Summary

A ghoulish villain cannibalizes their victims; yet these corpses are often criminals too, thus making this particular person a ‘vigilante’ in an ironic sense.

One night, this guardian angel (or perhaps, demon) crosses paths with a equally troubled girl.

After that., Musutafu will never be the same.
That Stormy Night: Cloudburst

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Thick icy clouds cover Musutafu like a blanket. The murky overcast cracks with streaks of lightning, jagged lines slicing through the vapor like a knife digging into soft flesh. A grey fog begins to drift overhead, the broken shape of it forming a glassy sky.

It's late, not even a single car splashes through the flooded streets. Periodically, streetlights gleam overhead, shadows dark & crisp in the flickering glow. The sound of emptiness hums with the dying bulbs, only to be disrupted by a loud gregarious boom of thunder.

At last, the first of many water droplets begin to descend from above. It doesn't trickle out like a shower faucet; it's more like the clouds could no longer hold the weight. The rain has become a living fabric, something one can reach their hand through. It's almost like being in a car with the window open, an outstretched arm surfing through the fast moving air.

Cold beads of water land on a girl's pale skin, running down her thin frame. She skids across the slippery path of a flooded sidewalk, her posture weakened by the weight of her soaking clothes.

Arms wrapped around herself, the drenched cardigan doing a poor job of keeping her warm now that it's wet, she tries to duck under a shop's awning to get someplace dryer. The fierce sound of heavy rainfall pounding on the sheet above her head is louder than the occasional boom of thunder. She shudders when a chilly breeze nearly sweeps her off of her feet. It's not an ideal place to wait the storm out, but it's the best she's got.

The girl then catches sight of herself in the shop's window reflection. Messy blonde buns had become slightly frizzled and damp, a wonder how the pins held, but nonetheless disappointing to the girl. Letting out a pouty huff over her disheveled appearance, she lets herself untense a little. There's nothing better for her to occupy the time with than fixing the mess.

However, there's a person watching her that isn't as concerned about the state of her hair. Slitted pupils narrow in on the damp clothing, admiring how it clings to her luxurious body. An elongated tongue runs along pointed teeth, glossing over scaly lips. Like an apex predator, the person begins to slowly creep towards her, using the dark atmosphere as a camouflage of sorts.

She can't even release a startled gasp before a heavy hand is clamped down over her mouth. The person assaulting her forcefully pulls the petite girl backwards, essentially dragging her like a luggage full of dead weight. Before the girl can recuperate or struggle against the hold, the attacker pins her against the rough brick of a wall.

Her head collides with the concrete, resounding with a sickening crack of her skull. Whatever concussion that may have caused makes her vision blur with occasional blotches of random color. The disoriented girl tries to wriggle free from the death grip she's in, but only makes the arrival of a headache transform into an ear ringing migraine.

Through the splotches of hazy vision, the blonde takes in the features of her assaulter. A large man with what must be a mutation quirk stands at over eight feet tall. The scaley pattern of an alligator's hide makes up their skin, a dark shade of malachite glistening in the rain. A thick leather jacket and jeans make it hard to distinct the guy's age; he could be a biker or edgy teenager.
In the face of fight or flight, the girl chooses to fight. Underneath the blonde's skirt, she keeps a knife strapped just above her thigh. Carefully unsheathing it as not to draw attention to her movements, she pretends to whimper under the alligator hybrid's strong grip. Then, she lashes out with the blade, aiming for their throat.

A shard of steel clatters across the pavement. The knife had split in two. The man's alligator hide is too thick to slice into. The blonde's eyes go wide as she realizes there's nothing she can do now. Her opponent is too strong to break free from, let alone the disorientation from hitting her head is making it hard to do much of anything in defense, and she doubts her fists or nails will be enough to harm considering a knife didn't work.

The alligator has a perturbed face, glancing between the broken weapon and the girl a few times. He then begins to chuckle, mostly in relief that the surprise attack didn't work. "You sure are naughty..", the rank breath makes the blonde's eyes water as if it was the smell of onions. A clawed finger begins to lace itself down the cardigan on her torso, popping buttons as it runs along. "I can be naughty too..", the alligator hisses in her ear as he goes to slice through another layer of clothing. The man licks his chops, the damp shirt shows an outline of the girl's black bra underneath, it's all that's left to undo for him to be filled with immense pleasure.

The blonde squirms a little, hoping to slip free, but she stops instantly when sharp talons dig into her arm. Warm liquid mixes with the cold, rain washing away blood, but all the same sloshing across her skin. It's a searing pain, a wound that will no doubt leave a scar.

The man presses his chest against her own, condensing her breasts in a painful way. A sharp inhale from the alligator makes her rear back in reflex. Sharp teeth are bared, she's assuming the scent of blood must have triggered something in his instincts.

"That's quite the perfume, little lady.", the gator laughs at his own joke. The elongated tongue that keeps slipping free then laps up the dribbling blood. A moan elicits from the man, he presses himself against the girl a little harder. "I can barely contain myself.. Let's just get on with it..", his predatory gaze then flicks to her skirt.

The girl lets out a muffled cry, her futile struggles now increasing tenfold as she realizes what the man is about to do. The tears brimming her eyes begin to spill, streaking down her cheeks. She's powerless to stop him as a scaly hand reaches for the skirt.

She contemplates closing her eyes, hoping that'll ease the approaching pain somewhat. However, movement from behind the gator catches her sight. Then, there's nothing but the hot sting of red splattering across her face. Specks of something warm cover her body now, as if a water balloon filled with paint just collided with her.

It's then that the girl notices the sharp object protruding from her assaulter's chest. Even though her knife had failed, something else succeed in piercing the gator's tough hide. The man coughs, gagging on some of his own blood. Tilting his head down to stare at the wound, he lets out a bloodcurdling scream, as if he only now realized he got fatally stabbed.

The girl stares at the foreign object that tore through the man's unnatural flesh. It looks like a streak of blood frozen solid, but with a mind of its own. The tentacle whips around like a tail, showing no muscle or bone tissue to restrict its movement. It moves with a flexibility that's transparent to the flow of water, but remains firm and steady.

Another agonized cry for help escapes the man as he gets thrusted backwards, the tentacle protruding from his chest carrying him into the sky. Then, the gator hybrid is brought back down with immense force. The forceful effort slams the man into the street, splitting cracks into the cement and leaving
behind another splatter of blood. However, the onslaught doesn't stop there, the tentacle hoists the gator back up for another round of being thrashed about.

Watching the horrific display, the girl begins to quiver and falls to her knees. The man continues making a sickening wailing noise that's too distorted from gargling blood to reach beyond the block. The tentacle shows no mercy, it just keeps slashing up & down with the man as a kabob. The crater left in the road is soon filled with enough blood to make up a hot tub.

If the man has a mutation quirk that gives him similar traits of an alligator, then he should be able to hold his breath underwater. At least, that's what one would think. When the man is forced back into the crater, he's pinned there this time. The blood stops just above the nape of his neck, cutting off any oxygen he may need. Bubbles begin popping at the surface, the weakened body of somebody that had been beaten trying to rear itself away.

When the corpse stops resisting, three more tentacles rain down from above like they're part of the storm. The sound of flesh being torn apart somehow overlaps a clap of thunder. In the flash of light from the sky, like an angel, or perhaps a demon in this case, the owner of the tentacles drops down with grace.

The strange appendages retreat into the person they belong to as he staggers over to the unmoving body. Dropping to his own knees, he bends down and sinks his teeth into the gator's flesh. Even with a transmutation quality, the person is still a human. Whether it counts as cannibalism or not, the gruesome tearing of teeth through meat would forever be ingrained anybody's mind that watches it.

