Summary

With no real choice and to avoid any mishaps Mayu joined the Heroes Association after randomly gaining powers. And meeting people able to withstand her touch was a plus. Training with them was a treat. Falling in love was bit more of a hassle and not a part of anyone’s plan.
Chapter 1

The evacuation warnings blared throughout J City every five minutes, echoing on the emptied streets. The announcements of threat level had gone up soon after the Heroes’ Association had officially acknowledged the danger, repeated, marking the urgency. People looked for shelters or drove away. And when the roads became clogged they left the cars and continued on foot. It was fairly standard procedure.

Giant screens had hidden the publicity and showed news and updates to whoever was left to hear and see.

Monsters rampaging. The first wave had been defeated by Stinger. Then something bigger had appeared and more had followed. Fallen heroes. More monsters. Threat.

Rain poured and thunder roared as Mayu ran, panting, soaked, chased.

Caught on the bakery where she had ventured to treat herself after a deadline met along with the employees and a group of kindergartners with their teacher. It was safe until the windows were shattered by a tentacle.

Fish with legs and arms and teeth and too many weird appendages and sharp edges tried to get to the kids inside. Hastily after making the shocked woman at the counter answer Mayu ushered the group into the walk-in freezer while making as little sound as possible, trying make the creatures believe only she was there.

So she had dashed out, taunted the beasts, turned the other way and kept running.

They had followed amused by the hunt and partially insulted apparently.

With the situation and the warnings and the updates there had to be heroes coming... The rain that made the road slippery under her flats was of no help at all.

A hopeless situation turned for the worse when lightning struck, pain roaring through her, searing, making her trip, falling flat on the wet concrete. The roar of thunder around her was deafening, the flash strike direct, burning from within. Lightning flowers bloomed red over her skin, branching from her fingertips to her shoulders and neck as electricity hummed through her body.

“The snack is still alive.” A watery voice growled, approaching, claws hissing against the ground.

Not dead? Mayu realized through the lessening pain, hands clenching, surprised. People usually did not survive... that... She grunted, pushing herself up, coughing, wet pink hair fluffed up from the shock.

“I like them squirmly.” Another hissed.

Lightning rustled around her, twining around her body, moving in a ring around her, dancing upwards. Head clearing Mayu staggered, standing, glaring. The discharge was sudden, thunder following, the lightning, her lightning, frying the sea monsters into crispy bits of seafood.

Mayu gawked, staring at her hands. Superpowers? White, blue and yellow wisps gathered around her fingers once more, the burn marks the lightning had left on her skin illuminated by it, still angry, red and raw. The rain kept falling. Amai Mask was discoursing about his new album, ignoring any question about the need of heroes in J City. And then everything vanished.
The ointment was itchy under the bandages. Mayu grimaced staring at the TV, sitting on the centre of the hospital bed with a notepad, trying her best to ignore the prickling and the need to scratch. Bandaged fingers were also of no help when trying to write things down.

The news and specials were dealing with the aftermath of the Sea creature’s invasion again and again, most of the times adding nothing to what was known. Reports, reassurance, damage calculations, singing praises or putting down the heroes’ efforts. Showing clips of the fights. And she had been shocked to find footage of her scorching the behemoths in the rain amidst them.

Doctors had been amazed at her state and the display of suddenly acquired power and quickly discovered that they should not touch her without rubber gloves. Thick ones. One of the nurses had been shocked into a faint already. To be completely honest Mayu had been unconscious when that one happened and already apologised to the now curly-haired and overly-cautious woman.

“Aida Mayu.” There was a portly man in a dark suit at the room’s entrance. Mayu sat straighter, pushing her hair out of her face, lilac eyes narrowing slightly, confused. “The Hero Association would like to talk to you.” Two of the wounded heroes ran through the corridor fleeing in terror when the man was trying to be serious and solemn, breaking a bit of the effect.

People would fear someone with weird powers unless they were registered. Even so a heroic status was not a total guarantee of acceptance. And the Association had already made it very complicated for her to answer «no» by allowing footage of her to appear on the news amidst their members.

Control over the newfound powers was not easy to achieve and after two futon fires and random flares in public when not fighting weird abominations or pursuing “hero” actions she decided it was best to move out to a place where she would not endanger anyone when idle. Z City’s abandoned district was place Mayu targeted as she reorganized her life after qualifying, keeping in mind the new needs. Cheap rent. Little to no people to harm in case of an accident. Monsters cropping up frequent for training. It seemed reasonable.

Sighing, a bit breathless having hopped over the fence that kept the regular populace away, crossed the emptied streets, some neat and rebuilt and others half-wrecked or bearing signs of fights, finding the building and climbing the stairs, she let go of the trolley handle and reached for the key.

The door of the apartment to her left opened abruptly, a blond cyborg walking out, staring her down. Startled the lightning flared free, making the light-bulbs on the corridor flicker to life, brighter than they would normally be. Fortunately they didn’t shatter or blow their fuses.

“Hello...” Mayu greeted, recovering due to the pink apron taking away some of the intimidation, smiling easily, breathing deeply, focusing to quiet down the wisps. “I’m Mayu.” And it was hard to clamp down the electricity when it was tangling. “Nice to meet you.”

“Genos.” He answered after a pause, relaxing a fraction, scanning the newcomer. The landlord had indeed warned them about the arrival of a new tenant. Aida Mayu, rank 102 B-Class, entering a day after Sensei due to «special circumstances». Lightning-based powers. They seemed a bit volatile at the moment. Recently acquired so it was understandable... a small alarm triggered his reflexes, moving, catching a suddenly unconscious woman by the midriff, folded over his right arm.
Genos’ eyes narrowed, feeling the energy course through his body in a sharp peak. It would be enough to knockout and harm a regular human. According to his readings it had recharged him by bypassing sleeper-mode, bio-fuel conversion and even activating the secondary batteries. Shaking his head, switching focus from the odd effect, he became concerned, scanning her. There seemed to be no wounds and her vitals were stable... She just had fallen asleep, already entering REM state. Abnormal but not life-threatening. At a loss of what to do he just picked the limp body up and, bracing her against his shoulders, taking her inside.

Saitama tilted his head, trying to understand why a pink haired woman in a sky-blue dress mumbling about pudding was dozing off on his futon. He sat down after leaving the groceries by the fridge, reaching for her shoulder to shake her awake. A tingle erupted over his skin, buzzing and insistent, spreading through his body like an overly strong phone on vibrate. It stopped when he took his hand away. It came back when he tried again. And stopped with no contact. And happened again when he tried the same trick.

