such rude nicknames. She was only curious about it. Specifically, she was wondering why Bakugo would go and nickname her after a deadly venomous snake like a copperhead. “I mean, I’m not really toxic… am I?”

“Of course not, Copperhead,” Bakugo huffed. “It’s your hair. You couldn’t be ‘toxic’ anymore than that stupid Deku could ever be.”

_O... kay. Not sure if that’s an insult or a compliment, but... Fair enough, I guess..._

"Midoriya says Bakugo usually nicknames people for whatever reason," Todoroki recalled as Kirishima led the explosive blond away.

"I've noticed," Ayuma replied. "He's nicknamed Midoriya, Kirishima, Kaminari, Mina, Sero, Ochaco, Ojiro, and probably a lot more. I'm honestly a little surprised I don't fall under the 'Raccoon Eyes' title he calls Mina by."

"Probably because your black eyes are only temporary when you activate your Quirk," Todoroki pointed out. "Ashido's dark eyes are permanent."

"Fair enough."
"Hey everyone, we're back!" Ochaco called out, Tsu by her side. The whole class gladly welcomed them in, asking them about their Work Studies. Like who they were with, how they were doing, and whether they did anything on their first day on the job.

"Nejire introduced us to Ryukyu," Tsu explained. "She was glad to take on Ochaco and me as her trainees."

"Nice one, getting a Work Study," Kyoka congratulated.

"We have the Big Three to thank for that," Ochaco admitted. "It was a pretty slow day, just a patrol and stopping a robbery. But there was a fight we had to stop, which we managed to stop pretty easily."

"Wish I could find a Work Study," Sato groaned in jealousy. "The school hasn't made it easy."

"Hah! Someone's bound to wish to have us with them for a Work Study," Aoyama flounced. "Ne t'inquiète pas, mes amis!"

Ayuma shook her head with a smile. You can always trust Aoyama to try perking everyone up in his own way.

The warehouse was dark, dusty, and damp as the blonde approached. So this is where the League of Villains was hiding when they were introduced to the Yakuza. Where one Yakuza member was disintegrated and Kenji "Magne" Hikiishi was explosively killed. Last I checked, Dabi wasn't here when that happened, but he might be here to pay his respects. She went inside to see the black-blue-and-silver outfit of the young man she formed a pact with, kneeling by two chalk-drawn silhouettes in the floor.

"I knew I'd find you here," Suru told the dark-haired villain. "I heard what happened. I'm... sorry, about your big sis."

"Don't worry about it," Dabi waved off the apology, leaning against the wall. "At least you called her what she is. Toga and Twice would flip their lids if you called Magne a guy."

Suru hopped onto one of the crates to sit on. "I can understand that much. One of my siblings is sort of like her; more so the hero Thirteen, though."

"So why do you want to ask me about Magne?" Dabi asked.

Suru gave a light shrug. "Nothing too awful; just for a little feature on the community Magne was a part of. It's not the most well-known thing in Japan. But I hear there are several thriving groups regardless of them being heroes, villains, or anywhere in between."

Dabi hummed. "Fair enough. Magne did say she had a close friend somewhere who's like her."

"Noted. I'm also planning on looking into heroes like Thirteen and even Tiger."

"Something tells me that this news article isn't just a regular assignment."

"No, it isn't," Suru admitted. "I'm hoping that writing articles will eventually help me reach out to my lost siblings, wherever they are. I'd hate to still have no leads on where they are by new years, and not just for the holidays."
"I can introduce you to the rest of the League if you want," Dabi offered. "Shigaraki's been looking for new recruits ever since Magne's death thanks to that plague mask-wearing wacko Twice dragged in not too long ago. Kurogiri's been missing in action for at least a week now, too."

"I'd rather not, Dabi; at least not yet. From what I hear of your friends, getting mixed up with them means I'd have to walk on eggshells even more than I used to."

"Eh, I see your point. Maybe another time, when our groups are able to get along. Though there might be a rocky start when we find out what kind of group that is. Just don't give the heroes too much credit and you'll be fine by then."

Suru nodded. "Sounds like a plan. Who knows? I might even write an article on the dark sides of various heroes. Poking around in dark places is something my mentor always encourages."

Dabi smirked. "Your mentor must be quite the reporter, then." The two stopped at the sounds of sirens. "Dammit, the cops are here again. Can't let them catch me."

"See you later," Suru bid goodbye as she slipped out another exit. Dabi returned to the shadows as the blonde circled around to see the cop cars scrounging through the warehouse for any evidence. Shaking her head, she headed off again.

*Those police won't get away with what they did to us. Not now, or ever.* With a wave of her hand, the glass windows of an abandoned building separated from the frames. Her anger strengthened the glass as it fused, stretching and reshaping into a sort of streamlined, glowing board. A board made for her and her alone to ride.

*I'm glad I always made sure to practice with this sort of thing with my Quirk, or else I wouldn't have the best transportation to rely on.*

Like she'd done it so many times before, Suru hopped onto the board, sturdy as diamonds. With her Quirk, she directed it into the air, heading off into the night. She surfed through the wind easily, enjoying the feeling of being up in the air like this. *Well, time to find Magne's friend. With luck, a census should make it easy enough to find him or her. With this new article, I'm bound to find a way to seek out Tenkijo.*

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, family's probably going to be something big this arc, and possibly the next one, too. But you gotta admire Suru's dedication to finding all of the still-missing kids of Yokohama. Especially using what's basically her occupation.
The two brothers were sitting in a hero's office, side by side. They had the same dark crimson hair and similar purple-to-red slits for eyes. One stared fearlessly into the hero's face with narrowed eyes. The other's eyes darted between the two.

"I have to say, I didn't quite expect to have the two of you come into my Agency like this," Gang Orca commented. "Hinise and Taimatsu Akune. Normally we simply return to leaving each other to our own devices, as I'm sure you know. May I ask the reason for such an occasion as your arrival?"

"Nothing terribly important, really," Taimatsu began. "We just have a bit of room for curiosity at the moment."

"The Eight Precepts of Death seem to have finally stopped offering us a stock of their grand plan, for now," Hinise explained. "But my brother here has apparently been on a little exploration I thought he gave up on."

Gang Orca hummed. Last I checked, Taimatsu was never really dedicated into the business of his family the way his brother is. He always seemed far closer to their younger sister; may she rest in peace.

"Go on..."

Taimatsu nervously wrung his hands in his lap. "As you know, we've decided to no longer cause any sort of harm to you. Ever since the passing of our dearly departed little sister and brother-in-law... That little trainee I've been hearing about, Nightmaiden... the one you recently christened the Hero of Heroes... I saw her the other day after we spoke, at the train station... Simply by going off what is known of her Quirk and appearance... I'd like to know the earliest time she'll come here next..."

Gang Orca's eyes narrowed at the request. Why would they want to know anything about Ayuma? She can't possibly be related to Fever Dream and her husband. It sounds almost too good to be true. She's proven how she can grow afraid of Pro heroes; if her biological parents turned out to be heroes, she certainly wouldn't be. Not unless her fear is selective depending on her history with certain Pro heroes, or even people in general. "Are you meaning to ask that I allow you to meet her face-to-face?"

"Nah, he just wants me to see what she looks like to confirm something," Hinise answered for him. "He doesn't want her to be 'burdened' by the presence of people she may-or-may-not be related to."

Gang Orca's dorsal fin twitched. "Related to?" Taimatsu honestly believes that Ayuma is
somehow part of their family? If Fever Dream and Phantom Thread had a child, one would think at least some people outside the parents' families would be aware of it. And any case concerning such a thing had to have long-since gone cold at this point. "Forgive my confusion, gentlemen, but I fail to see how the young trainee who has just joined my agency can be related in any way to your late sister. Enlighten me, if you don't mind."

Taimatsu took a deep breath, looking as if he were trying not to cry. "In looks and personality, she's become her father's daughter... but I could still see her mother lurking inside her... Our little niece, Ayuma..."

Gang Orca shifted uneasily, realizing something. "I never told you that was her name..."

The two brothers startled, a light of hope entering both their eyes. "So there's a real possibility that our lost niece is working with you," Hinise finally realized.

"That may be," Gang Orca agreed as he leaned forward. "However, if any information concerning her supposed biological parents is true, Fever Dream cut off all ties with her family not long after starting the now-abandoned Epileptree Office where she and Phantom Thread teamed up. Odds are, even if you are Ayuma's uncles, you'll still be unable to have custody of her."

"We realize that!" Hinise snapped. "I already told you, Tai doesn't want her to know we head the Yoake-Oni, anyway. If she's been doing fine ever since getting lost in the system, then we'll just leave her the way she is."

"Yes, I understand," Taimatsu said dejectedly. "Perhaps, someday, we'll be able to meet her face-to-face. Thank you for sparing your time to speak with us."

Gang Orca nodded. "She'll be here this coming weekend. Until we meet again." The two visitors stood up, and left his office and the building into the night, as Gang Orca picked up his phone.

Hinise put a hand on his shoulder. "Gotta hand it to you, Tai; it looks like you really did find her."

"I really did," his little brother assured with a nod, smiling as they returned to the underground. "And I'm glad I have."

Hansha had just finished his homework for the evening. Finally, after hearing Inasa rave about being confused and frustrated, and he probably will for the next hour or two. But it was pretty shocking to hear that any Work Studies for the students of Shiketsu were being shut down that morning, almost out of nowhere. Some of the upperclassmen said it had something to do with someone in the second-year Hero classes. Who was it and what happened? It was a bit hard to tell, and just about everyone was a little paranoid as of recent.

Not that Hansha could necessarily blame them. After all, figuring out that someone in your school -- let alone your class or friend group -- was somehow replaced by someone entirely different a matter of days after it ended would be a nasty blow to the reputation.

Hansha dropped his books into his bag in the living room only to notice a girl on the couch, with ever so slightly more purple in her hair than blue-gray, up in a ponytail. But her eyes were the exact same sea-foam green as the boy's. Because it was his twin sister, Kagami. "You finally done with all that?"
Shadowgeist: Kagami Miru-Yoarashi; her Quirk: No-Sell! Any damage-causing attack sent her way is instantly nullified on contact, and skin-to-skin contact with another person also cancels the other's powers. It's a passive, yet perpetual Quirk, but not all attacks can be blocked; her Quirk is as selective as her own brother's.

"Yup," Hansha sighed, plopping on the couch by his sister. He noticed her drawing out a couple of different designs in her sketchpad, with more than a few numbers linked to each. "What's that you're drawing there?"

"New hero costume designs," his sister answered. "Can't have Gale Force and Cursed Mirror having trouble during their training."

Hansha rose a brow.

Again? "Are our usual costumes somehow still not warm enough or something? I get that you're trying to make it big in Shiketsu's Support Department, but seriously."

Kagami gave him a similar deadpan expression in response. "No... Well, okay, maybe. But that's not primary concern. If Inasa's going to be a flier, he'll need something a lot smaller and more maneuverable than a gauntlet five times the size of his actual arm, and a system of tubes and air pumps that most likely weighs more than he does. And you, young man, need a lot more defensive capabilities on your costume considering both of our Quirks' prerequisite of making contact with an attack. I know all too well what you do to yourself in all those sparring matches, against Quirks that you can't fully reflect. You need more armor unless you neglected to tell me you're a masochist or something."

"A few problems with that: 1, I'm 3 minutes older than you, Kag; 2, training my Quirk is the only way I can strengthen it -- especially against what I can't fully deflect -- and armor won't be of the most help; 3, I'm not masochistic, don't be gross."

"Whatever helps you sleep at night," Kagami shrugged off, flipping to another page.

"Kagami, what is that?" Hansha asked in an accusing tone, pointing at the drawing on the page.

Drawn over the paper was a strangely simple, yet somehow very detailed drawing of an eye. The eye's outline looked entirely normal, but the iris and pupil looked like... they were shattered, shot through by a bullet. And the strange line leading straight down looked somewhat like one of her scissor blades, and at the same time looked like a straight stream of tears.

Kagami grumpily shaded part of the blade/tear streak. "It's a little side-project, if you must know. I think you can figure out the hidden meaning of each part of it without me explaining, though."

Yes, Hansha could very easily figure it out. He knew what every part of it meant, and it all had to do with their early home, and her right along with it. The broken part of the eye was the long and short of the Quirk she used on all of them, to break them from the inside out. The blade/tear streak beneath was what else she did to them and what they always wanted to do when it happened. Under the image was handwritten scrawl that spelled out "Shattered Ones."

"A lot of bad memories we should've left behind along with the escape," Hansha answered, trying to keep the quavering out of his voice. "Why did you make that?"

Kagami had gone strangely somber; a far cry from her typical cheeky self. "It's a symbol for all of us. You already met Ayuma and Zuanshi, and I wish I could've seen them for myself. I just hope that at some point we can find everyone else and gather under a common name. Am I really
"I personally doubt it," replied her twin, "but it's still overall a terrible life that some of the others still haven't gotten over yet. Ayuma still can't trust herself around most adults she's known, and has more than enough reason to justify it. We all know what Madame Kirai is capable of; she was able to make them silence all of us and escape the punishment she deserves. If her sentence turns out to be only a temporary thing like I believe, it's only a matter of time before she takes advantage of the legal system all over again, and comes after us. Heroes or not, things will get nasty if she's ever set free."

Kagami's expression twisted into a glare of determination. "All the more reason to come back together, if only to face her down the way we should've done so long ago."

"So the Yakuza branch in your city thinks she's one of them, huh?" Aizawa inquired.

"They've provided an impressive amount of proof that they are," the deep voice on the other end recalled. "Remember, she's essentially a ghost to the legal world. We both know she's undocumented, without a single known file of her existence to her name. According to what little is known about her, she doesn't even know her surname. And them knowing who she is to a T despite the fact sounds like very strong proof of their blood ties to her in such a situation."

"However, I can't help but get the feeling something is very, very wrong with her past. But I most likely won't be able to do anything to figure out the entire story. If what they claim turns out true, then we might have more than a mere case of her getting 'lost in the system.'"

Aizawa could see what the other hero meant. Hearing that not one but two high-rank Yakuza members claimed that one of his most mysterious students to date could be the child of two late Pros was a serious case. "I'll see what I can do. Next I have the free time, I'll consider looking into it, alongside anything else I've learned thus far. But with Sir Nighteye requesting a team-up at the moment and me already being a teacher, that might be awhile yet."

"I understand. I already notified Nighteye about his local group making contact with my own, but he's letting us be due to Yoake-Oni's... vehement refusal."

"At least that means whatever issue there is isn't as widely spread as I thought," Aizawa sighed.

"Sorry for bothering you once again," the other hero bid goodbye before he hung up.

Aizawa added what Gang Orca told him over the phone to his notes for when he could finally make a case of the ward of the school. It's official, then. I'll need to tell Nezu about all this as soon as I get the opportunity. He's right about Ayuma being a ghost to the law, though. She and the other kids in her orphanage don't trust police because they possibly hurt at least one of them. She has an incredibly fragile trust with Pro heroes, and tends to be particularly scared of people that hurt her in any way.

And then there was the question of when he was certain he'd be able to even investigate the Yokohama Foster Home, in any way. He presumed any lost files belonging to the similarly-lost kids would be somewhere in whatever might be left of the foster home. No, it's not a real foster home; if what I've taken note of is true, it's only one of those glorified orphanages that was just renamed just to keep up with the times. Its caretaker did enough to her charges to traumatize them out of trusting adults, or at least leaving it so fragile as to break at the slightest misstep. The law itself has gone blind to them in their absence, with barely a real file to their names outside the
Since there was so much that he still couldn't follow, Aizawa didn't see any other choice except going to the source of it all. Maybe there, he'll at least be able to figure out everything he was missing.

Izuku was adding to his hero notes, as he usually did when he had nothing else to do. He wasn't quite in the mood to study with everything on his mind, but he needed to busy himself somehow. Mostly he was adding to the notes he kept on his classmates. From his oldest friend-turned-enemy-turned-rival, all the way to the ward of the school. He easily kept track of how everyone was doing, adding and erasing notes as things kept going.

Uraraka seems to have increased her limits, especially in ignoring her Quirk's effects. I think Asui's jumping skills have improved like Iida's speed has. Todoroki has just about equalized both sides of his Quirk; I'm glad he trusts me enough to talk to me about it. If it weren't for him, I wouldn't have known Ayuma was going with him and Kacchan as Gang Orca's assistant. But she'll be fine; she's been able to handle all sorts of things with minimal damage.

Still, Izuku kept the note of Ayuma dealing with Quirk possession. He only seen anything of it in movies, where people suddenly, *radically* lose control of their abilities. Usually ranging from kids who recently manifested their Quirks to very young adults, suddenly stopping on the street and writhing in pain that no one could tell where from. People with Mutation Quirks related to animals going feral, Transformation Quirks turning into emotionless monsters, and Emitters sending out their powers in massive, unrelenting torrents. It made him scared of people who didn't grow up with control over their Quirks, like kids in the foster system.

Until Ayuma came and cleared things up.

In her case, yes, her Quirk could take control of her body, but it has to have a specific reason to do so, like her being in immediate, life-threatening danger or incredibly angry. Usually certain emotions are the cause of Quirk possession in the first place; most commonly strong emotions. And 90% of the time the possessed person won't remember whatever happened while possessed, thus being as much a victim as anyone they may have accidentally hurt.

It was quite obvious when Ayuma had her first sparring match in class, between the announcement for the Sports Fest and the Festival itself. She was pit against Kacchan, who definitely tried his hardest to use his explosions. But she got possessed and started fighting like she'd been training all her life. She even managed to tap into Izuku's fears and draw out the disfigured, roaring shape his own subconscious had turned Kacchan into, forcing him to essentially fight himself. Mr. Aizawa managed to erase her Quirk before it got too ugly at least.

But it would regularly happen. Sure, Quirk possession wasn't something you could overcome overnight, but Ayuma would regularly lose control of her fear or anger, and subsequently her Quirk, while sparring, and it would basically start whaling on her new classmates.

And for something far more recent, when her Quirk seemed to finally be under her control, Todoroki told Izuku that she seemed to turn desperate when the rest of the class was challenged into fighting Togata, battling him the only way she knew how. Even for a little moment, his friend who watched on the sideline saw Ayuma fighting for her life. Never crying for help even if she needed it. He knew that kind of fear all too well, for all his life.

And he recognized that same fear in the eyes of Eri.
It was all over the poor little girl, in fact. It flooded her wide, ruby eyes with tears. It was in those tiny, bandaged hands clutching him, shaking like a leaf in his arms. That tiny voice quietly begging him not to go; not to leave her with the man who called himself her father. And most of all, the utterly helpless hang of her head as she literally slipped through his fingers, and went back into the darkness with Chisaki.

Ayuma might've recognized such signs if she were with them. She might've known what it meant. She might or might not have simply whisked the sweet-looking girl away right then and there, like Izuku himself wanted to.

At least, that was the kind of person Ayuma seemed to be.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, that took a little longer than I thought it would to write all of that, but here we are. Anyways, yeah, Ayuma's oblivious to all this for the time being. And who knows? Maybe the whole regrouping thing Kagami was talking about might actually come true at some point in time. But do you think Ayuma would've grabbed Eri and taken off if given the chance? Or would she have also just let her go back with Overhaul?
I honestly really wish something from the Vigilantes spin-off appeared somewhere in the main storyline. Out of every character I'm aware of, they're the most familiar with the Quirk-booster that basically made Ayuma and three of her classmates famous. If any one of them showed up in the anime, I'd be thrilled! But, on that happy note, it's time to get a look at Ayuma's skills in Stealth-Ops.

The next day, everyone was talking about Kirishima, Ochaco, and Tsu’s debuts at their Work Studies. One news article talked of how Red Riot managed to stop a villain who managed to temporarily de-power Suneater -- Amajiki -- and how he beat the villain when he used a cheap knockoff Quirk-booster. Those two were with the BMI Hero: Fat Gum. The other article was of the girls with Hado and the Dragoon Hero: Ryukyu, stopping two villains with gigantification Quirks.

“Hey, Ayuma,” Kirishima asked, “you were made famous as a kid because of a Quirk-boosting drug, right?”

Ayuma nodded in confirmation. “I researched Trigger the second I was able. When we were little, the drug was at a pretty early stage. I think someone managed to dart a huge group of civilians with it, and it wasn’t the last time. Since that particular brand of Trigger would basically shut down all inhibition and reasoning while boosting their Quirks, none of the impromptu villains were able to stop themselves… Like they were turned into monsters.” Not that I was all that different back then, sans getting darter; I couldn’t stop myself or my own Quirk as it mowed them all down.

“Yikes…” Kaminari cringed.

“The guy I fought definitely used something like that,” Kirishima recalled. “But the variation he used only made him at least somewhat more unhinged. Before he used it, all he could produce were small razor wheel blades on his arms. After injecting himself, he could grow out huge swords from all over!"

Now that Ayuma thought about it, none of her foster siblings could really control themselves very well either. Suru would change the windows with every strong emotion. Zuanshi would hurt others and himself with his crystals once they hardened, sometimes shooting off in spikes. Raiko was regularly a good shock away from an electric explosion. And Tenkijo could cause particularly bad messes when Kagami and her No-Sell Quirk wasn’t around. Himei was a near-constant slave to her animal side, too. And in Ayuma’s case, before enrolling at U.A., Nightmare could take control of her whenever necessary; there was no struggle.

A couple of days later, Ayuma felt something was off. The whole class got a message that classes were cancelled for some kind of teachers’ convention. Midoriya, Kirishima, Ochaco, and Tsu were all called by their Work Studies, but told they didn’t need their costumes. She could’ve sworn she saw Mr. Aizawa leaving the front gates just after she woke up, so that was pretty suspicious; even more so when she saw the Big Three heading out a little later. She couldn’t help...
worrying. She felt like something big was happening.

But would she follow the instinct that was telling her to find out what?

She could only weigh the pros and cons in her head. Going would satisfy her instinct about whatever was happening. She could be sure that her classmates were okay and not in any sort of trouble. It wouldn’t be any different from listening to foster parents discuss something; she regularly did it with her foster family as a kid. She even had the free time to do so, considering she did all the necessary homework assigned next Monday.

Then again, it might or might not be any of her business to begin with. She might even get in trouble if she were caught, particularly with the possibility of Aizawa being there. The rest of the class would worry about her if they realized she snuck out. And their reason for being called in the first place might even have a gag order.

The pros seemed to outweigh the cons in the situation, as hefty as the risk of getting caught would be. Flying would be the quickest round-trip option, since it’s her best shot at getting to her friends and coming back with minimal notice on their end. She decided to not put on shoes, both because of her personal preference growing up and so they don’t fall off on some random street. Using her balcony as her launchpad, she formed her wings and took flight high above the school, following the multicolored trail of Midoriya.

Ayuma trailed her friends’ path to a single building in a city, seeing a group of images on the second floor and her friends and the Big Three heading in that direction. She descended to the front door and went in, heading up the stairs -- as opposed to the elevator -- as quickly and quietly as she could. She reached the meeting room with all the people inside and camped just outside the doors.

No visible sign of any hinges; sliding doors, I presume. Oh well, I’m safe right here as long as no one comes out and looks my way. It should be easy to at least crack open the doors without anyone noticing.

She managed to carefully slide the doors apart, to a point that there was a slit big enough for her to look inside and listen without anyone noticing. A huge group of heroes, along with Ayuma’s fellow students, were seated at tables fashioned into a large rectangle inside the meeting room.

“For the past couple of weeks now,” a blue-skinned Pro began, reading off a tablet in her hand, “those of us at Nighteye Agency have been conducting an investigation into Shie Hassaikai: a small, but organized group of criminals.”

*The Eight Precepts of Death*, Ayuma translated. *Kind of like how the name of the Yoake-Oni means the Demons of Dawn. Shie Hassaikai must be another Yakuza group.*

“What prompted this?” one of the guests inquired.

“An accident involving a gang of thieves called the Reservoir Dogs,” the blue hero answered. Some of the heroes seemed to have heard about that incident. “The police thought the whole thing was an accident, but there were a number of details that didn't add up, so we began tailing them.

“In my capacity as a Nighteye Agency sidekick,” a tuxedo-wearing hero beside the young woman introduced himself as a white screen rolled down. “I began following leads to see what I could uncover. I found that in the past year, the members of Shie Hassaikai have increased contact with those outside their organization, including other groups whose business dealings are less than reputable. Their aims seem to be expanding their organization and enriching its coffers. Shortly after our investigation began… they made contact with a member of the League of Villains: Jin
Bubaigawara; villain name, Twice.” A picture of a young man with several others in plague masks talking to Twice was projected on the screen; Ayuma definitely remembered that clone-creating villain. “They were wary of being tailed, so I was unable to follow them then, but with the help of the police, I confirmed that an altercation had occurred between the two groups.”

“That'd be about when they decided to reach out to Tsukauchi and me,” commented Gran Torino. "Figured we'd be able to assist given the League's involvement." Ayuma was mildly surprised at that statement. She could still remember the friendly detective who was there with Tenya and Tensei, even though it felt so long ago.

“Where is Tsukauchi?” asked the hero who also asked about the Reservoir Dogs.

“Follow-ups with some more eyewitnesses; y'know, cop stuff,” Torino replied before turning to Midoriya. “Sorry, kid… I didn't see something like this coming. I've got a bad feeling that things are about to get ugly.”

“I don't care if they do, I want to help,” Midoriya replied. Mirio asked about him, leaving Midoriya to explain that Gran Torino was his first internship. Ayuma remembered him from Kamino Ward.

“Go on, Bubble Girl,” ordered the man Ayuma assumed was Sir Nighteye.

“So, after all that went down, we posted a notice on the HN requesting assistance,” the girl announced. The centipede man said she could skip that part, and Bubble Girl quickly apologized.

Ochaco was confused about what HN was, and Hado explained that it was the Hero Network. It’s a web service for licensed Pros to keep them all connected on different events, even allowing requests for assistance from heroes with certain Quirks.

One of the other Pros was getting a bit frustrated. “Does anybody wanna tell me why a bunch o' high school kids were invited to this conference? I don't care if they are from U.A. If we have to keep stopping to explain this stuff, we'll never get to the actual plan.”

"Don't say that!” A huge, balloon-like hero tossed his chair when he stood up, gesturing to Kirishima and Amajiki. “These two have important information to pass along!” Kirishima looked confused, and Amajiki bowed his head in shame. “Anyway, I see a lot of new faces, so let me introduce myself. Nice to meet'cha! I’m Fat Gum! Here, have some candy!” He flung a few pieces of hard candy to Ochaco and Tsu.

Seems fairly friendly, along with that Bubble Girl hero. Unlike some of the other heroes I'm seeing in here. That woman by Ochaco is probably Ryukyu. And Gran Torino just might remember me, too.

“Hassaikai’s movements are hard trace, but we suspect one of their main sources of income is illegal drug sales,” Nighteye explained. “So I requested help from heroes with some expertise in that area.”

Fat Gum nodded. “Yup, I brought in my fair share of drug dealers back in the day. And at Red Riot’s debut fight, he proved he could, too. Tamaki was shot, and the bullet contained some kind of drug I’ve never heard of before.” His fist clench a couple of other candies, before letting them fall like dust from his hands. “…One that destroys Quirks.”

Ayuma’s eyes widened. A Quirk-destroying drug?! How is that possible?! And if Amajiki got darter with that kind of drug, is he Quirkless now?
Togata asked his friend if he was going to be okay. Amajiki affirmed he’d be fine. He was back to normal after resting for about a day, somehow forming a cow hoof from his hand; the blond was shocked that he had beef for breakfast. That much helped Ayuma understand that Amajiki’s Quirk seemed to personify “you are what you eat.”

The skeptical hero commented, “I'm glad to know the effects aren't permanent at least. So this stuff doesn't zap a Quirk for good.”

“No. But Eraserhead has some further insight,” Nighteye gestured to the teacher.

“It doesn't seem to function exactly like my Erasure does,” Aizawa pointed out, “since I’m not actually attacking the Quirk directly. What we call a Quirks is an extraordinary addition to an ordinary human body. Those additions are collectively referred to as Quirk genes. I can shield those genes and temporarily block their expression, but I don't actually damage them.”

*Or in the case of a runaway Quirk, he can stop those Quirk genes in their tracks.*

“But after Tamaki here was shot, we brought him to the hospital,” Fat Gum stated, “and they found his Quirk genes had sustained damage! Fortunately, they seem to have healed on their own and he's back to normal now.”

*Okay, that makes it at least a little easier to understand,* Ayuma thought. *What Mr. Aizawa’s Erasure does to Quirks is like casting a shadow over a plant; it doesn’t do anything too harmful because the plant is still alive, but keeps it from functioning as it should. This drug is more like trying to cut off the stem, but it might only be a matter of time before it gets to a point of actually cutting it off from the roots.*

“What do we know of the substance he was shot with?” inquired Nighteye.

“Whatever it was didn't harm the rest of his body; nothing but his Quirk was impaired in any way!” Fat repeated. “The guy who shot him clammed up, -- he won't say a word! -- and the round that hit Tamaki was totally spent. However… Kirishima bravely defended Tamaki from a bullet, which then bounced off his own body, and should now provide us with a viable sample!”

Kirishima himself was pretty surprised at that, and Ochaco and Tsu congratulated his help. “And when we analyzed the substance we found in the bullet, we discovered something that made me sick to my stomach… It contained human blood and cells.”

Ayuma felt like she was encased in Todoroki’s ice. The mere thought that someone was possibly being exploited to form Quirk-destroying darts like what got Amajiki… She hoped to the powers that be that the human source of that discovered tissue wasn’t someone she personally knew. The main person on her mind as any kind of source would be Kagami… if Ayuma didn’t already know she was with Hansha and their adoptive brother Inasa.

“Sounds like something out of a scary movie,” Tsu understated.

“In other words… that effect came from a person; from someone's power,” Ryukyu summarized. “A Quirk that can destroy Quirks.”

An armored Pro hero hummed. “I'm not connecting the dots here… how is all of this related to Hassaikai?”

“The man who shot Tamaki used an illegal drug to boost his Quirk during his fight with Kirishima,” Fat Gum elaborated. “The distribution channels for stuff like that are complex. Although things have shrunk since the old days, drugs still pass through various people and
organizations before they finally reach the end user. There’s no concrete evidence that Hassaikai handled the drug, but we know for a fact that they interacted with one of the middlemen responsible for moving it.”

“That’s all?”

“The other day,” Nighteye interjected, “Ryukyu's team broke up a fight between two villain groups. One of those groups was controlled by the intermediary organization that Fat Gum just mentioned.”

“One of the two giants had been given an inferior drug that didn't last long,” Ryukyu added.

One of the heroes still wasn’t convinced. He thought they were just seeing what they wanted to see and just wanted Shie Hassaikai to be the root of all evil. He needed something concrete. In response, Nighteye projected an image of a single, fairly young-looking man with a plague mask.

“Other young head, Chisaki; Quirk: Overhaul,” Nighteye stated. “With this power, he can disassemble things and then reassemble them. A Quirk that allows him to completely break down matter. And a bullet that can break down Quirks.”

Ayuma could just see the inexplicable tsunami of utter horror passing over Midoriya and Togata’s faces. They silently bowed their heads in shame, like they knew something especially awful about this. *I don't like where this is going…*

“Chisaki has a daughter named Eri,” Nighteye continued. “There are no records or details about her birth. But when Mirio and Midoriya encountered her, they noticed there were bandages wrapped around her arms and legs.”

*Bandages?... Like she was being cut up? Why? Why would anyone want... her blood... The kind of horror in the boys' faces wound through Ayuma as well. She almost wanted to scream, cry, and throw up at the thought; she had to fight herself down from doing so right there. It was almost, if not as bad as Madame Kirai's torture. Ryukyu wondered if someone could do something so horrific.*

“In a world of superhumans, if you can dream it, you can do it,” Gran Torino growled.

If Kirishima realized what was going on, he was doing a terribly good job hiding it. Amajiki looked even more frightened than usual. “Once again, why do we have children in this meeting?” chastised the hero who first criticized the students’ presence. “I'll say this one time: we're wondering if this Chisaki bastard is turning his daughter's body into bullets, and selling them on the black market.” That was what helped Kirishima and the other girls understand.

“To be clear, we aren't certain that he's actually selling the bullets,” Nighteye replied. “At this point, their efficacy appears to be questionable. It's possible that they're still in the testing phase, and he's giving out samples to rally more people to his cause... We have no hard evidence, but we do know he’s gathering allies and funds from across the nation. If the completed drug allows him to annihilate someone's Quirk entirely... imagine the devastation he could cause.”

“Just talking about it's enough to make my blood boil,” snarled Fat Gum. “Let's go get this monster!”

The child-hating hero wasn’t impressed. “Woulda saved us a lot of trouble if these two amateurs had just gotten the girl away from him.”

*Oh no. You're definitely not going there! How could they have known something like*
“I take full responsibility Rock Lock,” Nighteye stopped the other hero. “The blame should not fall on them. Even without knowing the whole story, they acted to save the child each in their own way. Midoriya was willing to bear the risk of taking her then. While Mirio chose to wait for another opportunity when success would be more likely… I assure you nobody in this room is more frustrated than they are.”

I feel for you two, boys. I would've jumped at the chance to save that little girl. No one should do such a terrible thing to a poor little girl. Both of the boys shot from their chairs, shouting that they vowed to save Eri next time. Ayuma was glad for that. She was relieved that Sir Nighteye told Rock Lock not to blame them, and that they tried to save her in their own ways. And the green-haired Pro hero assured them that the rescue of the girl was their definite goal.

Rock Lock was still not letting up. “Tch! You kids wanna talk big, that's fine. But if what Nighteye is saying is for real, that little girl's at the center of Hassaikai’s entire underground drug operation. She may have managed to get away from Overhaul for a few minutes, but she got herself seen by a couple of heroes. You think he's still gonna keep her at home after that? Hell, I know I sure wouldn't. And if we go bustin' into their headquarters and she's not there, they're gonna know that we're onto them. We gotta be sure of where he's hidin' her.”

“He has a point,” Ryukyu pointed out; something Ayuma begrudgingly agreed with. "Do you have a plan for that, Nighteye?

“That's our conundrum. Since we don't currently know how far they've taken their plans, the success of our initial strike is crucial. To that end, we've made a thorough list of groups with connections to Hassaikai, as well as properties owned by the organization.” Nighteye formed a marked map on the projection screen. “This is our starting point. I would like you all to investigate each coordinate on this map. It is the most logical way to narrow down our targets.”

“So that's why you asked minor heroes like us to join you,” one of the other Pros understood. “The heroes in this room all operate in one of those locales. We know the areas better than most.”

“Didn't expect someone who worked for All Might for so long to be such a careful planner.” Fat Gum burst out, “Let's just go bring 'em down! While we're taking our sweet time, that abused girl's out there crying somewhere!”

“We can't do this like All Might would,” Nighteye countered. “That's why we must be meticulous about our strategies and predictions from the outset, so we have the highest chance of saving her.”

“He's right, we shouldn't rush,” Gran Torino added. “If we show our hand and then don't end up rescuing her, we'll just be throwing gas on a fire. Like how Stain's capture was a beacon that led criminals to seek out and join the League. In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if they handed out Quirk-destroying weapons to those hoodlums in order to increase their recruitment”

“You're thinking too dang much! If we keep sitting here yapping about it, we're never gonna get anything done!” the BMI hero shouted again.

Aizawa raised a tentative hand. “Excuse me? I've got a question. I don't know the specifics of your Quirk, Nighteye; feel free to correct. But from what I've heard of it, your Quirk Foresight allows you to see into the future. So why not use it on us? That's logical, right?”

Nighteye’s head dipped slightly. “I'm sorry, but I cannot. My Foresight has some limitations. I
need a full 24 hours between activations. That means I get one person, and then I'm spent for the rest of the day. Additionally, the future is played in my mind like a flashback. Think of it like viewing a film strip; for one hour, I have the power to watch a person's life as a movie. The issue is, everything I see is from a tight perspective on the person in question. This severely limits my capacity to interpret context."

“That should still provide more than enough information to be useful, don't you think?” Aizawa pointed out. “And it doesn't explain why you can't do it.”

“...What if I saw imminent death in the near future? Worse, what if it were a cruel, merciless demise?” Ayuma could see where that was leading. "My Quirk should be employed only after we've confirmed the highest likelihood of success. Then it can help ensure our victory. It shouldn't be relied upon when there are still too many uncertainties."