What's even stranger, is that the person who rescued the girl looks no older than fifteen. Despite the slim figure, it's apparent that there should be some muscle under the articles of a baggy hoodie & sweatpants. The clothes are as dark as the boy's unkempt hair, a heavy set of locks cover his left eye and leave the strange looking right one to peer out. A red iris is shrunken down to the fraction of the pupil, surrounded by a black sclera. Webbed veins crack the void, even reaching beyond the eye and stretching across the skin that borders it.

Ripping another mouthful of flesh from the corpse, the boy swallows it without bothering to chew. Like a condiment, gore surrounds his lips as if the sauce got spilt by a messy eater.

It was just so enthralling to watch that the girl let out a piqued pant. However, the boy's ear twitched as soon as he heard it underneath the downpour of rain. Whipping his head up to spot the blonde that's gazing at him, he freezes like a deer in headlights.

The two stare at one another for what feels like a solid ten minutes. Both of them are so lowly crouched that they could look into eachother's eyes if they wanted, but the boy looks more dazed than focused.

Perhaps it's because the blonde girl is so fixated on him with her cheshire eyes. A toothy grin and heavy blush covers her face, the freezing rain doing nothing to fade it.

"Hi! I'm Himiko Toga!", she frantically waves with both her hands like she's trying to flag down a taxi or grab a celebrity's attention. The blonde then cranes her neck forward, as if she's trying to get a better look at the boy in front of her. "What's YOUR name?!", she brings her arms to her chest in anticipation of the answer.

The boy is still looking at her with an appalled expression. Most people would have ran off screaming by now. Yet, this girl is still here, she even watched him feast on the guy's corpse. Now she's introducing herself and asking his name. Maybe that concussion is more severe than either of them could diagnose.
Albeit reluctantly, the boy returns her greeting, "A- Akatani.. Akatani M- Mikumo."

The giddy grin on Toga's face broadens somewhat, she's pleased with her rescuer's answer.

The boy can't help but smile in response, even if it's just a small one that nobody can see through the thick coat of falling rain.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for giving this story a chance; I hope you enjoyed the first chapter and stick around for more!

However, the updates on this won't be very often, I must apologize. The chapters may also be rather short in comparison to what one would expect.

It may not be what you want to hear, but I've got a little bit of reasoning..

First: My primary focus right now is my other story, titled 'Since That Day'. If you like Attack On Titan, I suggest you give it a look, since it draws the same concept as this in giving the main character an ability/power (quirk) from another show.

Second: This one is a tad bit embarrassing, but I should probably be honest. This chapter is essentially all I've got to show for this thing. Sure, I have an idea or two for more, but nothing concrete that'll keep this thing going. It just felt wrong to make this a one shot though; I feel like there's a lot of potential here. So, I'd rather take my time to come up with something cool and fun than rush into it or prematurely finish. Currently, I'm wrestling with if I should stray from canon and do my own thing or just go down a traitor-esk route in U.A, but I believe that concept is used a lot, so.. we'll see.

Ultimately, I'll appreciate whatever patience you're willing to let me test to the highest limits and will attempt to maintain your interest at the same time.

Oof, this is gonna be tough.
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

An aroma of fresh coffee grains tickles his sense of smell. The gust of wind from the air conditioner also holds the scent of recently baked pastries, each of them displayed behind dainty glass platters. There's the slap of shoes against tile as he walks across the rustic terracotta floor. Booths are bathed in sunlight, the reflection gleaming through the window only slightly.

Just ahead of him is a familiar face, albeit a few years to boot. The old friend has his arm raised just under the coffee shop's slow turning ceiling fan. "Toshinori!", the hand waves in a gesture to come over so they can sit together. Toshinori chooses to oblige.

The gaunt blonde grunts as he slides into the booth, a result from the strain on his bones. If not for his sickly appearance, the groan may have been a reminder of age catching up instead. Yet, his hollow cheekbones are pulled into a soft smile regardless of those health issues. Sunken eyes meet rectangular ones, "It's good to see you, Naomasa."

Always the detective, whether he's on or off duty, Naomasa is wearing his usual attire of a tan overcoat and slacks. A matching hat is set aside, letting his short black hair breathe a little, as well as exposing a few grey strands. "It's always a pleasure.", he returns the smile before sliding a menu across the table, "Please, order something. It's on me."

"Oh, I wouldn't want to impose!", Toshinori tries to politely push the menu away. "The food wouldn't be very good on my stomach anyways.", he subconsciously places a hand over the left side of his chest. Beneath an oversized t-shirt, there's a gnarly cicatrix, the very cause for his health problems.

"Right.. Caffeine is probably a bad idea then..", Naomasa looks down with a pensive expression before returning his gaze to the blonde. "Would you mind a cup of tea instead?", he suggests.

The blonde nervously scratches his cheek with a forced chuckle, "I don't really have a choice.. Do I?"

"Nope.", Naomasa pops the P as he shuts the menu.

Toshinori's laughter becomes genuine after that, the wound on his side aching a little from the wracking of such a frail body. Clutching the sore injury until the pain fades, he can't contain a few side effect wheezes. The blonde lets out a cough in order to clear his throat before asking, "As much as I'd like for this to be a simple friendly meeting, I assume there's a reason you called me here?"

"Since when do we ever skip the pleasantries, Toshinori?", Naomasa tries jesting the blonde a little more before letting himself give in to a stressed sigh, "You're right in your assumption though. I need your help on a case."

Toshinori bashfully rubs the nape of his neck, "Don't get me wrong, Naomasa. I'm flattered, truly.". He then hangs his head with a small shrug, "But.. YOU'RE the detective here. I'm not exactly the best person suited for cracking a mystery by comparison."

"Trust me, I would have gone to Aizawa for help instead if all I wanted was half baked conspiracy theories.", Naomasa leans back with a dismissive wave of his hand. "What I'm really looking for is somebody that can bring this one in for me with relative ease.", the detective taps the menu as if he's
pointing at a case folder instead of an overpriced croissant.

Toshinori muses to himself for a few seconds, nodding in understanding. Occasionally, there's a villain that the police can't handle; that's where the pro heroes come in to help. However, there's a variety of talented locals to choose from. "Why me of all options?", Toshinori has to ask.

"You KNOW why..", Naomasa fixes Toshinori with an intense stare. The blonde swallows his nerves, acknowledging the unsaid reason with a single nod. "This is a villain that's just as elusive as the hero killer, with a body count even higher. The victims are found as mangled corpses, half eaten and signs of torture completely evident.", Naomasa briefly summarizes the information necessary for Toshinori to become determined in catching the criminal.

Leaning forward in his seat, Toshinori gives the detective his complete undivided attention. "Tell me their name.."

Naomasa locks eyes with the blonde again, gazing into blue orbs of righteousness. "Everyone back at headquarters has dubbed him --", he hesitates as if the name itself is evil, "--The Tokyo Ghoul."

"Hi! I'm Mikumo Akatani; I'll be your server. Can I take your orders?", their waiter finally arrives at the table.

Waiting there with a pen and pad in his hands is a boy with long dark hair, one emerald eye peering out while the other is covered by heavy locks. An apron loosely hangs around his waist, part of the coffee shop's standard employee uniform. A grey waistcoat over a white dress shirt and brown cravat makes the boy look more like an underage bartender though.

"Ah, yes!", Naomasa is pleasantly startled from his cogitation, "I'd like a coffee for myself with a touch of toffee nut. As for my friend, could you please bring him your most purifying tea?"

"Of course!", the boy nods along to the order as he transcribes it to his notepad. Once he's finished writing things down, he clicks the pen with an assumed finality, "Anything else?", but still asks the question just in case.

"That'll be all.", Naomasa hands his waiter the set of menus. "Thank you.", Toshinori says it in synchronization with the detective once the boy takes them away.