“Genos who is this again?” He asked, finding his voice trembling in an almost auto-tune effect as he kept the electrical loop through absent-minded grab. She was either a battery or a girlfriend.

“She fell asleep on the corridor.” Genos stated, finishing putting the dry plates away, joining him, sitting behind the table, opening the laptop. It didn’t really elaborate much. “With such an odd sleep cycle I suspect she suffers from something.”

“Narcolepsy.” Mayu mumbled, waking. A bit of smoke rose from the fabric, prompting a small sneeze. She sat up, glancing down, patting the spot that had started to smoulder, glancing around, shaking off the drowsiness, taking a moment to suppress the lightning. “The only banal effect to happen instead of… you know…” She paused, staring at the man that was blankly looking at his own hand on her shoulder. She did recognize him as the one that had delivered the final blow to the Sea King. But more importantly she noticed the fact that he was neither unconscious nor writhing in pain nor in a coma.

“Exploded and/or melted internal organs, severe internal and external burns, ruptured eardrums, heart conditions, amnesia, concussion, confusion, chronic pain, dizziness, instant death…” Genos spoke up calmly, citing the most likely outcomes of a lightning strike. “Would you like some tea? Sensei?”

The cyborg offered without even making a pause to separate the subjects, standing, heading for the kitchenette.

“He is very cheery.” Mayu arched an eyebrow chuckling. “And I absolutely love the fact that you are not hurt by touching me but you can take the hand away now.”

“Ah, right.” He agreed easily, taking his tea from Genos.

“I’m Mayu, by the way.” She introduced herself, thanking the cyborg for her cup.

“Saitama.” He answered, sipping.

“If you’re going to introduce yourself you may want to keep it under 20 words.” Genos sat down with his own tea.

“A word challenge is it?” Mayu closed her eyes, thinking. Then she clicked her tongue, opening a cell-phone, typing, opening her public hero profile, placing it between the two men. “Can we train...
together because neither of you got hurt on contact?” She counted twelve. “I’ll treat you to dinner often.”

19 words and a visual presentation. Genos looked impressed and slightly interested. For some reason Saitama just oozed resignation.
"I have read the reports the association made on your abilities." Genos was at her door the next morning. Mayu tilted her head sipping strawberry milk, nibbling the straw, not particularly surprised that the serious looking cyborg was ready to work, letting him into the bare apartment. "They seem barely complete so I would like to assess your abilities myself before elaborating a training methodology." He paused, noticing her pastel yellow sleeping T-shirt, growing a bit aware of time and moment, looking down, shoulders slumping, self-consciously. "Is it too early?"

"Not really." Mayu chortled, tossing the empty box into the bin, scavenging the countertop. "So how would we do that?" The plain brown paper bag contained half a dozen of big flat sugar cookies. She pulled a pair out and offered one as she bit into the other.

Genos took it, staring.

"We will need readings when idle and when in combat." He continued without eating. "Then we will need to extrapolate the data into tests where your abilities need to be pushed as far as you can and are willing to take them."

"Let me go shower and change." Mayu licked the crumbs and sugar out of her fingertips. "Then we can start." The cyborg just nodded, eating the cookie, sitting down to wait. And got up to sweep the floor out of habit.

"The Lichtenberg Figures should fade an additional 15 to 20 percent but they are unlikely to disappear. These were very deep burns." Genos considered after examining Mayu's arms and neck traced by the paling, now flattened burn marks left behind by the lightning. The pastel green sundress left them rather exposed. She didn't seem to mind the scarring or the exam.

"That sounds better than what the doctors told me." She smiled, letting go of her hair, leaving it unbound, as Genos went around the table and sat with an open notebook, writing. She could have sworn she had seen something like «teaching to grow stronger» scribbled on the first page. "Also they are not red anymore."

It did manage to pull his lips into a sort of semi-smile but little more. It vanished as he proceeded the listing of the findings made in a whole morning of dusting, cleaning and assembling the living quarters.

"You are producing 1 to 10 amperes and around 600 volts, constantly fluctuating. From time to time it drops to milliamps but not by enough to leave the range deadly for normal humans." Mayu looked down frowning, eyes dulling in concern. "Don't." Genos reached out, taking her hand. "I mean…" He hesitated. Unhurt and as a cyborg he could feel the sudden spike of electricity, surprise at the contact, as a prickling sensation spreading over his metal parts, registering as warm, pleasant even. Energy trickled evenly, replacing what he had depleted so far. "Don't feel disheartened. When Doctor Kuseno changed me into a cyborg at first it was hard. Things broke in my hands. Weapons flared when my emotions ran high." Anger and hatred without their target to unleash against. "It will
Mayu took a deep breath, slowly. The numbers started to lower.

“What do I need to do?” She asked, determined.

“You need to keep your passive output under 4 milliamps to be safe for others.” Dr. Kuseno could easily build something for measuring and warning. Training to control her own power should be enough to start. “Now we can…” He paused, noticing that she had fallen asleep on the table, hand still in his.

Sighing he stood, separating, doing the same he had done the day before, opening the futon and letting her rest. This time, instead of doing chores he settled nearby to keep scanning, to see what sleep did to her passive electric generating.

It was clear from the destruction that this was the place where Saitama and Genos trained or sparred. Shattered rock. Melted and vitrified stone. Scorch marks. Craters. Shattered cliffs. Boots prints. Fist prints. A new semi-circular valley carved on the mountainside.

Rather obvious why Genos had taken her to that place if he wanted to see lightning. Less obvious why Saitama had tagged along but Mayu was not about to squabble against the presence of a second person that was in no danger from a casual bump. According to him he was curious.

Mayu stepped away from the two men and took a deep breath. So far she had only a handful of monster encounters to draw from and she did what she had done.

Electricity built, white-blue wisps dancing around her body, crackling. Thunder began to rumble as the charge built up. And as the energy grew it became a bit harder to contain. Focusing she opened her arms, balancing it out. A few moments later her flats scraped against the dirt as she parted her legs to keep steady.

“Release.” Genos called out, taking the readings.

A ring of lightning pulsed from Mayu, the wisps turning into lightning, scorching the area around her. The smell of ozone tainted the air. Thunder was deafening. The flash of light was harsh. Sensei covered his eyes for a moment, looking a bit impressed, a small smile changing his usually blank expression.

“Again. This time aim for the mountain.” Genos asked, writing down the first results.