“Whoa whoa whoa, hold up, death is still information!” Rock Lock noted. “If we know what's coming, then we could figure out how to survive.”

“You don't understand. It's possible what I see is unavoidable.”

“Bro, that's the only excuse you have?! Oh hell no, just use it on me now! I'll show you I can beat death!” Rock Lock’s assistant was trying to calm him down at this point.

“I CAN’T!”

The room was silent. Ayuma couldn’t help disliking Rock Lock more and more, barely breathing outside the door. The dark-skinned hero just didn’t get how bad it could be. Death is a fear everyone has, and witnessing someone’s death and knowing it’s going to happen at some point can be arguably worse than experiencing anything close to it. He doesn’t understand how it must feel to know someone's about to die, and that there’s nothing you can do to stop it.

“We should get started,” Ryukyu’s even voice broke the tension. “There’s a child in trouble; that’s what's important here.”

Nighteye stood up with a slam on the table. “We must confirm the girl’s location and take her into our protection as quickly as possible using the most accurate data. I'm counting on your help; all of you.”

Ayuma silently took off to hide behind a corner as everyone started to leave. She watched her classmates, the Big Three, Mr. Aizawa, the minor Pros, Ryukyu and Fat Gum, Nighteye’s sidekicks, and Gran Torino. Nighteye himself was last to leave. Before he could suspect anything, Ayuma fled. She went to the staircase and flew up to the roof so she could leave. Fighting the tears from the sheer magnitude of the situation, Ayuma formed the deep blue stardust trail leading to Tenya -- the first classmate she could think of -- and took to the air back home.

Ayuma returned through her balcony like nothing happened. No one knew she left; no one would suspect it, either. To everyone else, she was just clipping her music box paper and/or texting Zuanshi and the twins over the phone. She was now doing the former, just so she could decompress. There was a lot for her to think about after that meeting she listened in on.

She knew she had to keep her mouth shut about this. If she told the others she knew, they’d ask each other who told her and not consider she was eavesdropping. The teachers would get all pissed off at her for getting into something that wasn’t her business but it was. Sir Nighteye wasn’t the only one dealing with the remaining Yakuza. Because of the Yoake-Oni, Gang Orca did, too.
So why wasn’t Gang Orca allowed to come to the meeting? Why wasn’t there even a sidekick present? Or a call for me like there was for the others?

And then there was that little Eri girl. She couldn’t believe someone was so heartless as to use a little girl’s DNA to destroy people’s Quirks. And she probably did have a small inkling of hope thanks to Midoriya. The hope Midoriya and Togata gave her is far from false. Just what she heard of this poor little girl reminded Ayuma way too much of her younger self. Being continuously tortured with no way of escaping it. Endlessly longing for help even though she knew it might never come.

Sure, when she was little and tired of how her Quirk could take control of her at a millisecond’s notice, she did fantasize about the family she’d have if she didn’t have it at all. But after revealing the source of her split personality, even for a short amount of time… she knew Nightmare’s own personality. A snarky, mildly rude, older-sibling character that would take control of her to keep her safe. All that time, her Quirk was protecting her from injury and trauma by taking over. Any threat would be neutralized and she’d be none the wiser. It never intended to have such an outcome as being hated all her life, but her safety was top priority.

And now that she had full control over her Quirk and didn’t have to share it with itself… she couldn’t imagine losing it.

Chapter End Notes

Keep in mind Ayuma's (and by extension, her siblings’) basic mindset towards authorities and most adults; specifically, the fact that their obedience to adults is mostly driven by fear rather than real trust. What causes their strange behaviors and decisions also affects the way other adults see them; particularly, authorities themselves.
Giant

Chapter Notes

So Ayuma does know all about the issue with Eri, but there's a few problems with her next move. She can't quite do much without exposing herself, which wouldn't go very well for her. So what to do...?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

For the next few days, Ayuma kept as close a watch on her involved friends as she could. Be it in class, at lunch, and even during training. Even with the pressure of the secret she had to keep, she could keep up with her “unemployed” classmates. They appeared to be all under a gag order, which was a minor relief to Ayuma; she wasn’t the only one keeping it all a secret. Bakugo was demanding to know the secret Kirishima was keeping, but the faux redhead refused to cave. Ochaco and Tsu were doing relatively well, but failing to save that little girl seemed to weigh heavily on Midoriya’s conscience.

When it was time for lunch, even Todoroki seemed to notice Midoriya's behavior, and knew something was up. The green-haired boy didn't walk with him or Tenya on the way there, which was also rather out of character for him. In the cafeteria, Ayuma noticed Todoroki and Tenya sitting by Midoriya and decided to join across from them. Midoriya wasn't even eating; he was just staring at his katsudon bowl in a daze.

"You're not gonna eat?" Todoroki asked, snapping him out of it.

"Oh! Uh... Of course I am, see?" Midoriya tried to cover his tracks.

Tenya put down his orange juice. "Are you alright?"

"You've been acting edgy and depressed ever since you started your Work Study," Todoroki pointed out.

Ayuma nodded in agreement. *I'd add that you’ve probably been a bit distracted about Eri, too.*

"Oh, have I really?" Midoriya wondered, his voice still half an octave too high.

Tenya was silent in thought for a second. “If you ever want to talk or anything, just let me know. We're friends, right?” Midoriya's eyes widened. "That’s what you said to me, remember? Back when we were heading off to our internships... When I was acting like a fool.”

*So, Tenya parroted Midoriya's advice from way back when to Midoriya himself to cheer him up.* Ayuma almost chuckled at realizing how thoughtful the gesture was.

Midoriya made a strange blubbery noise, and tears fell in front of his bowl. He was trying not to break down in tears right then and there in front of them; Tenya was freaking out, and even Todoroki was expressing concern. “Sorry... it's okay... it’s nothing...” Midoriya scoffed down the rest of his lunch, still trying to hold back his tears. “Heroes aren't supposed to cry...”

Ayuma's eyes softened in pity. Poor Midoriya... it hurts how much he's already cracked...
“I don’t know…” Todoroki said softly. “I figure that heroes cry when they need to… Don’t they?”

Ayuma smiled in approval at her friend’s statement. “Whatever’s happening, we’re all here for each other; you’re no exception.”

The other two boys started offering portions of their food to Midoriya. Part of Todoroki’s soba noodles with scallions and some of Tenya’s beef stew went to his bowl. Just for fun, Ayuma considered offering some of her ochazuke, but decided against it. Midoriya just seemed grateful to have good friends around him, willing to lend a hand despite his circumstances.

Even heroes cry… Unsure as you sounded, that was the perfect thing to say to him, Todoroki… Well done…

A couple of days later, before the sun was even up, Ayuma was awoken by the sound of footsteps coming from Tsu’s room going towards the elevator.

What’s Tsu doing, getting up so early in the morning? The sun is nowhere near up yet. Unless… it’s the mission she and the others were given with that Eri girl.

She swung out of bed and went into the hall. She saw a note taped to Tsu’s door, saying she had an urgent call-in from her Work Study. She presumed Ochaco, Midoriya, and Kirishima had the same thing. Ayuma knew that meant something big just happened.

Go with them. Follow them.

The urge was practically a voice in her head. Ayuma had to follow her friends, wherever they were going. Almost without thinking, she got dressed and grabbed her costume case. She waited for them and her teacher to leave the school. But before she went anywhere, her phone buzzed. She growled in a sudden wave of irritation.

What now?

She took a quick look only to realize it was from the Orca Agency. Gang Orca needed her to punch in real quick because of an emergency. But she was still being urged along by her own subconscious to follow her friends to Nighteye Agency. She had to choose between an emergency from her own mind, or from the hero who took her into his "pod."

Maybe it was something to do with what my friends are going into. Gang Orca might even let me go. Come to think, I might be more easily caught if I follow my friends again. I can follow Midoriya and the others at a later time to avoid suspicion. Besides, I know my classmates; I’ll know if they need my help.

With that plan in mind, Ayuma sighed in relief. She went to put a note on her door, and went down the elevator to head out.

The sun was finally rising by the time Ayuma reached Orca Agency. She hurried in and went up to Gang Orca's office. She stopped in front of the door when the hero started to walk out. "Uh, Gang Orca! I came as soon as I got the message. What’s happening?"

"I apologize for calling you in a day early like this, Nightmaiden," the hero apologized, "but there isn’t time to explain. Prepare yourself and follow me once you're ready."

Ayuma nodded, rushing off to get her costume on. Once she was ready, she went back
downstairs and followed the trail leading to Gang Orca. She found him and several of his sidekicks in a backstreet, fighting various thugs with massively charged Quirks. Several other people were battling the strangely reckless thugs that were throwing their Quirks around. Without a thought, she prepared a storm of nightmarish monsters, and dropped them into the fray.

The monsters were fighting as soon as they touched the ground. Their opponents seemed to barely notice that they were fighting their own biggest fears, but the allies seemed newly motivated by the help. One of the helping strangers seemed to be working together with Gang Orca, creating scarlet walls of cold fire along the ground to drive the villains into clusters for his ultrasonic waves to strike them down. Another seemed to have his body on fire, battling hand to hand with some of the villains and scorching them in the process. With the monsters holding down the worst of the unruly criminals, it was fairly easy to properly apprehend them.

"So this was why you had to call me in?" Ayuma asked when she deemed it safe enough to land.

"Unfortunately," one of the injured sidekicks affirmed. "Entire groups like this showed up all over the city. Somehow a lot of Quirk-boosting drugs were smuggled into the city for small groups like this to use. Our forces are spread rather thin, even with help from the police and Yoake-Oni."

That made Ayuma do a double-take. "Now we're working with the Yakuza group that was supposedly causing trouble?" She turned toward the two men that helped the group with the thugs only to step on something. "Hm? What's this?" She picked up the discarded injector that was under her foot. "I'm guessing this belonged to the guys we just took down?"

"Most likely," Gang Orca nodded. "We're gathering them for the police to analyze due to the sudden influx of these drugs into this city."

"Here's some water for you two," one of the relatively unharmed sidekicks gave some water bottles to the helpers, since they both had diffused their respective Quirks. Both of them seemed pretty exhausted and were glad for the water. They looked oddly similar; given how they also had two fire-related Quirks, they were probably brothers.

Ayuma suddenly looked up. Something's about to happen. Something isn't right. What's going on?

It wasn't very noticeable, but she almost thought she heard something. A long, high screech; someone calling for help.

"Do you sense something, Nightmaiden?" Gang Orca asked, noticing her actions.

Ayuma looked back at him, nodding. "It's something big. And I think it's coming from the mountains outside the city."

The hero nodded in understanding. "We'll be fine right here. Go to where you're needed."

That's what I was hoping for. Ayuma formed her wings and took to the sky, following her instincts to the mountains, as fast as she could go.

There was a small group of images in the forest on the mountainside. A golden brown image was zipping around like a missile, bouncing off trees and rocks. A few others were closing in around a wispy, dark purple cloud. It seemed oddly familiar as she drew close.
"The warp villain." Midoriya's voice echoed in her mind. Of course it would be that walking portal from the training camp.

"Watch out for Kurogiri's portals!" a younger voice shouted.

*That voice... Tsukauchi!*

She shot over to the fight only for Kurogiri to appear right in front of her.

"You again," he recognized, creating a giant maw of dark mist, ready to swallow her whole.

*No. Not this time.*

Without even thinking, she swerved around Kurogiri and landed a roundhouse kick to the neck armor, forcing the portal to retract. He landed only to get buffeted by Gran Torino's pinball-esque barrage. He managed to reorient himself and started creating portals all around to divert the attacks of the police and the elderly Pro. Ayuma barely managed to catch him with a ribbon before he went into a closing portal.

"Nice to have a bit of young blood to help us out," Gran Torino smirked when Ayuma helped him get airborne again. "Think you can keep up?"

"You've seen me fly before, you know."

Their misty target lunged at them with portals wide open, and they both dodged the attack.

"Tag team?" Ayuma offered.

"Better than just wasting bullets."

Their opponent was still waving portals around like swords, sending them at Tsukauchi and the officers. They were trying to shoot the villain, but he kept absorbing the bullets. He even briefly slipped right out of his suit and tried to teleport *himself* away. But before he could, Ayuma chopped off any portals he made with her scissor blades, and Gran Torino kept ruthlessly pounding him with attacks.

"Why you...!" Kurogiri formed portals under various rocks and fallen trees, opening their other sides above his attackers.

"I got the projectiles! You get him!" Torino barked, kicking the massive weapons away.

"Got it!" Ayuma weaved through the dark mist, trying to find the main body. She just needed to find his eyes somewhere within his Dreamscape image. There's no way his bright yellow eyes could hide in such a dark color.

"Now you're mine." The mist closed in on Ayuma in a dark purple sphere. "Now where are my manners? You may call me Kurogiri. You must be the great Hero of Heroes I've heard of. What a miniscule threat you are. How *did* you manage to almost defeat Dabi and Twice?"

Ayuma scowled at her prison. At a snap of her fingers, a huge number of scissors appeared around her, each one pointing out. "This is how." With a wave of her hands, all the blades shot outward in a single sphere, shredding the mist and allowing her to escape. By then, she found Kurogiri's main body and formed her ribbons, surging forward. She sent them out to "bandage" his hands entirely, before leaping over to jerk them behind his back."Gran Torino!"
"Ready!" Ayuma kept Kurogiri in her grasp so Gran Torino could land a proper hit. "Now!"

And at the same time, Gran Torino landed a blow to the solar plexus, and Ayuma sent herself up from an ax kick down on Kurogiri's neck.

"Good work there, kiddo," Gran Torino commended. "What's your code name?"

"Dreamscape Heroine: Nightmaiden," Ayuma answered. "I had a feeling something was going on and came over. How did you find out this slippery villain was even out here?"

"There were a lot of eyewitness reports in the last week or so," Gran Torino answered. "Once we got the League's most annoying member, the rest are soon to fall along with him."

Kurogiri tried to stand up only for a scissor blade to press against his neck through his armor. "Don't move," Ayuma warned as the police finally started to catch up.

"Be careful, Ayuma!" Tsukauchi warned. "Any exposed part of him is able to produce those warp gates. It won't be easy to properly restrain him." Maybe not, but Ayuma's Quirk allowed her to seek out his wrists enough to help get the cuffs on without too much issue.

"Wait..." Kurogiri wheezed around the blade against his neck. "There are rumors... of a wild man who keeps appearing without warning... You've heard of him... Have you not, Gran Torino... Dangerous as it is... I have business with the wild man..."

"Oh really? Well then, let's sit down and have a chat about it," snarled the elder hero.

Ayuma heard a shriek and a crash further into the forest. "I don't think that'll be necessary..."

"His eyes... are always on what lies ahead..." Kurogiri continued. "Detective Tsukauchi... Gran Torino... And Little Nightmare..." Ayuma felt a chill go up her spine from the nickname. "He didn't just have Tomura Shigaraki..."

Another crash, and Ayuma almost thought she saw a tree falling, and heard a news report that's be on a radio.

"Meet another one of All for One's servants." A massive shadow marched out of the trees. "Gigantomachia."

The creature was as big as the trees around him, even walking on all fours. His body seemed like a combination of rugged rocks and rippling muscle and sinews, and fangs protruded from his solid lower jaw. As the radio tied around his neck buzzed with a weather forecast, a deep, booming voice rumbled at the creatures underfoot.

"Let... Kuro... Giri... GO!"

The beast reared up, giant fists clenched into massive sledgehammers. Gran Torino shot over to shove the police away, and Ayuma grabbed Kurogiri and flew out of the way. Good thing for both of them, because there were crater where the monster's fists landed. Gigantomachia roared in outrage. He tore up trees like they were twigs and hurled them at his enemies. Ayuma barely dodged the projectile with the load she was carrying, and Torino, Tsukauchi, and the police were also having trouble avoiding what was being thrown at them.

Realizing her issue, Ayuma brought her captive down to the group on the ground, handing Kurogiri over to them.
"Make sure Kurogiri doesn't go anywhere!" she shouted over Gigantomachia's roars. "Just try to stay out of sight!"

"Right!" Tsukauchi complied. "Be careful, Ayuma! This guy seems on a whole other level!"

Ayuma simply flew back into the fray alongside Gran Torino. The great beast seemed to have almost grown in the short amount of time he was fighting. But with his flailing fists and massive projectiles, neither could get close. Anything that was created using Nightmare couldn't do anything either. Scissors bounced off, the ribbons did nothing, and any fears the monster had were so faded as to be non-existent.

"Nothing's working!" Ayuma exclaimed in frustration.

"This thing is out of control!"

**SHRIEEEEEK!**

Ayuma spun around at the new sound. That definitely didn't sound like it was coming from Gigantomachia's radio! And no one close by could scream like that.

Wait... What's that?

A small, rust-colored image flying towards the battle. It looked like it had wings, and large ears. It seemed to be where the shriek was coming from, as it let loose another one that caught Gigantomachia's attention. It sounded like it was yelling at the creature to stop. It made a sudden dive for his head, racing over his eyes. He roared in anguish.

"NOW AYUMA!"

Not even realizing the new arrival called her by name, Ayuma rushed in with her scissors, Gran Torino landing a blow to the face as the scissors slashed over the rest of his face. Newly enraged, Gigantomachia swatted at the attackers, forcing them all back.

That was when Ayuma could get a better look at the new source of help through their image. A young woman with bright orange eyes, short brown hair curled around her shoulders, and bat ears above the top of her head. A halter top allowed the skin of massive bat wings to stretch out, and clawed hands were where the thumbs on a normal bat would be; steel blades were cuffed to her wrists. At the base of her frayed jeans, hooked feet flexed in the air.

"I never knew you'd be able to fly, Ayuma," the woman commented, giving a small, fanged smile.

That was when Ayuma realized, as if time had slowed down. She knew that face. She knew that person. But this young woman was only about thirteen at the time of the escape. But her behavior was no longer feral, but back to its sweet self. Even as her shrieks vibrated the air, nothing happened to change her face. She was no longer a slave to her animal side, -- bat, to be exact -- but she was still one of Ayuma's big sisters. And the wings that could so easily wrap a young child like a living blanket had only grown that much bigger.

*I... I can't believe... this is where you've been... all this time..."

"...Hi... Himei..."

Chapter End Notes
Eee-YUP! Big Bat Sister Himei has entered the stage! And Ayuma's fighting alongside Gran Torino and her old friend Tsukauchi! Was anyone else wondering where they were during the whole thing? I know I was. But I promise she'll head over to Shie Hassaikai as soon as possible.

And one other thing: Those two fire-related Quirks she and Orca Agency were fighting alongside? Yeah, those were her uncles. Hinise's Pyro-Illusion Quirk allows him to harmlessly and perpetually set anything on fire. Taimatsu's Flame Body Quirk causes his body to heat up until it can burn on contact. However, the former drains Hinise's stamina, and the latter leaves Taimatsu rather dehydrated if used too long.
Himei Kougami; her Quirk: Megabat! She's taken on several characteristics of the flying fox, including wings, sensitive hearing, smell, and eyesight, and vocal cords that can reach incredibly high pitches. She's also made use of blades especially created to be used by people with arm-wing Quirks like hers!

Also, THIRTY KUDOS AND A THOUSAND HITS! THANK YOU FOR THIS MILESTONE, AND MANY MORE TO COME!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Himei was never a violent creature; at least, she never tried to be. She was one of the gentler souls in the early home she and Ayuma and the others shared, singing lullabies and helping the younger ones through bad nights. But she could never get too close to a loud sound or a bright light without going feral and returning to the darkness. Her screams could break glass and burst ears, and a lot of times she was sent to the basement for becoming a wild animal in the face of such overwhelming stimuli.

It made the home being stormed and the events that followed that much harder on her. Even now, Ayuma could remember the awful shriek she let out when a scissor blade tore into her wing in the raid. She heard it above Tenkijo crying out to Ayuma herself... when...

"Watch out, Nightmaiden!"

Gran Torino's voice forced her from her thoughts in time to dodge a boulder. Gigantomachia seemed to only be getting bigger, throwing more things at his opponents up in the air and repeatedly slamming against the ground. All Ayuma, Torino, and Himei could do was stop the projectiles from reaching any civilians or nearby structures.

"There's no way we can attack that thing while it's thrashing everything around him!" Himei exclaimed. "We can't even get close!"

"We have to!" Gran Torino barked. "It's the only way we can take him down! If it gets too bad, we'll have to grab Kurogiri and the boys on the ground and get somewhere safe!"

"It's the only way, Himei!" Ayuma added. "See the guys with the man made of mists? Go down and try to keep them safe from this monster. If we say we have to retreat, help them get out of here."

"Ayuma, no!" the bat-mutated woman protested. "I already felt like I lost you once; I don't want to see you almost get yourself killed again!

Ayuma's gaze steeled as she and the elder Pro rushed into the barrage, Himei calling for them to come back barely heard over Gigantomachia's bellowing roars. He continued uprooting trees and lifting boulders, hurling them at them, not even realizing he crushed some of them before they were thrown. His little finger alone had grown enough to tower above Gran Torino. His entire hand could easily grab Ayuma and Himei and snap their spines!
Watching Ayuma and the flying Pro hero in the midst of debris, Himei didn't know what to do next. She wanted to go in and help them with that villain, but she thought it was too dangerous. She had already chased him and the mist man down ever since they first spoke not far from her home. But Ayuma assigned her to help those people on the ground with the mist man. And there were police among them!

*We can't trust the police. They're on her side. They're all on her side! They'll recognize us! THEY'LL HURT US AGAIN!!*

One of the men on the ground looked up at Himei, the world seemingly slowing down. Even across the distance and flying weapons, the man down there was pleading for help. That he and his colleagues were being pummeled by the trees, rocks, and monstrous fists being thrown their way while an elder hero and her little sister were putting their lives on the line. The old man darted between projectiles to land hits that seemed to the beast like little more than cherry taps. Ayuma's Quirk -- which Himei realized she now had full control over -- was flinging enlarged objects and siccing nightmarish giant creatures onto the monster called Gigantomachia.

*But... if there somehow are good people among those obligated to "protect"... where were they? Where were they when we all got hurt? Where were they when we all took blades for each other's sake?... Where were they when we were forced to fight and flee?*

She noticed a heavy-looking tree was being hurled right at them and her mind went blank. Before Himei could even think of doing otherwise, she folded her wings. She dove towards them, her ears folding back at the cold and the air screaming in protest to what she was going into. Her eyes watered from the high speed and freezing air. When she drew in close, she swung out her swords.

And sliced the tree apart.

"Go! RUN!" she screamed behind her, using both blades to knock aside a large rock. She kept periodically looking behind her, but the injured unit was barely going a snail's pace, and Ayuma and that Torino hero were both struggling against the ever-growing monster. Ayuma seemed to have finally had enough, flying up higher and higher above the villain.

*NIGHT TERROR!*

Out from the ground beneath the behemoth, massive black tentacles sprung up. They were black as a starless night, black as Ayuma's eyes, and clearly seen even against the darkness her Quirk brought upon the world. They lashed violently at the monster, wrapping around his limbs and lashing at him like whips. Even her battle partner looked impressed; shocked, even. And Himei couldn't have been more proud of the little redhead.

*That's my little sister...*

With the opening Ayuma had given, the bloodied Gran Torino rushed down to Tsukauchi and the other officers. He dragged along the collapsing detective and the captive villain as Himei hurried along all the others. As strong as those tentacles were in holding down the great beast, Gigantomachia would eventually outgrow and destroy them. He just kept on growing, at this point almost half the size of the mountain they were on.

"We have to get all these guys to ground level!" Gran Torino shouted over the roars. "Can you take Kurogiri?!"

Himei nodded, wincing at the sound of the monster's ever-growing rage. The claws of her feet
hooked themselves into the crevices of the villain's neck armor, soaring down the mountainside. Vaguely, she could hear the hero yelling for Ayuma to hold out as long as she can until they're all safe.

The problem was, Ayuma's post-Nightmare migraine was starting to catch up with her. She almost thought she heard Gigantomachia cursing the name of someone within all his otherwise-intelligible bellowing roars. But she couldn't quite tell who. His massive, straining hands only climbed higher as he grew, and Ayuma had to fly to dizzying heights just to avoid getting struck out of the sky.

Two of his nightmares had made themselves most coherent in all of this. One was a man with orange hair, skin patched with ghastly white and a dark eye inside a white patch on his face. He seemed almost merged with her Super Move, too, with black pouring down his entire back and limbs. The other was a woman with similarly bloodstained dark red hair and berry purple slits for eyes, almost reminiscent of the two men who helped her and Gang Orca what felt like hours ago. She was riding on some sort of massive metallic gray monster, and seemed wreathed in flames.

But before Ayuma could figure out anything else, the altitude and headache became too much for her. Gigantomachia broke free of Night Terror, and she had only mere seconds before he came crashing down on the earth beneath him. She dove towards the still-in-range troop below, conjuring her whale to swim through the air alongside her. She heard Gigantomachia slam the ground, and the mere shock from the force violently tossed all of his opponents off the mountain.

Ayuma's whale was quick to catch her before going in to grab the cops. Himei was pretty much out of range anyway, the relenting Kurogiri securely in her grasp. She could also see a shakily-flying Gran Torino using his own Quirk to carefully carry Tsukauchi down. Despite the headache, Ayuma went over to them.

"Hop aboard, Gran Torino," she beckoned, holding a hand out. "It'll be easier for both of you this way."

the cape-wearing hero accepted her hand, letting her pull them onto the whale. "You'll make a fine hero someday, Nightmaiden."

"No offense to your Quirk, Ayuma..." Tsukauchi coughed, blood trickling from his mouth, "but what a nightmare..."

Ayuma rolled her eyes at the poorly-attempted joke, too tired and in pain to even bother responding. All she could do was bring them all down to the nearest town, not even daring to look at what wreckage the walking disaster they battled had left behind.

But it isn't like he's wrong.

Most of the aftermath was left up to Gran Torino.

Once the group had all touched down by a police station at the foot of the mountain, he had Himei hand Kurogiri over to them so he could be brought to Tartarus where he belonged. More than a few ambulances were called up to take care of the injured cops, heroes, and their new ally. Himei and Ayuma were both rather hesitant to it, but the elderly Pro didn't leave much room for argument. There was no way that even one of them got out of that grueling battle unscathed, if their haggard and bloodstained appearances were anything to go by.

But, given Ayuma and Himei’s rather… fearful reactions to the thought of being brought to a
hospital, he could only assume that their reasoning was far from unjustified. Their very eyes could've easily been from the same person. The girls were even shaking from the moment they stepped inside the police station, to sit down and wait for the help to arrive.

"I'm so sorry I had to meet up with you again like this, Himei," Ayuma apologized, staring down at her mangled costume. "I didn't think we'd wind up in a police station again."

"It's okay, Ayuma," Himei reassured shakily, arm blades in her lap as she wrapped a wing around her little sister. "I'm just glad I found you again. I missed you ever since the escape."

Ayuma mustered a smile. "So did I... Did you find anyone else?"

"Not really. I was usually out at night, so I never saw anyone. My Quirk brought me out into the mountains in the first place. I've mostly been helping the rangers who patrol the mountains ever since, and some of them with animal Quirks have helped me out with mine. But I can't say I'm surprised you're on your way to becoming a hero. Have you found any of the others yourself?"

"Yeah. Zuanshi and the twins each go to different hero-training schools. Zuanshi goes to Ketsubutsu, Hansha and Kagami are in Shiketsu, and I'm in U.A. They, uh... they first found out about me when Endeavor picked a fight with me, and have helped me gain control of my Quirk and grow stronger ever since."

Himei hummed, her ear giving a twitch. "I might've heard about that fight you had with Endeavor over the radio at some point. And something about a young hero-in-training helping a few other Pro heroes at some points."

The redhead chuckled. "Yeah, that was probably me... Hey Himei, do you have a phone number? We've made one to keep in touch with each other since reuniting. I could add you to the group."

"Maybe later, when all this has blown over." Not long afterward, Himei nearly flew through the ceiling when she heard the sirens of the ambulances. Ayuma herself was also a bit unnerved, the sounds only bringing up plenty of bad memories.

"Don't worry, ladies," Gran Torino waved off their fright as the paramedics came in. "They'll just patch us up and send us on our way. Nothing to worry about."

Says you, both girls thought in disdain. They simply remained still as stone as they were fussed over by the EMTs, not even daring to give a reaction. Not as Himei's long wings were stretched out to inspect the tears in the webbing. Not as one of them found a tear in Ayuma's costume that showed scar tissue along the left side of her ribcage identical to what was on her arm. (Obviously the other half of the damage Endeavor caused her.) They were just sitting there, motionless and nearly unresponsive, heads down and eyes looking at their feet. As if they were robots that had just shut down in the face of being overwhelmed, revealing an unmovable glass wall between the adults and the orphans.

Gran Torino didn't like what he was seeing. Not that he was mad about the girls' behavior; if anything, he was concerned. Why were they acting this way? Why didn't they bother responding to the paramedics? Where were the determined, powerful allies from the battle on the mountainside? Did they always shut themselves away like this in front of strangers? They didn't even want to follow them to the ambulance to get properly treated for their injuries; in fact, they looked more likely to bolt at any second.

One of the older local officers trying to help with the girls was staring at both of them in a
strange way. Like he somehow knew both of them but couldn't quite remember where or when. He was also trying to somehow get their attention, but to no avail. Torino's eyes narrowed in suspicion, but he was on his way out to the ambulance Tsukauchi was being loaded into.

The officer tapped Ayuma's head and she tensed up, Himei's ear twitching. The officer's expression suddenly donned a sneer. Gran Torino heard the officer viciously growl out, "I remember you two brats now." Whatever was visible of their eyes widened in utter terror.

Quicker than anyone could react, the man grabbed a fistful of Ayuma's hair and yanked her upward, whirling her around to grab her wrist and twist it behind her back. He started pulling the hand in her hair and the one wrapped around her wrist closer and closer together. Either her neck or her arm was going to break, and the officer even kept Himei down by crushing his boot into her lap, on top of where her hands were.

Gran Torino rushed over to get the man off the two girls, but he wasn't fast enough. Himei let loose a violent scream that shattered all glass in her proximity, including the windows, and set off the alarm. Ayuma pulled off a backwards kick and squirmed out of his grasp, spinning around to shove him into the nearby desk. Before Torino even knew what was happening, Ayuma and Himei had jumped out the broken windows and prepared to take to the air. The officer, clearly not wanting to leave empty-handed, rushed outside and did something unthinkable.

He took out his gun and fired at them.

The man only shot a couple of rounds before Gran Torino and one of the local officers apprehended him. The rogue was shouting for them to capture the escaping girls as people in the area panicked at the sound of gunshots. He shouted that they attacked him and his old unit a long time ago. Even something about an orphanage, all the while calling Ayuma, Himei, and a bunch of other kids despicable names, carrying on about how they refused to respect authority.

That was when Torino knew what was wrong. Hell, he knew what the officer said was wrong. They were scared to enter the station because they knew something like this would happen. They must've had a bad experience like this at some point in the past and it got swept under the rug. Even so, the elderly Pro was saddened by such a cruel truth. An officer with a grudge tried to apprehend two innocents and they were forced to fight and flee.

And for all they knew, at least one of the two might've been injured by a bullet.

All that Ayuma had in her mind was a mess of emotions. Fear, pain, sadness, and anger. She remembered that particular cop all too well. He was one of them that she and the others had to escape from when they were younger. The fact that the officers who hurt her and her siblings were as scattered as they themselves were, -- and could possibly be found anywhere -- to put it simply, terrified her.

And Himei was just as scared; that much, Ayuma could tell. Regardless of being at least twenty years old now, the bat mutant was evidently wracked with fear and pain. Even after the whole battle with Gigantomachia, and controlled by her animal side or not, Himei hated loud noises, and gunshots are as loud as sounds come. But something else was wrong...

"Himei! Why are you flying like that?!" Ayuma cried towards the orange silhouette, shakily flying through the air. It looked almost like one wing was flapping more than the other.

"Something hit my shoulder!" she yelled back. "I think a muscle got torn or something! I can't flap my wing!"
Ayuma's heart dropped. *She was shot. That cop shot my sister and now she can't fly right! What should I do? What should I do...?*

"*Go to where you're needed."

Gang Orca's words echoed in her mind. He was the closest thing she had to someone she could trust enough to help. *And he must be back at the agency by now. "Himei, will you be able to keep up with me? I can create something to help if you need it."

"I think I'll be able to handle it if it isn't too long," Himei responded. "Why?"

Ayuma preparing the Dreamscape trail to the orca hero. "I'm bringing you somewhere safe. Follow me!"

Through her image's glow, Himei looked rather pained, but followed her as quickly as she could.

Chapter End Notes

Truth be told, Ayuma's the only person Himei can trust at the moment, injured or not. That whole thing with the old officer was nothing short of disastrous. He planned to apprehend both of them, and they reacted the way anyone would to such a scenario: fight back as needed, and get away as quickly as they could.
So where were we? Oh right! Ayuma and Himei running from a crazy cop with a grudge. What a tool he was. And now a certain pair of heroes are going to learn more about it. And for something else, you're going to learn about it, too!

Gang Orca and his exhausted sidekicks were finally starting to regroup at the Orca Agency. The issues of the drug-boosted villains had pretty much been taken care of at that point, and the heroes were more than grateful for their underworld allies. The lower tiers of the Yoake-Oni were a big help in bringing everything under control, too. Fever Dream's brothers seemed glad to be able to help, and Hinise seemed satisfied that he saw their niece, and that Ayuma was indeed quite like her supposed father.

But just before Gang Orca was going to head inside, he saw shadows pass overhead. The sky washed over in black, and he almost thought he smelled blood. He looked up at not one, but two shapes circling overhead, seemingly starting to glide down towards him. One held Ayuma's translucent moth wings, so Orca was sure that one was her. The other had enormous bat wings, but they seemed to be shaking and flapping irregularly.

He watched as they circled down to the ground, Ayuma supporting the young woman who was flying with her despite herself looking absolutely spent. The woman was evidently a bat mutant, and she had one wing wrapped around the other, blood caked over her shoulder. Both of them, he noticed, were also battered with many other injuries.

"What happened out there, Nightmaiden?" he asked, moving to help the two. But as soon as he even grazed the stranger's shoulder, she flinched away, flattening her ears and baring her fangs.

"It's alright, Himei," Ayuma reassured her friend. "He's not going to hurt you... I hope..." The brunette simply turned her eyes toward her injured arm, muttering under her breath. With careful hands, Ayuma folded the better wing away to inspect the blood-covered wound piercing Himei's shoulder. "Gang Orca, this is Himei. She helped us out in the mountains with a villain issue, but something happened afterward..."

"I see. Those injuries need to be treated, Nightmaiden," Gang Orca stated, "especially that particular wound on your friend. I can bring you to the hospital to have them looked at. We'll make sure nothing happens to either of you."

The two girls looked at each other hesitantly, but they soon nodded, and followed the towering hero.

Considering Ayuma and Himei had both gone through such a tough battle, and an extra adrenaline rush to flee the bad cop, they had both quite clearly run out of steam. Ayuma's post-Nightmare headache had come back full-force, graduating to dizzying migraine status. And Himei's shoulder hurt too much to bother moving it. Gang Orca drove the two of them to the hospital, but they seemed so exhausted that they most likely wouldn't remember much once they were fully
Not long after his passengers had been handed over to the hospital staff, Gang Orca was told something he certainly didn't expect. Not only was the bat mutant Ayuma called Himei just like his trainee, -- without a file to her name -- but the bullet that tore a ligament in her shoulder, and lodged itself in her clavicle, was from a **police officer's pistol**!

To think that a certified officer of the law would pull out his gun and **shoot** at two scared innocents. And after calling the station where it came from, he heard that the reason why was nothing more than a **grudge**. The sheer notion of that sort of thing happening had Gang Orca's blood far past boiling point. He was almost grateful that Ayuma was taken away to get patched up, and that Himei was sent into emergency surgery to remove the bullet before they could patch her up as well. At least then, they didn't have to see him this way.

The great hero took a deep sigh. **Ayuma and Himei... I beg of you... please be alright.**

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Tsunagu has always found some children and youths to be rather... different.