Once their server leaves to place the order, the two law enforcers return to their previous discussion. "I heard from Nezu that you'll be teaching at U.A this year. If that's the case, you're the best suited person with the perfect opportunity to capture this villain.", Naomasa doesn't miss a beat with the continuation of his explanation.

Toshinori is starting to make more sense of this meetup now. While it's true that a villain so elusive can potentially pose a threat to the majority of heroes sent to stop them, this whole thing isn't just about the case. It's not like Naomasa is asking for a big favor when Toshinori is in the local area, so that must only be an added benefit to all of this.

"Speaking of which.. Don't take this the wrong way, but I never took you for the type that would get into teaching.", Naomasa laughs as he tries to shift the subject into a more lighthearted one.

Toshinori only manages a smile, still not being completely content with the bait & switch of the 'Tokyo Ghoul' case. "Neither did I.", the blonde shrugs as he answers honestly.

Naomasa nods along with a knowing smile, as if he predicted that's exactly what his timely friend would say. "I'm going to assume there's an ulterior motive to why you chose to begin teaching heroics classes then.", the detective folds his hands in a sophisticated manner. When it comes to this
perspicacious posture, Naomasa shows a slight relation to Nezu's pawkiness.

"I'M the one with an ulterior motive?", Toshinori raises an eyebrow in jocular recrimination.

Naomasa sheepishly rubs the nape of his neck, trying to placate the blonde with a rueful titter. "I thought you said you aren't a detective?", he throws in a joke for extra measure before giving his apologetic confession, "I didn't arrange this JUST to discuss The Tokyo Ghoul. I also wanted to see for myself if your condition has worsened or gotten better. Since your patrols have gone down to three hours a day and you look even more disheveled from the time I saw you last.. it isn't good, is it?"

Toshinori softens his expression, body hunching in admittance. The smile that he had been trying to use as a mask slips away, a yielding frown in its place. "I'm running out of time, Naomasa.", he gives his own confession, "The real reason Nezu offered me a place to teach at U.A is to potentially help find a successor."

"I see..", Naomasa breathlessly replies. He nearly falls over, having to brace himself in the far corner on his side of the booth. Conceding to the realization that Toshinori's time as a hero is coming to an end, he almost pale more than a corpse. It's one thing to know of it, but almost near impossible for him to come to terms with.

Toshinori must notice the detective's disposition, his demeanor shifting to something somber. Once Naomasa regains some of his composure though, he's able to put on a false smile to reassure his friend. "We thought Nighteye was just being pessimistic when he tried telling us the necessities of finding a suitable successor. Now, the time has come., he tries to keep his voice from wobbling and abruptly stops to avoid giving in.

Toshinori begins to absentmindedly pull sugar packets out of the table's condiment container. "Er, well, my sidekick and I aren't really on good speaking terms because of all that., his hands continue to occupy themselves by lining up the sugar bags into a row that resembles a miniature train. If Toshinori anxiously playing with the tiny packets is anything to go by, he's just as unsettled by this whole predicament.

Sinking deeper into the vinyl of the booth, Naomasa finds himself feeling discouraged. "That's a shame. You two really were quite the dynamic crime fighting duo., he and the blonde look off to the side as if that's where they'll find those forgotten days. Shaking off the dull attitude, Naomasa tries to inspire some optimism by making a suggestion. "He always liked coffee, right? Maybe bring him here to Anteiku to share a drink and hash things out., he slaps the table for emphasis which only accomplishes the startlement of Toshinori.

The blonde gives a non committed hum, his gaze still lingering on the sugar packets strewn across the table and purposefully ignoring Naomasa's eyes. Neither side says anything more for a solid six seconds, the atmosphere turning awkward as a result. It's like the detective is waiting for the person that he's interrogating to crack, but Toshinori is too nervous to steal a glance in order to check. Giving in to his own anxiety, the blonde sighs in defeat, "You're right. I'll try inviting him here sometime..

That must be enough to pacify the law enforcer, since he's already moving on to the next topic of conversation. "You know, it was actually my sister that told me about this place., he holds a fond expression as he looks around the charmingly quaint café.

Toshinori smiles now that they're on a subject that he can get behind. Discussing family with his friends always brings warm feelings, which is much needed after the prior conversation. "Speaking of which, how is Makoto doing these days?, he decides to ask.
Naomasa snorts, "As rebellious as always.", which gains a chuckle out of Toshinori. "But.. She's doing really good for herself. She actually graduated from college not too long ago with both a bachelor's and master's degree.", he proudly proclaims.

"That's wonderful news! I'm so glad to hear it!", Toshinori fixes his posture as he conveys his excitement for Naomasa, "I've always known that she's a bright one."

"Oh, you have no idea how many times she's come close to figuring out your secret all on her own.", Toshinori gives a nervous chuckle in response to that news while Naomasa simply carries on with his own laughter.

Their waiter returns to the table with a tray then. "One coffee with toffee nut.", Akatani Mikumo places the mug in front of Naomasa, "Careful. It's still hot.", he warns. Then there's a cup of tea that's slid over to Toshinori, "And I made sure to consult a few others to find our best option for you. I hope you like Barley."

"I love Barley Tea. Thank you.", Toshinori slightly bows his head in appreciation. Wrapping his frail fingers around the cup, the blonde brings it to his lips to take a sip.

"If there's anything else that you need, don't hesitate to ask.", the waiter flashes his customers an earnest smile before carrying the tray back towards the kitchen.

"On the other hand, it's probably better to have a variety of candidates to choose from. This is a big decision after all, and you can't just pass the mantle on to the first kindhearted kid you see.", Naomasa refers to their earlier conversation about Toshinori's successor and U.A.

The blonde shys away, curious as to if the detective has some sort of observational skill that may have given away his thoughts about their waiter being a nice person. "I wouldn't be as brash to do something like that.", Toshinori isn't entirely sure if he's trying to convince himself or his friend anymore.

Naomasa is too busy gently blowing on his coffee to cool it off rather than to be observational, allowing the blonde to breathe a sigh of relief. "Have you reached your limit for the day or are you still planning on patrolling later?", Naomasa asks before taking a small sip of java from the mug.

Toshinori stops just short of taking a sip from his own drink to respond, "I've still got about two hours left that I plan on using.", he lowers the cup only slightly to get a better view of Naomasa, "What's up? Did you need my help with something?", he wonders.

Naomasa waves in an allayed manner, "Nothing urgent enough to keep you from your patrol as a hero.", he pauses to take another sip of coffee before continuing, "I was only going to invite you to swing by the station so we can go over the Tokyo Ghoul case. It can wait until tomorrow though, I've got other paperwork to finish anyways."

"Ah, alright. That works for me.", Toshinori nods in agreement.

Suddenly, the muffled noise of sirens starts to draw near. Toshinori and Naomasa turn their heads in time to watch a set of police vehicles zoom by the window in some sort of high speed pursuit. All it takes is one shared look between the two law enforcers and they're both giving mutual nods of understanding.

"Next time, I'll cover the check.", Toshinori promises before he downs the last of his tea.

"Just go.", Naomasa smirks as he watches his friend briskly head towards the cafe's exit.
Once the blonde steps foot outdoors, he glances each way to make sure nobody is watching him. Then, the frail form of a skeleton morphs into that of a bodybuilder. Steam generates from the solid muscles of a hero, a triumphant rictus grin etched across his face.

The shift in mass isn't very hard to miss, especially when what's left behind is acknowledged by all of Japan as the number one hero. "Waahh! It's All Might!", a teenage fangirl shrieks with glee. The mightful man bellows out a boisterous laugh at the awed reactions of pedestrians before launching himself into the sky with a powerful leap.

Watching his friend soar over dozens of skyscrapers, Naomasa can't help but deflate somewhat. Pretty soon, that sight overhead won't be there anymore. When All Might retires, it'll be the end of an entire era. Not only is Toshinori recognized as the highest hero in rankings, but he's considered to be a literal symbol of peace. The hero always wears a massive smile in the face of danger, assuring everybody that everything will turn out okay. Good will always triumph when All Might is there. So, what about when he's gone?