Mayu nodded, straightening, extending her arms instead of letting the charge swirl around. Her hair had fluffed up a bit into wild waves. The wisps gathered around her hands, some licking along the lightning flowers. Genos waited, watching, seeing the figures climb, watching as she adjusted her stance once more to fit the building power, uncaring about sound and brightness.

“Release.” He called out. The single bolt of shaped plasma drilled through the stone, burning and melting.

Saitama nodded, impressed. With that ability she was strong.
“Just one more.” Genos assured him. “I’ll let you decide when enough is enough.”

Mayu took another gulp of air, coughing with the ozone that was hanging heavily around her, waving her arms and walking away from the singed area where she had started zapping about. She steadied her legs and started.

It shaped itself like the first attempt, flowing, growing, glowing, roaring.

It burst on release, expanding suddenly.

And it inverted, returning, resurging, growing around her.

Genos shouted in concern, the numbers climbing fast, multiplying the first results. It was enough overcurrent to make Geno’s systems flare up, functions going haywire, shutting down, overloading or overclocking. Weapon systems registered peaks and optimal priming. One of his eyes went dark and the readings distorted.

Mayu looked afraid, trying to move, negating or unleashing the charge. But whatever movements she made only seemed to fuel the growing lightning. She knelt down, slamming her palms against the soil. The stone cracked under a sudden roaring discharge but the main bolt continued to grow.

Saitama moved through the wisps, gripping the woman, pulling her up, against him in a full hug, punching into the ground, acting as a lightning rod, allowing the electricity to run through his body, dispersing into the earth.

It took only a few seconds but they seemed too long.

“Thank you.” Mayu whispered, her arms winding around Saitama, squeezing a bit, eyes closing in relief.

“That was a bit dangerous. Are you ok?” Mayu nodded, forehead against his shoulder, heartbeat calming down. His attitude was soothing. “Genos?” Saitama pulled his fist from the dirt, shaking it off.

“I’m fine, sensei.” The cyborg rebooted the shot systems and stood approaching crouching next to them, placing his hand on Mayu’s shoulder.

Static snapped between the three.

Mayu chortled, the tension gone.

Genos smiled, reassured.

“We’ll continue another day. The sale is almost starting.” Saitama stood, picking up Mayu who barely had time to grab the skirt before it showed something. “Piggyback or over the shoulder?”

“Whatever lets you run faster, sensei.” Mayu answered, amused.

“I don’t need another one calling me that.” He complained half-heartedly.

They could triple the quantity they were buying and grab a few extra discounts. Mayu had seemed thrilled when he had entered the apartment with the promotion pamphlets as she and Genos got ready to leave. Her fridge was empty except for three kinds of flavoured milks.
“The two first lightning blasts you created were of negative polarity.” Genos started his report and annotations as soon as they had returned to the apartments with the bargains and properly storage them. Mayu looked up from the onions, ignoring his hovering about over her refusal to be helped in making a thank-you dinner, scraping the diced vegetable to the side, starting on the peeled carrots. “Averaging 30000 amperes and about 1000000 volts. There is potential for more but I chose to keep the samples basic.” Mayu nodded, listening, accepting the wok Genos fished out of one of the cabinets overhead, placing it on the hob, clicking a flame to life, letting the metal heat up dry.

Sensei was watching TV, lounging on his side, the news droning on without any threats reported.

The supermarket mission had gone mostly according to plan.

They had gotten the discounts.

Genos had gotten mobbed after recognized and extras had been offered to add to their spoils.

Mayu had tried to stay hidden, keeping herself safely away from everyone a bit uncomfortable in the crowd.

Saitama had gripped her hand keeping the current nullified, dragging her through the store easily as they raked the shelves.

“The one that escaped your control was of positive polarity. It can potentially reach ten times more energy than a negative lightning.” And after scanning the data it cleared why it had continued to grow even after Mayu had released it. “It should take more effort to shape and manipulate but you will be able to handle it after training.”

“I don’t know what triggered the difference.” To heated oil she added the carrots, onion, garlic and ginger to simmer. “Meaning there is the risk of sparking a positive lightning unknowingly.” Mayu clicked her tongue, stirring the mix. And without knowing how far it could build and if she was able to direct it properly it could cause devastation...

“Have you fought monsters already?” Saitama asked, looking over his shoulder.

“A few.” She admitted, adding broccoli, red bell peppers, tossing them through the sizzling mix. Mostly crossing paths when walking about, doing whatever needed to be done. Nothing too hard or attention-grabbing.

“And it never happened. So don’t worry.” Sensei reassured Mayu light-heartedly, returning to the TV.

“That is very simplistic.” Mayu pushed the softened vegetables to the sides of the wok. “But sweet of you to believe in me after having to be a living SPD.”

“Sensei is right.” Genos was quick to agree. “In nature positive lightning is less than 5 percent of the occurring flashes.” Mayu nodded, half convinced by the two men’s reassurances, cracking the eggs into the pan, giving them a few moments before scrambling. “Manipulating air into plasma by superheating it at about 50000 Fahrenheit, which also results in the thunder due to its rapid expansion, starts the active creation of lightning. You may be able to use the sonic shock wave as well, averaging at 120 decibels, but that is an idle hypothesis. Heat and sound are by-products.” He paused, waiting, big black-and-gold eyes focusing on her. “Expected but undefined as of yet. Can
“Go get the plates.” Mayu relented, asking for the help he was desperate to give, as she added yesterday’s leftover rice, peas, corn and soy sauce, mixing it all. Use it all before starting denting the new groceries.

“This means you have developed a set of passive immunities or resistances that allow you to use your power without harming yourself.” Genos concluded his listing, taking three plates and chopsticks from drawers and shelves, placing them down, peeking at the colourful mix. “Electric immunity seems to be constant as your body is continually humming. Heat resistance is also in effect I see as you just grabbed a wok without protection.” He looked down, eyes narrowing, examining the event.

“I could have sworn the handle was…” Mayu stared at the handle that had been worn down to bare metal, feeling nothing as if the temperatures of metal and flesh simply matched. She opened her hand slowly, taking it away, tapping at the metal in wonder before shrugging and grabbing it again to toss the mixture another time.

“That leaves light and sound. You are not going blind or deaf after or during.” Which was obvious even without data analysis. Genos placed the plates on the table as Mayu brought the fried rice to it. “The question is if those safeguards are triggered only during your power usage or are active all the time.”

“I flinch with sunshine.” Mayu answered, serving, chortling amused. She also jumped from her seat, startled when Sensei clicked the wrong button as he turned to join them and the TV shouted about an orchid competition in M-City. “Are you sure you don’t want any meat?” She asked after Saitama fixed the volume situation and sat down at the table, picking up his plate. “I can still…” Mayu offered, starting to turn.