He was always good at reading people; many people considered him to be an empath for that reason. And seeing a person's general demeanor within the first few minutes of seeing them face-to-face became one of his strong suits. How they acted and how they spoke would typically show him how they thought. He could sometimes even see who they really were... whether or not they hid behind a mask.

But those different children... they always confused him somehow. These exceptions usually had his sixth sense saying something about them that even he couldn't believe. That Bakugo somehow had the soul of a hero under his spiky shell. That some children and youths he saw held crippling, paralyzing fear with underlying guilt. That so many are more willing to shut out adults entirely than allow all of the ones who harmed them to do so again. More than he could ever care to admit, they always surprised him.

And his new roommate was one of those exceptions.

She was set down in the bed beside his not too long ago, where she quickly fell asleep. All sorts of injuries were cleaned and treated from what he saw. Her hair was a mess of tangles and bits of dirt, rock, and even twigs on the white sheet, and his fingers itched to restore it to that coppery curtain he knew it was. She was sleeping on her side, her torso rising and falling with a sort of exhaustion he didn't think he'd ever see.

Tsunagu could certainly recognize the girl; Ayuma, if memory served him well. She managed to fight the then Number 2 Hero and maintain a stance in battle against Endeavor. In the U.A. Sports Festival, she just missed the top spot in a race, but was unfortunately disqualified afterward. Even so, he was impressed by her raw power, though mildly troubled by the clear lack in control, and offered her a chance to be his intern. He hoped to help her refine that strength into a tool that people don't need to be afraid of. She chose Hawks instead, unfortunately, and he was left with her more... jagged classmate instead.

Though in hindsight, that might've been for the best, or the young Number 2 Hero would no longer be here. And she saved Tsunagu himself, too, from dying of blood loss; thanks to her, he only got away with a missing lung. He had the chance to meet her before that night, and saw her face-to-face. But unfortunately, her presence had just **shrunk** in his wake, unable to be seen. His sixth sense was largely useless for such a mess of matted threads. She shared the qualities of a hero, a villain, and a victim, and he couldn't see which was the most dominant.
But here, curled up in the bed beside his, she was something else entirely. A tired, war-torn soldier, wrapped up in the body of a little girl. A mere child, forced to fight for her life in every little way. He could see what Kugo saw in her. Some stray strands were littered over her as if they were cracks. Every so often, a part of her would twitch, or her closed eyes would squeeze tight, or she’d almost whimper. Like she was having some kind of dream.

It made him almost wonder what she was dreaming about...

The noise was deafening. The armored men yelling. Everything and everyone toppling over each other. Red lasers threatening to blind whoever was looking at the forced-open door. She ran out of the basement in absolute fury, taking out all the scissor blades she had on her and threw them like knives. People were dropping like flies; stabbed, paralyzed, or both.

Ayuma went to the basement door and went down, calling for her sibling. They were down there, slowly dragging their way up the staircase, still weakly coming back from Kirai’s Paral-Eyes. Ayuma was calling to them.

"Tenkijo! Hurry up! Come on!"

They reached out a shaking hand and she grabbed it, proceeding to try pulling them out. They were so much bigger than her, and she was trying to support the door’s weight as well as theirs. All while stubbornly trying to block out the screams behind her.

She heard Suru crying out.

That was Himei just now. Her shadow’s gone.

Was that Hansha?

Zuanshi?!

Jenrai and Raiko!

Everybody!

Ayuma had to hurry and get Tenkijo out. The two of them were almost there... Just a little longer... A little further...

"AYUMA LOOK OUT!"

...What was that, hitting her back? Why were her legs so weak? Why couldn’t she stand?

Ayuma tried to turn and look, but all she saw was her...

Ayuma was awoken by her own short scream. She was shaking, gasping for air, and so cold. Tears were in her eyes. The cloth over her felt like it was tying her down, and she struggled to get out of it. Before she knew it, it had simply unraveled around her and released her. Ayuma’s head shot up to meet mossy green eyes not far away.

"Put your mind at ease, young hero..."

...Best Jeanist...

Ayuma’s racing heart had gradually slowed down. The darkness of her Quirk lightened as her
eyes returned to normal. Oxygen came to her more easily, and her breathing slowed to a regular pace. She realized it was Jeanist's Fiber Master Quirk that moved the blanket holding her down, weaving it back together at her feet. He looked strange... and different, compared to when she saw him at the mall, or when she saved him and fled from All for One.

"For sleeping relatively peacefully, that must've been quite the sleep terror," he commented softly. "And judging by your injuries, quite a battle, as well."

Ayuma looked toward the door. "No nurses or anything... Probably wasn't enough to alert anyone."

"There's also the fact that it isn't the best idea to wake someone having a terror," the hero added.

She suddenly shot upward, looking around. "Himei? Himei!" Tsunagu watched as black flushed into her eyes and darkened the room around them, and she looked out the door again. She let out a sigh of relief when she saw the orange trail leading to her sister, who was alright; the steady fade-in, fade-out rhythm meant she was most likely asleep.

"Himei?" Tsunagu echoed. "Who's that?"

She looked back at the blond hero. "She's, well... she's my sister, you could say... And technically a wildlife ranger, who helped us in the mountains with a couple of villains. But... after the battle... we were..."

Tsunagu saw the tears filling her jewel-bright eyes as she looked down. He immediately saw something in her. A kind of heartbreaking fear and sadness he wished a child would never have to experience. *What horrible thing happened to this 'sister' she speaks of?*

"...Attacked..." Ayuma's tears were starting to fall and dampen the sheets, "...by an officer..." Her voice rose and cracked under her emotions. "Not only were some of my bones nearly broken by sheer strength... That cop pulled out his gun and shot my sister!"

Tsunagu's eyes widened in astonishment and horror, and he couldn't have stopped it for the life of him.

A certified police officer, obligated to protect people, decided to openly attack two girls rather than help them. And that officer thought such actions were *justified*. If that were combined with all the times a hero hurt her, accidentally or not, it'd be the perfect reason she doesn't trust the authority figures around her, or is genuinely scared of them. *She can't trust the police or certain Pro heroes because they harm her and the ones she cares about. Was this the sort of life she had to live?*

He was almost sick at the thought of such a life. A life trusting almost, if not entirely *no one*; never truly feeling safe. He carefully slid out of bed and walked over to her, sitting on her bedside and placing a reassuring arm around her shoulders. His fingers, jumping at their chance, began meticulously plucking every twig, leave, and pebble from her hair. All the while, she silently shed her tears. "It was a despicable thing of that officer to do to you and your sister," he said to her. "That officer has clearly torn his obligation to protect and help people."

Ayuma just sat there in silence, letting her newfound companion clear out her hair. He simply discarded of them in the trash can, slowly restoring the coppery curtain. "The others are probably worrying by now..." she said muzzily. "I should probably go back to U.A. at some point... and tell them I'm alright..."
"Not until your strength returns," Tsunagu chided softly. "Rest, little broken bird. You'll be able to return later, when you and your sister are fully stitched back together."

"But Nightmare... and the dreams..."

An eyebrow rose. **This isn't the first time her Quirk has caused this? Caused her to have terrors or actual nightmares?** Honestly, the drawbacks of some Quirks can just be outright horrifying. Especially those of orphans that are left suppressed and left to build up like volcanoes.

Shrugging off such thoughts, Tsunagu finished cleaning out Ayuma's hair before letting her lay down again. She still needed some time to rest before she could go anywhere, after all. And if Kugo didn't already know about what happened to his Hero of Heroes, he will most likely know soon.

Chapter End Notes

Tsunagu Hakamata and Kugo Sakamata, may your good deeds to those of Yokohama Foster Home follow you in good fortune. Also, I'm hoping I don't need to actually tell you guys what happened to Ayuma in the borderline-SWAT storm her night terror had so graciously decided to put out. Sorry about that.
Remember that promise Ayuma made to Shinso? Where she said she'd come back if something bad happened? Well... here's what happened when she wasn't able to go home yet.

Toshinori Yagi was in a staff meeting when he first got the call. Nezu was discussing recent events concerning the Work Studies with the first-years. Vlad King said all was going well with those of his students who decided to go on one. Yagi commented that young Midoriya and the others had also been doing well.

And he forgot to turn down his phone's ringer beforehand.

"A PHONE CALL, IS HERE! A PHONE CALL, IS HERE!"

Vlad King deadpanned at the retired hero as Yagi took out his phone to see the ID. "You need to figure out how to use the vibrate function, All Might."

"Sorry, sorry," he apologized for the ringtone as he left the room. "I'll just take this and be right back."

Once out in the hall, Yagi answered his phone. "Hello, this is All Might speaking."

"No need for formalities with me, Toshinori."

Yagi was surprised he didn't start coughing blood at the voice. "G-g-Gran Torino! Uh... What is it?"

"Nothing too important. Just wondering... Have two young ladies shown up at U.A. in the past hour or so?"

Young ladies? "No... may I ask why?"

"Well... I, Tsukauchi, and a few of his comrades went into the mountains where we caught sight of Kurogiri. I'm sure you remember him."

"Of course. Kinda hard to forget a villain who almost killed me."

"Figures. We were having a bit of trouble when a hero-in-training showed up and helped us take him out. She looked about the same age as young Midoriya. I believe she was the girl from Kamino that All for One called 'Little Nightmare'."

Little Nightmare... Of course it had to be her. "That would be young Ayuma. But why ask about her? Did she get hurt?"

"Not badly, from what I could see. All of us got a pretty good beating... but we caught that slippery Warp Gate."
Yagi let a smile come to his face. "That's a good thing. You've practically grabbed the League of Villains by the horns!"

"Not quite. There was nothing we could do about the other guy... It was a hard decision to make, but when he appeared followed by a little more help for us, we had to retreat. All for One's top lackey has disappeared after a short battle we had with him."

"More help? Did someone else come and help you besides Ayuma?"

"Yeah, a wildlife ranger up in the mountains. A woman young Ayuma called Himei; she had some kind of bat Mutation Quirk, too, and a couple of arm-blades. But with the battle, it's honestly hard to say which side came out on top, considering we caught one and lost the other. And the one who got away... is a walking disaster..."

Yagi couldn't argue with that. Any direct servant of his nemesis had to be incredibly dangerous regardless of whether the master was out and about or in the most secure prison facility to date.

"That said, something did happen in the aftermath concerning the two helpers."

That only made the blond hero grow more worried. "What? What happened to Ayuma and this friend of hers?"

"We went to stop at a local police station to rest up before being taken to the hospital," Torino explained. "The two of them weren't exactly all for it, but we didn't figure out why until... one of the local officers attacked them..."

The image of a certain Nightmare-caused sequence flashed in the hero's memory. All those kids, writhing in the grasps of police officers... The younger appearance of his orphan student almost having her neck broken... He could vaguely remember one of the officers trying to break an arm on one of those unfortunate children.

"No, not an arm... a wing. Was that one this Himei? "Like the sequence... when All for One forcefully activated young Ayuma's Quirk..."

"Somewhat like that, Toshinori. But this was one guy who tried to break Ayuma's neck and tried to hold Himei down, but they both got out and flew off. The officer even... opened fire on them both... We don't know where they went or where they've ended up."

"Maybe you can try contacting Gang Orca," Yagi suggested. "He's young Ayuma's Work Study, so he must know something. Even if neither of them were hit by a bullet, I don't think they'd be able to fly as far as here from where you went after a battle with two strong villains."

"Hmm... that's a fair point. I'll see if I can. Tsukauchi's been a little concerned himself after Ayuma and that friend of hers took off like that."

"Just tell him Ayuma's a strong young woman," Yagi advised. "She's most likely alright." He heard Torino's grunt of agreement before he hung up.

Someone cleared their throat behind the retired hero. He turned to see a boy who looked like a young, purple version of Aizawa behind him, wearing a PE uniform. He had the same tired eyes and relatively messy hair, and even a similar capture scarf slung over his shoulder, but he had a dark mask-looking device around his neck instead of goggles.

"Sorry to intrude, All Might... but... I'm wondering where Ayuma and Eraser Head are," he
said, rubbing the back of his neck. "Neither of them have shown up for afternoon training and... I feel like something's happened."

Ah, of course. Yagi remembered this young man from the Sports Festival. Hitoshi Shinso, the one who almost defeated young Midoriya because of his Brainwashing Quirk. And also who young Ayuma somehow managed to get surprisingly close to in the time since, considering they were battle partners who won against Vlad King in the Final Exams. Come to think, he has seen the boy going to the TDL along with young Ayuma and Aizawa after classes.

"Aizawa's out on a mission with a few other heroes at the moment," the retired hero explained. "And I believe young Ayuma was also called in by Gang Orca because of an emergency."

Shinso didn't look entirely convinced, but he sighed. "Ayuma's instincts must be rubbing off on me or something... She promised she'd come back if something bad happened like last time..."

Yagi could see where he was coming from. That certainly explained why young Ayuma came flying back to U.A. after the brutal attack on the training camp that summer. She was the first one to pass the word along to them, but she came back because she promised this friend of hers that she would. That meant she'd put a lot of trust into this boy in front of him, to promise that she'd return in case of trouble. But still, she and that Himei Gran Torino mentioned hadn't come to the campus, so they must've gone elsewhere.

"Tell you what, I'll let you know when young Ayuma and/or Aizawa returns," Yagi suggested. "That way, they can explain their absence to you themselves."

The purple-haired student narrowed his eyes slightly, but turned on his heel and left. "I guess that's a good idea... But I just hope she's alright..." he murmured to himself.

Yagi wouldn't exactly admit it to a student, but he thought the same.

Hitoshi wasn't sure if he could feel any more stupid in making this sort of decision.

Sure, he finished his daily training in the gym he visited when Ayuma and Eraser Head were at the camp. He cleaned himself up afterward, too... but he was still worried about his crush friend. The incessant feeling that something bad happened just wouldn't leave, and he wanted to wait for her just to be sure she was okay. And somehow he figured it would be best to wait alongside her own class. Now he was just standing in front of the 1-A dorm, debating whether or not it would be a good idea to even knock on the door. Especially with thoughts on the people inside.

That Bakugo guy would definitely blow up in his face, -- no doubt about that -- but the only kind of solace in that would that he seemed to be like that to everybody. The two guys among Ayuma's classmates he Brainwashed back at the Sports Fest might still hold a grudge. Some of them just seemed a bit too energetic or obnoxious for him to want to approach. And, this last one being more for Ayuma's sake than his own, the dirty-minded shorty -- who apparently harassed her more than once -- might even try to use Hitoshi himself to get to her.

He swallowed his fear as best he could and raised a hand. Before he could stop himself, he rapped his knuckles against the double doors.

Hitoshi waited a minute or so, almost considering leaving right then and there, when the doors opened to him. It was the 1-A Class Rep, with a small glimpse of a black-haired girl in a turtleneck
inside at a table. He could also just see the one named Todoroki sitting by the TV.

"Ah, good afternoon!" said the Class Rep with a flat-handed wave. "You must be Ayuma's friend Shinso, if I recall correctly. I'm Tenya Iida! Come in, and welcome to our dorm!"

Hitoshi nodded as Iida shook his hand and let him in. If he were honest, he was a bit surprised that he was being welcomed by the students he wouldn't actually expect to allow a stranger into their home. The noirette sitting at the table looked up from her homework to see him, giving him a friendly wave and smile. **Oh wait. I think that's Momo Yaoyorozu... kinda hard to recognize her since I've only ever seen her with a ponytail.**

"So what brings you here to our dorm, Shinso?" Iida asked.

"Mostly just waiting for Ayuma, I guess," Hitoshi replied. "I was wondering where she and, uh... your homeroom teacher have gone since they're apparently not here. I think some of your other classmates were missing, too."

"Ah, of course. Perfectly understandable to be concerned about a dear friend of yours being unexpectedly missing," Yaoyorozu commented.

"Their Work Studies called for them in the middle of the night," Todoroki said, not looking away from the TV. Hitoshi realized he was flipping through news channels as he sat down on an adjacent couch. "We realized it when Midoriya, Ayuma, Kirishima, Uraraka, and Asui didn't come for breakfast. They all put notes about it on their doors and left while we were still asleep."

The purple-haired visitor couldn't help but notice the intensity of Todoroki’s different-colored eyes as he stared at the TV, alternating between news channels. He must've been looking or waiting for any breaking news to show up concerning Midoriya and the other Work Study students. Not that he could blame the guy for being worried when he felt the same. But the other was probably more justified, since Midoriya did tend to injure himself in battle to massive degrees.

"You were the reason Ayuma left... from the training camp," Todoroki said, more of a statement than a question.

Hitoshi looked at him. "Yeah, I guess you could say that. She promised me she'd come back if anything bad happened. But this time, even though I feel like something's gone wrong, she isn't back yet."

Todoroki hummed and finally tore his eyes from the TV, staring at Hitoshi instead. "Ayuma must be really important to you... Like how Kirishima is to Bakugo; he's been coming downstairs from time to time just to see if they've come back yet..."

"And if you ask me, Midoriya seems to be rather important to you," the purplette added. "Don't think I didn't notice how he was the only one who got you to use your flames, on and off the battlefield."

Hitoshi wasn't exactly sure, but he thought he saw Todoroki crack a smile. "...I guess you have a point.... It seems we both have someone important to us that we can't help worrying about."

Hitoshi hummed in agreement. If anything, he was glad for this sort of common ground with Todoroki. And with what the dual-colored boy had stated, he knew he'd formed a bond of understanding, with the hero student. A sort of brotherhood, even.

At the very least, he wasn't alone in this waiting game.
This was the absolute last thing Hansha expected from a text from Zuanshi.

The message was quick, and cryptic, when it appeared on his and Kagami's phones. It was only saying that they had to check a certain news channel now. Kagami turned it on to see a breaking news report coming from a mountain range and nearby city. It was about a villain who fought a group of authorities, -- an elder Pro, a group of police officers, a wildlife ranger, and a hero-in-training -- that somehow managed to completely level a mountainside. The two of them were horrified at the footage of the destroyed mountain.

But Inasa had turned up at the worst part, and he wasn't at all as loud as usual.

"What's this, you two?" he asked, voice shaking.

Hansha simply motioned for him to sit down and watch with them. The larger boy complied, sitting in between the twins as they continued watching the screen.

After the villain battle, the group went to rest and wait for medical help at a police station in a nearby town. But when the ambulances arrived, one of the local officers attacked the ranger and young hero, showing the security footage. A man was holding one red-haired girl in a position that was sure to break an important bone if held too long, while stomping on a sitting brunette. Then came a loud screech that completely offlined the camera, and the footage switched to a different security camera outside, watching as the two girls flew for the sky. There was a couple of loud BANGS as they flew out of camera range.

Kagami had a hand over her mouth, eyes wide and tearing up from horror. Hansha felt like he was about to throw up, and Inasa looked absolutely dumbfounded. The twins simply looked at each other from across their adoptive brother.

"That was Ayuma," Hansha murmured, "no doubt about it..."

"And Himei..." Kagami added in a muffled whimper. "Only she could ever scream like that."

"More of your old siblings?" Inasa asked the two of them, earning a nod from each.

"And that cop... he must've been one of the goons... from the escape," Kagami added, her mind already starting to slip from the memory. "He tried to break Ayuma's neck... all over again... And maybe Himei's arm, too... and he shot them...!"

Hansha was already feeling her words affect him as well. His surroundings were flickering in the wake of the bad memories, and his brain couldn't tell which one was real. Sitting on the couch, or almost picked off his feet with his arms behind his back. "Kag... stop it... they're coming..."

Inasa's attention was directed away from the news and to the traumatized twins. He knew better than to try and call them out of this state of mind at full volume, or else make them hurt him or even themselves. All he could do was mute the TV and hold them both close, murmuring soft assurances to both of them. Whether or not they consciously knew, they were safe in his hold.

Even while they were both entranced in a teary, thousand-kilometer stare, they clung to him like a lifeline, shivering like they were out in the arctic. He could feel Kagami's Quirk disabling his -- maybe her No-Sell was even spreading to her brother -- but he didn't care. He's had to do this sort of thing before. Their parents couldn't really do much, since they were usually out working late.

*It reminds me of when we first took you both in. You were both always so scared, and so much smaller than me even though you were older, even now. Every other grown-up you met terrified you. I'm sure I lost count of all the times I've had to help you... carrying you through attacks like*
this... You couldn't even bring yourselves to trust the people who wanted to help you through that fear... But I've always been there for you... and I always will be your hero...

Just while watching the screen, Inasa couldn't help recalling the twins' "sister's" behavior in the exam. Ayuma from U.A. High. She fought well, and strong, in how she managed to easily take on so many people all on her own. And she was apparently an effective rescuer, too. Maybe she even knew how to sense the changes in the wind the way Inasa could. A good hero if he ever saw one.

But at the same time, after getting a real good look at her, he could see that she was every bit as shattered as Hansha and Kagami were. The way she just stopped herself in mid-air and screamed her lungs out. That blood-curdling shriek that tore the air with its sheer terror and pain. She was just so much more vocal with her trauma than his twin adopted siblings, and even he was taken by surprise at how loud it was.

That said, Ayuma did try to make him and Todoroki cooperate. She really did, but it was his fault they didn't hear her. His gusts sent her voice spiraling in the other direction. She fought desperately and cried for help, and he didn't help her. It took someone else entirely as well as both boys getting completely paralyzed by Gang Orca to even realize they had to cooperate. Even with the noise she could make, his own Quirk ensured that she wasn't loud enough for them to hear her cry for help.

And if Ayuma and this Himei suffered the same hell the two orphans around him lived through... Inasa couldn't imagine living a life with no one to be their hero.

Chapter End Notes

So we have the sort of bond Inasa has with the Miru twins, and now a starting friendship between Shinso and some of 1-A. What do you think about these sorts of dynamics I put in here?
Little One

Chapter Notes

Pardon the delay, guys. I don't know why, but the dub apparently was not in the mood to catch up with the sub. On top of that, my computer has decided not to cooperate ever since the new year started. Not so Plus Ultra, I know. But anyways, let's start off by Ayuma falling into a much better dream... Well, not exactly a dream; more like... a memory.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was a long way away, and a long time ago. In the dark, isolated cavern of the building that was the basement. A child's body lay on the cold stone floor in the heavy, suffocating silence. Blood seeped from crack-like patterns etched lightly into pale skin. The breathing of the tiny body was so quiet, you would've thought the child a corpse if you weren't listening closely.

It was an eternity afterward when even one of the body's hands started to twitch. It clenched into a fist and relaxed as the face it belonged to seemed to wake from a trance. A pair of eyes went from a few slow, disoriented and teary blinks to flying wide open with terror as the child tore her way upward. She was off-balance, and braced her trembling hands on the floor, trying to catch her breath.

The oxygen just wouldn't reach her lungs before it left her. She couldn't see a thing, and her breathing bounced off the walls and ceiling in a claustrophobic echo. And the worst part was that her body was still weak from the effects of Paral-Eyes. She fought to stagger to her feet, but her legs just didn't want to let her stand.

A wave of twilight poured into the basement, with the sounds of whispering voices within shifting shadows.

"Shh! Be quiet so she doesn't hear us!"

"Hurry; head down and get her. We'll stand guard since we've got the door."

"Got it."

Footsteps pattered down the staircase in the form of one tall silhouette. She recognized the eyes of the figure, gleaming with all sorts of different colors like a kaleidoscope. "Hey there, Yume."

"Tenkijo..." she murmured as the shadow knelt to her level. "I... can't..."

"Don't worry," the androgynous orphan smiled warmly as they scooped her up. "We'll get you patched up and in bed in no time."

Tenkijo carried their little sister up the stairs to where Himei and Suru were holding the door open. Once out of the basement, the older girls carefully closed the heavy door. They followed Tenkijo as they carried the little one to a bathroom, Himei briefly heading off to get some pajamas.

"Oh, Ayuma," whimpered the blonde big sister as soon as she really saw the mess the little
redhead was in, sitting on a sink counter. All the scratches and dried blood, the massive purple welt on her cheek, and blood mixing into the tears on her face. "That looks worse than usual; you were doing so well, too. What happened?"

Tenkijo went to get the first aid supplies, returning to gently clean and bandage the scratches like the family medic they've always been. Ayuma sniffled at the memory. "My Quirk appeared, Suru, in a villain swarm! I... I don't even know how... I don't even remember... It just took over me and used me... I was just trying to help my foster family because they were in the crossfire... And they just beat me and sent me back..."

By the time Tenkijo was just about done, Himei had returned with some nightclothes for the little redhead. The older orphans went out into the hallway so she could change before bringing her to her very small bedroom.

"You think you'll be able to get some sleep, Ayuma?" Suru asked worriedly. "Our doors are always open if you're scared."

"I know, Suru..." Ayuma replied, looking down at the plain gray sheets of her bed. "But I wish they really thought I was helping them. None of them were hurt after my Quirk stopped... I just wanted to save them..."

Suru smiled sadly, her messy braid gleaming like a halo in tandem with her eyes from the lights outside the window, as she brushed Ayuma's coppery locks out of her face. "I know, Ayuma; my sweet, kind-hearted little sister. Maybe one day this cruel world will learn not to hate you or any of us. You can prove how wonderful you really are yourself, if you can one day escape this place and learn to take control of this power you have."

"I hope I can... someday... Suru, can you sing the lullaby for me?"

The blonde chuckled as she eased herself onto the bed, pulling Ayuma into her arms. "I'm not quite as good as Himei since she's learned it, but I'm all for it..."

If there was one thing Eri had always known, it was that she was a curse.

There was no denying it. Everyone around her said it was true. She was always being told that she shouldn't have existed, but at the same time she was the center of some grand master plan her "father" had conceived. She lived through an eternity of being injected and drained, taken apart and put back together like a mangled toy. All because her "father" wanted to make use of her awful Quirk and its unimaginable dangers.

All she wanted was to leave such a hole of torture, but a threat was always held above her head to stop her. And that threat was always someone else's life. She knew what her "father" was capable of. She was forced to endure it so many times she was sure she should've died a million times by now. She's stared death in the face and has been yanked back to life more times than she could ever hope to count.

And still, it was so much deeper a scar to see other people meet it.

Her "father" had a Quirk that could at least activate in the same way hers did. All it took was a touch. But he was able to make people and things explode at the brush of a fingertip, and sometimes make them come back together. She has seen it happen, to the big man with the weird gloves when he challenged Kai. A graze, and he'd explode, but then he'd come back together, and just get back to work with a grumble. That man didn't like her "father" unlike all the others; Eri
secretly admired the hardened warrior for such a spirit.

That was why, the second she found an opening, she ran. She ran through the dark maze where she always heard her "father" slowly following her. She cried for help, and no one appeared around a corner to help her. She tried following the light to at least be out in the open where he wouldn't be able to find her or hurt her.

Until she ran headfirst into that hero; the green rabbit.

Whether or not she wanted help, she couldn't help being scared. She did slam into him, and he was surprisingly strong not to even stagger whereas she tumbled back into the hard pavement. He effortlessly helped her up, his wide, jade green eyes alight with concern. The big blond hero looming over his shoulder cast a swath of a shadow over her as well, when her "father" caught up.

Even as she was asked to return to the dark home she could never feel safe in, she clung to the green-wearing hero, begging him not to leave her. Forcing herself to tune everything else out as all she focused on was her shaking hands clutching his clothes. He didn't push her away at all; instead, she felt his arms settle around her. He felt so warm... so protective... and kind.

Eri wanted to stay there with him forever... but when their lives were threatened, she had no choice but to return.

Someone as kind as he is... doesn't deserve to die because of me... So why now?

Why did the heroes come back for her? Why are they still here? Why would so many complete strangers be willing to put their lives on the line... for her?

It didn't matter now. Hari had Eri firmly encased in his cold grasp, and her "father" was prattling along in front of them with the other guards followed behind. The two new people left already, and everything was shaking. All she could do was curl into a ball, shut her eyes, cover her ears, and pray for it all to end soon. Just suffer through it; the same way she always has. After all, no one was supposed to help a cursed child like her. She wasn't worth that kind of trouble.

So why is that blond hero trying to save her?

The student just walked through the walls like they weren't even there when he first showed up, telling the grown-ups that they needed to talk. The two men above Eri were more than a little irritated, if the shift in Kai's voice and tighten of Hari's grip was anything to go by. She could see Shin and Deidoro hiding in the darkness, the latter chugging a bottle of strange liquid. But what scared her most was the look in Kai's eyes as he stared down the hero.

It happened even faster than Eri thought. The second he charged, he suddenly careened into the wall. Shin started opening fire and was barely dodged, using his Quirk to find out the boy's intangibility Quirk. She heard Shin and his breaking monologue, and she silently wished he would just give up and leave, if only for his own life. She could see Shin and Deidoro hiding in the darkness, the latter chugging a bottle of strange liquid. But what scared her most was the look in Kai's eyes as he stared down the hero.

"Please don't!" Eri cried, her voice quavering weakly. "Go back! Leave me! Otherwise he'll kill you!" He'll kill you the way he killed all of the others. I might kill you without even trying!
But she could see a boundless determination in his blue eyes. Even before he gave voice to such a vow, Eri knew he really wouldn't let go. "I'm never gonna let you down again, Eri. I swear it: I am going to be your hero."

He wasn't letting her squirm out anytime soon. Not when she wanted to just leave to keep him and the other heroes safe. Not when Shin tried to break him with words. Not when Kai tried to call her back into the darkness, reminding her how cursed she is.

"Go; hurry," she repeated to the hero.

"Don't listen to him," he soothed, his gloved hand in her hair.

Kai started trying to break both of them with massive spikes of rock. It all simply went through him, as he lifted her above the fray.

"You could've been hurt... but he didn't care," the hero growled, holding her all the more protectively.

Of course he doesn't care about me. He can just put me back together with his Quirk. The same way he always has done to me.

Hari was back up; he had his gun aimed at them. Kai cleared a path in the spiked minefield. Eri knew he was going to fire.

"Sorry 'bout this," the student apologized, the smile never leaving his face. He tore off the better part of his cape, shrouding them both with the red fabric. She heard the bullets that were fired, but they were too far off to the side as he vanished into the floor.

Even in the brutality of the fight, Eri was sheltered in the cape blanketing her form. She somehow couldn't get one thing out of her head. She couldn't keep her eyes off the hero. Somehow, just by the look in his bright blue eyes, she realized that he knew. He knew she was willing to return to the depths of Hell rather than see someone else hurt. He knew Kai was a monster, and addressed him as such. He easily alternated between Kai and Hari, landing vicious attacks between slipping through solid walls and floors and spikes as if they weren't there.

The adrenaline she felt just watching made Eri hyperaware of everything. She could hear Shin starting to move within the walls he was trapped between. He was calling out to Kai like a lonely dog. A pillbox-sized case was thrown to him, filled with five bullet-sized capsules to load into his gun. Eri's heart dropped at the sight of them; she recognized exactly what they were.

That's from me. Those were created because of me. Someone's Quirk is going to die, and their user along with it. Please. Oh please don't let it be him. Please! I'll do anything if you don't hurt him!

Her eyes were fixed on the barrel of the pistol. It hovered in the direction of Kai and the hero, before suddenly swiveling towards her instead.

Me? My Quirk is going to die today? Will I be killed for real this time?

The blond boy noticed Shin's aim. Eri saw him streak towards her as she shut her eyes, bracing for the shot. She didn't even need to see him overtaking her, shielding her. But behind her eyelids, she saw his shadow overtake hers. Her eyes flew wide when his glove delicately brushed her hair away. His smile remained in front of her; a sick sort of reassurance even with the looming consequence of his daring act.
And she felt it when his Quirk disappeared. She felt her own blood race through every blood vessel in the hero's body. And when the boy was on his hands and knees, trembling on the brink of despair, she knew it was all over. The one who promised to be her hero was going to die, at Kai's hands, a Quirkless wannabe.

Because she killed Permeation.

She helplessly reached out for him under the red shelter he gave her. She wasn't even paying attention to Kai and his rambling. All she could focus on was the hero, silently begging him to just leave, if only with his own life. But in the next second, he was fighting again, throwing Hari this way and that, landing blow after blow upon Kai. He avoided Kai's hands of death, even while Quirkless and possibly still under Deidoro's Quirk. He'd keep coming back for her to get her away from Kai's attacks. even while repeatedly being punctured by the stone blades. Because, as he said, he was still Lemillion.

Eri couldn't stop her eyes from filling with tears. She could see every one of Lemillion's injuries wherever the spikes partly impaled him. She knew he was going to die if he kept this up, but her voice wouldn't work. She couldn't tell him to retreat, and she secretly knew he wouldn't anyway. Because she was somehow important to him, enough to die for her; a truth that made her heart soar and stomped on it at the same time.

"You wanted to become a hero so badly," Kai's slithery voice crawled through the silence. "And yet you couldn't even save Eri. You're filthy, Lemillion; infected. But I'll fix you all with her power. Every last one of you."

A soft sound, rhythmic and unnoticeable to the elders, met Eri's ear. Something cracking. Something splitting. Something giving way. And it wasn't Kai's Quirk; it sounded more like brute force from someone like the warrior. Cracks webbed across the wall, breaking away entirely to form a massive doorway in the solid rock. Everyone's eyes were on the shadow in the cloud of dust.

The green rabbit had arrived at last.

Chapter End Notes

That one hurt to write. Especially after just watching Permeation effectively die onscreen and how Young!Mirio disappeared into the light. Can you imagine any of our other characters losing their Quirk? *shivers* Not a very pleasant thought. With that said, I apologize again for tardiness, even though it was technically Funimation's own fault for now pulling the dub back a week behind the sub since Christmas. I'm hoping and praying they even things out again soon.
Kindness

Chapter Notes

Still waiting on the dub to catch up with the sub. It doesn't seem to want to do so at the moment, so unlike what I was hoping for, this chapter's a little short. And I apologize for that.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hitoshi didn't look up from his phone when he heard the sound of the elevator. He just kept on scrolling through the most recent news articles he could find. Todoroki was still flipping through news channels, and the purple-haired visitor decided to help in his own little way. He could let the hero students know if he found anything concerning any of their classmates and what their Work Studies may have called them away for.

"Hey, what's this guy doing here?" a gruff, growling voice demanded. Hitoshi didn't really need to look over his shoulder, but did so anyway and saw none other than Class 1-A's not-so-accurate face sauntering over. "Ya lost, Mr. Mind-Control? Cause the General Studies dorms are a bit further down the line; I can send you there if you like." He put a sparking hand up by Hitoshi's face, but despite such a looming threat...

"Like you would actually do it, and I'm not lost," Hitoshi replied, silently enjoying the growl he got in return. If he bothered to go beyond that, he'd be under his control in no time.

"Shinso is our guest, Bakugo," Iida's voice called from the kitchen. "He came to visit so that he could wait for Ayuma and the others to return."

"And as you can see, they're not back yet," Hitoshi pointed out. "Now would you be so kind as to head back upstairs and let the rest of us wait this out in peace?"

Hitoshi was mildly surprised the rest of Bakugo didn't explode alongside his Quirk. "WHAT DID YOU SAY?!"

He froze, eyes blank as he throttled back into a neutral posture. Hitoshi smirked at his luck; not to say Class 1-A deserved the reputation that the ash blond gave them, but the living grenade really was the easiest to provoke.

"Go back to the elevator," Hitoshi commanded, and the blond spun on his heel and walked back to what he came out of. Once in the elevator, Hitoshi was about to add on to it, until he realized something. "Uh, which floor is his room on?"

"Fourth," Todoroki replied.

Hitoshi nodded in thanks. "Press the button to the fourth floor," he commanded the Brainwashed Bakugo. In the next few seconds, he heard it close and finally thought it safe to release the student.

"Good work," Todoroki commended, sporting a minuscule smile of amusement. "At least you got Bakugo to quiet down and leave without any problem. Your Quirk seems like it'd be really
useful for hero work."

Hitoshi smiled back, returning his attention to the news articles on his phone. A few more
scrolls of the screen, and Hitoshi saw something that made his stomach flip over. "Uh... Todoroki...
you might want to see this..."

Nothing happened except Todoroki suddenly not switching channels anymore. Instead, his
eyes were locked on the screen showing the same monstrosity that was on his phone.
Todoroki's answer came touched with a sort of speechless horror Hitoshi himself knew all too well.
"...I think I already am..."

---

It's him... the green rabbit...