The detective is shaken from his musings by the loud clang of a tray clattering against the tiled floor. Glasses shatter from the impact as well, water and coffee alike spilling everywhere amok the mess. Standing at the center of it all is the one responsible, the young waiter named Akatani Mikumo. The boy's mouth is hung open, undoubtedly gawking at the receding back of All Might.

Snapping out of his rumination, he begins to profusely apologize. "Sorry everybody! I'm sorry!", he repeats it like a broken record while hastily picking up the shards of glass. What must be a co-worker rushes over with a cloth to wipe up the spilled beverages.

Naomasa chuckles to himself, appreciating what might be one of the last times he sees a kid geek out so hard over All Might. The show alone is enough of a reason to leave behind a bigger tip than usual.

Placing the grey fedora on his head, Naomasa prepares to take the coffee to-go. As he slides out of the booth, he leaves behind some yen.

As the day goes on, nearly every customer follows suite. Some tips are hefty while others are low, but business is booming, especially after word got around on social media that All Might 'passed by'.

When the sun sets though, and day turns to dusk, the coffee shop finally closes. Akatani has the responsibility of sweeping and shutting things down for his shift though. So, after hours, he remains as the sole worker to clean everything.

As he idly sweeps some stray crumbs into a dustpan, there's a sudden tapping at the door. Akatani sets the broom aside, glancing to see who's knocking. Peering through the glass is the girl that he had met the previous night. She looks like she's still wearing her school uniform and her hair is tied into messy buns just like last time.

Akatani flips the lock so he can open the door for her. Stepping into the coffee house, the girl lets out an impressed whistle. "Anteiku, huh?", she plops herself down into the nearest booth. "If you're curious about the name, the manager wouldn't even tell me why it's called that.", Akatani locks the door again to ensure no late night customers try to get a last minute order in.

The blonde shrugs with no sincere interest, "Not really what I meant.. I was just wondering why you decided to bother working here.", she even starts drumming her fingers against the table in boredom.

"It has its benefits, such as free coffee, which does wonders for my quirk.", Akatani pays her no
mind until he finishes setting up the brewer, "Would you care for any?"

"Nah. Caffeine isn't really good for my complexion.", she bats her eyelashes in a teasing manner. Akatani just turns away from her, hiding the small blush that's dusting his cheeks. "So, why is coffee so good for your quirk? Is that what those tentacle things are made of?", she bounces in her seat with eagerness for an answer.

Making his way to the booth so he can sit across from her, Akatani shakes his head with a dry laugh. "I wish it were something that simple..", he doesn't even try to plug up the leak of depression in his tone, "I wouldn't wanna scare you off, but I guess you've already seen what I really am."

Himiko Toga twirls a lock of her blonde hair, "It'd be pretty rude of me to run away from the person that saved my.. well, ya know.", the natural blush on her face darkens a little bit. She ends up pulling her legs close to her chest so she can wrap her arms around the knees. "Besides, I really want to get to know you. I think it'd be super cool to be like you.", she flashes a toothy grin.

"Well.. Alright. Don't say I didn't warn you.", Akatani rubs the back of his neck with lingering hesitation. "I guess you could consider it as a drawback; my quirk makes it so I can only eat.. h-human flesh..", the boy flinches as he reluctantly finishes the end of his sentence.

The blonde tilts her head in confusion at the action, but it soon starts to sink in that most people would likely judge him at that point. Thoughts of bullies calling him cruel names and possibly even beating him over it crosses her mind. Any ordinary person would run away screaming, not even giving the poor kid a chance to show his true personality.

"Hey.. It's okay..", the soothing words feel strange on her tongue but she feels obligated to say them. "I got a lot of ridicule for my quirk too. I won't judge you.", she reassures him.

Akatani's one visible eye widens at that news, clearly surprised to hear the confession of her relatability. "Y- Your quirk?", he stammers out what must be a desperate question to hear more about it.

Raising one pointer finger and wagging it back & forth, Himiko tuts in a teasing manner. "You're supposed to tell me about YOUR quirk first. Remember?", she giggles at his instinct to shyly turn away; it'd be a cute reflex if it weren't for the reason why he has it.

"Uh.. Besides human meat, I can have coffee. It doesn't completely satisfy my hunger though. Believe me, I tried. I still try..", he solemnly hangs his head as he finishes explaining the details of his unique taste buds.

"Yeah, the bags under your eyes -- Oops! I mean EYE -- make that obvious.", she jokingly covers half her own face with a hand. Akatani doesn't have the reaction she was hoping for; he doesn't look offended, per say, but he doesn't laugh either. "You make it work though!", she adds as an afterthought to save him from feeling embarrassed since he seems like that type.

"Thanks..", she hears him say it even though it's a low mumble.

"What about those tentacle things then?", she then catches his gaze with her own, "Oh! That's right! Your eye was really weird too!", she can't contain her elation as she leans forward to get a closer look.

Receding just a bit at the sudden lunge, Akatani self consciously places a hand over his eye. "Oh.. That's just another side effect of my quirk.", he recovers as he realizes she's just genuinely curious about it, "W- Whenever I'm hungry or excited o- or.. It just happens. I call it my kakugan."
"Can you summon it on your own?", she leans forward more with piqued interest.

Slowly pulling his hand away so that she can see, Akatani slowly nods. "Y- Yeah..", the red iris glows at the center of a black sclera just like the last time she saw it. What excites her most about seeing it again though, are the veins that branch out like shattered glass.

"Wow..", she gasps in awe before falling back with a squeal, "That looks so cool!"

Akatani chuckles with a small smile that has the potential to melt Himiko's heart. "That's probably the first time anybody ever said to me..", he catches her eye with his own, "Thank you."

Himiko feels her face heat up more than usual, forcing her to turn away from him. "W- What about the tentacles?! You never told me about those!", she whines in the hope that he'll be too distracted by the question to notice her fierce blush.

"Oh, right!", he jumps in his seat as if he's suddenly reminded, "I call it my Kagune. It's made out of my Re Cells, which is why they're as flexible as ordinary blood cells, but strong enough to fight with.", he begins to mutter while trying to explain it as simply as possible.

Himiko nods along like she can understand every word until he suddenly realizes that he's still murmuring nonsense. A heavy blush settles over his face as he clamps two hands over his mouth.

Himiko can't suppress the laugh that breaks through her lips like water crashing through a dam. Akatani looks down at his lap with a pout, "You should've stopped me."

"Why would I?", she heaves in between giggle fits, "It was just too cute!"

Akatani practically has steam coming out of his ears at this point. Fortunately for him, he's saved by the beeping of the coffee brewer, an indication that it's finally ready. Hastily climbing out of the booth so she doesn't see how red his face is, he starts to stammer out his own diversion, "It's your turn now! Tell me about YOUR quirk!"

"Oh..", Himiko abruptly stops laughing as she starts to deflate with her own embarrassment. "I didn't think you would actually want to know..", she mumbles so Akatani doesn't hear it.

"Hm?", the boy throws her a brief glance as he pours himself a cup of coffee, "I didn't catch that."

Shaking herself from her self inflicted brooding, she puts on a smile that would make some people assume she's the illegitimate daughter of All Might. "My quirk allows me to turn into other people!", she summarizes it to the best of her abilities.

"Whoa, really?!", Akatani nearly trips over himself as he spins around to see if she's just joshing him. "That's so cool! How does it work? Do you get their quirks too? Does it only work if you turn into a girl or does it work with boys too? How does it activate?", he starts spewing questions like rapid fire before lighting up as if he just had an epiphany, "Do you mind if I write all of this down?"