“No need.” Saitama answered, attacking his portion with glee.

“The rampaging monsters were swiftly dealt with by the newest heroine of the Hero’s Association, Aida Mayu that, while having no official hero name, is nicknamed by fans as Lightning Empress, Sparkler, Zap, Livewire, Bolt, Volt and Sparky. While she did not stay we have confirmed through the Hero Association that these were indeed…”

Saitama stared at the TV, pouting slightly, the chocolate milk stopping on its straw. Mayu had a fan club?

“I’m a girl.” Mayu answered, seemingly reading his expression, looking up from her laptop where she had been tapping away, sharing the company, flavoured milk and a bag of chocolate chip cookies. “There aren’t that many heroines on the active so it draws people in. The Association encourages it.” She chortled, closing the top, sitting down next to Saitama, staring at the screen that had changed to report the rest of the heroes activities that day. “I’m partial to Sparkler.” She mentioned as a joke, poking his ribs, deliberately sparking him. It was a ticklish sensation that he retaliated with a stolen milk box.

Saitama chuckled as she offered another cookie, after hopping a few times after her beverage, arms flapping about, easily kept away by his outstretched arm, attempting to pacify him.
“How did that fight go?” He asked, exchanging hostages. Genos had found her asleep in a nearby park and brought her home before she accidentally electrocuted anyone trying to help or harm a lone girl, leaving shortly after answering to a phone call from the Association, having been assigned a mission. Neither men had known about the previous events so her collapse could have the narcolepsy acting up. Now it could be exhaustion as well. She had been working hard.

“They had no chance to get close. Charged up three blasts for each. Bare minimum like Genos said.” Mayu reported enthusiastically, more at ease with her power. They were still working on the keeping it from being deadly to everyone else but according to the cyborg Doctor Kuseno had something almost done to reach that end. “But I should do something with my body just in case. Join a dojo or something.”

“Why’s that?” Saitama changed the channel leaning back against the rolled up futon.

“I can’t spar with either of you can I…” Mayu poked the straw through the carton. “Maybe with Genos if he has a «level below zero setting».” She considered, legs crossing under the little violets peppering the wisteria coloured skirt. “If zapping isn’t enough maybe an electrified kick is.” She started thinking up possibilities, veering away and back. “But what would I do if I’m faced with something that is immune to electricity?” Concerned she glanced at Saitama. “Like, I don’t know, a rubber monster.” She took a sip, leaning against the futon as well. “Do I kick it and hope it bounces?”

“You call me and I kick it till it pops.” Saitama patted her head amused, a bit proud that running away hadn’t even crossed her mind, offering, ruffling her hair. “Or Genos. He can incinerate it.” He glanced at the TV. Boring… commercials… he clicked the remote again.

“Theoretically I could melt it by sparking enough charge to superheat…” Mayu picked up the secondary notebook Genos copied for her with the simplified findings on her powers and progress charts from her handbag, leafing through it.

“Stop the theories.” Saitama rubbed his forehead, already having disabled the listening skill when Mayu began murmuring along Genos’ notes. “Do you want to watch something?”

“What do you have?” Mayu asked, putting the notes aside, grabbing another cookie.

“Your clothes…” Genos mentioned from the side-lines as Mayu stood on the barren sparring grounds, the wisps crackling around her idly, the numbers mounting. No positive lightning had made an appearance since last week’s incident. The rock around her was starting to char and melt. She glanced at him, puzzled, keeping the lightning steady. The effort was not affecting her yet. Repeating that exercise was building up her endurance. It was just a matter of training, like sensei had said. “They don’t burn off of your body.”

“Is this like the heat thing?” Mayu asked, releasing the lightning, the roar echoing before the silence, breathing deeply, ignoring the prickling ozone built around her. It was not to choking levels but it was very noticeable every time she stopped generating.

“I would say you have more control over your powers than you are aware of.” Genos placed his hand on her shoulder, taking the temperature readings. Also meaning she knew through simple instinct what she had to control to not end up accidentally naked. “I am sorry it took me this long to
“No one noticed.” Mayu touched her hair, flattening it. She had given up on doing ponytails when training. In the end it looked like a spooked cat’s tail. Better to have a wild mane. “But can we start on the fine-tuning and day-to-day off button?”

“Dr Kuseno said he would send me the device soon.” Genos assured her. “I’ll treat you to dinner tonight.” He offered after a moment of staring at the ground.

“There’s really no need…” Mayu started softly, a bit self-conscious.

“You cooked for us every day.” Genos murmured. He did not want to be ungrateful even if she said it was to repay them for their assistance.

“We wrestled over who cut the potatoes and who roasted them.” Mayu mentioned with a sigh.

“Sensei stole your peanut brittle and I accidentally threw away the toffee caramels.” Genos goaded.

“I want to go to a dessert bar.” Mayu retaliated in grief.
It had been one month. Mayu grew aware of that as she sent the short story under the collective theme Jewel a couple of days before the deadline. In a week the printed version of their monthly efforts would arrive, the one written the month before. The new theme should be chosen as soon as everyone had sent their stories.

Satisfied she reached for the toffee caramels.

A smile popped on her lips when the act reminded her of Genos’ trick. He had lied about the caramels to use that slight as an excuse to express gratitude and appreciation without suspicion or Mayu pointing out that they were the ones doing her a favour.

Fans of the “Cyborg Prince” had crowded him on the requested dessert bar, leaving the cakes wide open. He had been exceedingly calm and polite, shaking hands and giving autographs before making his way to the table Mayu had claimed with several plates of scavenged treats. All that seemed to stem from and add to the reputation his photograph and heroic actions had built.

It took a bit of time to convince him to relax and have something, forget about the training or growing stronger. Macarons and a bit of poking until he shared. Amusingly enough he was feeling like any other 19 year old boy in the girly environment with the idea of a date having dawned on him through the chatter of the other girls. It was as adorable as his insistence on taking a few desserts for Sensei.

Saitama had indeed taken the peanut brittle. Not that she minded after he surrendered the coupons for candy bars and helped her triple the amount she could carry.

Mayu closed the laptop and stood, stretching. Maybe she could go out and get a fancy pastry...

A loud whirring sound made her turn abruptly, sparking in recognition, facing an armed drone at her open window. The thing looked a bit more armoured than the others.

Lightning hissed releasing a quick bolt to throw its aim off, charging a blast.