Eri watched in awe as the green-haired hero barreled through the whole in the wall, slamming
a fist into Kai's shoulder like a battering ram. In no time at all, Kai was sent flying, and a scruffy
man in all black with a long scarf flashed a glowing red, literally hair-raising glare in Kai's
direction from under his gold goggles. An older man with green and yellow hair and a silver suit
came in as well.

"Nighteye, quick!" the black-clothed hero called. "Secure those who've been injured!"

The green-haired businessman looked around the room before coming to the blond hero in
front of Eri. "Mirio!"

"Get... Eri out of here..." the swaying blond wheezed. "She's... behind me..."

In no time at all, Eri was being pulled against a wiry, but firm shoulder, with a gentle hand
between her shoulders. She could see Lemillion partially slumped over the adult's shoulder on the
other side of the embrace.

"Rest; I've got you now," the man instructed. "You were amazing. You've found her...
Mirio..."

Mirio... Is that... his real name?

It was enough to make her start crying all over again. Being a hero is only a title, and it was
only known by the Quirk behind it. And this hero, without his own Quirk, was reduced to a name
no one would be able to hear again. And it was all her fault... Directly or not, she was the one who
killed the hero Lemillion before the world could ever start calling him by such a name. Lemillion
was no more because of her; now, he was only Mirio. And not much later, Kai only reminding
them of it did nothing to help.

"I... I'm so... so sorry..." she sobbed. "I did this... to him... I killed Lemillion... He's not a hero
anymore... because of me..."

"No, little one... it was never really your fault..." whispered the hero called Nighteye. "You'd
never wish such a thing, and I know it..."

She didn't even have to look behind her when she heard the crashes of the ground. She could
feel Kai's murderous presence closing in. The hero in black was gone, and so was Hari; she could
only pray the poor hero wasn't dead. Nighteye only pulled her and Mirio in closer.

...Nothing happened.
Eri mustered the courage to open her eyes, and look behind her. She could see the green hero using a wedge of rock to knock aside the monstrosity Kai made of himself. She turned away and kept her eyes shut, blocking out all the noise of the battle around her. She was passed along into Mirio's arms again as Nighteye supposedly went to aid the green hero.

A softer, much gentler presence replaced the older hero. Eri looked up to see the green hero -- who Nighteye called "Deku" -- standing protectively above her and Mirio.

"Lemillion, Eri, how badly are you injured?" the boy in green asked. "Do you think you can walk?"

"Yeah..." Mirio answered. "No problem. I'm fine."

_No he's not_, Eri thought, fists clenched and shaking. _He's badly hurt, Quirkless, and can barely get off the ground. He would've killed him if the other heroes hadn't come!_

"...But I failed... You're sad again and it's my fault."

_No. Don't blame yourself. Blame me if you have to blame anyone._

Deku simply looked to the side. "Come on, let's go." With a quick kick, another opening was blown through the wall. "I'm pretty sure this'll lead us back. We need to get away from Chisaki!"

Eri unconsciously reached out to Mirio for comfort in leaving the monster behind them, but jolted when she felt something wet. Her shaking hand came back with dark red staining her fingertips. _He's bleeding, and really hurt... He can't go on like this... "No," she said, clenching her fist again as tears welled in her eyes. "That's enough..."_ All she could think about was what Kai told her: Every action she takes will result in another's death, no matter what; because she is a cursed child -- a monster -- and that's all she'll ever be. _"I'm so sorry..."

Deku looked beyond Eri, along with Mirio. Both of their faces turned wracked with horror at an awful, gut-wrenching sound. Mirio screamed in despair, and she didn't want to see why; she already knew.

_Someone else has died... because of me..._

Another attack, and Deku disappeared from in front of her to stop it.

"Take her!" he ordered. "Get Eri to safety!"

Mirio nodded, before gently urging Eri along. "Come on. Let's get you out of here while he buys us time."

Eri could only follow as he took her by the hand, leading her painfully slowly through the corridor that even she knew better than he did. A clear trail of blood marked the otherwise sterile floor every time his injured leg even shifted its position. Tears formed rivulets from his eyes to the tiles. He leaned on the wall for support until even his last leg gave out on him.

"Go, Eri," he said through his restrained sobs. "Find somewhere to hide. Wait for help... Dozens of people... are doing everything they can... to save you... Just hide... It's all good; you're gonna be fine... Okay?... Just go..."

She couldn't move. It hurt too much to watch, let alone run away knowing he was suffering here like this. He was in so much pain, and so were all of those other people who came here for her sake. She was the reason they came here, and she was also going to be the reason they all died.
"Someone is about to die because of you!" Kai's angry voice echoed violently through the corridor. "Is that really what you want?! ERI!!"

The image of it was harder to avoid this time. She could remember the chair. Being strapped down... slowly being drained of all life... The fiery pain streaking through every part of her... reappearing in herself sobbing in the restraints... Before she knew it, she was walking back, unable to even hear the blond teen calling for her to return.

"No... Wait..." she said, crossing the threshold onto the battlefield. "It's not... I don't want this..."

"Go back!" Deku panicked. "You need to stay with Lemillion, Eri!"

*I'm sorry... but I can't... If only to keep you safe..."

"Eri," the voice of Shin and that of Kai were blended into a single, eerie call, within the black palm of a hand that their voice spoke from. "Look at him, injured and alone. You don't really think he can defeat me, do you?"

The answer came out sooner than she wanted it to. "No I don't." Because I've seen you kill so many people so easily. I don't want someone as kind as that hero to die.

"Smart girl. So then what do suppose you should do?"

She looked up at Kai. At the monster he turned himself into just to keep himself over her. "I'll come back... But if I do... I want you to make them all better again!"

Kai lowered his mouth-bearing hand. "Ah yes! It's so much easier to be hurt yourself than it is to watch while others are hurt for you, isn't it. The faint flicker of hope Lemillion gave her has been extinguished. Don't you see? You think you're helping her, but you're really just being cruel." The look in his eyes was that of a predator ready for a killing blow. "She. Doesn't. Want you."

"...Yes I do, a small voice inside Eri admitted. I hope that I'll be safe one day. I want you to save me... But I want you to be safe even more. I'm willing to go back, if only to save you from him. You're a good hero who should save all of those other people out there who need help more than I do... It'll be better that way, and I can wait for you.

"...Maybe he's right," Deku finally said, yanking a spike from his foot. "Maybe you think you don't want my help... But I won't let you down, Eri... I'm not letting anyone die!" He crushed the spike in his bare fist. "I'm going to save you!"

Almost as if in response to such a vow, the ceiling caved in. People fell into the room in a tangled mess of people. Rikiya's massive form was more than obvious among them. The hero in pink looked towards the minefield of spikes in utter horror and rushed towards whatever it was. The heroine in green leaped her way down. The lady dragon above Rikiya firmly slammed him against the floor to knock him out.

It's really happening... I might really be safe now... I'm going to be free...

"ERI!!" that all-too-horrifying voice called out into the swirling dust, and every single part of Eri froze.

Next thing she knew, she was thrown up in the air.
Alrighty then. If my calculations are correct, Ayuma will have her first real interaction with Eri at some point within the next handful of chapters. But we'll see if that turns out to be true.
This one is going to be a doozy, I'll give you that. And we have not one but two POVs we're not familiar with. Alrighty then, let's leap on into the underground.

Ryuko was relieved at how quickly the villain went from busting the front gate to tied down in front of them. For such a big guy, he went down pretty quick, as Uravity and Froppy had commented.

"Rikiya Katsukame," Ryuko remembered. "Enhances his size by breathing in the life force of the person he's touching. Isolate him now before he regains consciousness!"

"Yes ma'am," the officers replied, preparing to drag the villain away.

"Things are sounding pretty lively in there, we'd better get moving," Nejire-Chan said, pointing at the broken entryway.

Ryuko nodded. "We're heading in later than I had hoped, but let's catch up to Nighteye."

"Right," the first-years said before heading towards the gate.

Their feet hadn't even hit the ground when they suddenly dropped. Ryuko felt it, too, the sudden noticeable drop in her strength. She spun back toward Katsukame to see him absorbing bright orange energy from not only her trainees, but also the cops. He's stealing their vitality! How? He's not even touching them!

"The Quirk booster Irinaka gave me is finally kicking in," the villain said. "About damn time." He stood up to full height, the restraints breaking around his body. "That's more like it!"

"Oh no," breathed Ryuko. She felt what was left of her power race through her veins, her body twisting and morphing and growing into her dragon form. She just managed to catch a monstrous fist in her talon. So that's it: his Quirk's been enhanced! She glanced back at her younger interns, catatonically leaning on each other just to stay upright. He's drained them so completely they don't even have the energy to stand. "Nejire!"

"Yup, I'm going to it, full-charge!" the weakened bluenette affirmed, preparing an energy blast. She backed off to let loose the spiraling wave of her own vitality.

Katsukame barely had to lift an arm to guard from it, laughing at the futile attack. "Looks like the drug wore off, so I'll need to get a little handsy with you!"

Ryuko never saw Nejire look so pissed off and disgusted before as she fired a couple more warning shots. "Back OFF, you creep!"

"Uraraka! We need some backup quick!" Deku suddenly appeared calling out for Uravity. "Underground right below the intersection over there! The others are pinned down; we have to help them!"
Ryuko could understand what his two classmates were too tired to. "Let's go!" she roared, beating her wings to charge at the enemy. Uravity used her Quirk while he was off-balance, and Froppy's tongue also tied around his head, dragging them along.

"Now Nejire! Hit us with everything you've got!" Ryuko commanded.

"How are these stupid little girls still moving?!" Katsukame demanded.

"We don't give up!" Uravity answered.

"And no matter what..." Froppy began.

"We always go beyond!" Nejire finished.

All of them completed their battle cry. "PLUS ULTRA!"

With a well-placed shockwave of Nejire's Surge, the group went straight through the ground and into a large room below. Everything was a shambles underground, in a landscape of broken concrete and monstrous spikes in the ground. The debris dropped in their entrance only added to it.

"Nighteye!" Uravity shrieked in horror.

Ryuko looked to where the trainee was, and saw something she wished none of them had to. A man who looked infinitely small compared to his own surroundings, sprawled sideways on a chunk of broken concrete. A massive spike broken off the floor piercing his ribcage. The concrete was stained dark red along with his silver suit.

And even when something made the floor erupt underneath a spot on her other side, he wasn't moving.

The weightless feeling of being suddenly thrown into the air terrified Eri. Her stomach flipped over with a painful aerial loop. She saw Kai surging his way upward on a stone pillar, and Deku was nimbly leaping his way up too.

A flash of red caught her eye, and she saw a familiar red sheet of fabric, waving like a single flower around the rock it had probably been carried by.

*His cape...* she remembered where it came from. Mirio took off his cape and left it with her, to shelter her from her own trauma. A hero who fought so bravely even though she knew it would all be in vain in the end. And the thought of that only brought back everything all the other heroes did to save her, and what it cost for the heroes themselves. *No... Enough... I don't want anyone else to die... I don't want this... Why do they keep trying?*

*I am going to be your hero... I'm never going to let you down again, Eri.*

The words of the hero who was Lemillion echoed in her head, and even more with the way Deku repeated such a vow. A strange buzz of energy ran from her horn all the way down her body. A small flickering light lit a corner of her peripheral vision. She reached for the fabric that danced in the air above her, to that lonely symbol of the light that these perfect strangers are so willing to grant her. The light just out of her view blazed. Her hand just slightly grazed Kai's head as her fist closed around the blood-colored cloth.

Shin separated from Kai just beneath her.
She clutched the cape in her tiny hands on the other side of Kai's rising pillar. She saw the rising, sparking figure of Deku flying up the moving concrete, a desperation in his luminous jade eyes. That was when she really realized how much those heroes, who broke into her hell of a home, wanted to save her.

*These people aren't going to give up; not until I'm safe. Even if it means they'll die...* She stood up, ready to take the leap, as she remembered the kindness of Deku's arms when they first met, and how she longed to be in them again. *I have to let them. I have to go back... I have to go back!* She threw herself off the platform. *I have to trust him!*

She could hear him above the wind in her ears. He was calling her name. A small voice inside her forced itself from her throat, crying for him to save her. He seemed to pick up speed as they got closer together even though time felt like it was slowing down. Warm arms folded around her and she held onto their source like the lifeline he was.

"I've got you... I won't let you go..."

...*I won't either...*

Eri could feel it. He didn't let her go even as he lept between all of Kai's attacks in his desperate effort to get her back. His arms only tightened their grip as they descended. His Quirk hummed with power against her, and the buzz of energy inside her responded with new fury. His body bounded between each strike again and again, all of them vaporizing in his wake. In a blinding burst of speed, they were up in the clouds. The shock of all the noise and speed rendered the little girl deaf, but she was in awe of what her eyes beheld nonetheless. Especially the thankful, glowing-faced grin beside her.

*This is the real sky... It's so beautiful and blue, and bright... And he's here... He's so happy...*

They landed with a jarring shock that carved parallel streaks into the ground below. Deku gently set her down on her feet, examining himself. To Eri's own shock, his injuries had strangely disappeared. He got down on one knee in front of her. "Is this your power at work? Are you... a healer?"

She glared down at her feet, fighting her tears.

"No... I've always been told I only hurt people..."

He suddenly startled and crumpled on himself, like something had run him through but she couldn't see it. Her own horror at the sight of his agony forced her back a few steps.

"What's happening? It's like my body's being pulled apart from the inside!" he strained.

"She has no control over it," Kai's newly-warped voice said. The ground began to split with cracks, and Deku rushed to grab her and stay away from the new tendrils of sharp rock. "She may have activated her Quirk in time, but she doesn't know how to turn it off. Isn't that right, Eri?... She has the power to rewind people; that's her secret. Use her right and you might even be able to turn someone back into a monkey.

"If you keep carrying her like that, you'll be annihilated. Everyone who touches her is rewound into nothingness. Didn't I tell you that the girl is cursed?" Even from a distance, Eri could feel Kai's penetrating, murderous glare. "Hand her over. The only way to stop her is to disassemble her. Or did you want to be wiped out of existence?"

Deku didn't respond, instead shifting Eri onto his back. He secured her to himself with Lemillion's cape, like some sort of sling.
"Kay, Eri. Hold on," he murmured, tying her to his back. "...So that's it. The moment my leg was hurt you rewound it back to before it was broken. I never even felt the pain... It seems to me your Quirk is a blessing, Eri."

A... blessing? Her eyes started welling up with a strange emotion just at the mere word, and started dripping tears on his shoulder. Did he really just call Eri's power the complete opposite of a curse? Was her worst gift from the universe really something so... beautiful? And if she really caused him to feel the pain of being rewound... she also prevented him from feeling a different pain? She felt his power only increase, until his remaining glove and sleeves started vaporizing off his arms.

"Eri... will you please lend me your power?" Deku asked. Eri didn't know how to reply, but apparently holding onto his shoulders tighter was answer enough.

"Neither of you realize the true value of her ability," Kai hissed. "Quirks get exponentially stronger as you develop them. I conducted countless experiments. I extracted Eri's power, and I distilled it into its ultimate form! As a result, it doesn't stop at simply rewinding the flesh; it works on a much grander scale. It rewinds the course of the species to a time before Quirks ever existed! Can't you see?! Eri represents change!"

A muscular hand from the new monstrosity Kai turned himself into roared towards Deku and Eri. "The ability to annihilate Quirks once and for all, and change humanity back to normal! With her powers, I can end this infected society! Cure this 'hero' sickness! She. Is. MINE! A naive little boy like you doesn't know how to use her!" He lost all control as he started rampaging towards them, flanked by more tendrils of rock. "It's up to me to cure humanity!"

A mere second before Kai's rock spikes could hit, Deku dodged so quickly he disappeared. Eri watched as Deku swung back around to brutally kick Kai's monstrous form in the side, sending it into the air. Deku kicked them around in the air, shifting into a steady position.

"You know, Eri..." she heard Deku whisper above the air. "You remind me of a friend of mine... She knows what it's like to have a power like yours in a world like the one you lived through... My friend didn't have the best life growing up, and her Quirk is kinda scary... but she's a wonderful person at heart... And I think she'd love to meet you... So let's get through this... so you can see her..."

Someone... like me?

Eri couldn't believe what she just heard. Deku knew someone just like her. Someone who was as cursed as she was. Someone who'd want to know her, as a kindred spirit. Eri could almost feel such a spirit being there with the two of them; a shadow in the sky who knew her heart. Someone who knew her pain and her fear. Someone who could be... a sister...

Kai split himself out into a whirling storm of flesh and blood where he himself was the eye. Eri was sure he didn't even know what he was saying. Deku was whisking them both around like a lightning bolt. He kept rushing at Kai again and again, pummeling him over and over whilst leaving no injuries on himself. Kai only kept on disassembling and rearranging himself with the remnants of Rikiya's body. She watched as Kai's insane eyes drew nearer, Deku raising a fist that glowed with his Quirk's sheer power, like the strength of a thousand fists being condensed into a single, vicious attack.

As the blow struck, it was like Kai's monster form was hit by a machine gun. Chunks of flesh shot off the main body that convulsed with each loss. They closed in further, on where Kai himself was in the heart of the beast. His gold eyes flickered with a sort of wild terror Eri never thought he
could ever feel. Kai was terrified of Deku and what he was capable of. What she was capable of alongside him, healing her hero before he could know any pain. Power coursed from his body throughout the stolen flesh and vaporized it, shattering the bird-like mask off Kai's face.

Deku landed with Eri on the ground not very far from where Kai sprawled unconscious over the ground. Through all the swirling dust, she could see his entire face now. It was strange... Kai looked so different without his mask... somehow, she thought he looked better that way. Even though he was knocked out, and the fear only marginally wracked his face... he looked better, showing his real face... And they defeated him, and forced him to show that true face... Overhaul was done. Eri was free. The hero she thought would die had lived, because of her.

Tamaki woke up when something told him a horrible thing happened.

He didn't know how long he'd been out. He could vaguely remember being overcome by his injuries from those Hassaih thugs. And passing out on the floor before he could even leave the room, let alone rejoin the others. But the pang in his stomach was definitely not from food. Something bad happened to Mirio, and he knew it.

_I have to find them... I have to find Mirio..._

He remembered the upbeat, jovial blond boy he grew up alongside. The bright, shining star who so willingly let Tamaki tuck himself away into the safety of his shadow. His nearest and dearest friend in U.A. He had to return to him. He had to stand up and walk!

Somehow, painfully slowly, he managed to get his feet under him. He lifted himself, shaking, to his feet, bracing himself on the wall. He forced himself into a run in his desperation. Something deep inside was telling him where to go, where to turn and which twisted hallway to go down.

He almost tripped over something on the way: not just any object, but a person. Blood trekked from a whole in a massive wall, to the battered form beneath him.

Tamaki recognized that costume anywhere, and his stomach fell to the earth's core.

"MIRIO!"

Chapter End Notes

I'm glad that this whole arc's almost over, to be honest. Maybe at one point in the near future, we'll get back to our regularly scheduled programming, and a much-needed breather arc. But I actually kinda love going through Eri's point of view in all of this. What do you guys think of it?
Grieve

Chapter Notes

It's been a long day, and more than a few weeks' worth of chapters. Now's just about the time to head home for our heroes. All of our heroes. I just hope Ayuma can get over all of this in time for the next arc. It'll make for a much-needed break.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tamaki went through the twisted halls and corridors as quickly as he could in his condition. And with his injured best friend in tow. It was getting pretty noisy up top, if the rock dust falling from the ceiling was any indication. He had to find all the others and get out of the complex. But with how Irinaka twisted the hallways to an unrecognizable extent, he wasn't sure if he was going in the right direction. His only clue was the dripped blood on the floor that spoke of where they had gone.

"Ta... ma... ki..." the young hero on his back murmured.

"Don't worry, Mirio," the smaller soothed. "I'll get you out of here."

"Era... ser... Head..." Mirio let out a weak cough.

Eraser Head... Did something happen to him?

"Dammit!... backs into it!"

He stopped short at the muffled voice. That was part of the police unit that the heroes were separated from. Were they trying to dig themselves out? If so, they might've been almost there. He went in that direction to see the unit crashing through the wall, forming enough of an opening to get through. Their leader was triumphant, but also worried after seeing who was on the other side.

"Suneater! What happened? Are the other heroes with you?"

"No, they're still further underground somewhere, I think," Tamaki replied. "But I think something's happened to Eraser Head. We need to split up and find the others. Because Mirio's warning gave me a really bad feeling. At least the three I managed to poison aren't going anywhere fast."

"Do you think you can lead the way?" another officer asked.

Tamaki looked back into the foreboding, twisted corridors. He might be able to follow their own blood trail, but it wouldn't be easy. "I'll try. Can some of you break off to find Fat Gum and Red Riot?"

"Sure." A group was sanctioned off to go in another direction. "Lead the way, Suneater."

Too focused on the others to care about such responsibility, Tamaki turned around and went back down the corridors, the police following him to the steps he took. He took out the marlin Fat had given him earlier. He said this might come in handy... Time to see if that's true.
It took a bit longer than it probably should have, but they eventually came across a small door that wasn't touched by Irinaka's Quirk. Tamaki quickly gobbled down the marlin and gave the police the green light. With a violent kick, the door flew open for Tamaki to pierce a knife-holding wrist with the swordfish that manifested over his arm. He was able to see Eraser Head sprawled on the floor, barely moving. The silver-haired young man above him dropped the blade he was holding the second the marlin's nose got him.

"You're Kurono, right?" Tamaki asked. "I know how your power works, so don't even try to use it on me." The cops with him immediately rushed in, guns aimed at the Yakuza member, telling him to surrender. Not like he had a choice, though.

_Thanks for the tip... Lemillion..._

"Suneater!" Tamaki turned at the voice to see the young Rainy Season Hero bounding down the corridor; a faint look of relief crossed her wide eyes when she saw Lemillion. "Thank goodness. I'm glad he's okay."

"Froppy... What's happening?" Tamaki asked.

The look that appeared on her face was far from reassuring. "Deku's fighting. He's up against Chisaki and... Sir Nighteye's badly hurt... and doesn't think Deku will make it."

Tamaki looked at one of the remaining officers. The man nodded, and he nodded back in understanding. "Just lead us topside."

Eri couldn't believe her eyes. She couldn't believe she and Deku had emerged victorious over the monster she was forced to live under as long as she could recall. Kai sprawled haphazard within the depths of his monstrous creation, eyes rolled back. Now that all the action was over, she realized how much the buzzing of energy grew throughout her body... and a fiery heat was joining it in her head that she couldn't place.

Deku looked over his shoulder. "Eri... Are you hu--" He suddenly crumpled like before, the light in Eri's peripheral vision blazing so brightly it outshone the sun.

_No... what's happening?... Why won't it stop?! Why?! Is he going to die?! Is he going to die because of me?!_

She saw Kai suddenly get up, lifting a mighty red hand. It lifted over her and Deku, ready form one final attempt in attacking them. The massive appendage descended on the two of them. But the second it closed above them like a meaty dome, the glowing light consumed it. It completely disappeared, and next thing she saw was Kai and Rikiya getting thrown skyward.

_I have to get off! I have to get away! I have to make it stop!... No! Stop! He's gonna die! She heard Kai's old words echo in her head. NO! She couldn't hear her own physical cries above the voice she was stubbornly trying to shut away. Don't die! PLEASE! I DON'T WANT THIS!_

Then, all in a lone instant, it stopped. The buzzing went silent. The light went dim. The searing heat took over with a dark wave of exhaustion. She couldn't hold herself up and started dropping, but she didn't need to. Deku caught her and gently lowered her to the ground, keeping their heads resting against each other. Through the closing slits of her suddenly very heavy eyelids, she saw his exhausted, but somehow relieved expression, before her own consciousness dropped.

Ayuma jolted awake from a kiss on her forehead, more than a bit disoriented. All she could
see was white beneath her, and a familiar face not far from her own. "Recovery Girl?... What are you doing here?"

"We came to check you out of here, young Ayuma," she heard Mr. Yagi's voice. She pushed herself up into a sitting position to see the scrawny retired hero not far away. "Young Midoriya and the others have completed their own mission, and we were sent to bring you to the hospital where they are."

"But... what about Himei?" She couldn't leave her big sister behind. Not after losing her for so long and facing such terrifying danger from police all over again.

"One of her coworkers is downstairs," Yagi told her. "You can talk to him before we leave."

Ayuma's head lowered, but she nodded in understanding before slipping out of bed. Himei was probably still being patched up after that bullet; she just wanted to be sure her sister would be alright, and that they could keep in touch.

"I'm terribly sorry that I cannot help you, Tsunagu," Recovery Girl apologized to Jeanist. "My Quirk can't regrow what has already been lost."

Best Jeanist only seemed moderately disappointed. "You needn't worry, Recovery Girl. At the very least, I'm alive; thanks to the Hero of Heroes."

There was pride in his eyes as he looked to Ayuma. Pride reminiscent of a parent who's seen how far their child has come. She mustered a smile back as her teacher and school nurse led her away.

Downstairs in the lobby, Ayuma met up with a quite relieved Gang Orca. He was quite surprised to hear she was roomed with his old friend, but glad to hear he seemed to be doing great. The hero introduced her to a jovial but worried young man in the uniform of a wildlife ranger. He had a bright pair of orange-brown eyes framed by charcoal-colored hair drawn in a white-tipped ponytail. A literal tail of the same colors poked out from behind him, lightly brushing the floor with every swish; he even had large ears swiveling from the top of his head.

Okay. Obviously a fox-related Quirk. Probably has the same enhanced senses Himei does.

"The name's Haiiro Kitsune," the man said with a toothy, albeit somewhat shaky grin. "Nice to hear that our flying fox has such a great little sister. Especially hearing she's the great Nightmaiden."

Ayuma chuckled. "Me? Great?"

"Of course! Everyone knows how famous you are for rescuing Pro heroes."

Ayuma almost rolled her eyes, not all that surprised about such a thing. "I'm sorry that Himei got shot, though. The cop that did it sure didn't want us getting away a second time."

"But you did, though, and the best part is Meimei will be getting out as soon as her shoulder heals."

"That's always good. Uh, by the way, can you give me Himei's phone number, if you have it? Just so we can keep in touch now that we've found each other again."

The fox man nodded, taking out a small notepad and pen before ripping out a page. He scribbled onto it before handing it back to the student. "Here you are."
Ayuma was glad for the help. She was about to take out her phone when she realized it wasn't there. "Umm..."

"Oh yeah, you probably would need this," Haiiro figured, pulling her phone from his pocket. "Aw, don't give me that face. Silver Fox Quirk means foxy slight-of-hand, am I right?"

The redhead simply shook her head and grabbed her device back. "Thank you very much. Now I need to get back to my new friends."

Ayuma certainly didn't expect what she saw in the hospital her friends were brought to. Mr. Yagi led her to a room that felt so desolate it could've easily been the room of a ghost. Mr. Aizawa was already waiting there, along with Bubble Girl and Centipeder. Bubble Girl was crying into Centipeder's arms, only momentarily looking up at the newcomer.

"Good to see you're also alright, Ayuma," her homeroom teacher said softly. "Midoriya and the girls are being treated for their own injuries. But for some reason, Sir Nighteye specifically wanted to meet you: as I quote, 'The girl Mirio told me about.'"

"Unfortunately, he probably won't make it," a nurse said softly.

Ayuma looked into the foreboding dark room. She saw the faint light of a monitor, as well as all manner of tubes and wires leading to the center of a hospital bed. A tube and breathing mask was also among the myriad of equipment. Hesitantly, she stepped closer, seeing the man in the bed, looking so small compared to all the plastic and metal surrounding him and stuck in his torso, his breath fogging the breathing mask in steady intervals.

"Sir... Nighteye?" Ayuma asked into the silence, afraid to break it. "You wanted to... see me?"

Two hazy, golden eyes slowly cracked open. "Come closer..."

Tears welled in her eyes at how weak that voice was. The voice that was once so full of authority was reduced to a mere rasp among the beeps of the machines. She went towards his bedside, leaning slightly over the bed rail. The golden eyes focused on her as much as they could. "Violet eyes, same as mine using my power... you were watching the meeting... outside the door..."

Ayuma tried to keep the tears from falling as she nodded. He saw me... and he let me be anyway. He didn't punish me for my curiosity or intuition... he just let me go...

"I'm... I'm Ayuma... I was only there because I was worried for my friends... I'm so sorry... I couldn't save you..."

A shaky, pale hand weaved around all the wires and reached up, brushing aside her fringe as if he were trying to pat her head. "Don't be. It's not your fault you couldn't save me... I don't blame you for being worried for their safety." Despite her best efforts, tears leaked out and trailed over his fingers. "I'm sure you've always been such a sad, sweet, incredible little girl... I only wish I could've properly met you sooner... Ayuma..."

His hand fell from her face, only for her to catch and hold it in her own spindly hands. She was losing her battle with her own sadness, crying silently for the mortally injured hero. "Just don't die and you'll be able to... You'll be able to know me, Nighteye... Just live... Hospitals can be wrong about how long someone has to live; please let this time be one of them."

A soft chuckle came from the man, as he closed his eyes in a sort of smile. "...It's alright... If I don't make it... I'll say hello to your parents for you... If I can..."

"Don't joke like that; not now... just please, live... Live so you can know me, Nighteye..."
Yagi had soon walked in, with a similarly tearful Midoriya not far behind. "...I'm so sorry..."

Nighteye turned to the blond man. "Is that you, All Might? You feel like talking, now that I'm on my deathbed?"

Yagi's head bowed. "I don't know what to say. I was wrong. I pushed you away and now --"

"Nighteye," Midoriya called gently as he came in. "Hang in there! Please, you have to live!

"I've never heard you sound so penitent before, All Might," Nighteye replied. "But I didn't resent you for what happened between us... I mean that. All I wanted, was for you to be happy... And if you've decided to fight fate, then I --"

"You should be fighting it, too," Mr. Yagi interrupted, tears appearing in his own shadowed eyes. "Please, give me a chance to make up for what I've done."

"...There's nothing to make up for... I wanted to change the future, to keep you from being killed... I looked for ways to alter the fate I'd seen... I tried... But there was nothing I could do... And then today, Midoriya succeeded where I failed... I believe... it might have to do with the energy contained in thoughts... The power of a vision so strong it leaves no room for doubt... and strives toward the desired future...

"It wasn't just Midoriya... Everyone there truly believed that what they were fighting for would come to pass... Maybe what we saw today was the result of that energy converging on Midoriya, and being released... You've changed my thinking... You've shown me the future isn't set in stone... And that's enough for me... I only have one regret left..."

Ayuma looked up to see Togata stumbling in, a nurse fruitlessly trying to hold him back. His face was so wracked with pain and tears and ruffled hair that she almost didn't realize it was him. He pushed his way in even on a bandaged ankle, leaning over the rail. "Sir! Don't give up! Please keep fighting! Don't die on me!"

Nighteye's golden orbs squinted at his older trainee. "Mirio... I failed you... this is my fault... If only I'd been there..."

"No it's not your fault," Ayuma countered. "You can blame me for not saving you or whoever did this to you all you like, but don't blame yourself..."

"Don't say that!" exclaimed Togata, leaning further over Nighteye. "You were always there, teaching me and showing me how to be strong; everything I am now is because of you, don't you see? I'm not ready!... Please don't leave me..."

"Don't leave all of us behind, Nighteye..." Ayuma agreed, her hands tightening around his. Instead of answering, his hand slowly slipped out of her grasp and reached towards the sobbing third year. His shaky hand cupped his cheek as his eyes flashed into the same colors Ayuma's eyes became when Nightmare was active.

"You'll be okay..." he said tenderly, his voice growing quieter by the second. "You're going to become... the finest hero the world's ever seen... That's one part of the future... that shouldn't be changed..." His hand, covered with Togata's falling tears and what remained of Ayuma's, fell limp back over his bandaged chest. "Work hard... and be sure to smile..." He turned up toward his crying old friend. "After all... without joy and laughter..." he looked towards Ayuma, "to balance the sorrow... this world cannot hope to have... a bright... future..."

Ayuma watched as the life seeped out of his eyes and up through the ceiling. The smile never
left his face. And with only a brief glimpse into the Dreamscape, she watched the faded glow of his purple and green image fade into the darkness. It was only a few seconds before they all broke down at a sound unmistakable to even someone who's never heard it before...

After that, there was nothing else for Ayuma to pay attention to. Not as Mr. Aizawa led her away and brought her to all of the others to say hello and goodbye-for-now. Not as Ochaco and Tsu hugged her as tight as they could or when Kirishima said to tell Bakugo he was alright for him. Not as she was brought outside where her supposed new little sister lay writhing feverishly in a quarantined room. Not as she was told she could take that day and the next off from Gang Orca. Not as she was brought out to Midnight's car and driven away to complete any unfinished paperwork or anything like that. All she heard in her head was that lone, awful, perpetual sound.

The flatline.

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The news stories had spread to just about every channel by nightfall. A Yakuza compound was raided by various heroes and came back with a tortured little girl, and a battle with a ferocious giant in the mountains was followed by a rogue officer firing at two young women. It was a coin toss which channel was showing which story at any one point in time.

Hitoshi was really starting to worry at this point, and so was Todoroki. Ayuma, Midoriya, and the others still hadn't come back yet, and the reports of the events that each had taken part in were showing non-stop. And they probably would be for the next day or so. It was nearing curfew as well, so Hitoshi would have to return to his own dorm soon. Bakugo had come down a lot more times after He brainwashed him to go back, but at least the explosive blond learned from his mistake.

"I should probably head back to my own dorm," Hitoshi said dejectedly. "It's probably been a long day for all of the guys out there."

Todoroki nodded in agreement. "Come back and wait tomorrow if they're not back? Bakugo and I will be out for our Remedial Course."

The purplette nodded. "Sure. I can hold down the fort while you're gone."

"Oh? You're heading back to the 1-C dorm?" Iida inquired. "I see. It is getting a bit late. Until we meet again, Shinso."

Hitoshi nodded at the arm-waving bluenette as he left the 1-A dorm. *Guess I'll have to wait longer than last time...*

He stopped when he saw something out the corner of his eye. Up by the front gates, where the sun was vanishing from the horizon, he saw a familiar blotch of coppery red. *Ayuma.*

Before he could even think, he jogged over. Ayuma looked up, eyes widening before she went towards him, gliding on her Nightmare-formed wings. She put her feet back on the ground in time for her to fall into his arms that wrapped around her. He felt his shirt dampen where she buried her head against his shoulder; she was crying. He only tightened his grip, brushing her hair with his free hand.

"It's alright, Ayuma... I'm here..." he whispered to her. "You're back home... you're alright... Just let it out..."

"S-s-sorry I took so long to c-come back..." whimpered the redhead in his arms.
Hitoshi smiled sadly. "Don't worry about it. I'd be worried anyway."

He heard her soft, muffled voice through her hiccups and sobs. "A hero has fallen today, Hitoshi... A man I -- I could've saved but... I wasn't there -- to save him... He succumbed to his -- terrible injuries and... I couldn't do anything..."

He shushed her gently, ignoring the fact that she used his real name. "It's okay, Ayuma... You can explain everything tomorrow... Get a good night's sleep. I'll drop by in the morning."

She didn't verbally respond, but he felt her nod against his shoulder to comply, before he turned around to lead her to her dorm.

Chapter End Notes

...Okay, that hurt way more than writing Mirio losing his Quirk. Ayuma just had to watch someone die, and even her own Quirk confirmed it when it happened. But she's now returned to the one person she can count on as a shoulder for her to cry on. Now excuse me as I prepare for the aforementioned breather arc I think we all need.
So, one more unnecessary-dub-delay later (I'm very sorry about my own corresponding delay), we're back in business with a new arc and the next moment of truth. I can already guarantee that Ayuma meeting her new baby sis is soon to come.

When Ayuma woke up in her own dorm room, she couldn't remember very clearly what happened the night before. She could just make out a lot of worried faces through a lens clouded with tears. She believed she could recall Tenya ushering the other guys to give her space. And Momo and the other girls -- aside from Tsu and Ochaco -- helping her into bed.

But what was especially clear was the face of someone who wasn't even in her class. A tired, concerned face framed with purple. Soft words whispered in her ear. Warm arms, wrapped around her, and a hand against the back of her head. As late as she was compared to last time, she was glad that she'd returned to U.A. and was welcomed back by Hitoshi (Since when do I call him by his first name?).