Himiko stares at the boy in bewilderment. It's almost like his personality just did a one eighty; he went from a sulking emo to an overly excited dork. Not only that, but this is the first time that somebody showed such genuine interest in her quirk. Akatani just looks so enthusiastic about it that she doesn't have the heart to say anything other than, "I don't mind!"

Realizing that he just geeked out over her quirk, he does a reclusive action similar to when he caught himself muttering paragraphs. "Awesome. Thanks.", he tries to passively play it off while grabbing a notebook that's stashed under the cashier's counter.

Himiko instantly notices that the journal has some serious damage. The binder looks singed and
some of the pages are sticking out as though they were torn apart at some point. Despite the
condition of the book though, she can also tell that he takes it seriously since there's a label all the
way at number thirteen.

Flipping through some seared pages, he eventually lands on a blank one. Setting his cup of coffee
aside, he clicks a pen and looks at her with eager anticipation.

"Like your quirk, most people shun me for how its used.", she reminds him before continuing, "I
need a person's blood so I can drink it; I then look and sound just like them. I only use it on people
that I really really like though!"

Akatani glances up from his notebook at that last part, still writing detailed descriptions from what
little information she gave him. "That's amazing..", he exhales in awe, "You would be perfect for
stealth missions, whether it's as a hero or some sort of spy in the FBI!"

Himiko's mouth starts to slowly slide open. Nobody had ever told her she can work as a law officer,
let alone a HERO. She doesn't know whether to be flattered or angry, she's still too shocked. Instead,
she asks, "D- Do you really mean it?"

Nodding enthusiastically, he only piles on more crazy compliments. "There's so much potential for
what you can do with your quirk! If there was some sort of assassination target, you could disguise
yourself and set up the perfect ploy. If disguising as somebody else comes with any other perks, you
could catch your opponent by surprise in a fight as well!", he then gasps with worry, "A- Are you
crying?"

Himiko lets out a startled gasp too, bringing a hang to her cheek where she feels a warm stream of
tears. "I.. I..", wiping the water away with the sleeve of her cardigan, she profusely shakes her head.
"I'm just surprised you can be so sappy!", she jokes with a laugh to boot.

Laughing along, even if it's somewhat forced, Akatani slowly relaxes. "I sometimes forget that's still
a part of me too..", he lets out a distant sigh, "It's probably from my mom's side."

Himiko tilts her head like a kitten trying to figure out why he looks so sad. "How does SHE feel
about your quirk?", the blonde warily asks since that may be the cause.

Akatani's smile quickly vanishes, replaced by a woeful frown. Instantly, Himiko jumps to wave her
hands in an apologetic gesture. "I'm sorry! I didn't mean to upset you!", she shouts with the anxiety
that he may be too upset with her to keep talking.

"N- No! It's okay. That's not it..", Akatani shifts his gaze to the notebook that's in front of him. "This
was actually really nice. It feels good to talk about my quirk with someone and to hear about their's
without any kind of ridicule.", he runs a hand along the journal before shutting it. "The last time I got
to experience something like that was with my mom, actually.", he continues staring at it like it's a
picture of her though.

Himiko nervously rubs her elbow, thankful that he isn't looking at her as she asks, "Do you wanna
talk about it?"

Akatani looks contemplative for a moment before he closes his eyes with a sigh, "No. Sorry."

Himiko nods in understanding before snapping her fingers with a grin, "We can always get out of
here and do something fun to forget about it instead!"

Akatani takes a sip of his coffee before shaking his head, "Not tonight.. Sorry."
Himiko pouts, feeling although she just backpedaled and lost all the progress of befriending the boy. She doesn't want to sound desperate, but she still decides to use a final question as her last resort, "What about tomorrow?"

Akatani taps his chin as if he's mulling over some plans before shrugging, "I could probably do something after work. Meet up here? Same time; same place?"

Himiko feels relief wash over her with the breeze of the building's air condition. "Perfect! It's a date, then!", she shoots up from her seat with excitement.

"D- Date?", Akatani looks like he just blew a fuse or something. Due to the computer crash of his mind, he isn't able to register her leaving the coffee shop until she's already gone.

His head hits the table, eliciting a groan from him despite the smile on his face.

Chapter End Notes

Wow! I'm blown away by all the positive feedback from just one chapter! The bookmarks and kudos rivaled that of 'Since That Day' in one fatal swoop and your comments are all just so heartwarmingly kind! Thank you, everyone!

I was going to address a particular comment personally, but I assume it's something that other readers will ask at some point. So, there aren't any other ghouls, it's just Izuku/Akatani's personal quirk. While I may bring in some elements such as Anteiku in this chapter, it's just an ordinary coffee house.

I just sorta feel that keeping the stakes a little lowered is better than making them grand scale. If a situation gets TOO out of hand (such as world conquering) then you somewhat already know things will eventually get resolved. However, if it's more of an internal matter or street level, then everything is fair game in terms of what cataclysm could strike.

I just hope that I can keep this up since writing Himiko was actually pretty difficult. I wanted to keep that craziness about her character so it wouldn't become a misinterpretation, but I can't go all out with it until later chapters. I was sorta thinking of it in a pacified sense as to how a stalker would lure in their prey by acting normal while that psycho side slips through the cracks occasionally.

Writing Akatani also felt while it would become a slight OC, and I wanted to avoid that somewhat. So, I decided to sprinkle in some of that Izukuness to show that he's still that pure boy underneath whatever new identity he created for himself. My personal inspiration for that could be considered his theme song, I just listened to 'To give life to a Marionette' from the HxH soundtrack. The first half with the piano and guitar, the dark & somber mood, is Akatani. Then, that sorrowful violin is like the remains of Izuku trying to hold on.

I dunno, maybe I'm overthinking all of this. All I know is that I'm having fun and I hope you are too. Especially now that I have some interesting stuff planned for the next few chapters.
The night’s cool breeze whips his face as he steps outside, almost like walking straight into a spider’s web. To help bite back the cold nipping at him, Akatani takes a sip from the to-go cup that he filled with coffee on the way out. The heated contrast is almost enough to burn his tongue that had been nearly smitten with frostbite.

The bell above the entrance jingles as he squeezes through the opening. Akatani then shuts the door, watching to see if it closes completely. With his free hand, he turns the key in order to lock it. Once he hears the familiar click that comes with the twist, Akatani slips the key back into his pocket.

Waiting out front with her hair tied back into two messy blonde buns and the usual school uniform, is Himiko Toga. She gives him her trademark pointy toothed grin with a small friendly wave in greeting. "Hey Akatani-Kun!", a light blush dusts her cheeks as she says his name.

Akatani returns her grin with a small smile and slight nod. He takes another sip from his coffee cup before replying with, "Hey Toga."

The petite blonde gives him a playful pout while tilting her head to the side, "You're gonna hurt my feelings. We're friends; aren't we?", she continues after seeing his face take on a worried expression, "Friends refer to eachother by their first names. Don't they?"

Matching the same tint of red that the girl has on her cheeks, Akatani nervously turns away. "S- Sorry, Himiko. I don't have very many friends, so I didn't really know..", he then awkwardly shuffles his feet before asking, "So.. What did you wanna do?"

Treading down the sidewalk with a single skip, she happily answers the question. "I was thinking you might need a disguise, Mister Tokyo Ghoul; I'm gonna take you to my friend's mask shop!", she glances over her shoulder to see Akatani scramble after her while trying not to spill any of his coffee.

"W- Well, I never really had a problem with hiding my face since..", Akatani tries to stammer out his best attempt at a polite way of turning down the offer, "..nobody ever survived to tell anyone..", but starts to mumble when he realizes what he said was practically a confession of murder.

Himiko keeps skipping down the sidewalk; perhaps she didn't hear the last part or she simply doesn't care. "What about the people that you save?", she asks instead. "What about the ones like me?", she gives him a teasing flutter of her eyelashes.