It had started happening shortly after moving to Z-city. At first she had thought nothing of the machines that sometimes appeared, following her about. Could be from the Hero Association. Could be from Doctor Kuseno for all she knew, especially after Genos had told her he had spoken with the scientist on her behalf on several occasions.

Then they started to grow insistent, invasive and aggressive.

So Mayu had chosen to take them down on sight.

Lightning slashed through the air, charring its outer shell, cracking and melting the machine. Unable to fly it fell to the ground, crashing on the street. She peeked over the balcony, making sure. Scrap metal on the pavement. The next strike was direct, hammering it down, concrete cracking beneath.

Positive lightning was especially effective against them and their interference had taught her how to trigger it by imploding negative lightning. It was something about the radio interferences it generated as well. But that time it was both unnecessary and not something to do inside the house.

A couple of Association mail drones had suffered the same fate by accident. She had explained through the phone why and started shipping the wreckage of all the things that beeped annoyingly
around her head, trying to fight and “gather data”. The Association drones were now painted a bright gold to make sure they were recognizable at a glance.

“It’s open.” Mayu answered the distinctively metallic knock on her door, closing the phone after sending the message about the drone, hiding the toffee so Genos wouldn’t know she knew. At least until she had time to go shop and dramatically snatch another bag of the candy while staring him down on the sweets aisle. It had been sold out in the Saitama coupon raid.

“It arrived.” Genos said, sounding a bit excited, stepping into the apartment, closing the door behind him, stopping, noticing the smell of ozone and the still sparking woman. He crossed the room purposely, peeking over the balcony wall, eyes narrowing, analysing. Mayu shrugged, peeking at the parcel he carried.

After a bit of reassurance that it was nothing of concern they sat down and opened the device they had been waiting for to further the agreement.

In that month Mayu had managed to gain the control she needed over her constant charge production. As with learning anything new she had to be very aware of each step of the process to be able to do it and keep up. Developing control had been composed of long hours seating hand in hand and lowering her amperage and keeping it down. It could get dull and yet a slip in focus was enough for her levels to climb up once more to the first reading Genos had taken.

Doctor Kuseno’s gadget looked like an earring, a plain hoop of silvery metal small enough to be worn as a ring as well. It came with several crystal-looking marquise cut pendants tucked the padded box. There was also a printed booklet with the instructions.

Genos immediately started to read out loud, committing the information to memory while sharing.

The earring’s inner mechanisms measured and gave the electrical and biological readings at any given time. The loop itself warned Mayu immediately if the values fell into deadly range in a situation where her body registered none of the stress levels or higher currents congruent with combat situations.

The crystals were made to gather and store the overflowing lightning for Genos to use both to boost his weaponry and as emergency recharge but most of all to make sure she didn’t need to control, diverting the flow, freeing her from the need of constant vigilance. It was a simple matter of attaching them to the earring and changing when full.

Mayu took off the white rose earring from her left ear placing it on the table, picking up the loop, examining it and the way it would be secured, closing it in place after pushing her hair out of the way, tying it so it was visible.

A synchronization request pinged to life almost immediately in both their phones. They acquiesced.

Genos trusted the Doctor and Mayu trusted the cyborg.

It took only a few seconds for the readings to start aligning and scrolling.

“Your numbers are high. Matching.” Genos nodded, satisfied. She had just blasted some sort of mechanical thing so it was to be expected. She was also not doing a thing to lower them. Training from whatever state of mind and voltage she was in was the best way to work. “How does it feel?” he looked away from the data, staring at her, waiting.

“Rather normal.” Mayu admitted, pulling her purse from under the table, scavenging through its contents, ignoring the rustling of wrappers and caramels, pulling the compact mirror, tilting her head
to see. Not too heavy either. “There is a little alarm.” She mentioned, powder-blue nails tapping the metal, making the hoop hobble. “Where do you want to start?”

“Take the idle generating to bearable levels.” Genos asked, reading the manual, making sure they were setting it up right. He had given the numbers to Doctor Kuseno but double checking would do no harm.

Mayu was smiling warmly, making him pause, stare, fidget. The levels were going down. The cyborg focused on that, avoiding the growing distraction.

Images, bubbling up fleetingly.

Sweaty palms, building heat and fluttering heart and insides…

Forgotten for his own good.

Genos used the linked phone to set that gentle low under 5 milliamps as «daily». The device would know that was where Mayu should be and warned if it went over it without reaching the «combat» baselines. He stared at the screen with narrowed eyes, clicking a few icons in quick succession.

The soft beeping stopped.

“Genos?” She called, clipping the storage cell on the earring, noticing his distraction, the fixed downwards stare, approaching, peeking into the screen and booklet. No answer. Absently she ran her fingers through his hair, testing, the soft fibres barely reacting to the static. The readings were still low. The secondary bars of the reservoir were steadily filling. There was little else to do other than go on living as she pleased. “Thank you...” She murmured, hugging him.

Startled Genos looked up, at her, dropping the phone on the table.

It felt warm.

Metal did not have that much sensitivity.

No matter how much of a normal life the Doctor tried to make him able to experience there were simply things that technology could not accurately replicate. And frankly it should not seeing that his goal, his purpose, was to fight and destroy the rogue cyborg that had ravaged his life. Mayu’s power made him feel, recall sensations. She smelled light and sweet, the perfume in the glittering bottle kept on the shelf, mingling with her scent and with the bite of ozone.

“We can go on a monster patrol. Saitama may want...” Mayu suggested, moving away, standing, oblivious, heading towards the door.

The tug brought her back down, unbalanced. Genos’ hand was grabbing her wrist, pulling her close, catching her against his solid form, kissing her, tasting toffee on the soft lips. Mayu’s breathing stopped, lightning building sharply and swiftly, the device’s alarm chirping and disabling as it went above and beyond combat levels, scorching the floorboards, shattering the crystalline reservoir, the small shards scraping her neck and jaw, the lights and appliances in the apartment clicking and whirring to life, SPD’s going into overdrive in their duty to protect appliances before everything shut down.

Warmth and prickle turned into heat and want in the small storm.

Alarms beeped in the silence shrilly growing silent for a long moment before repeating the warning.
Genos cupped her face slowly in the quiet room, opening his eyes, drawing away, freeing her wrist, unsure of what to say, unable to look away.

Mayu stared back, lips parting, unable to speak either, remembering to breathe, the intake trembling, erratic, unmoving, wisp-shrouded hands on his shoulders. Scorch marks traced all she touched. The floor. His shirt. The metal of his shoulders. His mouth.