Nevertheless, that didn't help what she so clearly recalled from visiting Sir Nighteye in his final moments. He didn't reprimand her inability to save him despite her reputation. He had nothing but kind words for her, Midoriya, and Togata. He wished he could've gotten to know her sooner, and frankly, she did too. Togata himself wanted to introduce her. But there was still one particular thing that she couldn't drive out of her head.

"If I don't make it... I'll say hello to your parents for you... If I can..."

Now that she thought about it, Ayuma wondered what he meant. She could never hope to remember what her own parents even looked like? Did Nighteye know who they were? Was he going to tell her who they were if he survived? Did anyone else know who they were? And if they were dead as he implied... did he know how they passed on?

The questions just kept circling around in her head, and there was no clear answer in sight for any of them. She looked to her phone (which was charging... one of the girls must've plugged it in) to see a new message from Gang Orca. It was to remind her that despite Todoroki and Bakugo having their Remedial Course today, she was given the day off to unwind from all the excitement of yesterday. They were going to be having classroom work that day anyway, so it wasn't the biggest deal.

But maybe I can at least catch them before they leave... if they haven't left already.

With a sigh, she got herself dressed and went downstairs for something to eat. Maybe after classes she'll be in a better headspace anyway. And she could explain everything to Hitoshi.

On Recovery Girl's orders, Ayuma wasn't quite able to perform any sort of training. But Hitoshi did drop by the dorms to meet up with her in the 1-A common room. He said it was because he promised to hold down the fort for Todoroki yesterday in waiting for the others to
return. Which was understandable enough. Besides, it was helpful for Ayuma to relay everything that happened on her end over a cup of tea.

"I was really only called out because Gang Orca needed me with some thugs," she admitted. "A lot of small groups had used short-term Quirk-enhancers on themselves and tried to go haywire on the city and the agency was spread a bit thin. There was also a minor Yakuza syndicate in that city, but its members had no part in the drug-dealing as far as we've heard from one of their higher-ups."

"Yakuza?" Hitoshi rose a brow. "I thought all of those groups went down when heroes first came to the table."

"Most of them, yes; but not this one," Ayuma explained. "The Yoake-Oni are surprisingly rather tame and even help the heroes on occasions like yesterday. They were actively trying to avoid getting mixed up with the syndicate of a different city, the Shie Hassaikai, who probably gave those thugs the enhancers in the first place. The others were called out to storm that group's compound."

"Huh... Demons of Dawn and Eight Precepts of Death. Charming names."

"I have to agree. But then something led me out into the mountains where yet another group of police and an elder Pro were going after Kurogiri, the Warp Gate of the League of Villains. I helped capture him, but we were soon jumped by one of his allies being followed by one of my own older foster siblings, Himei. She helped us hold off the new villain long enough for us to get away..."

"But according to the news, that new villain took out the whole mountainside. And then came the issue that really had me worried afterwards..."

"...Yeah," Ayuma winced, already feeling the tears starting. Her hand subconsciously went up to her scalp, remembering the feeling of having her weight held up by nothing but her hair held in a tight fist. "We had more than a few injured and had to wait for medical help within a police station. But I... I didn't think one would recognize us, or even try anything... But he just... He just went for it... He recognized me and Himei and went for it..." Hitoshi put an arm around her shoulders.

"It was just like last time..." she continued, tears falling onto the table. "We had to escape last time... because of the cops... If we hadn't gotten out of there... my neck would've been snapped. All we could do was run for it and he... he went and shot Himei and we couldn't help the others because she was hurt... And after I was healed and brought to my friends... I had to watch... I had to watch a hero die."

Hitoshi didn't quite understand what she meant by "last time," but he was certain it had to do with Ayuma's past. But watching a hero die, he could understand. He distinctly remembered that being something she said when she first got back. And with her being the Hero of Heroes that typically saved the Pros from such life-threatening situations... it would be a hard hit for her, and not just for her reputation itself.

"You don't need to feel guilty over it, Ayuma. It's not your fault," he reassured her. "It's not your fault some ass of a cop thought he could dump something on you and this sis of yours for something I don't know but seriously doubt you'd do. It's not your fault a hero died from his injuries because you couldn't be there to save him beforehand; it's impossible to be in more than one place at one time, even for you. You're still the Hero of Heroes... and I believe you'll still save a whole lot more heroes yet, before you become part of them."
Ayuma sniffled, looking up at him. "You mean... before we become part of them."

Hitoshi smiled, a lopsided half-smirk of approval. A look that seemed to say, "That's my girl."

It was sunset again when Hitoshi had to return to his own dorm. Todoroki and Bakugo had returned from their Remedial Course at least a couple of hours ago. The former thanked Hitoshi for holding true to his promise to hold down the fort, and the purplette parted from 1-A on good terms. Todoroki also confirmed that it was only classroom reviews at the course site, so there was no issue with Ayuma not being there with Gang Orca.

Ayuma had mostly opted for waiting on the others' return with Todoroki. He told her that she will most likely have to come along with him and Bakugo to assist Gang Orca because of some "special assignment." None of the course's participants knew what it was, but he figured it was going to be physical.

It was late in the evening when the door finally opened. Everyone else had gathered in the common area, and positively swarmed Midoriya, Kirishima, Ochaco, and Tsu the second they walked in.

"There you guys are! It's about time you showed up!"

"All of us were worried about you!"

"Yeah, we saw the news."

"It looked terrifying!"

"Is anyone hurt?"

"What troublemakers!"

"Tell us everything!"

"I made you guys a double chocolate cake."

"First Kamino and now the Yakuza? You guys are always getting into such crazy situations. Do you know how much that scares us?" Kaminari fretted, with Midoriya meekly apologizing.

"I'm just glad their okay," Ayuma heard from Shoji as Todoroki pushed through to Midoriya.

"I don't know, are they?" Kyoka doubted. "How can we be sure they're not like how Ayuma was yesterday?"

Ayuma watched as Toru went to Ochaco and Tsu, flinging her arms around their necks in a tight hug. It was only a matter of time before Tenya jumped in and told all of them to give the returning party some space. He realized that all of them most likely were mentally overwhelmed as well as physically exhausted. But even as Midoriya said he was fine, it was clearly seen in his eyes that he wasn't exactly telling the truth. And when Tenya soon jumped into shaking Midoriya for answers, it took Todoroki's intervention to help the poor guy get some space, while Momo went to make some lavender tea.

Kirishima wasn't exactly spared either. Bakugo seemed to prefer lingering in the back while everyone else fusses over the Work Study students. But that didn't stop Sero, Kaminari, and Mina from confronting him, the pinkette having brought down Koda's rabbit as a sort of therapy animal.
"How are you really doing, Midoriya?" Ayuma heard Todoroki ask. "Ayuma came back yesterday in a pretty bad way. And you went through the same sort of ordeal."

Midoriya didn't seem quite able to meet his eyes. "It was rough; no doubt about it... but I'm fine, Todoroki. Really."

Even Ayuma could see in the elementalist's blue-and-gray eyes that he wasn't convinced. She looked back to see Kaminari trying to get Bakugo to join in only for him to promptly turn the other down in favor of going to bed. He also ordered Todoroki to do the same. "Unlike the rest of you losers, I've got stuff to do. And so does Icy-Hot. Besides, I don't want to have to be around Copperhead any longer than we'll have to be tomorrow."

Todoroki rolled his eyes at the blond, but soon looked at his phone, furrowing a brow. Midoriya took a look at what had the other so upset, eyes widening. "Do you think you'll be alright with that, Todoroki?"

The other took a bit, but gave a nod in reply. "With Ayuma nearby to be sure, I'll be fine."

It was relatively early the next morning that Ayuma went to the bus ready to bring her and the guys to the test site. While she expected the chaperone teacher to be Mr. Aizawa like it usually was, this time it was Present Mic and All Might. The former explained (rather loudly and expressively) that it was because of little Eri at the hospital and possibly any other errands while he had the chance. The girl was welcome to wait on the bus for the other two to get there.

It took a while, but Ayuma could see when they finally came out to the bus. Present Mic gave them both a light scolding and told them what he told Ayuma herself. When they finally got in, they were soon on their way. And Ayuma's curiosity about something finally led her to message Todoroki on her phone, just so they weren't overheard.

I heard u & Midoriya mention me about smth u saw on ur phone last night [Ayuma]
What was it?

Todoroki took out his own phone, from what she could see from her spot on the bus.

[Shoto] My father called me. He said he's coming to the test site to observe all of us.
I originally thought Mr. Aizawa would be there, which made me feel bad enough. But since it's actually All Might...

That was when she understood. It made sense that Todoroki would get mildly irritated about something concerning his father.

I c. He never rly got along w All Might, from what I've heard [Ayuma]
But what do I have 2 do with it?

[Shoto] Think about it, Ayuma.
You've saved plenty of heroes in your life, but he's the only one you've actually fought.
He's gotten onto your bad side, and he knows it. Any time you were mentioned on the news before we moved into the dorms, it was like he's almost scared of you.
Like the only reason he attacked you in the first place was because you reminded him of someone he hated/was genuinely afraid of.

Ayuma found that last bit to be a little strange. She reminded Endeavor of someone else for whatever reason. Somehow, Endeavor is scared of her, a peer of his youngest son. And even if he
isn't, he realizes he made a bad impression in setting her off in broad daylight and only leading her to become his son's classmate. Then again, she can create anyone's worst nightmares. So of course someone would tie her to their own fear, even such a powerful Pro.

Wouldn't surprise me tbh [Ayuma]
But only my Quirk can tell if he rly is afraid of me

When they reached the test site, the students split from the teachers and went to their respective changing rooms. Ayuma was quick to get her costume on and head to the observation room where Gang Orca said he would be. By the time she got up there, Gang Orca and Mera from the Provisional License Exam were watching the security cameras.

While there was no audio, she could see Todoroki and Bakugo had already met up with the Shiketsu students. There was Inasa, someone who looked like the guy that jumped two of her brothers and some of her classmates in the aforementioned exam, and a honey brown-haired girl.

"Glad you made it, Nightmaiden," Gang Orca greeted his trainee.

"It's about time we got started," Mera said, barely acknowledging her.

"Yes, indeed," the Killer Whale Hero agreed.

"Shall we make today's training... a little bit more interesting?"

"What do you mean?" Ayuma asked hesitantly.

"We've brought a few guests to introduce to that particular set of students, Nightmaiden," Gang Orca explained, "sans Shishikura, of course. You've arrived at a good time, as I believe you'll be quite helpful should they need your aid."

He pointed to one of the other cameras, and Ayuma was shocked at what she saw. If this means what I think it does... things are going to get tricky.

"You think that'll be enough for now?" Aizawa asked after erasing Eri's Quirk for the umpteenth time that day.

"For today, at least," replied one of the doctors. "The Quirk enhancers are still circulating pretty strong, but her body is fighting hard to expel them. She seems to have already worn herself out, but... we'll let you know if anything happens. If her fever goes down at all, we might be able to flush the rest of it out."

The Erasure Hero could understand that much. He was the only one able to stop that little one's wild Quirk, as far as he knew. Eri was still sleeping relatively fitfully, but she appeared to be calming down at least a little bit. Quirk enhancers were better off not used by people at all, but they were especially not meant for young children.

Whatever possessed that Chisaki guy to put this girl through such an ordeal, he's not sure he'd want to know. To use such drugs on the poor thing on top of cutting her up, bleeding her out, and resetting her bodily condition while undoubtedly traumatizing her mind is nothing short of monstrous. It filled his head with thoughts of wanting to kill the guy every time the mere idea of her life crossed his mind.

It was almost odd how much the little girl in the hospital bed reminded him of Ayuma. A
Quirk that had been wild and uncontrollable most of her life. An undoubtedly bad hand dealt from early life. A sort of strength you'd never expect to see in someone so small and relatively weak. Whether or not they had someone there with them, they fought against something terrible. And even without any sort of help, they might've even won.

He wondered how it would go if the two were to meet when Eri was able to even have visitors. Logically, it would be a good idea for Eri to know she isn't alone. That there is someone who knows what she's been through, where he -- in many different ways -- has no idea. Maybe he can introduce his student to the little one when she's finally ready for it, even though it might be awhile. With him around, they definitely won't have to worry about the runaway Rewind and Nightmare Quirks going loose in a hospital.

It reminded him of the rabbit hole he jumped into when he first started researching the Yokohama Foster Home. The place where Ayuma had apparently spent her own early years. Before she was a homeless, nameless ghost to the very laws of the country she wandered. Maybe, if this really is the last time Eri's Quirk is going to trigger itself today, he can go and take that final leap and see it for himself.

And maybe, if he can find anything, he'll be able to give all of their names back.

Chapter End Notes

This is gonna be fun. Given his current situation, Aizawa does have the opportunity to go for it. And yes, Ayuma will be now doing the "babysitting" that Bakugo had mentioned not too long ago. But what do you guys think Todoroki meant when he explained his father's... dislike towards Ayuma? Let me know down below!
Ayuma is known for her strength even among heroes. And so are all of her siblings, especially those who've resurfaced. And since she's set in charge of overseeing a large group of kindred spirits, she might play a surprisingly important part in helping her friends.

"So I'll be put in charge of the three troublemakers and new girl," Ayuma said as she was handed a clipboard, "and you'll be training the other seven."

"Precisely," Gang Orca affirmed. "Considering what today's training for that particular group entails, you might be helpful should push come to shove, Nightmaiden. But try to keep it to a minimum; we need them to learn how to do this particular assignment themselves. You can take notes on the group's different Quirks; Shiketsu has shown concern for it based on the circumstances for student 11."

"I'll do whatever I need to," she replied. "Isn't that new girl the one who waved at Midoriya at the exam? I remember him telling Todoroki that she legitimately assaulted him in the first round. I wonder if these special circumstances mean that someone replaced her during that time..."

"Also... try not to pay attention to anything I say. Wear these if you feel you need to." Gang Orca retrieved a set of noise-canceling headphones, rather sheepishly. "I'll need to take on my typical public persona, and I've been told I tend to get a bit too loud."

"Uh, yeah... wouldn't surprise me," Ayuma said as she took the headphones and put them on, leaving one side off for the time being. "Besides, you're not the only one here who's loud." Her eyes wandered back to the cameras; specifically, where Bakugo and Inasa were heading to the designated training area. She couldn't stop herself from looking for a certain far-too-fiery hero up in the stands, either.

She could almost hear him yelling at his son from there.

Gang Orca led her down a corridor, where only his footsteps made any noise on the tile; she glided along the floor behind him, just to keep out of his line of fire. Once the door opened, they went out onto the gym floor. Gang Orca's face seemed to shift into that of an angry commanding officer.

"So, I've got even more disappointments today," he remarked. "What shame you must feel to be standing before me, given how easy the exam was!"

As if a switch were flicked, all the other students stood at attention, as if they were scared of being yelled at. She glanced up in the stands to see Present Mic, All Might, and as she was warned, Endeavor not far away. Scattered sparsely in the stands were some other possible teachers, along with one with a student in a Shiketsu uniform.

"That must be that Shishikura guy who went off on Zuanshi and Hansha. Along with Bakugo"
and Kirishima. He's probably just watching because he failed the first round.

She went over to the new girl standing awkwardly on the side. "Excuse me. I'll need you to give me your name and your Quirk."

"Oh, lit. I'm Utsushimi, but you can call me Camie. I'm, like, able to create illusions when I blow out this, like, amazingly pretty cloud. I call it Glamour; pretty slick, don'tcha think?"

"So an illusionist Quirk," Ayuma realized as she wrote it down. "Funny how it reminds me of my Nightmare Quirk." She looked back at Gang Orca with enough time to clamp the headphones over her ears before he started shouting.

He started specifically yelling in Bakugo's face. Ayuma wasn't sure she wanted to know what he was actually saying until he suddenly tossed him. On instinct, she whipped out a green anthropomorphic rabbit with her Quirk that grabbed him out of the air. "Strike one," she muttered.

Gang Orca did the same with Todoroki, and the metallic monster from fighting Gigantomachia caught him with four long arms. "Strike two."

Then Inasa was thrown, and she barely had the time for her orca to catch him on its back. "Three strikes, they're out."

"Nice grabs, gal pal," Ayuma heard from Camie when the former removed one side of the headphones. The fawn-haired girl stared in awe of the three beasts, looking over their charges as their creator dispelled them.

"Thanks," she replied.

"...Today we will put you through a special trial," Gang Orca lectured the students Ayuma caught as she returned to his side. "It's time you start training a new muscle: the one that beats in your chest! If you hold out a hand to someone in trouble, will they take it?! Not as you are now. It's fine to have fangs, but when a life is on the line, you must have trust!" She heard the bigger set of doors open. "You need a special connection with the person you're trying to rescue; remember that as you train today. Now, meet your opponents! In this battle, show that you can come to an understanding with them! That's the hurdle you face!"

The three of them prepared a battle stance while Camie pointed at herself in confusion. Ayuma turned around and watched as the large group of kids rushed through the doors; one of them was even flying. Their teacher seemed to be scrambling to calm them down to no avail, and that was about the time Ayuma decided to head to the table where Mera and a few other observers were sitting to leave the headphones. It wasn't even all that surprising to see how confused Todoroki was as he looked down at the kids.

Well, at least I can get a few pictures out of this on my phone. Who knows? Maybe one of the others will enjoy them.

"These kids are from Masegaki Elementary School," the Killer Whale Hero elaborated before turning to the teary-eyed teacher. "Don't worry. We're taking responsibility for your students now."

"Thank you for your help, Mr. Whale!" she thanked him, bowing several times.

"There's coffee or tea in the back if you need any," Ayuma added. The woman thanked her as well before sinking into a chair at the table.

Unfortunately, that was about the moment, Bakugo's shouting at Gang Orca sent one of the
kids running away crying. Another one told the other kids while yet another started punching Bakugo’s stomach and only compelled him to shout again.

"So, you’re one of those," one of the boys hanging by the wall remarked, a coy, cocky smile on his face. "A grown-up who thinks they can get their way by yelling. By letting no one else get a word in edgewise. Well, we’re not impressed by that."

*That kid kinda reminds me of Monoma. Or even Chishi. Not sure I like that, though.*

She was then drawn to the ones crowding around Todoroki, who somehow thought the capsules on his belt were "wieners."

"I assure you that it’s not," Todoroki replied, opening one for emphasis. "This is a first aid treatment for when help doesn’t arrive in time."

"BORING!" the kids all shouted before tackling the poor guy.

"Man down!" Ayuma exclaimed, running over to try and get him out from under the dogpile. "Come on, kids, he’s new to this sort of thing. Cut Icefire some slack!"

"Stay out of this, witch lady! You don’t even have shoes!" one of the boys howled. "And what kind of dress is that supposed to be?"

Some started pulling at her hair and costume as they started looking into her pockets. "Ow! Easy! My hair's kind of attached, you know! Hey! That's not for little kids!"

She managed to scramble out from under the kids and readjust herself after taking back the clipboard. It was too late for the latter, though, since it looked like one of the kids scribbled "HEROES R WEAK" over the page.

*Suru didn't have this sort of problem with everyone else, did she?* A few memories of her other siblings, their Quirks, and even Tenkijo’s dysphoria attacks came to mind. *Oh yeah. She kinda did. But at least back then, she had help. And we were more open to her being the head, anyway. Madame Kirai made us so scared of her that we couldn't even move. And the police only made it worse.*

"The four of you will accomplish this together with your supervising peer," Gang Orca announced. "Win the hearts of these unruly youngsters."

"What do we look like, *nannies*?!" Bakugo exclaimed in indignance. "We're babysitting while Copperhead's babysitting *us*!"

"Settle down! The rest of you will have a lecture after your practical exercises. Do you understand?!"

"SIR, YES SIR!" called the other seven.

"Wait, you're helping to look after all of these other heroes?" one of the kids asked: a shy-looking blonde girl with two flowers on her head like antennae. "But you look smaller than all of them."

"That might be mostly because I'm not fond of shoes," Ayuma replied. "It's easier for me that way. Besides, considering I used to be like you kids, I thought you'd take me being here a little better."
"You were? How?"

"THAT'S IT! THE MC IN ME CAN'T TAKE IT ANYMORE! WHERE'S THE MOOD MUSIC?! AND WOULD IT KILL THEM TO HAVE SOME KIND OF COLOR COMMENTARY?!"

That voice from the stands alone made Ayuma regret leaving behind those headphones. Sounds like Present Mic finally cracked. "I'm sorry about my teacher up there," she apologized to the girl. "He's the one that doesn't know how to keep his mouth shut. And I still kinda need to free my friend out from under yours."

"Can I help?" she asked.

Ayuma smiled. "Sure. Just be careful of Bakugo and Inasa, okay?"

Endeavor growled to himself as he watched the insufferable orphan girl walk over to where his living legacy was getting pounded by little children. He couldn't believe what he was seeing for the life of him. What would possess the Hero Commission to assign a small group of the failures of that exam to take on babysitting a bunch of primary school kids? Isn't that what teachers are for?

That rotten excuse for a girl was no help. He wanted to eradicate that thing from his son's path, not add it in as another comrade for Shoto. It was useless. As useless as the two disgustingly weak individuals it reminded him of, its monstrous nature notwithstanding.

The thing turned around and glared up at him. For a split second he didn't see the orphan he tried to burn away. He saw burnt orange hair and skin that looked splashed with white paint. Like any moment those black tentacles that somehow passed as nerves would whip out from his spine as targets for Endeavor to burn all over again. How he wished he could feel the satisfaction of seeing that pathetic child with the mind of a man writhing under his boot all over again.

The next second showed him the image of a puny girl in place of the monster when it once again turned its back. Instead of Kuroga, he saw Akune, the woman who should've learned her place even though he tried thousands of times to put her there. Instead he was forced to fight her minion and not even Akune herself. He couldn't stop mistaking the creature that treated his son like a sibling for two different people. His own mind had fused his inferior classmates together. That pathetic excuse for a hero and that useless villain he called a wife and battle partner have been replaced by a husk of a child that should've perished a long time ago, if not been burned like the witch it is. It's in its DNA to be torn apart like those two, and I am NOT afraid of that thing.

"GIVE THOSE BACK!" Bakugo shouted as two kids made off with his gauntlets. "They aren't toys, ya damn brats!"

"Did they really swipe your gauntlets that easily?" Todoroki asked.

"Yeah, how did that happen?" Ayuma asked herself.

"I took them off because it's too dangerous to keep the things on!" Bakugo shouted back.

"Sure, they totally didn't just slip them off your arms while you weren't paying attention," Ayuma remarked. "Camie, how are you holding up?"

"Like, help!" the girl called out, trying to calm a catty-looking girl. "I mean, winning your hearts is like super vague, you know? What are we supposed to be doing here? This is way weird." She tried getting closer only for the girl to get even more angry.
"Team Fish-turds look like they've completely lost the beat and are flapping like flounder!" Present Mic announced. "Let's hear from their teacher. Got any special requests? Just what do those kiddos need?"

The teacher sniffled. "So much. These early elementary school years are an important time for character development. Because the difference between children’s Quirks has a huge effect on their self-esteem, we offer counseling in order to support healthy emotional growth. But counseling is not a cure-all. The students in this class have completely closed their hearts to us. I understand that this is my responsibility. But still, I hope meeting heroes who're working hard to achieve their dreams will help lead these kids down a more respectable path."

Just while seeing the teacher cry, Ayuma realized something. It's just like when I was little, but not quite. Madame Kirai always commanded too much authority and laced it with fear, forcing all of us to remain under control despite the fact that we hated her as much as she hated us. This teacher doesn't command enough respect and all the kids feel is frustration, easily able to take over for themselves.

"There's no time for us to bicker with each other," Todoroki stated. "We have to save them."

"In other words, all we have to do is make friends! No problem!" grinned Inasa. "Just like with Hansha and Kagami!"

"Let's get this babysitting over and done with," Bakugo said. "I'm ready to go back to some actual training." Present Mic wondered how he was going to handle this. "The stupid teacher didn't fulfill her role as a leader so the brats ended up taking over the class. This isn't something that just happens. If they're not listening to her, then someone else must be in charge here. There's definitely some kind of boss kid that these little monsters are following. We just gotta figure out who it is."

"Like with my siblings and our caretaker," Ayuma added. "Even if it's for different reasons, the story's the same. The adults didn't even care about us, so we watched out for ourselves and shut them out for our own safety. We instead looked to one of our own. But our leader was the oldest girl in the home." Inasa nodded in agreement, meaning he must've been told that by Hansha and Kagami.

"What do we do once we find the leader?" Todoroki asked.

"We beat him up and hang him from a post to make an example out of the punk! Then we make the kids throw rocks at him! It'll be the most effective way to make them realize what an insignificant little pest their leader is!"

"I thought the idea was for us to be nice," Inasa commented. Everyone else seemed to agree that Bakugo's suggestion was a terrible move, especially when he upfront challenged the kids to bring forth their ringleader. Ayuma knew they wouldn't do that. She and her own siblings would never sell Suru out like that.

"Such an outdated and violent way of solving problems," sighed the kid leaning on the wall. "You're showing your true colors."

"ENOUGH ALREADY! JUST BRING IT!" Bakugo hollered.

"Bakugo, don't!" Ayuma scolded. "They aren't going to just point out their leader. That'd be like letting their king or queen be taken captive by a stranger. Whoever their leader is, they are the oldest sibling, and come hell or high water, the other kids won't give them up." As someone who's
lived with such a leader, I for one wouldn't dare rat out my big sis. I'd sooner give myself over to Nightmare completely.

"Rad how you know what they're thinking, girlfriend," Camie commended the first year. "Besides, like, delinquents aren't in fashion, y'know." Bakugo seemed a bit offended by that statement.

"Getting to know each of the kids is the fastest way to becoming friends!" Inasa grinned, raising a hand into the air. "Who wants to become a hero?!" Almost immediately, a sizable group of the kids swarmed him. Laughing at his small victory, he picked up some of the kids like he'd done it before. "That's great! I want to be one, too! Doesn't heroic passion make your blood bubble with excitement? It's the job of a hero to make sure everyone smiles. Think if you caused your teacher trouble, you're likely to become good heroes?"

Well...

"I guess not..." one of the kids he was holding considered. "But wait. That means, since you gave the teachers and the commission guys more work by making them do this class, you can't become one either. Is that right?"

Inasa froze for a second, then flew off from the laughing kids as if one of Ayuma's monsters had sucker-punched him. He dropped into his signature apologetic bow, not seeing his cape flip over his head.

The redhead already had her hand pressed against her face. "Kids are a lot smarter and more in tune with any situation than they let on, or are even given credit for. Lots of people tend to forget that part regardless of the fact that we've all been there."

"Is it just me, or are these kids, like, super twisted?" Camie asked. Bakugo tried to use that to justify violence.

"Bakugo, they're just kids," Todoroki defended.

"Well, that's how I was raised; and look, I turned out awesome," Bakugo countered.

"Debatable," Ayuma remarked, catching herself on the fact that it slipped out so easily. She didn't even pay attention when Bakugo tried yelling at her for that hard-to-deny jab.

"And I think I might have a better way," Todoroki continued.

"Oh. Why don't you show us what you have in mind. I'm sure this is gonna be good."

Todoroki ignored Bakugo and went to the kids. Endeavor tried shouting from the stands to "encourage him" again, and was promptly ignored. The girls seemed to be interested until they realized Camie was doing the same thing (Almost kinda funny how they're doing the opposite thing as her. Probably just doing it because she hugged one of the guys earlier.) He immediately corrected the kids on his hero name and started telling them about himself. Present Mic noted that it sounded more like an autobiography and was denied almost on the spot. He stumbled back to the group in defeat for Ayuma and Inasa to try and console him.

"You did what you could, Todoroki," Ayuma reassured him, "but maybe there's still yet another way."

"Hey, you guys have been yelling and running after them this whole time, but I don't know," Camie spoke up. "Wouldn't it be faster if we, like, just showed them how cool all our Quirks are?"
Bakugo claimed he was thinking that, but Ayuma doubted it.

"We got a lot of work to do," Bakugo added, "and plenty of these snot-nosed twerps seem to think it's fun to cause us trouble. We can't just try to gain their trust and think that's enough, we gotta go all in with the demonstration of our skills."

"That actually sounds like a decent idea," Ayuma replied. "Introducing ourselves to them via our Quirks and having them do the same."

"I see! Got it!" Inasa remarked, his grin widening.

"Copperhead knows what these kids are thinking best because she's practically one of them," Bakugo commented. "If anyone can effectively approve of our ideas before trying them on the brats, she can."

"That's true. I can't believe we didn't realize that sooner," Todoroki said to himself.

"Great! Now, like, here's my idea..." Camie began.

As she explained her plan, Ayuma could feel the aura of the kids gathering behind them. It was so painfully similar to when she and her siblings stepped up for themselves. They were a single mind in over a dozen different bodies with a thousand different ways of showing it. The kids were going to become the sort of monster that the children of Yokohama had once become.

"Ha, you guys aren't fooling anybody," their little commander taunted. "We're better than you, and we'll take you down to prove it!"

"Oh? Then bring it on!" Bakugo challenged, the others preparing to follow his lead. "Let's have a proper fight."

Ayuma saw the boy by the wall still not moving. She heard him call her and the others Neanderthals, and resorting to "useless violence" won't work on them. Shishikura even went to Present Mic to "assist" in his commentary. Even their teacher was starting to panic.

"Hold on! I don't think you know how dangerous this is!" she cried out. "Those children are strong and believe whole-heartedly that their Quirks surpass those of the heroes! They won't hold back against your trainees!"

Ayuma realized that they believed so deeply that they were stronger. Because, in some ways, they were probably right.

Chapter End Notes

Yup, looks like Ayuma recognizes their behaviors because she's been in their position. She's been in a large group of kids that stand together in opposition of the Status Quo. Plus, Endeavor seems very nasty so as to dehumanize her just because of who she reminds him of. And once they become a single mind, there's no stopping them. I wonder what this'll mean for them, though...
In Our DNA

Chapter Notes

This superhuman world knows no fury like a group of pissed off kids and their untamed Quirks. And the only ones who can cause such a thing are the ones dealt the worst hands. And as for those who think that doesn't exist, they obviously haven't seen groups like Magesaki or Yokohama.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ayuma ducked away from a sphere that ripped off half of Bakugo's mask. They slowly circled back around, flashing sharp white teeth that bit relentlessly at the air. "My Binging Balls will make a feast out of you," smirked the kid commanding the objects. "Bet you didn't see that coming! These monsters are super fast and strong!"

The other kids were soon to follow in the onslaught. A cloud of dust swarmed into their faces, leaving Ayuma, Todoroki, and Inasa blinded, and sneezing or coughing. Each of them called out their Quirks' names and sent them at the heroes-in-training. Flower petals, electric strikes, a huge hammer, rings of energy, and even cannon fire.

The kids prepared another group attack. Todoroki prepared an iceberg shield while Bakugo blasted away a few other strikes. Inasa blew some of the Binging Balls aside with his wind, and Ayuma prepared a few monsters just in case, but she didn't have the time to tell from whom, and couldn't see them through the smoke.

"Pretty bold of them to attack without hesitation like that," Bakugo remarked. "I'm almost impressed."

"Really? Maybe you'd be surprised if I showed you my own family," quipped Ayuma.

"They know that we're hero trainees," Todoroki pointed out. "They likely feel that they don't need to hold back against us."

Inasa was trembling on the verge of tears. "It's so sad. I just wanna be their friend. Even if it wasn't part of our training."

The kids seemed to be staring to realize that the teens were unfazed. Eventually, one of the girls who were spiting Camie stepped up. A heart-shaped crosshairs appeared in front of her face as she shouted "Queen Beam!" With a pink flash, she fired a shot at what appeared to be Todoroki, and Ayuma sent one of her creations to take the blow. It went so fast it was almost like it wasn't there, and the smoke cleared to show...

"Hey... Wow, you have such a beautiful face, dear. Don't let that frown spoil the effect."

The girl stopped her attack to marvel at the image that Bakugo and Ayuma both stopped short at. It was only a few seconds later that the image of Todoroki (who would never talk like that, by the way) disappeared into pink mist surrounding Camie. "Sorry, hon," she apologized. "Just a little illusion for ya. Wouldn't it be, like, so swoony though? Our school's mega old-fashioned and doesn't even allow us to go on dates. Ugh, it's just the worst."
It was then that the real Todoroki’s classmates burst out laughing, with Ayuma taking out her phone. "Do that again!" she called to Camie. "I need to get a picture of that for the others back home!"

"You got it, girl!" Camie grinned, happy to blow another cloud to recreate the illusion. Ayuma gladly got a picture that she was totally not going to show Midoriya and everyone else later. Bakugo was still laughing and even decided to imitate the illusion of Todoroki doing such a thing. Right in Ayuma’s line of photography, too, (and Kirishima was bound to freak out at seeing it) though he might not have noticed because he was still laughing at "Glamouroki" while the real bic- colored boy was wondering how that was even funny.

"Anyway, let's do the thing we were talking about before, guys!" Inasa suggested.

"Yeah, I think now's the best time to do it," Ayuma agreed, still wiping tears from her eyes after laughing so much. She looked down at her pictures with shameless pride. So Camie’s Quirk actually can be seen by cameras; lucky us, since Todoroki would never do such a thing otherwise. Inasa lifted all of the kids with his wind.

"You kids are amazing, I'll give you that," Inasa said joyfully. "Thing is, there's more to heroing than just power! Here I go!"

"It's so lame that we can't do this outside," Camie shrugged. "Whatevs." She blew her pick mist towards the ceiling, where it cast ribbons of light over Ayuma’s darkness. Todoroki’s ice crawled over the ground and leaped up everything the kids sent at them to form a huge slide that the children were being dropped on. Bakugo even went to the ringleader -- the kid leaning on the wall -- and brought him over as well.

"Allow me to offer a few playmates," the redhead winked. With a wave of her hand, a group of all sorts of children joined the elementary school students. Some were as old as the trainees, others were as young as the little ones themselves. And Ayuma knew who every single one of them were.

The monsters she used before had also appeared: the monster who caught Todoroki, four metallic humanoids, and a being made of two different people somehow molded together. One of the metal humanoids was tinged blue, with only a right arm and no clear face sans for two pinpricks of light as the eyes. The second had no eyes, but had all of its limbs accounted for. The third had no arms, and its mouth hug open in a permanent gape. The last was tinged red with only one eye, and long wires wrapped around its arms and covered half of its face. The spider-esque creature seemed a bit similar to them with the shape of its four arms and four legs, but its wide head and long body was covered in silvery velvet fur.

The last one was particularly intriguing, though. It was in a fairly roughly up, male U.A. uniform, but its shape was clearly feminine. The tie laid over its collarbones like an untied scarf. Its shoulder-length hair was a mix of burnt orange and dark red, and the fabric of its left shoulder was charred. Its face even had two different sides: the left side was pale with a mulberry purple slit for an eye; the right was partly peach, partly ghost white, around a deep powder blue ring on a black sphere.

"That looks kind of like you, miss," one of the children remarked; the little one who could fly. "Just with short hair."

Ayuma couldn't help but agree, and it gave her a sneaking suspicion of who it came from as she looked up at where Endeavor’s flames glowed against her and Camie’s aurora display. Endeavor... Is this how you see me?
Nevertheless, all of the kids seemed to love what the teens were doing. They played with Ayuma's monsters and the memories of her siblings as if they were always part of them, riding the spider-like creature through the air like it was a horse. None of them seemed to notice the spectral sheen surrounding Suru and the others as the older kids helped gather the kids into a line to go on the slide. At least the Masegaki kids' Quirks provided a great frame for Todoroki's ice, and Inasa could lift them all up to the top.

"HANSHA! KAGAMI!" bellowed Inasa as he lifted up the specters of the twins to perch them on his arms. "So all those guys Ayuma brought out were your family before we took you in? That's AMAZING!"

"The new kids are your bros and sisses?" Camie asked, eyebrows raising as she looked over the younger version of Himei. "That's like, so cool how you like, brought back such a blast from the past."

Ayuma chuckled, "Yup. The family I once had. It was a scary time for all of us, but there's no denying that we were always in it together."