Akatani bashfully rubs the back of his neck with a small huff of laughter, "They usually run away before they can get a good look."

Himiko hums a little before giving him a small shrug, "You can never be too careful!". She then grabs the hand that isn't holding onto a coffee cup and drags him forward, "Come on! At least give it a chance!"

The boy doesn't manage to utter a single syllable as he stares at the feminine hands that are gripping his own. The cool touch makes him self aware of the heat rising to his face. Akatani tries hiding his blush with the coffee cup by drinking out of it some more.

The empty street block is filled with the teenage girl's laughter as she forces him to keep pace. Air
breezes by them, the two briskly cutting corners. The light pat of Himiko's shoes on the pavement play along to the tune of Akatani's heavy sneaker thuds.

Akatani runs alongside her a while longer before asking, "H- How far is this place?", his voice is nearly drowned out by her joyous giggling.

"We'll get there faster if we take this shortcut!", she suddenly yanks him in another direction. Akatani almost trips over the sidewalk's curb as she pulls him away from the street. The two tread up a small hill of grass, coming upon a long chain link fence. "It should be somewhere..", Himiko briefly slows down to survey the gate before jumping with glee, "Aha! Right here!"

Akatani hesitates as she peels back a loose section of the fence. The torn piece looks like it was dug under by a dog and then popped loose by what must have been the animal trying to squeeze through. After what might have been a few times of Himiko lifting it up more, the gate must have gotten looser. Akatani glances around to see if there are any private property signs or witnesses before following the blonde through the small gap.

Once they cross to the otherside, the duo must venture into a small patch of trees and bushes. Eventually, Akatani is able to spot a clearing. There's a small stone path that's dimly lit by a lamppost, a park bench underneath it. Himiko shows no shame in plucking a flower from a miniature garden, sniffing the plant like it's a freshly baked pie. Akatani has to fight the instinct to flinch back when she thrusts the flower into his face, "I love their garden! Doesn't it smell so good?", she asks him.

Akatani gently pushes the flower away from his nose, nervously chuckling as he glances around. It starts to sink in that they're in the city's public park; however, the park is closed at this hour of the night, hence why Himiko had them sneak in. Almost like she can sense his thoughts, she waves him onward with a little reassurance. "It's just a little further. We'll cut through the park and then it's just up ahead.", her cat-like eyes catch Akatani's emerald eye and it's almost like a form of hypnotism.

Taking a sip of his coffee like it's liquid courage, Akatani gives her a single nod. "Alright. Lead the way.", his feet are already moving before his voice can catch up. Himiko's cheshire grin matches her eyes as she begins skipping again.

"We should come back here when they're open and go for a stroll.", Himiko takes in the aroma from another patch of flowers while making the absent minded suggestion.

Akatani gives her a noncommittal shrug before realizing she isn't facing his direction. "Maybe..", he mumbles before clearing his throat, "I mean.. If you'd like too."

"Nah!", one of her lighthearted laughs makes Akatani's heart swoon a little. "Parks are too sappy!", a teasing tone then laces her voice as she adds, "That's why I figured YOU'D like it.". She spreads her arms while spinning like she's presenting the place, "It's pretty but so boring!", she stops to giggle & grin at the boy, "Not that YOU'RE boring or anything, Akatani-kun."

"Breaking and entering is boring?", the question is more or less meant to be rhetorical as a way to jest her back. "You'll need to show me something fun one of these nights then.", he finishes off the last of his java before tossing the cup into a garbage bin that they're passing.

"We're just getting started, Akatani-kun. Have a little faith in me!", she raises her pointer finger as if it's some sort of declaration before aiming it at another patch of trees. The blonde diverges from the path as she asks, "Have you ever hopped a fence before?"

"Uuuhh..", Akatani drawls a little as he thinks back to times that he's scaled entire buildings, "I think
I'll manage.". Himiko must pick up on the hint of amusement in his tone, since her grin holds some humor in it too.

The two step through overgrown grass that needs to be mowed and weeds that need to be plucked. Then, they come across the metal fence that surrounds the property. Himiko steps forward first, placing her foot in one of the small holes that makes a rung for her to climb on. However, she pauses for a moment as if she's hesitant, and looks back at Akatani.

"Don't look up my skirt.", Himiko holds no real reproach in her statement as she pokes fun at the boy. However, she does find some pleasure in seeing how flustered he can get while spinning around to avoid any discomfort. Even though it's cruel to torment him any further, she still adds one last remark, "Or.. Don't get caught looking.", even adding a wink regardless of if he can see it or not.

Himiko can't suppress a tiny giggle when she hears Akatani groan in embarrassment from behind her. After she clears the fence and lands on the other side with a soft smack of her shoes, the blonde turns around to let him know. "You can look now. As a matter of fact, it's your turn.", she tries beckoning him over.

Akatani doesn't budge, he refuses to turn around. "I- Is this some sorta t- trick to make me look up your s- skirt?", he nervously stutters.

Himiko crosses her arms with a small huff, slightly disappointed that she hadn't come up with such an idea on her own. "You'll just have to peak and find out.", her mischievous side pokes through before she spins on her heel to leave, "Otherwise, I'm going without you."

Cautiously tilting his head, Akatani slowly turns it so he can see behind him. He must have been holding his breath, because there's an exhale of relief when all he sees is Himiko's receding back from the other side of the fence. "H- Hey! Wait up!", it then dons on him that he needs to chase after her and scrambles to climb the gate too.

"Took you long enough.", Himiko rolls her eyes as the boy jogs up from behind her. The duo start crossing a bridge that only has two or three cars passing by at a time.

"I didn't know what to expect! You're too unpredictable!", Akatani tries to defend himself and the actions that he chose.

Himiko doesn't let up on her teasing as she lightly pokes him in the chest, "And YOU'RE almost TOO predictable. If all it takes to get you hot and bothered are words, then--"

Akatani covers his ears with his hands, "La la la! Not listening!", he shakes his head like whatever words did manage to get in will somehow get past the barriers that his hands created.

Himiko playfully shoves his shoulder and the two break into a small fit of laughter. "Well, it's your lucky day to avoid this conversation, cause' we finally made it.", she then announces their arrival at the mask shop.

The store would have been easy to miss without Himiko's directions. Among apartment buildings and the occasional supermarket or diner, a small structure made from brick looks to be tucked away in something of a small alley. The only sign of it not being vacant are the glass door and glowing 'OPEN' signal that's above it.

The interior proves to be vastly different from the exterior though. Nyan lamps light up what looks like something a fashion designer put together. Several masks are out on display like it's an art show, some of them are even covered by tarps or kept in glass cases.
As he strolls down the isle, Akatani takes note of a plain white mask whose only variation are the occasional holes poked in it like a hockey mask would have. There also appears to be a cowl with pointed rubber ears and an equally sharp nose; it leaves a space open for the mouth and has white lens where the eyes should be.

"Uta-San, where are you hiding at this time?", Himiko starts trailing off to find what Akatani assumes to be the owner of the shop. Rather than follow the blonde, he continues browsing the selection.

Akatani comes across a red one that's laced in what looks like a webbing design, the only diversion being the strange white spots that must be some sort of lens. However, his eyes are drawn from there to a white tarp that must be covering something considered to be a masterpiece. His curiosity getting the better of him, Akatani pulls it away.

"Oh..", his reflex to shout in surprise and instinct to defend or fight makes Akatani settle on this dull reaction to an actual person being beneath the cloth. The man doesn't seem to be phased by their abrupt meeting either.

"Yo.", he then stands up, revealing just how tall and lanky he is. Dark hair like Akatani's is styled into an undercut, surrounded by piercings on his face that varies from lip to eyebrow and ear. Tattoos cover his exposed arms, there's enough to make sleeves themselves.