“Mayu?” Saitama entered without knocking. “The power is out. What are you two doing for...” His tone was playful but the words dropped into silence, expression growing even blanker than his usual relaxed visage.
Mayu was a bit fuzzy on how exactly she had reached the park and how much time had passed.

It was conceivable that she had simply walked.

And it had been enough of a time lapse to become night apparently. But not enough to be late judging by the activity around her.

Also sufficient of a gap to be tracked and attacked by several of those annoying drones through the unplanned and she was sure uneven route taken from Z-City’s abandoned area to the more pleasantly manicured residential area. One had gotten away wobbling in a single thruster, beeping about data acquired before she had decided to stop and sit.

Piles of scorched, melted and exploded scrap littered the path that lead to the wooden bench in front of one of the vending machines standing between two of the streetlights flanking the way. It was impossible to report in for credit and extra pay though. Her phone had stayed behind. Purse had stayed behind, under the table, hiding caramels and wrappers. Absently she wandered if Genos had actually noticed.

People walked about, enjoying the mild temperature, jogging, walking their dogs, cycling, carrying groceries through the shortest path to the apartment buildings on the other side of the park, visible above the trees. Some couples cooed with hands or arms linked.

They ignored the very obvious signs of battle.

The things were not posing a direct danger to them and if they were there was a recognizable registered hero sitting on the bench right there. It was of no consequence that she looked very much distracted. Just go on living and hope for the best as usual. There were no houses or stores in immediate need of protection either. Trees, flowers, vending machines, swans, ducks and dogs. Muggers were the most dangerous thing wandering about, maybe.

Absently she stared at her bare feet, wiggling toes, playing with the patterned edge of the viridian dress, following the interlocking cerulean triangles. Shoes had stayed behind. The earring kept beeping its discreet warning but she was in no mood to pay it any mind. The blood on the shallow cuts had dried. It was itchy now. Moreover the scene was just not leaving her mind. Like a persistent daydream. Or a craving for chocolate, the decadent expensive one.

Warm. Smooth. Dry. Mayu touched her lips, feeling them tug into a smile. Really sweet, almost innocent. Serious and dedicated. Gentle under the steeled body and will. Frailer than he knew. Made stronger by those around him, those who cared. Patient and reassuring when guiding her. Wisps danced against her skin. The lights around flickered slightly. And the befuddlement returned. Why had he… training together, fighting, living, confiding, reassuring had drawn them closer, true, but still…

“That was surprising.” Saitama spoke up, approaching with a relaxed gait, walking towards her, wearing the usual civilian clothes and the hoodie, carrying a paper bag, sitting down, giving it to her without a fuss, assessing her current state.

People kept walking by, finding nothing strange about the encounter.

Mayu had blushed after Saitama had entered her apartment looking for the reason for the sudden blackout, looking lightheaded for a moment before standing and wobblingly leaving the apartment, a
trail of scorch marks in her wake, glowing amidst squiggly wisps and buzzing slightly. Genos had been in an also very incoherent state of mind, staring after her before an alarm had sounded in the then silent room, coming from him. Likely if he could have blushed he would have been doing just that. He had not explained much, leaving in a hurry, promising to return and fix the power issue.

“It was.” Mayu answered, peeking inside. Her black ballet flats with hot-pink polka dots and wet wipes. And her key with the blue bow keychain. “Thank you.” She whispered, sighing, tilting, resting against Saitama’s shoulder, eyes closing, trying to calm down.

“Are you asleep?” He asked, looking down at her pink hair, unsurprised.

“Not this time.” Mayu admitted, opening her eyes, staring at the vending machine absently, noticing the poor candy selection it provided. Anyway her money had stayed behind. “You just feel good.” Calming, steady. Saitama chuckled, knowing her excuse already, the sound rumbling against her ear. “Is Genos...”

“He had to go release energy before it overloaded his core. He said.” Saitama moved a bit to let her rest more comfortably. “So?”

“We kissed. I stormed inside. Caused a blackout. It was trouble for you. Wandered off.” A pause followed her statements. “He started it.” Did that meant he wanted to continue though. Organizing it into words helped.

“Genos is too serious most of the times.” Saitama considered, still looking at her. Meaning he was very likely to be serious about Mayu as well.

Mayu sighed, turning slightly, playing with the cord of Saitama’s hoodie, silent.

“Monster patrol?” She asked after a while, eyes closing once more, hiding the concern. The earring had stopped its beeping. She was starting to calm down. “Or last minute sale run?”

“Nah. Looking for you.” Saitama stated simply, patting her head. His concern was shown very subtly most of the times. A look, a poke, a tease, a small, blunt question to whoever was looking worried or haggard. Then usually dragging the one affected by the downtrodden spirit to do something fun.

“I have no idea what to tell him. No idea what to tell you either.” Mayu moved away, shuffling into the bag to pick the wet wipes, taking care of her feet. Walking barefoot was more of a hassle than it seemed. Scared, maybe, she thought, focusing on the events, on her reaction. Losing them was a painful prospect and one of the many scenarios that she had started to concoct when thinking beyond the moment that had happened and left marks on the floor. And for such a small thing. She had asked them for help, hoping, alone. Had grown attached through offered kindness. They gave her support and peace. And she tried to give them as much.

“Fair enough.” Saitama accepted her answer easily, standing, extending his arms, offering help, pulling her to her feet. A touch more strength he needed was enough to take Mayu into a hug, arms enveloping her fully, securely. The lights flickered in response to her surprise. “Still...” His tone was a bit different.

Pulling away showed a serious, focused look. Her hands gripped the fabric of his hoodie a bit harder, singing, smoking.

There was no impulsiveness or accident in his actions as Saitama pressed his forehead against hers, gently before tilting his head, lips joining, brushing lightly and gently, pressing herder when Mayu
sighed, digging her fingers into the holes burned into the fabric, eyes closing as their mouths overlapped. His arms never left her frame, keeping her close.

“I AM MOULDY” whatever it was the mysterious being, monster thing of greenish-white patches had no chance to finish before a very despondent Saitama turned, letting go of a wide-eyed Mayu storming. Both the punch and the lightning were responsible for a very chunky, coal-like mess.

“Do not interrupt other people’s moments.” Saitama complained, looking over his shoulder. Mayu still sparked, lips parted in the sudden darkness of the shattered streetlights in a few metre radius. The vending machine was clicking, surrendering its contents in quick succession, jamming with a dissonant crack.

Smiling, the annoyance gone, Saitama grabbed her hand to prevent yet another dazed wandering away, flicking her forehead lightly to call her back.