Shoto was helping all of the cold kids warm up with his flames when he noticed one of the specters, trailed by the red metal creature. A little girl around the same age as the other elementary kids, or perhaps even a little younger. The child was so much younger than its summoner, but he knew that face just as well. Even when the kids were satisfied, the girl and monster didn't leave. With a glance back to where Ayuma spoke with Utsushimi, he picked up the little one, a bit surprised at how realistic it felt to hold the little girl, and have her staring back with an unending curiosity. She even reached up to trace the edges of his burn, and play with his perfectly-divided hair.

"Hey Ayuma," he flagged down his friend as he and the escorting monster approached. "I think I found you."

The redhead turned to him questioningly before she saw the little one he was carrying look to meet her eyes. The girl in his arms had Ayuma's coppery locks and bright indigo orbs. The same spindly, tapered limbs. The same guarded yet endlessly curious light in her eyes that lit the rest of her face. The same shyness that made her always try to hide behind her hair as the child curled into Todoroki's left side. Now that she got a better look at her younger self, she couldn't see any hint of the monster she was always told that she was.

_I guess Toru was right... I really was adorable at that age. And that monster among the four of them..._

"Yeah, you did," Ayuma replied, almost breathless. "And I think the nightmare who followed her... is you."

It took a while to clean up the whole slide that Todoroki, Inasa, and the other kids created. The Binging Balls were plenty of help, and the children were glad to distribute the work. Gang Orca, although admitting that his instructions were vague, was proud that they succeeded in their task. (He finished it off by using his drill sergeant persona again, but everyone could tell how blatantly he was trying to cover his true nature.)

She waited by the bus for the others to come back as All Might spoke with the Shiketsu teacher about what happened to Camie. She was a bit unnerved that the League of Villains, who typically targeted U.A. and specifically her class, went after the school the twins had enrolled in by impersonating the fawn-haired girl. But the plan to have the two schools cooperate to share
information was definitely going to be helpful in the future.

However, that didn't mitigate her feelings when Endeavor approached her and Todoroki when he and the others came out. He even spoke to him like she wasn't even there next to him. "Shoto. Long time, no see. You've changed quite a bit." He raised a hand towards them only for his son to slap it away with a glare.

"Let's go, Todoroki," she urged quietly. Her eyes never left Endeavor's dancing flames. She was already almost burned alive once, and the memory already had her scarred arm stinging; she wasn't in the mood for him to try again.

"...Shoto... I want you to know I'm proud of you, son." Said son only gave a near-inaudible scoff. "Because of that, I swear I'll become someone you can be proud of, too. Not just as the Number 1 Hero... but as the man that you call father. And as for you," he turned to Ayuma, whose shoulders only tensed. "Hero of Heroes, you remind me of a duo that I once knew. I hope that in their memory, we can learn to forgive and for--"

"Don't use such empty phrases," she interrupted, her voice a quiet hiss. "Forgiving is already unlikely, but forgetting is downright impossible." She put a hand on her friend's shoulder, turning her back to his father. "Come on, Todoroki; let's go home, where we really belong. Midoriya and the others are waiting."

The dual-colored male nodded, giving a slight smile as they went back to the bus.

_A already realized it, Endeavor. You really are afraid of me; and you're afraid of who I remind you of. And in a way, you're afraid of your own family. Or at least, what would happen if they turned on you, and followed who I remind you of._

Aizawa was glad for the free time since Eri settled down. He needed a break after all that has happened, and to see exactly what kind of past events he got himself into after first seeing the articles of the Yokohama Foster Home. Ayuma had already proved how easy it was for her to become afraid of a Pro hero. Not just with the ribbons from his own scarf, but that killer whale she sent on Togata that was obviously Gang Orca.

He could tell that Ayuma’s fear of heroes -- and according to Toshinori, adults in general -- traced back from some kind of traumatic experience that caused her such paralyzing terror. He needed to find the old home itself in order to fully understand that terror. Whether or not it was in one piece.

No one in the rebuilding district looked twice at him, thankfully, as he strolled to the supposed address of the foster home. With all the rubble still lingering around, Aizawa could see the damage that All Might’s swan song of a battle had done to the district. He couldn’t help it when he started feeling tense. Every bit of rubble that peaked above Aizawa’s head was a hiding spot, and _anyone_ could jump out and surprise him. A maze of concrete and metal mottled with shadows and light.

When Aizawa found the building, it was clear that its upper portions took a _massive_ blow, with a lot of old and new damage to what remained. The windows seemed to have been ripped out of their very frames, and cracks marred the walls of the building. The open front doors swayed lazily. A dark, cold aura hung over the damaged foster building, one that seemed to just _tell_ the underground hero that he was trespassing.

Despite the bad feeling settling in his chest, Aizawa pressed on, entering the building.
Immediately, he could smell mold and mildew, and see the dust and broken glass and debris all over the place. The place was very barren and lonely; the kind of lonely that a criminal in solitary confinement would feel. He was surprisingly grateful for the broken windows, as they at least made it a little less stifling.

In one small part of the back of the first floor, Aizawa found a hefty, metal door that had a staircase leading down behind it. A basement, most likely, but something about it felt… off… for some reason. Something about the dark channel leading down seemed to tell Aizawa: something would often take place down there; something awful.

Aizawa shook off the feeling and continued, looking at what was left of the other rooms. Playrooms, bedrooms, a bathroom here or there, a couple of closets… none of them were what he was specifically looking for, though. There wasn’t even a map to use to find it. But it had to be around somewhere. If the police were sloppy enough to set a group of upset kids’ Quirks on themselves and barely be able to cover it up, what he was looking for had to have been there.

After a while longer of searching, Aizawa finally found it. The office of the building, where the file cabinets stood. It was easy enough to wrestle the drawers open and find the folders inside in surprisingly good condition, considering how long it must’ve been since it was last opened. They were surprisingly well sorted, with a name on each tab and a picture of each kid inside. The photos were faded, but clear enough to see what the kids looked like last any of them had a picture taken.

Zuanshi… One of Joke’s kids; I remember him greeting Ayuma at Daboga. Hansha, I think he was also at the Licensing Exam, with the Shiketsu kids. Has a twin sister named Kagami, too? Probably in another part of that school. And this Suru Funsai… her Quirk only says something about glass, so that might explain the windows; oldest one here, too, so that might make her the leader of the group. Hime Kougami, a bat Quirk that might’ve also contributed to the windows, and I believe she’s the one Gran Torino mentioned to All Might. Raiko Arashi, lightning rod Quirk -- might’ve caused a good part of the explosion… There you are.

There was the folder he was looking for; despite the little girl in the photo being no older than 8, he knew that face anywhere. He read the child’s name: Ayuma, with the inked last name scribbled out with pencil. His eyebrows rose, but he opened the file to see that there was only one actual foster family she went to. She was sent back after more than a few complaints from the family’s neighbors about her “playing too rough” with other kids in the neighborhood. She was sent back after more than a few complaints from the family’s neighbors about her “playing too rough” with other kids in the neighborhood, with the last straw being the first time her Quirk went off. The rest of it -- the next 2-3 years -- were complaints all by Mahira Kita for using her Quirk to attack other children in the building and being “disciplined accordingly.”

His hooded eyes widened at the monthly grant Ayuma supposedly had attached to her: well over ¥100,000. If Aizawa recalled correctly, most kids in the system were only in the tens of thousands, not the hundreds; only the children of Pro heroes who died would be worth that much in foster grants. And at the bottom of her file, it even officially declared the girl unfit for a family as well; she meant it when she said the system blacklisted her. Strangely enough, the names of her parents had also been covered in graphite.

After looking closer at the scribbled-out surname, Aizawa realized that holding it up to the light the right way made it at least legible enough to know what it said.

“Ku… ro… Kuro… ga… Kuroga,” he finally realized. Does that make her who I think it does? He turned to her parents’ names, looking at them the same way, until he saw “Ichiro” and “Homara” for her father and mother, respectively; both were marked deceased.

I knew it…
He really should’ve known when he first saw the girl so long ago. When the death of Fever Dream and Phantom Thread was still relatively fresh. Her Quirk was a lot like Fever Dream’s Heat Mirage, able to create illusions that made it hard to tell them apart from reality. And her Night Terror Ultimate Move vaguely resembled her father’s Eldritch Spectre, only the tendrils weren’t branched like Phantom Thread’s extended nerves.

Aizawa was glad to finally see Ayuma’s missing file, along with those of the other children. It would help all the confusion considering she didn’t even know her own last name, explained by her own file essentially having all her known family scribbled out. And considering there were enough rusty, halved scissors in a cup on the desk to fill in for a cutlery set, it was probably far from what would be considered legal in the foster system as a whole.

After reorganizing all the files, Aizawa put all the folders into a pile and contacted Kayama and Yamada. Kayama was the only one available, and she was glad to help. She agreed to bring a couple of cases to bring the files back to U.A., where they could see what to do with the files from there, and was prepared to take pictures if need be. She’d be heading there in her car, and would be there in about a half an hour.

As he waited, Aizawa decided to take a further look into that basement he saw earlier. He had a light to find his way around, and the building appeared to be sound despite missing a few floors it probably used to have. With his phone for a light, he walked down the old staircase behind the metal door. The smell of mold and mildew was overshadowed by an awful, crawling feeling in the back of his mind. From what he could see, there were a couple of ruined rugs rolled up on the floor, and water damage on the walls. But there was something off about the red spots he found on the floor, and there was something about that faint metallic smell that gave him a shudder.

Something must’ve happened here, and more than once. Something no child deserved to experience.

It was like fear itself was painted all over the basement; the walls, floor, and even the ceiling. Every part of it screamed claustrophobia, with the only way in or out being the staircase and that single door. Any adult would find it hard to open, so he couldn’t imagine how strong any kid would have to be to open it, even before it became so rusty. The overall feel of it was like chains being locked onto him.

I wonder... What kind of Quirk does Mahira Kita even have? I remember Gang Orca telling me of Ayuma’s reaction to his sonic attack... Maybe it has something to do with full-body paralysis... The worst kind of trauma to fall victim to.

Normally, anyone prone to PTSD flashbacks tends to use a certain coping mechanism to ground themselves to reality. They always have something to do with the five senses; Aizawa can attest to it. But when the entire body is paralyzed, there’s no way of sensing anything. Nothing can save the victim’s mind when they have a flashback of such a situation, because the one thing their body remembers is being cut off from the world entirely.

And that can also mean screaming themselves hoarse, to make up for all the times they couldn’t.

“Shota!” a voice faintly echoed down the small corridor of a staircase. He turned around at the voice and headed back up the stairs, seeing Kayama with enough satchels to gather all the files. “There you are. Figures you’d be in the dark basement. So where are the files?”

“I was investigating why the basement itself felt more ominous than usual,” Aizawa explained. “I left them in the office this way. Anyways, the picture I’ve gotten from this place so
Kayama looked around at the building around her. Broken windows, cracked walls, strange scorch marks and bleached red spots on the floor. *Alright… maybe he has a point. If a place like this is where Ayuma came from, and it was scary before the building had its top blown off… no wonder.*

“Here they are, Nemuri,” Aizawa showed her the stacked files on the desk as Kayama set down the satchels. “Ayuma’s file is on the top of the stack. As for what’s inside… we’ll have to talk about it with Nezu and Recovery Girl.”

Kayama was a bit confused as she looked at the file at the top, but nodded. With that silent agreement, the two Pros began carefully putting the stuffed folders into the satchels she brought.

“Can you at least *tell* me what’s in Ayuma’s file that Nezu and Recovery Girl need to know about?” Kayama asked on the drive back. “If it’s something important, I should know too, considering you called me all the way here.”

Aizawa sighed, running a hand through his hair. “It’s her parents… not only were their names poorly scribbled out along with her surname, but her parents’ names are… Ichiro and Homara Kuroga.”

They were lucky Midnight didn’t swerve into another lane. “Phantom Thread and Fever Dream? Endeavor’s classmates? *Those* two are her parents?!… That actually explains a few things.”

“I thought so, too,” Eraserhead agreed. “Her appearance, the fundamentals of her Nightmare Quirk, her Night Terror attack.”

“You’re right about Nezu needing to know about it, Shota,” Kayama commented. “And Recovery Girl might also be able to help out should we need to break the news to her. And have more info about Ayuma’s parents, too.”

Aizawa nodded, leaving the two to pass the rest of the car ride in silence.

Once they were back at U.A., the Pros took the satchels and brought them to Nezu’s office. “We got the files from Yokohama,” Aizawa said as they set the satchels down on the desk. He took out Ayuma’s file and opened it. “And we found something about it you’ll want to know.”

Nezu only needed to see the picture to know what he was talking about. “Of course. I’ll arrange for an emergency faculty meeting immediately.”
It wasn't long before fall had finally begun, and a lot happened in that time. All the students involved in the Shie Hassaikai raid went to the funeral for Sir Nighteye, to bid the Clairvoyant Hero a final farewell. At the very least, little Eri had finally recovered from her illness, even though she was too unstable for visitors.

Unfortunately, the Work Studies had to be put on hold because of the circumstances, so that was going to be the last time Ayuma helped Gang Orca on anything for a while. But they parted on good terms, and he said his agency would eagerly await the day they could start over. He even hoped that Ayuma could properly introduce him to a couple of her other classmates by then.

As for those pictures Ayuma got in her time helping with the Remedial Course, the rest of her class certainly enjoyed them. Everyone had a good laugh at the picture of "Glamouroki" and its "Bakuglam" counterpart (the latter named by Kaminari and Mina even though that was the real Bakugo performing such a pose). Aoyama seemed almost proud, eagerly wanting to meet whoever caused such a "wonderfully shining moment!" Midoriya already seemed to know the first picture wasn't the real Todoroki, but he did find the fact that it was caused by an illusion Quirk fascinating.

But then there was something particularly strange that happened. Ayuma was trying to get to sleep with all the barking dogs she was hearing. She was hoping that little Yuki -- as Hitoshi still had yet to find a better name for the white cat -- hadn't gotten herself mixed up with any dog-walkers or strays outside the front gates. By the time the barking had finally ceased, her mind was finally able to stop keeping her awake. She slowly dozed off, drifting her way into slumber...

"AAAAAAAAAAAGGGHHHH!"

Ayuma and the others couldn't stop yawning as they went to class. Most of them were talking about last night. Everyone was wondering who screamed so loud last night that they woke the entire 1-A dorm, plus half of 1-B. She asked if anyone in the neighboring class knew who it was on her phone, and got a quick negative from the self-proclaimed "hospital crew." (A.K.A. everyone who was hospitalized after the incident at the Training Camp.)

Everyone on the fifth floor of the 1-A dorm was innocent, along with the fourth and third. That only left the second floor, which meant the culprit could've only been one of the guys; oddly enough, since the scream was very high-pitched. Tokoyami clearly wasn't it, and neither was Aoyama. Mineta claimed it was Midoriya for whatever reason, but not everyone necessarily believed him except maybe Bakugo. Too bad the blond boy didn't seem to show if he believed it.

When the greenette in question finally came to class, he seemed to be the most tired out of
everybody. He looked like he took a full-scale attack from Ayuma's own Quirk and noticeably hadn't slept. He flinched away from Aoyama as he went to his seat.

"So were you the one who woke us all up, Midoriya?" Kyoka asked.

He winced. "Yeah. Sorry, everybody." Everyone quickly ignored Mineta's little "I told you so!"

"Maybe tonight you should sleep on a different floor, Midoriya," Ayuma yawned. "There's a spare room on the fourth floor or fifth, last I checked."

"Oh no you don't, Copperhead!" Bakugo squawked. "You're not putting Deku on my floor!"

"She never said she was," Todoroki pointed out. "And it might be a good idea for Midoriya to sleep in a different room tonight just in case. The fifth floor probably would be safer, just in case."

"Yeah, I guess," agreed Midoriya. "I just don't want to be a bother to anyone."

"Don't worry, you wouldn't be bothering anyone," Momo reassured him.

Mina seemed to be preparing for something when Ayuma walked into class one morning, stretching her arms and legs. "Hey guys! C'mere! Check this." She started to sway back and forth, gradually adding more power to each move. She jumped into a one-hand handstand, starting to spin around on the floor by her head and shoulders. (Cleverly, she also wore shorts under her skirt.) Ayuma and some of the others started applauding her break dancing skills. (Mineta yelled at her about the shorts, but Toru was glad to give him a well-deserved pounding for being a creep.)

Midoriya took note of how useful the dancing would be for physical fitness and even combat, since it requires moving every part of the body with strict precision. Aoyama, who seemed to have befriended Midoriya -- ever since the latter screamed loud enough to wake all of 1-A and half of 1-B in the middle of the night -- seemed to have already noticed. It was why she was able to take him out whenever they were put together. The guys tried to imitate Mina's movements, but anyone could see that it... wasn't the best.

"I learned better moves from Naruhata's street dancers," Ayuma murmured in amusement. "And I couldn't have been older than eleven."

"Really?" Tenya asked with raised eyebrows. "Considering that and the picture in your room, you might know my brother's best friend."

Tensei knows Koichi? Huh; guess that was the guy he was always jogging with. "Possibly. I've always been better at singing anyway."

Kaminari saw the similarities between Mina's dancing skills and Sato's baking, since they were both hidden hobbies and skills that also transferred into hero work. He tried to do the same with Kyoka and her room full of musical instruments, but she seemed a bit embarrassed and possibly upset, too, especially when she threatened Kaminari with one of her jacks and went to hide behind Koda.

When Aizawa finally entered the room, he seemed more than a little traumatized. He didn't even step out of his sleeping bag. "It's coming... The School Festival." Everyone started cheering except Kirishima, who pointed out the issue of the villain problems, especially since All Might had retired, and villains specifically targeted them anyway.
"You're right; that's a reasonable point. However, there are students here besides those in the Hero Course. You get the spotlight every year at the Sports Fest; this is for everyone else. The Support Course, General Studies, and don't forget the Business Course students. This doesn't get as much attention as the Sports Fest, but it's still the yearly event they all look forward to. Many of your peers are feeling stressed out by the current conditions here at U.A. Especially the dorm system which had to be adopted because of the Hero Course."

Kirishima meekly sunk back into his seat. "When you put it like that... I guess it'd be unfair to cancel it..."

Aizawa nodded, "Correct. So yeah, it's still on, and hopefully, everyone will enjoy it. Though unlike festivals in the past, this one will only be open to U.A. students and staff, with a few exceptions. You may not be the focus this time, but your class still needs to participate with some kind of original programming. You need to decide what you want to do today." With that, he sunk into a corner and let himself doze off.

Mostly just students and staff? Darn. I was going to ask if I could invite Zuanshi and the twins and maybe Himei. It would've been nice if we were all able to meet up in person again.

Tenya and Momo were quick to take the reins. He proposed a quick brainstorming session, and quickly got all sorts of enthusiastically raised hands in response. Kaminari proposed a maid cafe. Mineta barely shouted out "TOPLESS" before Tsu had him tied upside-down and wrapped in burlap, and Sato tightened the apparatus and held it there so she could tie it off. All the better in Ayuma's opinion; just the first word of Mineta's suggestion had her skin crawling.

Anyways, they continued with all of the suggestions from the others. There were so many that Momo asked for some help writing them all on the board. Ayuma considered a singing competition, but she wasn't sure if that'd be very popular with everyone else. But when the time came to eliminate the "inappropriate, impossible, or confusing," at least she wasn't out. Tokoyami's "banquet of darkness," Aoyama's little show, Bakugo's "death match," and Mineta's suggestion were all crossed out. As it turned out, even Momo and Tenya's own choices, written without even being said, were voted down. (History lesson and study session? Is there anything else in those heads of yours?)

Tenya seemed to be trying to get everyone to calm down, but seemed to be having little success. The only reason everyone stopped talking at all was because of the bell. Aizawa said he wanted everyone to make their decision by tomorrow morning -- or else they'd be doing a public lecture of sorts -- before heading off to some kind of meeting. And if that were to happen, the first thing Ayuma would do is duck out.

When it was after dinner, Ayuma was in the common room with all the others who could be there. Kaminari said the "raid team" was doing make-up work, and Bakugo had already turned in for the night. That was unfortunate; she wanted to see how all of them were doing ever since Nighteye's funeral that she unfortunately couldn't be in, and Todoroki had been a bit worried about Midoriya.

"Now that things have quieted down, I have some thoughts about our list," Tenya stated. "It's obvious that we've caused some strain on the other students. It would make sense to choose something that might raise their spirits in an effort to make it up to them."

"I don't disagree," Momo replied. "We're aiming to be heroes, right? So we should be aware of any trouble we've caused for others."
"But that doesn't make any prejudice any more justified," Ayuma pointed out. "Not even the other hero class in our year knows half of what we've been through. We never asked for the targets that villains have put on our backs, and have been firing on since before I even got here. "No more than my siblings and I asked to be targeted by police for what they did to us. "No matter how many times we're told to believe otherwise, we don't deserve to be called out for something that isn't our fault. We're suffering as much as the other students, and we're all on the same side; the least we can do is prove that to all of them."

Tenya couldn't help but agree with Ayuma's reasoning, and considering Lunch Rush's cooking, he doubted any food-related ideas would work very well. So that meant all ideas involving food had to be struck from the list. The petting zoo seemed to also be a bit too much work, even for them, so it didn't sound like that would hold up much longer. Kyoka still thought her skit idea would be best. A squirming Mina repeated her own dance party idea until Todoroki came forward with a new idea.

"Dancing... that's a good idea..." He got up from his chair to sit at the laptop and start typing, Ayuma watching over his shoulder. "Hang on a second; there's something I've seen before... I don't know what it's called exactly, but it looks like everyone really enjoys it." He pulled up a video on Yo!Tube of people at a dance concert. "There, something like this."

Everyone seemed a bit surprised that Todoroki would make such a suggestion as a comeback to his original soba stand idea. He just said it would be a good idea as a sort of stress relief for the other students, having gotten the idea from the Remedial Course.

"Oh right, the kids!" Ayuma recalled as Tenya considered the idea. "Something that can reach them through all their frustration. I think you're onto something."

Mina already got the dancing part down-pat, since she somehow managed to coach Aoyama's dancing and successfully help him learn a few moves. And there was also going to be especially good music to boot, and everyone almost immediately turned to Kyoka.

"Why don't we perform live? With all your instruments!" Toru said excitedly, getting a very quick denial. "What's wrong? You're really good at playing and teaching people how to play. And you always look like you're having a ton of fun when you make music! I bet everyone in school would love to hear you rock out!"

Kyoka went silent, looking down at the ground. "No... I'm not Ashido or Sato... Their hobbies actually help their hero work. They have a purpose. But music..." she started fiddling with her jacks, "it really is just a hobby. Sorry... I-I just don't think it's something I want to show off to the school."

Kaminari looked like he realized something. "Oh, so that's why you got weird." He walked up to her face. "But you can play so many instruments! You're freaking awesome!"

"Jiro," Koda gently nudged Kaminari aside to give her some space. "Why not use your skill to make other people smile? I think your music will definitely be useful when you're a Pro!" The open grin on his face and liberty with which he spoke up seemed to really touch the dark purple-haired girl.

Just when Momo stepped between Kyoka and the boys, the girl herself finally spoke. "Well... after what you all said... If I didn't do it... I guess it wouldn't be rocking at all."

Everyone was cheering when she accepted, Koda giving her a big hug brimming with joy. They now officially had a proper idea for the festival, and they couldn't wait until they could really
The next day, Ayuma was a bit surprised when she was called to a supplementary classroom with the other Work Study students. In no time at all, she, Midoriya, Kirishima, Ochaco, Tsu, and Tokoyami were all herded into the room. Mr. Aizawa strode in soon after.

“I’ve called you all here with news from the hospital where Eri is being housed,” he began. “We’ve come to a conclusion of allowing her to have visitors, but only in small groups. No more than two at a time for the time being. We’ve given her the opportunity to make direct requests, and she made exactly three. The hero Lemillion, the ‘green rabbit’… and someone the latter told her about during the rescue. Someone who’s just like her. These are the only requests since she regained consciousness, so we’re obliging her.”

“Eri said that she wants to see Midoriya?” Tsu realized. “But who else did he talk about?”

“To your first question, yes,” Aizawa answered. “For the second question, I have a guess…” he looked at Ayuma for a second, “but only Midoriya himself can say for the next one.”

*Oh boy, it’s me, isn’t it.*

The green-haired boy looked down at his hands. “I didn’t give her any names… but I told Eri about Ayuma. They’re both just so similar…”

*Yup. Figured as much… But does that mean I’m going to meet her in the hospital at some point?*

“You believed it would be helpful to tell her of a kindred spirit,” Tokoyami finished when he trailed off. “A wise choice on your part, Midoriya.”

“Tokoyami is correct: telling Eri about someone she’s similar to *can* help in the long run,” Aizawa said in a matter-of-fact tone. “I also noticed a few similarities. But possibly another time, we can introduce her to Ayuma. For now, we can allow Midoriya and Togata to visit her. I’ll send for Ayuma when we see it fit for her to meet Eri. We’ll figure things out from there.”

"I hope I'll be able to meet her soon, Midoriya," the redhead said. "And while you're with her, tell her who I am, so she really has someone else to look forward to meeting."

Midoriya turned back to look at her, a new smile on his face. "I'll make sure of it, Ayuma. I'm sure she already can't wait to meet her new big sister."

Ayuma smiled wistfully at the thought of such a thing. She couldn't help seeing the memory of Suru with her younger self, now being repeated via her and little Eri. *Big sister... I like the sound of that...*

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**Chapter End Notes**

*You guys hear that? Ayuma, the little sister of Yokohama, is going to meet a little sister of her own at some point. Her early life with Suru is going to come around full-circle in time for the Festival! Also, what do you think she should be in her class event? Should she be with the rest of her class, or somewhere else like the*
beauty pageant with Kendo and Nejire? And if she stays with 1-A, would she be best in the stage crew, dance crew, or band? Let me know down below, 'kay?
Alright, everybody! This is it! Ayuma's moment of going full circle with her past and meeting the cutest little thing to grace My Hero Academia!

Aizawa had left a note for Ayuma on the message board in the dorms when she woke up that morning. It appeared that he deemed Eri ready to meet her in person. Instead of training, Ayuma met up with him outside the gates after class, ready to meet her new little sister. Himei had finally been able to message her back after getting in touch again, saying her shoulder was just about healed. All good news, even though that still meant she'd still be out of commission for a while yet.

“Try not to excite Eri too much while we’re there,” Aizawa advised the redhead on the car ride to the hospital. “I’ll be ready to disable her Quirk if anything happens. If you want to show your Quirk to her at all, don’t scare her, either. Her Quirk probably won’t activate, but it's only a precaution, just to be sure. Also, according to Midoriya and Togata's visit, we've found out that Eri's physically forgotten how to smile…”

“I'll try not to overdo it,” Ayuma assured her teacher, though she was heartbroken by the last sentence. I can't believe it... that little girl doesn't even know how to smile? That's so awful, and... just like how Madame Kirai caused a lot of us younger kids to forget how to smile, too. Besides, this kind of reminds me of Suru when I was Eri's age… Maybe I can teach her the lullaby…

When they reached the hospital, Aizawa led his protege to an upper floor of the hospital to the room where she presumed Eri was housed. He told her not to come in yet before going in. “I’ve come back with that last visitor you wanted to see. The person Midoriya told you about.” He peered outside. “You can come in now.”

Ayuma nodded and gingerly stepped into the room. She was met with a pair of ruby-colored eyes, wide with curiosity. A little lump of a horn was on her forehead, poking out between her long, pale locks. Scars littered what could be seen of her arms and legs. Even with how different she looked compared to Ayuma at that age, she couldn’t help seeing her younger self in that sweet little girl.

“Hi there, Eri,” she greeted softly as she bent down to her eye level. “I’m Ayuma. I hear a friend of mine told you about me not too long ago.”

“Ah… yu… ma…” Eri’s brow furrowed slightly as she tested the word on her tongue. “Deku said you’re like me…”

Oh, Midoriya must've let her call him by his hero name. Probably because it's easier than "Midoriya." “So I’ve heard. Uh… mind if I sit?”

The little girl looked down at her lap for a second, before nodding her consent. She looked back up in surprise when she felt the bed dip under Ayuma’s weight. Her eyes then wandered curiously over Ayuma’s arm and shoulder. “What’s that, Ayuma-sis?”
“Oh, this?” Ayuma ran her hand over the scarring splashed over her shoulder, the part on her side hidden by her clothes like always. “Just a burn that happened… wow, was it really only about last spring?”

“Not that,” Eri shook her head. “Those scratches.”

Ayuma looked back to her arm. “I’m not sure what you mean, Eri. Do you mind showing me?”

Eri gently took Ayuma’s slender hand, as big as it was compared to the smaller girl’s. With a hesitant, almost shaking finger, she traced lines over her arm. She perfectly traced the thin, white scores so shallow and faded Ayuma couldn’t believe she didn’t notice. The marks from some of Madame Kirai’s punishments that Eri’s own scars were almost similar to. She could almost see the shadow of that man in the plague mask cascading over her. And deep down, she almost thought the girl could see Madame Kirai looming over her shoulder as well.

“Oh, that…” she said. “That was from a… a bad person, who gave them to me… I was only about your age. You have a very good eye to be able to see them.”

“A bad person…” Eri compared the thin scrapes to the pinkish slashes in her own arms, holding them out side by side. “Deku was right… when he said we were the same,” Eri murmured, scooting closer to Ayuma. “Do you think mine will become like that when I grow up?”

“Maybe. You never know…”

And that was how it went for the most part. They talked, asking each other questions and giving brief or explanatory answers. They even split an apple, which Eri admitted was her favorite fruit. Ayuma had to admit, the little one was as sweet as she imagined; a beautiful little sister who she hoped to see more of. “What kind of Quirk do you have anyway?” she asked at one point

Eri’s eyes lowered, a hand moving up to cup her lump on her forehead. “Kai always said it was a curse… Deku said it was a blessing… I can… turn back time on people… But I don’t know how to use it…”

The redhead was silent for a bit, thinking. She got an idea and ducked down into Eri’s line of sight. “So yours is a rewinding Quirk which was called a curse all your early life… You know, people used to call my Quirk a curse, too. And honestly, I wasn’t able to really control my power back then either… I can show you if you want.”

Eri looked up into the jewel-bright indigo orbs. She nodded slowly.

Ayuma smiled brightly. "I've got just the thing to introduce you to." With her Quirk's activation, the room around them darkened, Aizawa watching them carefully from the doorway. The shadows condensed and twisted and lit up a bright sea green, patterned with other colors. A collar of silver fur around its throat, dark green and red down by its feet, and cream-colored paws. The same green rabbit-human-hybrid she remembered from the Remedial Course: Bakugo's nightmare.

None other than an image of Midoriya himself.

"It's Deku," Eri recognized the source of the creature's appearance, pointing at the dewy green eyes and swiveling ears. It stooped down as Eri clasped her hands over its white front paws, Ayuma scratching between the joyful creature's long ears. Her innocent, ruby orbs were wide with awe; almost sparkling, even. She wasn't smiling, but her eyes were more than enough to show how
much she liked seeing something that so resembled a hero she was familiar with.

"Deku said your Quirk is a bit scary at first, Ayuma-sis," the albinic little girl commented. "Is that because it makes your eyes and the room dark?"

"In a way, yes," Ayuma nodded solemnly. "When I was your age, it tended to cause... quite a bit of trouble for me, not unlike how yours supposedly is." Okay, that's understating it to a colossal degree, but I don't think she should hear about the whole Quirk possession, screwed-up-beyond-belief-biological-clock business quite yet. "Speaking of which, I had a big sister when I was your age. The age difference is just about the same, too." With a wave of her hand, the rabbit disappeared, switched out in favor of two shades; one of a younger Ayuma, the other of Suru. On one of the nights where she was taught Suru's lullaby.

"She's pretty, like you," Eri said softly, transfixed by the sight. "And is that a younger you, too? What are they singing?"

A wistful smile crossed Ayuma's face. "It's a lullaby that my big sis taught me."

Eri looked down at her hands, wringing them for a bit. "Um... Ayuma-sis... Can you sing it for me?"

Ayuma thought she wouldn't ask. But since she seemed eager enough to do so... "I'd be glad to, Eri." With a careful hand, she patted the soft, pale hair as she began.

"Look outside your window, darling
Look at what awaits outside
A world is waiting out there for us
To show the hearts that beat within us

"Within the walls and chains that keep us here
We stand and we wait to prove our strength
They don't know our faces or our names
But someday, they'll know we're people all the same

"Each of us has powers fit for heroes
Whether or not they want to see
But no matter who you are, at any point in time
You'll always be part of the family... to me..."

Eri looked up intently at Ayuma as she sang the lullaby in the soft, lilting voice she always remembered it as. "Pretty voice..." the albino mumbled softly. Ruby eyes slowly drooped as the little one curled closer, drifting off against her side. She looked up at Mr. Aizawa, seeing a ghost of a smile flicker over his otherwise neutral countenance.

"You seem to have gotten along with her swimmingly already," Aizawa commented. "By the way, Nezu's planning on bringing her to the Festival preparations at some point, and she'll need a new outfit."

Ayuma carefully tucked the little girl in and followed him out. "Okay... But how does that concern me?"

"...For some reason, I've been told the outfit I chose for her wouldn't do very well." He showed her the outfit, which appeared to be one of the most horrendous things she's ever seen. A big, ugly green, cat-themed sweater with a purple skirt and brown leggings that were also cat-
themed. The worst clash of colors she's ever seen.

"Uh, yeah... I see why..."

"I actually decided on having her wear this," a nurse added, holding a very different outfit. A pretty red dress and white dress shirt, with gray leggings and cute tan boots. There was even a dark red bag with a flower on it. "Eraser Head doesn't seem to realize... well..."

"Hmm..." Yeah, Ayuma could understand why the nurse was hesitant to debate with her teacher, even if it was over fashion sense. He was typically intimidating, as much as he was usually lazy whenever he had nothing to do. "Honestly, I would agree with you, nurse. Eri probably would do better with that outfit. Because Mr. Aizawa's choice would essentially have everyone's eyes on her... and not in a good way." Even I was able to make myself look at least casual enough that I wouldn't typically be stared at.

The nurse silently agreed. She wasn't quite able to tell, but Ayuma almost thought she could see Aizawa was crushed.

When Ayuma had returned to 1-A, all the other Work Study students seemed finally done with their catch-up lessons. They all greeted her warmly, thrilled to say they were finally all caught up with their work.

"Oh, Ayuma, how did it go meeting Eri today?" Midoriya asked.

"It went great," Ayuma replied with a grin. "Eri might not be able to smile, but she's the sweetest little girl I've ever met. I even helped pick out her clothes for when she's able to visit; trust me, Mr. Aizawa's selected outfit was awful."

"I didn't think Mr. Aizawa had the best taste in clothes, considering what he usually wears," Ochaco commented. "Was there a better outfit for her?"

"Actually, yes. A nurse who's been taking care of her got an outfit that was much better. I guess Mr. Aizawa thought my opinion would carry more weight for some reason."

When they got to everyone else, they were quickly filled in on the preparations. Their concert was taking place in the gym, and they were being divided into three fractions: band, stage effects, and dance. Kyoka was heading the band, and Mina would be coaching the dance crew. For the band itself, Kyoka herself was on bass guitar, Bakugo was on drums, and Momo was on keyboard and synth. (Personally, Ayuma could see the explosive blond beating down on a drum set, but Ochaco, Tsu, and even Kirishima were a bit surprised at it.)

That said, the others seemed to be having trouble picking out vocals and other instruments for the band. A few of them were volunteering for what looked like the umpteenth time since the problem arose, so they decided to have a sort of mic and stand to see who could sing that actually wanted to. Ayuma joined in with Kirishima, Aoyama, and (somewhat grudgingly) Mineta.

Kirishima was first up, and clearly started singing some sort of hard rock solo. It wasn't the rave/pop club genre they were going for, but it was a decent voice. Mineta was next, but he almost broke the system of the mic with him basically yelling indiscriminately into the mic. Aoyama was, unsurprisingly, a falsetto, and was cast aside for singing what sounded like the intro to an opera ballad.

Ayuma was about to step up and take the mic herself, but Toru snatched it from her hands to give it over to Kyoka instead. "I'm with Ochaco, it's gotta be you, Jiro! When you were teaching us
how to play instruments in your room, your singing was super cool! I know you'll bring the house down!"

"Hey, it wasn't that great, y'know..."

"Hey look, a mic!" the invisible girl insisted.