"Uta-San!", Himiko rushes over as soon as she notices him and wraps her arms around his waist for a hug. The stylist doesn't seem to care as she crushes him like a teddy bear, remaining as stiff as a board until she lets go. "What are you doing?", the blonde asks once she steps back.

"I thought I'd try to scare your friend.", Uta points a lazy finger at Akatani like his wrist is shackled down by a set of heavy chains. The rest of his fingers then unravel as he holds out his hand, "I'm Uta, by the way..

Akatani returns the gesture, shaking the man's hand. "Nice to meet you. I'm Akatani Mikumo.", a speculative brow raises when Uta leans in to get a closer look.

"I apologize if I'm making you uncomfortable, this part is a little necessary though.", Uta doesn't fully regard the boy even though he means to speak directly to him. The mask designer tilts his head as his eyes skim Akatani's face, his neck craning a little so he can take in all the features.

"E- Excuse me?", Akatani scrunches up his face in confusion as Uta's cheek nearly touches his own.

"It's part of his quirk.", Himiko starts to explain as she sways back and forth on her heels, "Uta can take in every detail of something if he looks close enough. It's how he makes his masks for everyone."

"It's hard to put into words, but yes, thank you Himiko.", Uta nods along as he swaps to the other side of Akatani's face. From the corner of his exposed eye, Akatani sees Uta's hand flinch as though it wants to part his hanging hair. "May I?", the designer surprisingly asks for permission first. Akatani shrugs and Uta takes that as a yes, carefully lifting the dark locks. Himiko stops swaying on her heels, leaning forward completely now to get her own glimpse of what's underneath. There's only another emerald iris. "Hm. I'm not sure what I was expecting, but I'll admit that I'm mildly disappointed..", he lets the strands of hair fall back into place.

Uta then waves Akatani over to a stool, patting the empty seat as a gesture for him to sit down. "Let's get started then.", he waits for the boy to follow before adding, "Firstly.. A few questions. Do you have any allergies? Perhaps to rubbers or metals?"
"Not that I'm aware of.", Akatani shrugs as he tries to think of anything notable and comes up empty.

"Do you want a full faced one? I personally find beginners prefer to have half-faced ones for their first time.", Uta taps a finger against his chin as he mulls over his customer's appearance one last time.

Akatani has to resist the urge to shrug again, instead opting for a soft hum. "I'll leave it to you to decide.", he replies before noticing the strange mask that's on the crafter's table nearby. Surrounded by tools such as scissors and pins or needles, lays a magenta mouthpiece that's shaped like a beak. "What about that one?", Akatani nudes his head in that direction for Uta to look.

"Ah, that's for another one of my clients. There's actually a whole assembly line of those for him and his friends. Were you interested in one like that?", Uta glances between the mouthguard and Akatani's chin.

Akatani regards it for a moment before shaking his head, "I'd rather not look like a cockatoo.", he then jumps in his seat at the realization that his remark might upset the designer, "No offense."

Uta chuckles instead, with his own small headshake. "No offense taken. The design choice was mostly his idea anyway. A 'plague' mask...", the designer rolls his eyes like the thought of it alone is silly, "How pretentious."

Uta works his way around Akatani, grabbing the clump of hair that covers an eye again and weighing it in his hand. "Hmm.. I didn't really care for this particular style at first, but it suits you. It gives me an idea.", Akatani peers up at him as he waits to hear more but the designer appears to be too fixated on the hair to notice until later, "Oh! Pardon me. I was just thinking aloud.

Akatani feels a small smile tug at the corners of his lips, but it quickly subsides. "I can relate.", he admits while glancing at Himiko to see if she's listening in or not. The blonde got to experience that side of him firsthand back at Anteiku, a side of him that he thought had been long forgotten.

Uta hums a short tune as he dons a pencil & notepad to write in. "Interesting.. That makes me wonder what else I should ask you.", he nibbles the eraser side before using it to point at Akatani, "Mikumo-Kun, do you happen to have any lovers?"

That particular question seems to break whatever social barrier the boy had put up. "Wha?!", he jumps in his seat, almost knocking the stool and himself over. "No. I've never had one.", the recovery holds a shyness to it that only interests Uta even further.

"I see. Could it be that you find girls younger than you cuter than the same age? Or is it the other way around? Could it be that you like older girls instead?", if not for the genuine curiosity made evident by Uta, one would think this were an interrogation.

"Um. I guess if our ages are close, then it doesn't really matter.", Akatani holds an uncertainty as he tries to stammer out a proper response. "C- Can I ask YOU something, Uta-San?", he peers at the designer from the corner of his eye.

"YOU ask ME something?", Uta's eyes widen as if he just saw a new color for the first time, "Now THAT'S interesting. Please, go ahead."

"W-Well...", Akatani turns away with the concern that his question may disappoint the designer, "I was just w- wondering.. is there a connection to these questions and making a mask?"

"Very much so.", Uta nods like it's common knowledge before elaborating, "The more that I know about you and your personality, the greater my motivation will be."
"Oh..", Akatani lifts his head up in understanding, "That makes sense."

Uta then cranes his neck with a burst of excitement, his nose just mere centimeters from Akatani's. As if he just had the epiphany, he asks, "What about Himiko?! Do you think she's cute?"

Akatani feels his face flush red and instinctively covers it with his arms, "Can we not talk about girls anymore?", he pleads while peaking through his sleeves to see if Himiko happened to hear what had been asked. The blonde appears to be in her own little world, browsing the masks on display a few feet away, which allows some comforting relief.

Uta gets behind Akatani, a smirk on his face, "I think I understand you now, Mikumo-Kun. You're a person with a lot on their mind..", he strolls back around to the opposite side so Akatani can see him again. "..But you don't have very much to say.. Do you?", he mimes an invisible zipper being closed across his lips and tosses the equally invisible key.

Akatani is about to make some sort of retort, but stops short and slowly nods in agreement. "Yeah.. I guess you're right.", his admittance isn't very enthusiastic though.

"Well.. In any case, I believe I have everything I need.", Uta begins shooing Akatani off of the stool, "I'll need a few days to work on the mask. You two kids go have some fun and come back during the weekend."

"O- Oh, okay.. Thank you, Uta-San.", Akatani staggers a little as he's ushered towards the exit. Once there, he gives a small bow in appreciation.

"Bye, Uta-Saann!", Himiko drags his name out as she waves to him on her way out.

Akatani pauses once he notices a vending machine and makes his way over to it. There's a canned coffee that he selects with a hot or cold selection, he chooses the hot coffee. As the canned beverage drops into the compartment below for him to take, Himiko skips on over.

"So, what'd you think?", she asks him while tucking her arms behind her back.

"It was cool.", Akatani pops the lid open so he can take a sip, "Thanks for taking me."

Himiko points an accusing finger up at him, "Told you sooo!", her taunting is followed by the usual laughter that Akatani has come to enjoy hearing.

The two then carry on into a leisurely stroll down the sidewalk, with no particular destination in mind. "We'll call it a draw.", he turns the next corner so she doesn't see the small smile he has from teasing her back.

"That's no fair, Akatani-Kun!", she protests like a kid throwing a temper tantrum, by hopping up & down while waving her arms in an exaggerated manner. "I won fair and square! Just admit it!", she huffs and puffs.

"Alright, alright..", he shakes his head since that sortof display was his breaking point. A grin etches across his face as he looks at her, "But consider this payback for back at the fence."

Himiko looks baffled at first, but almost instantly mimics his toothy smile. "You'll need to try better than that to get one over on me.", she quickens her pace as if putting a short distance between them will give her the last word.

"Oh, come on, I had you completely fooled!", Akatani chases after her with a bemused laugh.
"In your dreams!", she lightly shoves him once he draws near, "It's probably where you get to see up my skirt too--"

"Okay, I'm not going to go there!", Akatani raises both his arms as a sign of surrender. One hand lays flat to show his palm while the other continues to cling to his canned coffee.