“Come on. I’ll cook tonight.” Saitama asked nonchalantly, starting to walk.

Touching the spot where he had poked, still in a mild trance Mayu followed, mumbling her compliance, the previous mystification returning to her head. At least she had not lapsed into a nap. That would be too much.
Chapter 6

Weaving stories was something Mayu had always done and the very trait that had bonded the five girls in the first weeks in J-City’s University. From a detail a whole set of scenarios could be grown, diverging in the progress, ending and sometimes even the setting. Actions and dialogs. Answers. Witty and snappy retorts that could not actually be said out loud. Wistful thinking. New characters. New sequences and plots. Unfortunately creating ideas about what was happening in the now also meant that some of the outcomes were... bad. Worse. Downright to ridiculously catastrophic. Cartoonish to dramatic.

Saitama opened the door, the slightly singed giraffe keychain wobbling as it twisted, letting go of her hand for a moment. He had kept the hold for all their way back, pulling her along at first until their steps matched. But she was fairly certain the giraffe’s state was not her fault. It looked sooth-like, meaning fire not lightning.

Mayu glanced at her own door as the metal tumblers organized, considering. Her key was in the bag... Another set of scenes played out, ideas flowing, backtracking, coming to a standstill. Then she shook her head, sighing, squaring her shoulder.

Face the fear and the embarrassment. It was best just to talk with them, trying to see if there really was a damage to repair. She hoped not.

“Sensei.” Genos greeted as soon as the door opened. “The power is back on and I installed a few safeguards to keep any future surges from... “ He stopped talking as Mayu took off her shoes, closing the door. His voice abandoned the quick pace of information relaying, shutting down, just staring, standing between the entry and the kitchen oddly, fidgeting torn between approaching or staying respectfully away. Or awkwardly. It was also a word choice.

Saitama said nothing as he headed into the kitchenette, washing hands, gathering supplies and implements, looking around to decide what to make. It was best to let them sort that out first.

“Are you hurt?” Genos managed to speak up, his voice very low, scanning the scratches, deeming them light and harmless, head lowering, eyes down. Still looked like he wanted to come closer but didn’t quite dare. Unsure. Mayu scanned him as well. Most of the scorch marks were gone yet the metal still showed some traces. “I spoke with the Dr. and he agrees that the storage cells need to be made stronger to be safe to use even if you have to suddenly enter combat or experience a sharper spike...” While true to the fact that that had been a concern it was not exactly what he wanted to talk about. Still shattered synthetic crystal near the throat and eyes were bad ideas. Genos paused, taking a deep breath, standing upright and ramrod straight. “Mayu. I’m sorry. I was impulsive.” He started stiffly. “I was very young when the rampaging cyborg destroyed my town, my family, my life. I have said that I do not like to think too much about the past. It is best to focus on finding and destroying it, growing stronger. I was... meek but there was a girl.” Genos looked down, away. “A few crushes. They are gone too. Like everyone else. I had my first kiss too.” A fleeting smile ghosted over his lips as he continued. “It is hard to think back. And it is hard to think beyond getting, destroying this cyborg, making him pay and exact justice for everyone, for myself, to pay my debt to Doctor Kuseno. Sensei was right to say I needed to focus in growing stronger before confronting him. Recent battles have shown that I still let my guard down too easily and am overeager to enter a combat situation. You...” He stopped again, looking at her, golden eyes in black wavering, smiling. “Make it easier and harder to focus. To emulate Sensei, to train you, to respond to your request for aid, makes me say, teach, the things I should be doing. Training and thinking before rushing into battle. Consider the situation and abilities in your possession. And you offered to help me grow
stronger as well. Every bit, every battle, every offer helps in building myself for the final confrontation.” He stopped again.

Mayu was listening with a very surprised and absent look of complete bewilderment, wondering for a moment if he actually needed to breathe or was just organizing the next section of the speech.

“I had not considered if, as a cyborg, as someone driven to hunt down a monster, I would still be able to form attachments. Any attachment... It implies vulnerability. The possibility of going through the devastation of my hometown once more in literal and metaphorical senses. A relationship of any kind start with common ground, shared ideas, building trust. It usually develops into understanding, care, cooperation, reliance and comfort especially if the experiences are shared often, such as talking, eating, watching TV or just being around each other. In our case training as well.” And now he was fidgeting in the small interruption. “In this I can say that what we share is not so different from what has been built with Sensei. It can be defined as friendship, companionship. But in following this... attraction it became different.”

“You either stop him or he will never shut up.” Saitama mentioned, preparing the dumplings for steaming. “Unless he runs out of battery or something.”

“Genos.” Mayu called, smiling at the offhanded comment, approaching, taking the cyborg’s hand, letting go of any restraint, the spark making her contact felt. He stopped whatever he was going to say, waiting, tensing, fingers closing around hers carefully. “You and Saitama have been here for me ever since I asked. And I know you were reluctant at first.” She turned slightly to glance at the cooking hero. Saitama looked up, smiling absently, preparing the basket. “I was afraid when the sea monsters came. But I wanted to be someone that I was in my head. The one that talked back, fought back, that was not afraid, that could defend herself and others. So I acted. And it was called heroic. But the fear was still there. I could have been killed whether by this lightning accident or by the beings that were after me. I was scared the Association would just label me a monster and lock me in a glass cage to be used as a battery. Like... poked and studied.”

“A glass case, even if it is nonconductive, would shatter under the sonic blast and extreme heat you produce.” Genos murmured. “And there is no way you could be a monster.”

Mayu chortled, playing with his fingers.

“You know that that is not the actual point.” She whispered, blushing, pushing her hair out of the way. “I was afraid of killing someone with a power I did not understand and could barely control. I moved away and hid here. You were here. Both of you.”

“Dinner is ready.” Saitama interrupted, walking away from the countertop, patting Mayu’s head. It was a simple thing, reassuring and warm. And done without gloves or fear on either part. Trust and confidence. It showed Mayu that power was controllable.

Genos noticed the affection in the exchange. Sensei smiled more truly with her. It was a warm expression Mayu returned easily. He lowered his head, looking at their linked hands. Wisps danced between skin and metal, giving a familiar prickling to his palm, trembling slightly. He held her a bit harder. She responded the same way, turning a smile to him.

“It has been nine hours.” Genos calculated, suddenly concerned. “You have to eat. Your metabolism burns through calories twice faster than a regular human and four times faster when you start to spark and with the narcolepsy may be dangerous.” He pulled her to the table, dashing from it to the kitchen, grabbing missing plates and utensils, placing a heap of dumpling in front of her while calculating what she should consume.
“I don’t think I explained what I needed.” Mayu sighed, settling, watching him with a gentle expression, amused at the mothering, biting into a dumpling. “It’s good.” She murmured.