"Wait, I've heard Ayuma sing a couple of the songs she has on her music box," Shoji brought up. "She usually sings in the kitchen at mealtimes and my Quirk picks up on it."

"No! Jiro first!"

Kyoka took a deep breath of relent, before starting to sing.

"You know everyone... wants to sparkle
Like the stars in the night sky...

"In this wondrous place
Filled with all the dreams
I've been wishing for
Waiting for the chance..."

Everyone cheered at Jiro's performance, cementing herself as top spot on the vocals. She set it aside and started asking for volunteers on guitars. Kaminari was a good fit for it, and while Mineta tried, he didn't quite have the arms for the instrument. Tokoyami took the second guitar instead, though he admitted he was "defeated" by the F chord, which was probably a difficult one to do.

Ayuma took the abandoned mic for a second, seizing what was left of her chance to be part of the band. She recalled one of the music box songs she had most recently fully cut into the paper in her room

"We all need that someone
Who gets you like no one else
Right when you need it the most
We all need a soul to rely on
A shoulder to cry on
A friend through the highs and the lows

I'm not gonna make it a-
La-la-la-la-la
La-la-la-la-la-lone
I'm not gonna make it a-
La-la-la-la-la
La-la-la-la-la-lone

I'm not gonna make it alone..."

When Ayuma's singing once again fell on deaf ears, Kirishima and Aoyama comforted their crushed red-haired classmate, keeping Mineta from getting close to her.

“It’s alright, Ayuma, it was real manly of you to give it a shot,” Kirishima assured. “It’s not your fault they didn’t pay attention.”

“D'accord!” Aoyama agreed. “There is a good place for you quelque part, mon ami! A place where you truly can shine in the spotlight!”
"I guess, but where can I go?" Ayuma asked. "Singing is about the only thing I can actually do; both of you have alternatives. Kirishima, you would kill it at a rock concert, but you're stuck in the stage crew. Aoyama, you and I might fit into a musical or something even though you're the same way. I'm not fit for anything else."

"Of course you are," Kirishima defended. "You're practically the most awesome girl in the class!"

"Not quite. I might be faster and maybe even more agile than everyone else, too... but for all my physical strength, I'm still effectively a stick figure. I could hurt someone if I made any sort of mistake in the dance team with the kind of radius I need! The stage crew also has to be sure that everything works in perfect sync, and I doubt anything I could create with Nightmare would fit with everything else, even if it were in tandem with being a backup vocalist to Kyoka..."

"Ah, mon pauvre ami! Surely you have a place to sparkle!" Aoyama exclaimed, clasping her hands. "Do not call yourself mute when your audience is deaf."

"But it's hard for someone to sparkle when you're a dark dream in such a large shadow," the girl countered, slipping her hands from his grasp. Ayuma wouldn't verbally admit it, but she felt a bit jealous of the music-loving girl for taking the spot of lead singer in the band. And just from the looks on Kirishima and Aoyama's faces, -- the latter being subtle, but present all the same -- she could tell she argued her way out of all three of their suggestions. "Face it, guys. There's nowhere for me to fit in; no matter what, I'm still the odd one out. With my luck, it'd be better on both sides if I went on my own."

Chapter End Notes

Yikes... Looks like Ayuma's place in 1-A is getting to her. Things aren't looking too good for her. Can she still find a place to fit in with the 1-A dance club? Or will she need to find an alternative place where she can stand out? Also, her tryout song is Alone, Part 2.
 Alright! I've decided on what I'm going to do. And this is probably one of the most "original" chapters I've written since Little Falcon. I hope you all enjoy the part Ayuma will play in the festival!

Ayuma was still pretty salty over what happened while deciding everyone's places by the next morning. She had the heart to escort everyone to bed when they stayed up past 1 in the morning before they (especially Tenya) could be any more sleep-deprived by the time they were actually supposed to wake up. But that didn't make it hurt any less that she still wasn't assigned a role. She didn't have any particularly good options to be in the stage or band crews, never mind the dancers.

She went out to wander the campus in hopes of clearing her head. A lot of people were weaving through each other with supplies for various things. Art stuff, tools, boxes of all sorts of things, and even racks of clothes. She even had to sidestep people carrying wooden boards and planks somewhere.

"Hey is that you, Ayuma? What are you doing out here?"

She turned around at her name to see Kendo leaving her class dorm. "Oh, hey Kendo. I-I'm just looking around. Things seem pretty busy all over the place."

Kendo nodded in agreement. "Yeah, that's true. But isn't your class doing something for the festival? Shouldn't you be with them?"

"W-well, it won't be much of a difference whether or not I'm there," Ayuma replied sheepishly. "They're doing a big concert and dance club… But I don't really fit into it anywhere…"

Kendo's expression waxed sympathetic, until a sort of lightbulb went off in her head. "No worries! I got the perfect idea for you." She started leading the fellow redhead to somewhere in the school. "Honestly, I'm not participating in my class' event either. They're doing an 'amazing and original' play that Monoma wrote, with help from Reiko and a couple of the others."

That certainly raised a brow for Ayuma. "As far as I'm concerned, Monoma can only be as 'original' as his own Quirk."

Not really to her surprise, Kendo started laughing. "That's what I was thinking when the idea was first announced. And sure enough, yes, we're both right. I haven't seen the whole script, but it was pretty obvious all the same. The play's basically, uh… well, it's a poorly-retold combination of three different movies everyone may or may not already know. So I dipped out of it and went for something else instead; a lot of people nominated me for it because of a hair commercial I was forced into with your classmate. Given your reputation, you might be on the table, too."

"Will Monoma behave himself while you're gone, though?" Ayuma asked. "I'd hate to come back and hear he picked a fight with Bakugo and got blown up or something."

"Actually, I think he's going to be pretty busy; they're doing a lot of school-wide meals in between. It's a good opportunity to get some rest and think."

"I'm not at all sure that's what Monoma wants to do," Ayuma said thoughtfully. "But they're probably right. He's probably better off not being involved in any of this."

"That's what I thought. But you never know what Monoma will do."

"I know."

"Well, I think you're going to be fine. You have Kendo to help you out."

"Yeah, I think so."

"Ayuma, do you think you can handle this?"

"I think I can."

"Good. I'll see you later."

"Okay."

"Good luck."

"Thank you."
“I feel ya; I asked Awase and a few others to be his minders so that doesn’t happen,” Kendo reassured. “I’m sure anyone on good terms with Class A will make sure he doesn’t try anything.” All the while, Kendo led Ayuma to an equipment room. "I think you know one of the other contestants anyway."

“Hey hey, Ayuma!” Hado immediately jump-hugged the girl as soon as the door was opened. “Nice to see you! We’re doing a beauty pageant here and you were nominated for it, did you know that?”

“Didn’t… know…” Ayuma choked out from in the bluenette’s arms. “…Can’t breathe!…”

“Easy there, Nejire, give the poor new girl some air,” a girl with short pink hair said from near a clothes rack.

“Oops! Sorry!” Hado let Ayuma go to let her save her lungs. The ginger beside her patted her back as she caught her breath.

“Ayuma was indirectly booted from Class 1-A’s event, so I brought her here to see if she wanted to join us,” Kendo explained. "You got nominated by a bunch of people yourself, Ayuma, but the choice is yours. Even a few of my classmates suggested that you join."

"Wait... Part of Class B nominated me for the pageant?" It was mildly hard to imagine that some in the "rivaling" class, -- led by Monoma, especially -- would do such a thing, but it was possible.

"Yup!" the bluenette nodded. "And with how everyone knows you, it's no surprise. Whether or not you're known for your looks, even Yuyu thinks you're actually really pretty yourself."

“Me? Pretty?” That couldn't have been right; no street-roaming orphan like her could be beautiful. Momo was a lot prettier than her anyway. "Well, I wouldn't know about that... But Mr. Aizawa didn’t say anything about a beauty pageant, though. Not even when I had to help choose Eri’s outfit. But I’d be glad to join you girls and sing a song of my own. It sounds better than standing on the sidelines watching my class all on my lonesome.”

“YAY!” Hado cheered. “Now I’m super super glad you're in! Yuyu! What kind of dress do you think she’ll look best in?”

The short-haired girl from before walked over, strolling around Ayuma to get a good look at her. She took a few dresses from the rack, holding them in front of her as if imagining her wearing them. “Hmm… Not quite the cute type… not the sexy type, either… Okay, I’d suggest something fairly long, like a drape dress; possibly one shoulder, too. As for colors… something that brings out your eyes would probably work best. Play your cards right, and that scar right there will add to the effect rather than downplay it.” She then led her old friend back to where they were doing a sort of photo shoot where Amajiki was at the camera, talking about how they might finally beat someone.

“It doesn’t look like there’s anything like that on the racks,” Kendo commented, “and since nothing was my size, I don’t think there’ll be any in your size either, Ayuma… Hang on, there are some sketch pads here just for something like this!” She led her to sit on a bench outside the makeshift changing rooms before jogging off, returning with a piece of paper and a pencil. “There, you can draw or write out the suggestions Haya gave you on the sketch paper.”

Ayuma swallowed nervously as she took the pencil. “If you say so, Kendo.” With a shaky hand, she filled out the form to enter the pageant, selecting to perform a song and visual display via her Quirk. On the sketch paper, she chose to write the advice given by the short-haired third year.
She listed the necessary measurements, wrote that it had to be long (somewhere between midi and maxi, as Kendo said), something of the drape dress variety, and having one shoulder as well. For the colors, Ayuma wrote down for it to be something between blue, purple, and pink. She also added her choice of footwear and accessories. Just for her own satisfaction, she provided a rough sketch of what she hoped the basic outfit would look like. “So, now what do I do with it?” Ayuma asked.

“I’ll go tell Midnight you’re officially in, and send the requests to who’ll design the dress,” Kendo replied, taking the page and folding it. “Don’t worry. I know and trust who this’ll be going to, and I know they’ll be happy to help with this.”

“Thanks, Kendo,” Ayuma smiled before hearing voices; voices she could recognize. “Uh-oh.”

“Sounds like Monoma and the set crew,” Kendo scowled. “They probably went to the art room not far away for supplies, but then they’ll head to a different room to try out the costumes and props. Still, just so Monoma can't try anything, stay here with Hado until I get back, okay?”

Ayuma nodded, closing the door behind the orange-haired girl with a sigh of relief. She decided to go over to the clothing racks, looking over all the dresses on the rack. She then went to the boy behind the camera. “Hey Amajiki, did Hado win this pageant last year… if there even was one?”

“There has been a pageant; just not one she's won," the third-year explained. "She’s been trying to win the pageant for the past couple of years against another third-year," the young man explained. “Bibimi Kenranzaki, from 3-G.” He seemed almost ready to sink to the floor, shivering violently. “She’s terrifying, with her knife-like eyelashes and princess laugh and giant tanks featuring her face… I don’t know how people find her at all appealing, but Hado's always been the runner-up…”

“Maybe someone else will take the crown this time,” Ayuma considered. “No monarch’s reign is actually eternal, you know.”

Amajiki nodded, but he was still shaking a little as he continued the photo shoot of his classmate. Ayuma was welcome to watch, and did so while giving some feedback on the shots until the door opened behind them. She turned around to see Midoriya and Togata. Eri was in the outfit Ayuma and the nurse had selected for her -- in favor of the eyesore Aizawa bought, thankfully -- and looked quite adorable as she stared up at Hado in awe; there was even an apple blossom charm on the strap of her bag. Hado shot out from hovering in front of the camera to hover in front of the boys so they could chat, and Eri seemed to recognize Ayuma.

“Ayuma-sis!” the little one said in greeting as she walked over to her. “I found you!”

“Hey there, Eri,” Ayuma greeted as she knelt in front of her. “Fancy seeing you here at U.A. How are Mr. Aizawa and the boys treating you?”

“Mr. Eraser’s been nice,” the little one said. “Deku and Lemillion wanted to show me around to meet everyone and become their friend. What about you? What are you doing in this festival?”

Ayuma smiled fondly, patting her head. “I’m glad to hear all’s going well; I’m doing just fine. Apparently, I'll be in a beauty pageant with a group of other girls.”

“Alright, Ayuma, I got the -- oh! So this is the famous Eri?” Kendo inquired as she entered behind the boys. The little one in question hid behind Ayuma as she stood up. “Aw, must be a little on the shy side, but she seems like a real cutie.”
“She’s the sweetest little thing,” Ayuma agreed, laying a hand on the girl’s head. “Don’t worry about her, Eri; she just wants to say hello.”

The ginger hummed in agreement, kneeling to the girl’s level with a welcoming smile. “Hi there, sweetie. My name’s Kendo. Do you want to be friends?” She held out a hand in invitation.

Eri stared at the strange green-eyed ginger, eyes shifting between her hand and her face. She reached out a tentative hand, squeezing a couple of her fingers. “Can I?”

Kendo grinned, chuckling at how adorable the action was. “Of course!” Eri’s eyes seemed to sparkle in the wake of the two older girls smiling down at her.

“Come on Eri! Time to show you the Support Department!” Togata invited the girl along. She went over to the now-Quirkless third year, and he let her hold his hand as they left.

“Bye Ayuma-sis,” Eri said as they went out the door. “Bye Kendo-sis.”

Kendo smiled warmly as she left. "Never thought I’d meet such a nice little girl like that."

"I know, right?!" Hado grinned, heading back to the camera. "Togata told us she's absolutely precious! I can't believe she met you, too, Ayuma."

"Mr. Aizawa introduced me to her because of how similar we are," the 1-A redhead explained. "Apparently, Midoriya mentioned me to her at some point for the same reasons.

"But I have to ask... why didn't she smile?" the 1-B rep inquired.

Ayuma's face fell, eyes averting. “It’s a long story. Let’s just say... she hasn’t had the best life up until now.”

Kendo’s face darkened. “Oh… I see…Poor thing.”

“But Midoriya’s pretty much vowed to help her smile again, from what I've been told. And between my solo performance and the rest of the class’ concert club, it just might happen.”

Kendo seemed to be comforted by the notion. “That reminds me; you’ll be singing at the pageant, right?

Ayuma nodded. “I also plan to use my Quirk to make a sort of display to go with it.”

“Sounds like it’ll be interesting,” the ginger commented. “Think you’ll be able to rehearse?”

“The singing, of course,” Ayuma replied. “The display will probably require a bit of careful control, but I plan to give it my best.”

Ayuma told the others about what she’d be doing once she got back that evening, though they already heard from Midoriya. They were glad to hear she’d be able to participate in an event instead of being sidelined by circumstance. However...

“I can’t believe Mr. Aizawa didn’t tell us about any beauty pageant!” Toru exclaimed angrily. “Why did he keep it a secret from us?!?”

“He might’ve thought we’d all be too busy with our own event,” Tsu remarked with a finger on her chin. “We never told him that Ayuma couldn’t find her place and might need other options.”
“That said, I’m glad that you managed to find your place,” smiled Momo. “I’m sure you’ll do wonderfully in the beauty pageant!” Ayuma smiled back with a nod of agreement; she recalled that Momo and Kendo became rather close ever since their internship back in spring.

“Yaoyorozu is correct!” Tenya agreed enthusiastically. “We wish you luck, Ayuma; I’m sure you’ll do Class 1-A proud!”

Ayuma couldn’t help giggling at the shared enthusiasm. "I've already planned out the design of the dress and I'm planning out the accessories. By practicing my singing and fine-tuning my control over my Quirk, I might actually be a real showstopper."

"By the way..." Ochaco walked up to her, whispering something in Ayuma's ear.

While she didn't quite hear everything, she did get the gist of it. Apparently, Mineta had said something to Eri that morning when she and Togata turned up at their dorm while she was gone. Specifically, something about a decade in the future. As soon as it clicked, Ayuma felt a sort of shock and burning rage she'd never quite felt before, and the mood of the common room pulled a complete 180. Somehow, she was just barely able to hold herself and her Quirk in, only causing the dark Dreamscape.

"Mineta..." her voice came out scarily calm, and she must've looked awfully fearsome for him to suddenly start whimpering. "What's this that I hear you said to Eri this morning?"

The shortest kid in the class immediately ran for it screaming like a cat with its tail on fire. Ayuma "failed" to keep a few of his nightmares from chasing and lashing him all the way upstairs. When his screaming and pained cries vanished into the second floor, Ayuma let her Quirk deactivate. All the ones who probably knew what she was talking about sighed in exasperation in the staircase's direction, and everyone else had their hands up defensively.

"Hey, uh, what was that all about?" Kaminari dared to ask.

"I say big sister instinct decided to kick in," Mina whispered (loudly) in reply.

She remembered a few instances when she was actually Eri's age; younger, even. Some guy talking to Madame Kirai while pointing at one of the other girls -- either Himei, Chishi, or any of the older girls -- and Suru would be looking in their direction. No one else knew why, but she'd suddenly become incredibly pissed off; enough to make any nearby windows almost unbreakable, and start cracking inward.

Big sister instinct... I'd say that was the Suru in me.

The next week had Ayuma spend a good part of her spare time preparing her accessories, either in her room while practicing her singing or in the common room observing everyone else. She'd be twisting thin copper wire threaded through a barrette while listening to Bakugo yell at Kaminari for going too fast or Tokoyami using the wrong scale. Or tying and weaving gray cords into each other just right while the effects team discussed the setup for the stage.

After every training session, Ayuma also heard what Class 1-C was doing from Hitoshi. They were doing a sort of haunted house attraction that they were all working together to build. Hitoshi himself was helping to make sure it looked as realistic as they could get. He was even going to be directly involved in the "jumpscares" as well. He said he was looking forward to Ayuma's performance in the beauty pageant (she still thinks he blushed at that part, as much as he denies it) along with what the rest of her class was doing. Given his behavior when she mentioned it, Ayuma
had the feeling he was one of those who nominated her.

Her control over Nightmare was also improving. She had to carefully map out what she was planning to do with all the memories she was planning to manifest. Tweaking their appearances to make them exactly what she was looking for was a challenge, but she was determined to make it work. And she'd always be sure to have a head count of the entire "cast" of her performance. Many different people from different parts of her life. Timing it with the song she chose especially for the performance itself.

Recovery Girl didn't know what she was expecting when she was unexpectedly visited by Shota and Nemuri. Especially with the former carrying an old and unfamiliar file folder.

"We need to check the files of a couple of U.A. alumni for a second, Recovery Girl," the dark-haired woman stated. "Particularly... Homara Akune and Ichiro Kuroga."

The old nurse instantly got an off feeling, but she agreed. "I can't imagine why you might need their files, but I always have them just in case." She dug around in the A section first until she got out Homara's folder, then to the K section for Ichiro's. She brought them over to her desk to open them both while sliding her computer out of the way. "Now what might all of this be about, you two? You normally are quite hesitant to speak with me about anything."

"These are... special circumstances," Shota answered cryptically, opening the file alongside the two alumni. The photographs of the late Pros in their high school years were compared to a photo of a familiar face.

"Young Ayuma? Do you believe there's some sort of connection between her and those two?" Recovery Girl asked.

"Not only believe, but actually confirmed," Nemuri answered. "This is Ayuma's very badly-informed foster file, and as you can see, it's been deliberately tampered with in an attempt to write her off without a family. But after careful inspection, we've come to realize... she's their daughter."

Recovery Girl looked down at Ayuma's file, eyebrows raising at the lack of information; sure enough, the ink writing her last name and parents were scribbled out in pencil, with pre-system history entirely blacked out. Turning it to the light in just the right way proved what Nemuri said. *I should've known something was the matter when I saw her look and act so much like her father with her mother's power. Such a lovely child shouldn't have been given such a cruel life.*

"This is very concerning news," murmured the Youthful Heroine. "Is young Ayuma herself aware of this?"

"We're still looking for a good time to divulge this to her," Shota replied. "Nezu's been trying to arrange a staff meeting after we showed this to him, but it's been rather difficult."

"Along with Ayuma's file, there's also many more from the same orphanage she lived in as a young child," the younger heroine added. "Just for warning, she's not the only one missing so much info from her file. We're hoping to further discuss it with everyone else at a later date, most likely after the festival."

The elderly woman hummed. "Well, I truly hope she doesn't take it too hard when she does find out." Her fingers swept over Homara and Ichiro's pictures. "Sometimes, how long a secret is kept makes all the difference."
And that's another tally to the people who know about Ayuma's real lineage. I tried to keep the whole thing about Ayuma's performance vague enough to surprise you when it actually happens. Oh, and on a side note, there's an important implication when Recovery Girl speaks with two heroes she also knew as students. Can you figure out what it is?
Thank you for finally getting back in business, Funimation. Your massive delay can at the very least help shorten the inevitable next hiatus until next season. But good lord, please don't make us scared that you cancelled the rest of the episodes again!

Nezu was contentedly going about his business in his office. He'd just finished looking over reports on the internet criminal the police have been after, and was now analyzing all the information Mr. Aizawa had given him on the Yokohama Foster Home (or as the teacher rather accurately dubbed it, "renamed orphanage.") The files of the children Aizawa and Kayama had retrieved were more than welcome to aid in finding them, but why the underground hero said not to tell police about it had only a few very bad possibilities. The information on his sources only further accentuated his concerns about it.

He was about halfway through the article of the children's disappearance when his computer flashed a hacker warning. "Oh my, what's this?" he asked himself as he went to investigate it. To his surprise, rather than met with a warning, the animal principal saw a notification to a video chat of sorts. As soon as he accepted, a video feed flickered to life, featuring two of the children among the files; twins.

"Hello? Is this the principal of U.A. High School?" the young lady at the front asked.

"Why yes!" Nezu answered with a smile. "Call me a mouse, bear, or dog, I'm Principal Nezu of U.A. You two must be a couple of the Yokohama children like one of ours. I was just reading about you."

"The article about the trial or the escape?" the identical-looking boy inquired.

"The latter, I believe." Nezu sifted through the foster files until he found what he was looking for. "Ah! You must be Hansha and Kagami Miru; now hyphenated with Yoarashi, if the info Shiketsu provided is correct. I'm quite impressed with your technological skills, young lady."

"Well, thank you," the girl smiled abashedly. "But I've only contacted you as a favor for Zuanshi and Himei, if you know them. We've heard that your school's festival will be happening at the end of the month, and how much your security has strengthened because of recent events, so this was our best way of making contact."

"A lot of other schools have cancelled their own festivals due to recent events, including Shiketsu and Ketsubutsu, where our brother Zuanshi attends," Hansha continued. "And as Ayuma's, um... siblings, I guess you could call us..."

Nezu nodded slowly as he trailed off. "I understand. Of course you'd wish to see your dear little sister in person after being apart for so long. If you wish to come visit U.A. to experience our School Festival, I'd be happy to make the necessary arrangements."
"That'd be perfect; thank you so much," grinned Kagami. "Should I send pictures of Zuanshi and Himei so you know who to look for?"

"Oh no, I don't think that'll be necessary, young Kagami. It should be simple enough for me to know who to keep an eye out for. I'll send one of my staff to let you in once you arrive on the day of the festival."

"We'll let them know about it," Hansha replied.

"Thanks again," both twins said in unison before disconnecting.

Nezu smiled to himself as he returned to the article he was reading, planning out the arrangements for the five current Yokohama children to arrive at U.A. Such wonderfully bright minds, those children, and so close that they unabashedly call each other family. Surely young Ayuma will be happy to see her brothers and sisters again while she shines her brightest.

Suru honestly hoped she found the right hospital. One that supposedly had a doctor in training that fit the description of one of her siblings. If she was right, they'd be leaving the massive building very soon. It took a lot of digging around to find such an instance, so she could only pray that she was right. All she could do was hide in the shadows of an alley and wait. Every part of her was shaking in fear and anticipation; she fought the urge to chew away her fingernails.

Please be them, please be them, please be them...

She waited and waited until someone finally left the building, the automatic doors sliding open in their wake. A form that seemed tall in the glaring white coat, but compact at the same time. Black and brown hair messily cut around the tan person's chin absorbed the light of the evening and the street lamps just beginning to flicker on. Their clothes under the coat were simple; a black shirt, dark brown slacks, and faded brown shoes (or possibly only socks in disguise). She could just barely see a rectangular pin on the lapel of their coat.

I think it's them... Here goes nothing.

Suru finally stepped out of the shadows. "Excuse me, Doctor," she called, "may I ask you something?"

The person in question turned to her inquisitively. "Yes? What is it?"

Almost as soon as she could see it, Suru's heart flipped over at their eyes; an ever-shifting kaleidoscope of colors that were never the same pattern twice. The sight of it sent bolts of glee through every part of her. The pin proved to be black, grey, and white stripes closing in on one green stripe in the middle; exactly what she'd expect to see on a particular one of her siblings who had to have been this individual.

"Are you... Tenkijo Tashoku?" Suru asked, her prayers now turning to the hope that the person in front of her would remember her. Even now, they had grown taller than their older sister. Almost half a head taller, in fact.

Their eyes squinted for a second, inching closer. Moments later, those multicolored eyes blew wide, arms and shoulders falling slack. The wind started picking up, forming a space only they could share as she felt the ground thrum under her feet. "Oh my god... Suru?"

**Shadowgeist: Tenkijo Tashoku; Quirk: Elemotion!** Tenkijo has the ability to use the four primary emotions to control the four elements. Fear/surprise is linked to earth, happiness to
air, sadness to water, and anger to fire. The intensity of these emotions dictates how powerful an attack from its respective element will be. It can be especially destructive if it involves several emotions simultaneously.

Suru barked out a tearful laugh before Tenkijo wrapped their arms around her, the wind forming a cyclone under their Quirk. She leaned her head on their shoulder and gripped the back of their coat like it was a lifeline she wouldn't dare let go of. She cried into her sibling, and she felt their joyous tears dampen her scarf. The blowing winds combined with their blended words in a rhapsody only siblings like them and their own family could share.

"I missed you so much!"
"I never thought I'd find you again!"
"I never stopped searching."
"You wouldn't believe what happened to me after the escape."
"I was scared the police had gotten you."
"I feel like it's been forever."
"I've always loved you."

Gradually, the gusts of wind pulling strands of pale blonde hair from Suru's braid settled down into gentle breezes caressing whatever bare skin wasn't holding onto Tenkijo. She didn't know when the two of them went from crying into each other to her sibling rocking her back and forth on a bench, but they were both sitting down now.

"Each of us has powers fit for heroes...
Whether or not they want to see..."

Suru knew that lullaby; it was the one she always sang when they were all so much younger. When they were all chained to the building they were brought to at various different ages and realized they had to fend for themselves against the awful adults that put them there. Without even thinking, she finished it, her voice shaking a bit from crying.

"But no matter who you are... at any point in time...
You'll always be part of the family... to... me..."

The blonde finally managed to get her tears under control by then. She retracted from the embrace and wiped her eyes, sniffling all the while. Looking up at Tenkijo's softly-smiling face, she saw the glint of unshed tears in their own ever-changing eyes.

"I'm so happy to see you again, Tenk," she whispered. "I've been searching for everyone as long as I could."

Tenkijo's smile turned into an amused smirk. "Of course you'd do that, Suru. Don't know why I'm so surprised you found me. Have you found any of the others?"

Suru's head lowered. "Not any that I'd be able to get close enough to show myself to. I found Zuanshi, Ayuma, and the twins... and they're all in hero-training schools that aren't fond of journalists; even ones in training like me. The only person I've found outside a school is Himei... who was attacked by police in a different district."
"Hmm, I think I did hear that one... No sign of Chishi or Sundari, though? Kinzoku? Maybe even Kosshi? Didn't they all want to help people in their own ways?"

"Nothing... I'm starting to think they've become vigilantes in other cities... Either that or..." she trailed off, unable to say the awful worst-case scenario.

Tenkijo's arms tightened a bit. "Don't worry. Even you can't do it all, Su. All the impossible stuff is li'l Yume's job."

Suru couldn't help a smile at Ayuma's little nickname. And Tenkijo was right. "Yeah. Only Ayuma would have the courage to face so many powerful villains, and even a hero like Endeavor, in battle. And the ability to even put up a fight."

That rose a brow on the taller orphan. "You heard of all that, too? I'm guessing now we know what Ayuma meant when her Quirk first appeared."

Suru giggled in response. "Yeah. Though it's not like you didn't want to do the same thing as the younger ones back then. I wonder if you've done some heroic things yourself other than being a doctor-in-training."

The way their eyes shifted certainly seemed to answer. "Well... maybe. I guess you could say that."

The blonde rolled her eyes in amusement. "Of course," she replied, voice lowering with mischief. "Not like I haven't heard of a vigilante that goes by the name 'Divinity'; a perfectly gender-neutral and easy-to-remember name, yet somehow just as over-the-top as your own Quirk."

Tenkijo gave an embarrassed grin, the ground giving another short thrum; a telltale sign of a humorous "You got me."

"Come on. If we can find a good place to get something to eat, I can tell you what I've been up to."

Momo was pretty exhausted on the night before the festival. She wore herself out pretty thoroughly with her own nerves during practice, making sure she'd be able to do well. The way Hound Dog furiously barged into the gym at the end of practice didn't really help calm her down. At least being so worn would probably mean for a restful sleep.

Just when she reached the fifth floor of the dorm, Momo could hear something coming from the girls' side. Tsu was still downstairs with everyone else, so Ayuma was the only one who could've possibly been there. Momo quietly tiptoed her way to Ayuma's slightly-open door, peering into the crack. The fact that she was spying on her dear friend gave an unpleasant twist in her stomach, but she could only hope Ayuma didn't notice, or mind if she did.

The redhead appeared to be singing a song that her music box was also playing. Her Quirk was active, and she could see several different figures appearing and disappearing in a pattern dictated by the song's lyrics. At least a dozen different people of several different ages and heights.

"I'd walk straight through the bullet
Bend like a tulip
Blue-eyed and foolish
Nevermind the bruises
Into the fire
Breakin' through the wires"
Give you all I've got...

"I'd walk straight through the dagger
Never break the pattern
Diamonds don't shatter
Beautiful and battered
Into the poison
Cry you an ocean
Give you all I've got..."

It was actually rather sweet, seeing so many different people manifest from Ayuma's Quirk, each one assigned a line of the song. None of them seemed to be people that the orphan girl was afraid of; on the contrary, whatever memories involved them must've been very fond ones for her to have no trouble recreating them. Momo was certain one of them was Ayuma herself, when she was as young as that little Eri girl Midoriya and some of the others knew.

Come to think of it, she could vaguely recall Todoroki telling Midoriya about a large group of people Ayuma created at the Remedial Course. And that one of them was a younger version of herself. All of those different people... I think I've seen a few of them before. If Ayuma were an orphan from a very young age, she might've lived with all of those other people. Or at least knew them from however many homes she might've gone to.

She had to step away from the door when she felt the arrival of a yawn. Now probably wasn't the best time to ask about Ayuma's past. There would always be another time to do so, but now was the time to sleep; they all had a big day tomorrow. With a soft smile, Momo slipped off into her room, getting into her massive bed and gently drifting off to the distant sound of Ayuma's music box, and the voice that accompanied it.

Chapter End Notes

Here's a quick challenge, just in case the dub takes another weeks-long break. Ayuma and all of her siblings take a certain line from the song lyrics above. Out of all those who've resurfaced thus far, -- Ayuma, Hansha, Kagami, Zuanshi, Himei, Suru, and Tenkijo -- can you tell which lines they are?
It's hopefully the last chapter before the actual festival (aka Ayuma's place in the beauty pageant). I hope you guys are looking forward to it as much as I am! And the Yokohama family is slowly but surely coming back together. In some ways more clearly than others.

Ayuma was on her way from the 1-A dorm to the school building. All her accessories were finished, placed in the small bag she was carrying. She held out hope she'd win in the beauty pageant that’d be happening that afternoon. Midoriya had to make a quick run out for some rope for the concert the rest of the class was performing, since the old one had gotten too worn out to use. The weather for that day was warm for late October, -- more like the first few days of autumn, in fact -- but that meant there was going to be a great festival.

“Hey Ayuma,” someone called out. She stopped in front of the 1-C dorm to see Hitoshi jogging over. He was in a simple, dirty white shirt and rugged cargo shorts covered in what looked almost like blood. (Ayuma had a feeling it was fake, though.) More was painted on his face in two dark red lines. “Heard you’d be in the pageant from one of my classmates.”

“Yeah, I am. What about it?” she asked.

“Well… uh… I thought I’d wish you luck,” he said, sheepishly rubbing the back of his head. "I, um... I hope you win the beauty pageant."

Ayuma stopped for a second, before smiling warmly. “Thank you, Hitoshi. I'll be sure to do my best.”

Shinso relaxed, smiling back at her. “You can drop by the 1-C ghost labyrinth whenever you want to. It’ll be quite the surprise, believe me.”

Ayuma giggled. “I can tell. I’m impressed with the fake blood, too. It looks almost real. You’ll make a very convincing zombie.”

The purple-haired boy chuckled. “I’ll take that as a compliment to my friend who did it.” Someone called out for him to come back. “Duty calls. Hope to see you later.”

Ayuma waved back at him before continuing on her way.

She went to the pageant room to find Kendo waiting with Yanagi and Ibara. Each of the new arrivals was holding a folded up bundle of fabric in their arms. The bundle Yanagi was holding was a mix of teal and sea foam, while Ibara’s was dark pastel purple and bright lilac.

“Here are our dresses, Ayuma,” Kendo grinned. “Time to put them on and make the final adjustments.”
"You mean… Ibara and Yanagi were the ones who made our dresses?" Ayuma asked slowly.

The vine-haired girl nodded. "It was a true honor to be entrusted with designing your outfit, Ayuma. I’m sure it will look marvelous with you wearing it!"

"Reiko already offered to design my dress, and as a small favor, Ibara decided to do yours," Kendo explained. "Good thing, too; she’s a specialist with one-shoulder dresses."

Ibara gave her friend the outfit and allowed her some privacy in the dressing rooms as she changed. Once she was changed, she left the changing room with the silk-like maxi dress loosely swathed over her form. The folds of the draping gown hung lazily over her right shoulder and left hip. The more bluish shade of the dark pastel purple was contrasted by the pinkish sash around her waist that hung off her hip, and the silver, flowery lace along the shoulder and below the sash. Her footsteps were silent under the long skirt, for which the side slit covered by the sash gave plenty of room to walk.

"Beautiful," Ibara commented, eyes misty with joy. "Gorgeous, Ayuma."

Ayuma blushed, smiling shyly while subconsciously covering her scarred arm with her hand. "I’m glad you offered to make my dress, Ibara. I can’t thank you enough for taking such time and making it so beautiful."

"It wasn’t a problem," the greenette waved off, checking over the dress to make sure it fit properly. "I don’t have too much to do in our school play, truth be told, so I had plenty of time to do something for a dear friend. Though Monoma doesn’t quite know that’s how I was spending my free time. He just thinks I’ve been helping Reiko with the sets and outfits. Have your friends been helping with the other accessories?"

"Momo has, for the most part. Had to get Mina away from them before she added her own things to it, though, whenever she wasn’t busy with the dance squad for 1-A's event."

Ayuma adjusted the accessory in her hair. It was a hair clip with Hawks’ feather on copper wire with a few purple beads, the feather's scarlet hue proud against coppery locks. The thin, silver barefoot sandals Ayuma herself had prepared were also quite a success to compliment her appearance and herself.

Kendo was in a teal, strapless dress accented in pale cyan. She wore matching shoes that had small heels while Yanagi made the final adjustments.

"That looks great, Kendo," Ayuma commented. "Yanagi did a really good job."

"She sure did," agreed the ginger. "And looks like Ibara did great with yours!"

Then came the laughing.

Ayuma's hackles were on end already as she turned to the source. Monoma, could you have picked a worse time?...

He was standing in the doorway, flanked by Awase and Tetsutetsu, laughing. "What the heck are you wearing, Kendo?! And what the crap are all three of you doing with the beast of 1-A?!" Tetsu's compliment and Awase's comment did little to mitigate the situation.

"Don't just waltz in here; they could've been getting dressed," Yanagi chided them.

"This is nuts! Hard to believe someone who's sold her soul to violence could pull off a look
like *that*! Or a battle-scarred demon without mercy, either! HAHAHA!

"I can't figure out if that's a compliment or an insult," Kendo remarked.

"A compliment, but only for you, Kendo. After all, I'm the one who entered you into the beauty pageant to begin with! I figure you're a shoe-in because of all your friends from that commercial."