"Too easy.", Himiko keeps a victorious grin on her face. The way she struts next to him is almost too sly, but it's mostly meant as a form of mockery.

The two then fall into a comfortable silence as Akatani drinks from his can of coffee. The bitter sensation on his tongue is vaguely familiar to the blood that drains from biting into a person's flesh. While that particular similarity is unsettling to him, it's better than the alternative when it comes to his opinion on the matter. However, that may vary. It isn't just when his hunger overtakes him that he enjoys feasting on a corpse, but the occasional times where he's exhilarated by the capability of ripping into a criminal. Even if the person is a villain, he can't help but get disgusted with himself for feeling that way. It's like whatever humanity remained inside of him started slipping away. He never told Himiko the second reason for working at Anteiku, to remain as a member of civilization, to remain human. He doesn't have to though.. since he feels the most human when he's with her, and the best part is she knows about his quirk to understand that unspoken matter.

"By the way, I heard All Might is in the neighborhood.", Himiko snaps him out of his musings by mentioning the symbol of peace. As if the hero's name itself is a trigger word, Akatani practically freezes in place, his body stiffening like he was caught red handed during a crime. "Akatani-Kun..?", Himiko slows to a stop as she realizes that he's come to a halt.

"Himiko.. What do you think of All Might!", he avoids eye contact with her as he asks the question. The inquiry isn't necessarily meant to be a test for her, but that's how it feels for both of them when it comes to whatever answer gets given.

The blonde's smile wavers a little, as if she's saddened by whatever thoughts get accumulated in her own head. "What do YOU think of All Might!", she throws Akatani's own question back at him instead of answering it herself.

Akatani stares at the canned coffee in his hand as if it had personally offended him, his grip tightening just enough to crush the metal a tad. "I used to adore heroes.. ESPECIALLY All Might.", the boy scoffs with a feigned laugh, "I guess there isn't a kid that would think otherwise."

"D- Do you not like heroes anymore, Akatani!", Himiko hesitantly asks him as she moves closer. She's like a child hearing a bedtime story for the first time, her attention completely devoted to the boy's response.

The blonde flinches when he raises his head up, but the gaze misses her completely and focuses on the sky above them. Like he's staring up at All Might himself, his eyes glimmer in the pale moonlight as if tears are bound to be shed. "Heroes are a lot like doves..", Himiko tilts her head as she tries to understand what he's saying, "Doves soar over everybody. They fly above the people on the ground who continuously look up at them with admiration. Doves.. they're symbols of peace too. Why? These birds, they look the part of an angel, but they don't do anything. Nobody looks at them the same as a vulture or a buzzard since those birds are considered disgusting. Just because those animals rip into what's on the ground, what everyone refuses to see on the ground, they're considered ugly too. Personally.. I think the bird that's willing to come down from its flight shows more bravery as a hero..."

Himiko recalls the time that she found a wounded dove. A toddler stumbling across the bird that broke its wing; the little girl taking it so she can nurse it back to health. The dove was so pretty, so
cute. Just like Akatani said, she sank her fangs into it like a vulture and got ridiculed like she was something disgusting.

Slowly, the blonde takes his free hand. Her fingers interlock with his, her soft & cool skin pressing against his rough & warm palm. Akatani's head whips down in surprise to see it, the surprise making him swallow something dry. Himiko continues holding his hand since he doesn't say or do anything to protest.

Unlike the first time that she guided him this way, she gently tugs in the direction she wants to steer the boy. "Wanna drink something other than coffee?", Himiko asks a rhetorical question, but Akatani's eye shifting into its kakugan state is enough of an answer.

Toshinori Yagi steps off the elevator and into the fray of hard working law enforcers. Officers run back and forth in order to deliver documents to their co-workers or to answer ringing telephones. The frail blonde nearly gets trampled by a plump detective that tries to brush by. Even the slackers by the water cooler look out of breath. Regardless, he somehow makes it to his friend's office unscathed.

"Another quiet night at the precinct, eh?", Toshinori leans against the doorframe as he greets Naomasa with some sarcasm. The joke gets a chuckle out of his friend and puts a grin on the blonde's face as a result.

"Thanks for stopping by.", Naomasa pauses as if he's only now noticing the cluttered paperwork across his desk, "Er.. Sorry for the mess.."

Toshinori both metaphorically & quite literally waves it off as no concern. "It's not a problem.", he steps forward to help the detective organize the folders in a dented filing cabinet. Taking a second glance, the paint looks a little faded and the desk appears to have a few splinters on it. The police department must not be receiving as much funding as it used to now that pro heroes are gaining traction in their popularity.

"Did you happen to foil any muggings on your way over?", Toshinori's grin stretches a little since he finds some humor in Naomasa's way of making small talk.

"Nope. Aside from a robbery this morning, Musutafu has been as quiet as a mouse.", the blonde slides the last folder into the cabinet before it gets slammed shut.

"You've noticed it too?", Naomasa continues when he sees the perturbed expression on Toshinori's face, "Criminal activity is higher during the day. At night though.. It's nearly as rare as finding a unicorn in comparison to somebody shoplifting."

"Now that you mention it.. That's odd..", Toshinori rubs his pointed chin in contemplation, "Most villains do the opposite; they operate at night in order to avoid the heroes who patrol the area."

"Aizawa had a theory.", Naomasa begins digging through folders that are kept in his desk drawer, "Apparently, he did some cross referencing and finally found a connection between all of The Tokyo Ghoul's victims. The detective stops skimming the documents when he spots the one that he's looking for, slapping it on the table and flipping the file open. "They all share a criminal background. Every. Single. One.", Naomasa spreads out the crime scene images for Toshinori to see better.

"We're dealing with a vigilante?", Toshinori glances up at his friend with some skepticism. When it comes to how much of a bodycount there is, it's hard to believe it could be a coincidence. However, each corpse is so mangled that the comparison to serial killers such as Moonfish could be made. Something doesn't add up.
"Aizawa's theories are starting to seem not so far fetched anymore.", Naomasa settles on a pensive frown as he skims the papers.

The two are snapped out of their cognition when a police officer with the head of a ginger tabby comes stumbling into the room. "Sir! There's been a bank robbery!", he pants like he's out of breath from running to the office.

"Tamakawa!", Naomasa exclaims in shock before taking on a stern & reprimanding tone, "I told you I would be in a meeting and any interruptions would not be tolerated unless it has to do with The Tokyo Ghoul."

The cop speaks in between heavy breaths, "But sir.. the robbery..", he shakes his cat-like head with a pant.

The officer's large yellow eyes meet Naomasa's brown rectangular ones.

"It's a BLOOD bank."

Chapter End Notes

It's the end of another chapter, which you know what that means, it's time for another one of my long ramblings!

So, I brought in yet another element from Tokyo Ghoul. I hope you don't mind Uta's presence. I needed a character to design Akatani's mask and I figured Uta would be MUCH better than any OC I could come up with. I also hope I did a decent job of portraying Uta's personality; I didn't want to change that part of him. Hopefully, you don't mind the random quirk that I came up with for him, but as I said in a previous author's note, I want Izuku/Akatani to be the ONLY one with a ghoul related quirk. Regardless of how you feel, he'll only be making an appearance one or two more times, so don't fret too much. I'm positive that I won't be using any other Tokyo Ghoul characters.

One other thing I thought of how to incorporate into the story are the doves, but I thought Akatani just using that term for heroes was much better than the organization getting crammed in.

Yeah, there's some other easter eggs & references in there that I'll leave for you to find personally. Quite a few this chapter, indeed.

Lastly, I want to assure you with the splendid news that I have a good number of chapters completely planned out and so SO many ideas. I'm super excited to share it all with you.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!