"You mean the Uneri commercial you were in with Momo?" Ayuma asked Kendo as Monoma prattled on. *I mean... neither of you looked like you enjoyed it anyway.*

"Yup," Kendo nodded with a cringe. "In all honesty, you probably deserve your place in the pageant more than I do. But hey, the least we can do is aim for the top."

"Hey hey, hold the phone!" Hado interrupted. "It's not fair to say Kendo will win this. It's still anyone's game." She leaped over to the two of them. "This'll be fun, won't it?"

Kendo agreed, but couldn't say much before Ayuma yelped, feeling something sharply jab her in the back.

"Bless your hearts. How precious to think any of you stand a chance." Ayuma backed away from the young woman whose massive eyelashes poked her. "Not when I'm graced with perfect beauty! See for yourself!" The blond girl laughed haughtily at the other three who simply looked at each other incredulously.

"Is this that Kenranzaki girl you kept losing to before, Hado?" Ayuma inquired in a whisper.

The third year only nodded.

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Himei stretched out her massive wings and spine in front of the school gates, before folding her wings back in with a yawn. She was glad that it was mostly an easy flight to U.A. High, and that she could wait for her siblings without worry. Her shoulder was still a bit sore and scarred from the bullet, but she was at least able to fly again, even though she was advised not to push herself for another week or so.

*Probably going to be tired after all this... Oh well. Seeing some of my little brothers and sisters again will be well worth it.*

Her ear twitched when she heard the sounds of a car driving in. A taxi cab pulled up by the school. The first to emerge was a slouched man almost entirely clothed in black, the only difference being the massive scarf looped around his shoulders. From the backseat appeared a much stronger built young man with blond hair and a bright smile, turning to help a tiny, almost albinic girl out before the cab left. She wore a pretty little white and red outfit that perfectly complimented her pale hair and wide red eyes.

The little girl's eyes wandered over to Himei's in a way that was ominously familiar.

"You're Himei Kougami, correct?" the dark-clad man asked the bat Mutant lazily.

The young woman nodded, before looking back at another car pulling in. Out came none other than the purple-haired twins and their silver-haired compadre.

"HIMEI!" Kagami exclaimed, running into her arms. She was soon joined by Zuanshi (pulling a very hesitant Hansha along) for a group hug as Himei wrapped her wings around them.
How she missed things like this. Being able to wrap up her younger siblings in the stretched webbing of her wings. Like a huge blanket mixed with bigger hands.

"Aww, you guys are so close, you could just as well be family," the blond boy commented when they released from the embrace.

"That's pretty much the case," Zuanshi shrugged before he noticed the black-haired man. "Hey, I remember you! You're Ayuma's teacher, who Ms. Fukukado tried hitting on at Daboga."

"Please don't remind me of that," the teacher sighed. "Anyways, your names are Himei Kougami, Zuanshi Kessho, and Hansha and Kagami Miru, if what Nezu told me is correct. The visitors he gave permission to enter U.A. for the festival on behalf of Ku... one of my actual students."

"That's correct," Hansha affirmed. "We came to see Ayuma again."

"All of you know Ayuma-sis?" the little girl inquired, the blond boy picking her up to see them better.

"Sure looks like it," her friend commented. "I'm Togata, a third-year that attends U.A. And this little gal here is Eri!"

"Nice to meet you both," Kagami greeted them. "I'm Kagami, and this is my twin brother Hansha. The guy with the tear scars is Zuanshi, and the bat lady is Himei. We're sort of like Ayuma's siblings."

Ayuma's teacher helped the visitors with the security system so they could enter, following Eri and Togata. The festival was going to start soon, so they were free to explore wherever they wanted to until the first event at 10 o'clock. Togata said he and Eri would be in the gym where the event was going to be.

"We might as well see what the food vendors are selling," Hansha remarked, "before Kagami goes and gets herself lost on the campus."

"Uh..." Zuanshi pointed at the space Kagami previously occupied. "...Too late?"

Thankfully, it didn't take long to find Hansha's twin. By the time they found her, she'd already gotten her hands on a fresh crepe. They found her munching on it on a bench not far from a stretch of forest within the school grounds.

"Hey guys!" she greeted them, oblivious to their worried frustration. "You gotta check out some of the food these guys are making. One of them has chocolate-covered bananas!"

"Kagami, do you have any idea how worried we got when you vanished like that?" Hansha demanded.

"Oh come on, Hansha, it's not like there's much to worry about here," the girl countered. "Villain problems or not, this is the most secure school in Japan. I'm not planning on leaving the campus, so there's really no reason for you guys to be such worry-warts. It's not like there isn't someone we know somewhere in U.A."

"Still, it's probably best that we stick together," Himei chided. "None of us know this place like Ayuma does, and if she's in any of the events here, she's in no position to help us if we get lost. As friendly as the students and staff here appear to be, I'd rather we not take any chances."
Himei's ear swiveled at the sound of a thud. "What was that?"

Her siblings looked confused, clearly having not heard it. She went towards where she heard it to find a strange-looking stick lodged in a tree trunk.

"Wonder what this is," Zuanshi frowned, pulling it from the tree with one swift tug, leaving a dark blot in the inside of the trunk. Held between his fingers was a smooth, cream-colored arrow, with strange liquid smeared over the arrowhead. He gave the shaft a few experimental taps with his knuckles. "An arrow made of pure bone?"

"Let me see," Himei offered, giving it a few quick sniffs in hopes that her Megabat sense of smell could help.

"Careful, I think that fluid is some kind of poison," Hansha warned.

"The arrow... it smells just like Kosshi!" she gasped.

All of the others' eyes widened. If another of their brothers was able to shoot an arrow into U.A., he must've been somewhere nearby. Kosshi always had the ability to grow new structures from his body made of solid bone with his Calcify Quirk, in a way similar to Zuanshi's Crystallize Quirk.

"Wherever he is, Chishi must be with him," Kagami stated, her typical cheek having disappeared. "She's the only one who could release a toxin that could act this quickly."

That was only more concerning. Chishi's Quirk let her ingest and harbor any kind of poison to use at her leisure, mainly to expel through bodily fluids in a way similar to a dart frog. She could be eating something like nuts or berries in plain sight, and no one would realize she was stockpiling toxins from them. It wouldn't be hard to believe that she could poison Kosshi's arrows if he learned how to shoot a bow over the years, and they'd be a dangerous tag team if she could do the same. Quirks like hers definitely tend to be considered villainous, so they couldn't be sure how Pro heroes or police would react to finding someone like her close to, or even inside, their school undetected.

Himei stopped when she heard growling. "Someone's coming. They don't sound very friendly."

"Better put this back and head back to the vendors," said Zuanshi, sticking the arrow right where they found it. "Come on. We can look for Kosshi and Chishi later. If they're nearby... maybe they came to see what we hope to see, too."

The other three nodded, before heading closer to the main building.

Two individuals were hiding in the trees. Watching the infamous Gentle Criminal and La Brava embrace in a clearing. Their violent opponent fought bravely, as hard as he could to stop them. It was a miracle the arrow hadn't caught on one of the air membranes and bounced back to reveal them.

One of the two had bright, deep red eyes, with pupils that bore the appearance of a four-pointed star. A crosshair placed in his own eyes that stood proud against his otherwise dull mix of brown and gray. The other's eyes were fluorescent, acid green slits, and her long, dark purple hair formed a flowery contrast against the green tree leaves; truly the embodiment of a black nightshade.
"You think they got our message?" the green-eyed one asked in a whisper disguised by the winds.

"I hope so," the red-eyed one answered, carefully breaking the curved frame of a bow off his wrist.

Neither of them expected to see their siblings at the school where only their youngest sister attended. They were only there because they were vigilantes, following the internet-famous criminals. Come to think of it, that Midoriya kid might've been one of Ayuma's classmates. Too bad they couldn't go and ask him themselves, or they'd be taken away just like the other intruders were going to be.

All they could do was wait right now; wait and hope that the heroes evidently closing in wouldn't see their hiding places. But considering they falsified their own scents as Gentle and La Brava's, they were probably safe from the infamous Hound Dog, so they could leave without worry.

Chapter End Notes

I'll introduce you to what these two new arrivals look like in due time. Honestly, there are probably a lot more OCs in my story than would be considered very good for the story itself. But hey, all the better to branch out stories and side plots that otherwise go unnoticed. Now let's see if anyone can guess how long until next dub episode...
We finally made it guys! The one part of the series I was waiting so long to see and write out to show you! There's a lot to see and keep track of, guys, so keep your eyes peeled!

As far as Himei could tell, Hound Dog didn't even realize her or her siblings' presence by the arrow that pointed them further into the woods. A clone of Ectoplasm, where many others followed the Hunting Dog Hero, simply directed them to where the first big event was taking place. That was a huge relief, since it meant that they had no reason to worry about the heroes turning on them; Himei couldn't imagine what the aftermath would've been otherwise.

"You think Kosshi and Chishi are going to be alright?" Kagami asked.

"They're probably fine," Zuanshi assured. "Wherever they are, it's obvious that U.A. isn't concerned with them, or they'd be concerned with us and Ayuma, too."

Himei wasn't fooled. She could hear the faint shudder of worry in Zuanshi's voice. She could see the fear that touched his sun-colored eyes. He and Kosshi were especially close when they were younger. They had similar Quirks and could use them in similar ways. They were a tag-team with a combat prowess only rivaled by the Arashi brothers, troublemakers they were either together or apart.

"Excuse me, Ma'am," Hansha flagged down one of the patrolling heroes. "Would you mind directing us to where, um... Class 1-A is performing?"

Himei noticed and recognized the tone of Hansha's voice. Completely unsuspecting as always, any worry carefully filed away. He and Kagami were always the best at hiding their emotions when they were little; a strong coping mechanism that ensured no one could see them crack. Unfortunately, he was quite clearly the twin who never entirely broke that habit like his sister did.

The dark-haired heroine looked at the four of them with wide blue eyes, before clearing her throat. "It's going to be in the gym, just down that way and make a left," she answered, pointing them in the right direction. "I hear it's going to be a lovely concert."

"Thank you," Hansha bowed. "Come on, guys. Let's go see what Ayuma's class has to offer."

Himei nodded, relieved that Hansha reflected any suspicion like the mirror he was. Kagami and Zuanshi also smiled at one another as they made their way to the gym.

Not that the younger three found it surprising, but Himei was kept out by all the noise.

Hansa had a feeling that their big sister wouldn't be able to join them in the crowd. The possibility of flashing lights probably wouldn't help deter a sensory overload. At the very least, she wasn't going to go feral because of it. He, Kagami, and Zuanshi wove into the crowd, leaving
Himei at the back with Ayuma's teacher (and his friend) just in case. They had joined Togata and little Eri by the time the lights all went out to start the show.

The show certainly started off with a bang.

The music was definitely not something Hansha expected. The lead girl was singing her heart out on the stage. It was something Inasa would be positively thrilled to see and even make himself a part of. He watched as Ayuma's classmates -- the new family she found -- poured themselves out for the entire world to hear. Zuanshi and Kagami were already dancing along to the beat that vibrated in his chest. And alongside Eri, Hansha watched, and was amazed.

At the best part of the song, Kagami looked over at her twin brother and Eri, stopping in awe of what she saw. The huge laughing grin on Eri's face. The uncharacteristic grin on her brother's face and the joy in his shimmering eyes. Togata was crying tears of joy at the child's happiness, and Kagami teared up herself when she realized what for.

"I can't believe it... I don't ever remember my brother smiling like this before. Eri might've never known how. Ayuma, your classmates... they've gotten through to Hansha.

"Kendo, just out of curiosity, what do you expect the feedback to be on 1-B's, uh... play?" Ayuma inquired as the pageant contestants waited backstage.

"I'm hoping they just take it as a stupid comedy and nothing else," the ginger replied. "Not like Monoma's going to complain. He'll just say it's better than your class because they 'put more thought and work into it'. But in some cases, less is more."

Ayuma giggled at her quip. "Fair point. If it's as bad as you claim, one of my sisters might actually die if they saw it. Though of either laughter or disappointment, I'm not entirely sure."

"Welcome to the U.A. Culture Festival’s beauty pageant!" called the announcer. "We've got a lot of lovely ladies here that are ready to show off their stuff to all of you today! All of our girls will be shown in a random order, so you'll have to keep on guessing who's up next! For our first contestant, we have... first year Itsuka Kendo from Class 1-B!"

Kendo nodded to Ayuma and walked on stage, where a set of wooden boards was on the head platform. "The big sister of 1-B comes in with a magnificent strapless gown! But what are all those boards for, I wonder." Kendo stopped in front of the massive boards before suddenly enlarging her hands, chopping them all in half.

"She stuns with a martial arts demonstration in a gorgeous dress! Strength and beauty; a masterful demonstration of skill!"

Kendo bowed to the cheering crowd before heading back, congratulated by the other contestants. All except for Kenranzaki, though.

"Really! Is that the best you can do?! I'm almost offended you compete against me with something so DULL!" Kenranzaki leaped out on a golden tank proudly featuring her face, laughing all the while as it paraded onto the stage and danced. It was a miracle the platform didn’t collapse from the size of the thing.

"It's the Support Course third year and beauty pageant queen herself! Prepare yourself for a stunning performance!"

The older girls seemed to roll their eyes at it, like they’ve seen such a thing from the third year before.
“I’m guessing she’s a one-trick pony?” Ayuma presumed.

One of the second years nodded. “She always makes another tank to parade onto the stage; rumor has it she broke the stage in her first year. Flashiness is Kenranzaki’s best trait… whether or not it’s a good thing…”

It took awhile for the noisy tank to finally march off the platform, Kenranzaki laughing haughtily the whole time. By then, the announcer called for Hado to step up, and she gladly floated her way onto the stage. Using her Quirk to fly, Hado spun and danced in the air, almost like a fairy. Ayuma found it a very fascinating display, especially when her spirals drew a rose into the air.

“What a magical air dance! And I think the audience agrees! And now, next up is the unpolished beauty of Class 1-A, Ayuma!” Ayuma felt a thrill at her name being called, clearing her throat as she began to sing, vocalizing the whole way to the stage as her Quirk turned the world dark. “Whoa! Watch out, folks! Not only is her outfit a sight to behold, but this haunting beauty sings like a siren! Let’s see what else is there to see…”

Ayuma began the lyrics, reaching into her mind’s depths. A great, swirling cloud hovered above the crowd, and two shades appeared: the younger versions of herself and her oldest sister, in various different scenes.

“I wonder where you are
Hope it’s not too far
When will we meet?
The smile on your face
Just like the old days
Your beautiful heartbeat

“You gave me a good start
You gave me your heart
I'll never lose that part
I think you hear me
I think you’re right here
That's why I have no fear”

Her other siblings slowly appeared around the first two specters, dancing above the crowd around her as her younger self was passed from one to the next, each one with shadows so much bigger than they were.

“I wish you could see that~ I’m okay
Your words, they took me far
I wish you could see that~ I’m okay
That I am moving on

“Can you see me?
Can you see me?”

The images of her siblings all disappeared, the young Ayuma fading away briefly. The specter reappeared a little older, piggyback riding on Koichi’s back.

“I still remember
I Sat on your shoulders
I was too tired to walk
“Laughing together
Spring Sunday weather
Ice cream and just small talk"

Then flashed scenes of the two dancing to a street musician’s music, her racing his Quirk, and both sitting on a curb with ice cream cones. Then there was Ayuma helping string up his clothes and straighten the hair stalks on his All Might hoodies. Even helping out the mailman, some scenes involving Ayuma laughing as Koichi fled a barking dog.

“I wish you could see that~ I’m okay
Your words, they took me far
I wish you could see that~ I’m okay
That I am moving on

“Can you see me?
Can you see me?”

Then there was a very different display. Koichi and younger Ayuma disappeared, replaced by the towering Nightmare forms of several heroes. Ayuma herself leaped from Sir Nighteye to Kamui Woods, Best Jeanist, Mount Lady, Midnight, Gang Orca, Mr. Aizawa, and landing side-saddle on the silver spider-esque monster that returned her to the stage from the fading heroes.

Slowly, very slowly, Gigantomachia’s remaining nightmares joined it, along with Endeavor’s nightmare of herself that so resembled them both, and her younger self astride the beast. All of them hovered above the crowd, watching her.

“I wish I could see that… you’re okay
Waiting there for me
I wish I could see that… you’re okay
Please just let me know!

“I wish I could see that~ you’re okay!
Smiling back at me
I wish I could see that~ you’re still here
Watching over me!

“Can you see me?!
Can you see me?!
Can you see me?

“Can you see me?
Can you see… me?”

Eventually, she descended back down to the stage as her great creation dissolved into light particles that dispersed into the crowd, soon before her Quirk vanished.

For a few, heart-wrenching seconds, the whole world was silent. Then cheers erupted, and Ayuma took a grateful bow. She could see a good portion of her class cheering wildly, and 1-B almost speechless. Eri was cheering along with them from Togata’s shoulder, a smile as bright as the sun stretched across her face.

“What a captivating combination! A gorgeous and theatrical illusory display to compliment a wondrous beauty! A magnificent and ethereal performance!” Ayuma heard over the applause as she returned backstage, right into the arms of Kendo and Hado.
Out in the audience, Recovery Girl was glad she was there, watching the whole thing. Young Ayuma’s performance was truly a sight to behold. Just looking at the redhead on stage reminded her more of both of her parents than words can say, and seeing their altered forms with those of herself further strengthened it. Ichiro’s singing voice was a marvelous genetic heirloom, just like Homara’s illusionary powers. And she could tell one of the specters Ayuma created was a younger version of herself; a little one as sweet as little Eri.

This is quite an impressive student you’ve given us, Ichiro and Homara. In the name of your beautiful daughter… welcome back.

Ayuma’s entire class was extraordinarily proud of her display. They all welcomed her back into their fold with wide-open arms. Midoriya was amazed to see the images of Ayuma, her siblings, and so many heroes that her Quirk could create, with Todoroki nodding in approval.

“Ayuma-sis! Ayuma-sis!” Eri cried gleefully as Togata carried her over to them. “You sang so pretty up there! All those people you showed us looked so cool! I even recognized some of them!”

"Oh, you did? Which ones?" Ayuma asked. Eri didn't get to answer, because next thing the teen knew, she was wrapped up in three pairs of arms and one large pair of wings. "Guys?! What are you doing--?!

"There! Those were some of the people I knew!" Eri cried.

"Ooo, I'm so proud of our li'l Yume!" Kagami grinned. "I didn't expect to see you singing on the beauty stage, girl! And showing so much with your Quirk was AMAZING!"

Himei chuckled. "It really was. Especially all those parts we didn't know about."

"Seriously, though. What are all you guys doing here?" Ayuma asked when the hug was released. "I didn't think U.A. was allowing people who weren't affiliated with the school."

Zuanshi laughed. "We wanted to surprise you by paying your school a visit," he explained. "Our schools didn't have their festivals, so we decided to come to yours. And boy, we weren't disappointed."

"Your class' performance really was amazing," Hansha commented. "And so was yours."

"Ayuma, if I knew your new family was going to give my own brother a real smile, I would've forced Inasa to stick with U.A.!” Kagami exclaimed.

"Hey Ayuma, we're going to check out the 1-C haunted maze!" Mina called out. "We have plenty of time until the results of the pageant come in. Want to join us?"

"Consider it our apology for, y'know... ignoring you before," Toru said meekly.

"Sure! Sounds like fun!" she agreed with a grin, waving to her siblings before following her classmates to the haunted attraction.

The second Ayuma and her small group walked into the maze, a certain close friend dropped from the ceiling. Mineta, Kaminari, Mina, and Toru shrieked with fright, but Ayuma just waved. "Hi Hitoshi! Didn't think I'd see you so soon in this maze."

Hitoshi started blushing, before suddenly losing his balance, and falling to the floor. He shot back up and said, "I'm fine. Nothing to see here. Ignore the falling zombie." He scrambled back to
his spot above the ceiling.

Ayuma couldn't help laughing. "Come on, guys. Let's see what else is in here."

"WHY DID WE ASK 1-A's SYMBOL OF FEAR INTO THE HAUNTED MAZE?!!" wailed Mineta and Kaminari as they and the girls reluctantly followed.

Personally, Ayuma didn't quite see what the issue was. Maybe her Quirk had desensitized her to things that would normally scare other people. Maybe a few short glimpses through the Dreamscape showed where all the student-based jumpscare were. While she laughed at the ingenuity of Class 1-C's maze (and how her classmates reacted to all the ghosts, goblins, zombies, etc.), the others were shaking by the time they got out.

The rest of the festival was also a blast. Kagami recommended certain food vendors to Ochaco, Tsu, and Eri. Kirishima and Bakugo tried out the obstacle course. Ayuma caught Midoriya laughing at Todoroki and Tenya at the photo cutouts as he went off with Sato. Eri seemed to be really enjoying the festival, now that she was smiling and laughing with everyone else. Even Hansha was visibly enjoying himself alongside Kagami, Himei, and Zuanshi. Kagami certainly had a blast checking out the Support Course's little expo.

When the time came to announce the winners, it turned out that Hado had won the overall competition, to the applause of her thrilled classmates. Kenranzaki finally mellowed out enough to relinquish her throne as Pageant Queen, shaking hands with Hado. Monoma was clearly all kinds of upset, but Tetsutetsu and others of 1-B congratulated Ayuma and Kendo on their performances nonetheless.

"Take good care of the pageant for me, you two," Hado told the first years. "I'm sure next time, either one of you will take the top spot."

"You've got it," Kendo agreed, flashing a toothy grin at Ayuma.

"Of course we all know Kendo is going to outshine you any day!" Monoma cackled in Ayuma's face. "Class B will forever truly rise above Class A, NO MATTER WHAT THE SITUA--!
"
He was cut off by Kendo's karate chop to the neck and Tetsutetsu's hammer fist to his head, before the latter lugged him off the stage.

"Think he'll ever learn, Kendo?" Ayuma asked.

She sighed, "Probably not for a long time... But hey, let's hope we do even better next year."

It was about sunset when the festival had finally ended. Himei told Ayuma about the poisoned bone arrow she, Zuanshi, and the twins found earlier, and suspected the presence of Chishi and Kosshi; quite the surprise considering the timing that it appeared. They weren't sure if the two were actually still somewhere on or around campus, but they advised her to keep an eye out just in case they were sticking around. But aside from that, Ayuma promised to contact the four of them if she found any trace of the two before they gave their tearful goodbyes, and returned to their homes.

The redhead spotted Midoriya talking to Togata and Eri, handing the little girl a candy apple. He explained how he got the ingredients for it on a last-minute shopping run, with Sato providing the food coloring. Given how much the little sweetheart enjoyed the treat, he promised to make them again before she and Togata left with Mr. Aizawa.

"You know, I met those visitors when they first arrived here," the teacher told his protege,
over his shoulder as he walked away. "They obviously care about you a lot, Kuroga."

...Kuroga?

"Midoriya, Ayuma," Todoroki called to the duo, Hitoshi not far away. "Come on; let's head back to the dorms."

"Got it!" Midoriya responded, jogging after the dual-colored boy, chatting with him all the while. Ayuma, hesitating from what Aizawa called her, followed after him, staying beside Hitoshi on the way back.

"I was able to leave my post to see you perform at the beauty pageant," he told her. "I'm actually kind of surprised you didn't win. That was quite the show you gave us."

Ayuma smiled and felt her cheeks warm at the compliment. "Thanks, Hitoshi. I'm glad everyone liked it... And I'm glad you liked it." Briefly reaching up on her toes, she pecked his cheek and followed her classmates to their dorm, trying to keep her blush down.

She didn't notice him cup his own cheek, smiling in her direction.

Chapter End Notes

And that's peck number 2 for everyone's favorite dream team. Not to mention a juicy bit of not-so-subtle foreshadowing concerning Ayuma's pre-orphaned past. It's only a matter of time before a whole new situation I'm looking forward to shows up! I can't wait to show all of you!
So how long did releasing the last couple of episodes take? A month? Good god, these guys are getting sloppy. At least it was a package deal. I'll just keep it light and send out this one. Next chapter is going to be the last for probably yet another long wait, so I plan to make it count.

It was a little later in November when Ayuma and the other Work Studies students were called down to the faculty lounge. When they got there, they found Eri with the Big Three, and Hado was putting her hair up in twintails.

"Eri's coming to live at U.A.," Mr. Aizawa said simply.

Midoriya already lit up with joy at the news. And the others were thrilled to finally get to know the girl. Tsu even commented that Eri reminds her of her little sister. Ayuma herself was thrilled. Her new little sister was going to stay with her new, amazing family.

"Ayuma-sis! Do you like what Miss Nejire did to my hair?" she asked.

"It looks adorable, Eri," the redhead nodded. "You seem to have quite a bit of experience with it, Hado."

The bluenette grinned. "I sure do!"

Midoriya asked how it was even possible that they were letting a 6-year-old stay at a high school. Aizawa soon brought everyone outside, leaving Hado to keep Eri company. That much told Ayuma that this wasn't something meant for her to hear.

"From what we could tell, Eri was abandoned by her parents," he explained. "We know the head of the Shie Hassaikai is her blood relative, but he's been in a coma for quite a while. She has nowhere else to go."

Of course that was what happened, Ayuma figured. No wonder the Yoake-Oni turned them down; whoever was thinking up the Quirk-destroying drugs wasn't their real head.

"That's not all," Togata added. "Mr. Aizawa may have mentioned this already; the docs figured out that Eri's horn is where her Quirk is released from."

"I had a feeling it was some kind of tell," Ayuma remarked, to Kirishima's agreement. "And it does look a little bigger compared to last we saw her."

"Yup. It's slowly starting to get bigger again."

"Meaning, in order to keep an eye on her power..." Ochaco guessed.

"Exactly," affirmed Aizawa. "So, that's why we're going to let her live here instead of putting her into the system." (Ayuma pretended not to notice his eyes flicker in her direction at the mention of his own family.)
of foster care.) "We'll set up a room for her in the teacher's dorm. Hopefully, she'll be happy and we can help her find a way to harness her tremendous power. This is only our first step, though; clearly, it's a long road."

"Sounds like it's gonna be a lot of work for you," said Tsu.

"That's where I come in!" Togata grinned. "I'm on a temp-leave from school right now, and I'm super buddy-buddy with our little Eri, so I'm helpin' out! I know you guys are majorly busy, but I'm hoping you'll stop by and say hi."

"Of course we will," the five of them agreed.

Amajiki patted Togata on the shoulder. "If Eri's Quirk becomes usable, and she learns how to control it, then I bet we'll have our invincible man back in no time."

"Man, that'd be awesome, right? Guess we'll wait and see, though," Togata replied cheerfully.

"Sorry to be asking for help already, but can you get her settled in?" Aizawa requested. Togata gladly agreed, but the first years were shot down when Midoriya offered to join. They were told to return to their dorm, since they'd be having visitors.

"Visitors?" I wonder who.

That afternoon, Class 1-A was surprised by the Wild, Wild Pussycats, returning to announce their return to service. They brought along a package of pastries, which Mina, Toru, and Ochaco were thrilled about. Kota had even come with them, and Midoriya was glad to see the kid again. Mandalay even pointed out Kota's new red sneakers, most likely to match Midoriya's go-to shoes.

"We heard about your own battle with the League of Villains," Tiger told Ayuma. "You and that friend of yours handled it expertly. But I'm sorry we couldn't be there to help the... following issue."

"It's not your fault," Ayuma hand-waved. "It probably would've happened whether or not you were there."

Ragdoll was alright, too, and back to her old, chipper self. But ever since losing her Quirk, she's been sidelined to office work. They weren't about to risk loosening their grip on All for One, even if only for returning Ragdoll's stolen Quirk. The Pussycats didn't stay long, as they had to give a similar visit to 1-B, but they were glad to say hello. It was their last chance to drop by before the Hero Billboard Chart.

"You think we can introduce Kota and Eri sometime?" Ayuma asked Midoriya.

"I hope we can," he nodded. "It'd be nice to have her meet someone around her age."

"Especially since they both look up to you," Todoroki pointed out.

Midoriya's smile disappeared when he noticed the other's flatter-than-normal tone. "You think you'll be alright when the Billboard Chart airs, Todoroki? You don't have to see it if you don't want to."

"I'm fine," Todoroki replied.

But if you asked the green-haired boy and the red-haired girl, he most certainly wasn't.
The rest of the staff was quick to come to the meeting after school on the day of the surprise meeting. They were a bit surprised by the massive pile of stuffed folders at the center of the conference table, though. Midnight and Eraser Head were speaking with Nezu as the Class 1-A homeroom teacher pointed things out and explained them in a hushed voice.

“Any reason why you called us all here, Nezu?” Snipe asked as he sat down.

The animal peeked out from behind the stack of folders. “Yes, actually! A very important matter is afoot. Please, take some of these folders here and look inside.”

Recovery Girl frowned, but each staff member took a folder before they sat down, Ectoplasm passing one to Snipe. The nurse looked into the folder she had and was met with a picture of a fine-looking teen, about the age of a second or third year student. Wavy, eerie black hair crowned the child’s head and framed a tanned face, and her eyes were a mix and match of all sorts of colors. She saw the name of the child: Tejina Tashoku. The Quirk area was scribbled out as well as other general information of her personality. The history was entirely blacked out. The sheer lack of info on the child’s personal file alone was staggering.

“Why is this file so… badly informed?” Thirteen asked, displaying the file she was holding; a young lady with purple hair and bright green eyes, accented by a rather ashen skin tone. “No proper history, no info on their Quirk, most if not all of the behavior notes written by one person…”

“It was a particularly concerning discovery I made in a building in Kamino Ward,” Aizawa explained. “the Yokohama Foster Home. The one whose caretaker was sentenced to a mental hospital almost a decade ago, and whose juvenile inhabitants disappeared into a cold case within less than a week after the former. These files are all of those lost children: sixteen in total.”

“I remember that case,” Hound Dog growled holding a file of a tan, animal-like girl with bright blue hair and ears, and green streaked into it. “It was ruled a villain attack; I was called for investigation but couldn’t find them. But why bring this up?”

“The reason is that some of them have already resurfaced.” Nezu set five different files across the middle of the table. Hansha and Kagami Miru, Zuanshi Kessho, Himei Kougami, and Ayuma Kuroga. “And we have noticed the sorely vexing lack of information that all of these files unfortunately contain. We have reason to believe that this purposeful withholding of information about these children was deliberate, and caused by the caretaker herself: Mahira Kita.”

“If the dating is correct, simply by using the ages of the resurfaced ones as a scale, most of these children have already aged out of the system,” Ectoplasm pointed out. “But what reasoning is there for consciously hiding information about these children?”

“I thought that people in the foster system are legally obligated to provide as much information as possible,” All Might commented. “While I’ve heard of some that withhold or even delete information from the files, I never imagined it would be on such a scale as all the children in one building.”

“And the building itself was horrifying,” Midnight added. “You could tell there was a lot of damage done just on the first floor. And not just to the building. Many old bloodstains were scattered all over the floor, and there was an especially large amount of traces in the basement.”

“We have no idea what was or is going on inside Kita’s head, but there were a lot of bad things to see,” Aizawa added, sliding around pictures of the interior of the building. All Might
seemed particularly horrified the second he saw the photos of the first floor.

“What… what terrible damage…” he breathed, almost hacking up blood then and there. It looked like something out of a horror film. Anything glass or mostly metal was splintered and possibly bloodstained, and elemental damage was everywhere.

“As of this point, we can only speculate what their unknown Quirks are,” Aizawa explained. “There’s only a small few that even are explained. First is the oldest in the group, Suru Funsai, whose glass manipulating Quirk caused the damaged windows; Raiko Arashi, who can apparently absorb large amounts of electricity and exert it in a sort of blast if he so desires, or reaches a certain voltage; the last one is Himei Kougami, who is only classified as a Bat Mutation Quirk. All those who have resurfaced have displayed their Quirks, and altering their files to properly correct these mistakes, if not discarding them entirely to start fresh with what has been successfully found out about them, should be easy enough with their permission.”

“But we might need to hold onto the files of those who are still hidden out there,” Vlad King pointed out. “At the very least, an age-progression program might be useful in finding them with these given pictures. We could even ask the resurfaced children themselves for their help, with the lack of information and possibility of misinformation.”

“I remember seeing all of these kids when Ayuma was out at the Remedial Course!” Present Mic exclaimed. “She used that Quirk of hers to create an illusion of all of them! When they were at these ages!”

“Yeah, I remember that,” Yagi agreed. “I even saw young Todoroki with a younger Ayuma; that wind manipulator from Shiketsu singled out those Miru twins as well; looking very happy as he did so, I might add. The same illusions were even there at the festival.”

“Shame there’s no way of photographing Ayuma’s Quirk,” Midnight attempted to joke. “That sounds perfect for a proper photo album. Way better than these badly-lit photos.”

“Perhaps with her permission, we can have her create that illusion again to see them properly,” Nezu suggested. “That way, we can at least know what they used to be, in person. Seeing what they are in the present will also help, for all of those resurfaced.”

"One other thing, Nezu," Recovery Girl spoke up. "Ever since we discovered that young Ayuma is indeed the daughter of two U.A. alumni -- the late heroes Fever Dream and Phantom Thread -- I was hoping to know when to tell the poor girl. She deserves to know everything that this so-called caretaker tried so hard to hide from her and the rest of the world."

Nezu was quiet for a short while, everyone looking to him for his answer. "I've been looking further into the history of Ayuma's parents, and their connection to our new Number 1 Hero. I will send her to you at an optimal time in the near future."

"Good." Recovery Girl hoped that their most mysterious student would know her bloodlines soon. She's been following her parents' path ever since she first arrived. The least they could do was show her where she got it from.

Recovery Girl noticed something else on Ayuma's file. *Her birthday is on the 24th, eh? Perhaps that could be the day to tell her.*

Fuyumi was packing some fresh clothes for her mother when she found the photo. It was hidden behind a lot of other family pictures, its frame face-down on the desk. But that was
probably so their dad wouldn't see it. Curious, Fuyumi picked it up to get a better look at the picture.

The first thing she saw was her mother, standing in the middle with Shoto in her arms, still only an infant. On Rei's right side was a familiar woman, with wine red hair and slit purple eyes, one hand on Toya's shoulder and Natsuo on her other hip. On the other side was a man with orange hair and skin blotched with pasty white and blue eyes; one eye completely normal, the other black in a white patch. A younger Fuyumi was looking up at a girl around Shoto's age that the man was holding, who was presumably his daughter. Was she supposed to know these people?

"...our little dream-come-true..."

Fuyumi almost dropped the photo. It was fuzzy, but she did know the family of three that was with her and her siblings and mother. Auntie Homara and Uncle Ichiro, and their young daughter. They promised to help them get away from their father, and start over somewhere out of his reach. They even hoped that their daughter would be like another sister for Fuyumi and her brothers, especially Shoto.

At least, that was before they were killed.

Even now, Fuyumi could remember the day it happened. When Fever Dream and Phantom Thread, back from parental leave, fought against a powerful villain that killed them on live TV and escaped. The family's hope and morale was irreparably shattered. None of them knew what would happen to the daughter. But through all of that, their father didn't shed a tear.

Then again, he had no reason to mourn for them. They were enemies of his in their own right long before he married their mother. They were a tag team far stronger than he was; the three of them knew that, in the same way he hated them for it. No doubt, they would've been the next Number 1 Heroes if they were still here. And Toya would still be around, too, along with the sister they should've had.

I wonder... what would that have been like? If they were still around, and we didn't have to worry about Dad hurting Mom or any of us anymore... What would Shoto be like, growing up far away from Dad with someone almost like a twin sister?

Come to think, Shoto's newest classmate looked a lot like the little one in the photo. One might argue she had the same face as Uncle Ichiro. She's appeared on TV enough times to know what she looks like, whether or not she's using her hard-to-control Quirk. Maybe... No, there's no way that could be true. I shouldn't be getting my hopes up. But still... Mom might like seeing this picture of her old friends... and the family we were supposed to be.

She slipped the picture into the bag with her mother's clothes. It was better than letting Endeavor see the picture of the two people he always hated so much.

Chapter End Notes

That's a lot of info. And yes, putting Ayuma's birthday at November 24th leaves her a full 2 1/2 months older than the brother she should've grown up with. Can you imagine how different the Kurogas and Todorokis would be if Ayuma's parents survived? What do you think it would've been like?
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