“Thank you.” Saitama turned on the TV. No big reports were making it to the news. “And I don’t think we have to yet.” After all that talk maybe it was best just let things flow. “Genos stop fretting.”

Mayu fell asleep halfway through the motions of standing to make some tea, leaving the computer she had retrieved from her apartment open. Genos rolled out to futon, stopping his note clean up, picking her up easily, letting her rest. Sensei was reading manga, placing the volume on his knees. The news were a low hum, the closing jingle playing, cutting to commercials.

Whatever had changed was not something that needed to be rushed.
“Mayu told me about the kiss.” Genos sat down opposite of Sensei, folding the apron carefully, putting it aside. “I understand I was too agitated that night to properly talk about this when you returned.” Sensei nodded noncommittally, lowering his manga, straightening, listening. Genos would rush to a solution in an attempt to make it all work. As was happening now he would have asked for clarifications and a clear outline and that at the time would have made for a very awkward conversation, especially with Mayu still being mildly nervous and a flight risk. “And I understand that was Sensei’s way of showing you were also…” Genos hesitated in the word choice. “interested.” It seemed a bit too cold, generic. But for now it would do. Just to make sure he was explaining everything plainly and clearly. “I encouraged her to choose sensei.” It had seemed logic. Sensei was better suited if logic was to be observed. “Even if the signs point out that she likes us both.”

“Why would you say that?” Saitama pinched the bridge of his nose, groaning, slightly embarrassed, partially annoyed. Genos looked down carefully. “She got angry, didn’t she?” Mayu had never asked for a choice to be made. Actually he suspected she would walk away herself to keep them from breaking apart.

“Quiet” Genos shook his head. “Upset if I assessed the data correctly.” She had not said it though, clipping the cell in place, smiling, leaving for the scheduled meeting in the Z-City headquarters. It had taken a bit of will to keep from reaching out, attempt to correct his misstep. “Sensei…”

The cabs would never go farther than the gate and the fence. It was after all an abandoned area. But the drivers were always kind enough to leave her right at the edge, by one of the gates. They recognized Mayu from the news and the Association site. Granted they thought she was just doing her hero job beyond the border and not going home.

On the other hand maybe it was time to look in to her savings and invest on the bike. Maybe the electric model. That would cut down on the fuel costs. Amused with the thought she crossed the border and headed towards the apartment, adjusting the weight of her bag, avoiding the bigger holes on the road, keeping an eye out for the weirdness around.

The Hero Catalogue was a silly thing to print, especially considering how much information it contained. Same concern with the public sections of the online individual pages. And also because ranking, entries and departures were rather fluid and they only updated it once a year. But it was a bestseller. People liked to have the glossy-paged collector edition. Kids hunted heroes with it for autographs.

But who cared about those liabilities when they had just asked her to update and write the new entries for that year’s edition? Extra pay was always a good thing. It also meant absolute control over her own entry and the password to access the databases. Over Saitama and Genos’ entries too. Meaning she could use it to crush those stupid rumours.

Even the deadline was lax and easy even when considering the amount of entries to accomplish. So first she should discard the entries of the heroes that were no longer active. It would immediately take care of a good chunk of C-Class. There should be a bullet list on the files within the flash drive. Her
keys jingled as she unlocked the door, shoes abandoned, bag on the table. Then it should move into creating the new entries. Opening the refrigerator to the selection of flavoured milks inside made her stand still, choosing. Then it was a matter of updating the remaining entries with current rank, notorious battles, achievements and so on. She took a banana milk and poked the straw through the box. Should start on the top and move down…

That line of work was interrupted by the small knock on the shared wall. Mayu bit the straw, fidgeting for a moment, straightening the honeydew dress, heading to the door to see what was going on.

It was still early. She slipped the peach flats on her feet, sipping the milk. Usually they were out patrolling. Perhaps it had been a slow day.

Hesitation creeped in as Mayu pulled the door open. Genos… was fond of order, clear cut outlines and objectives. And having told him what had happened with Saitama he felt the need to both say he liked her but she would be better off with sensei. Selflessness was one thing. But immediately attempting to give up and sacrificing what he wanted because he was considering only the happiness of others was not… It was distressing. And she hoped that Saitama would agree with her and help that stubborn boy see that sometimes nothing had to be given up. Not when it was freely offered.

Shrugging she left her apartment, closing the door, finding both men at their door, waiting to see if she had taken the invitation.

“I will start then.” Mayu spoke up, adjusting her skirt as she sat down in front of both of them. The table was out of the way, leaving only the pillows. The TV was off. Geno’s spine was tense and straight as he stared at her, lips pressed into a line, hands clenched on his thighs. Mayu resisted the urge to hug and comfort him. Saitama looked calmer but that was his default. At least he had his shirt on. And it was with some difficulty that she took her mind away from what was beneath. “You were the ones that took the first step. Each of you.” Their kisses lingered in her memory. One sweet and shy, one sure and bold. And neither had been refused. “It was not that hard to see that I have grown to care about you during this time. And that made it impossible for me to choose.” Mayu hesitated, looking down, her own hands clutching the skirt, wrinkling the fabric beneath, kneading nervously. Had they locked the door? They should have locked the door… embarrassment coloured her cheeks but she needed to say this much. “I know it is selfish. But I can’t choose.” She nibbled on her lower lip, still staring at the floor, at her knees, at the edges of their sitting pillows. “And I will leave if this is impossible. I’d rather crush my own heart than break you apart. Genos needs you Saitama. And you kind of need him too.” She sucked in the intruding tremble in her voice, blinking to keep her eyes from tearing.

Genos and Saitama exchanged a glance. It was impossible to see her lowered face through the waves of pink hair fluffing up to react to the lightning dancing about, around her skin, responding to the agitated emotions. Her fingers were curled into fists, trembling. Both reached out, each taking a hand, pulling her closer.

Mayu almost fell between them, keeping between them, looking up, blinking.

The metal was cold against her palm, the interlocking fingers pressed against Geno’s chest. He was smiling, golden and black eyes glinting in with the light and the running of numbers.
“We won’t ask you to choose.” Genos assured her, reaching out with his free hand, running it through her hair, flattening the static. “You need us too, remember?” His tone was suddenly more relaxed, playful as the touched the earring that was making its best little beep to warn them that she was dangerous to regular people.

“If we all agree to this then what’s the problem?” Saitama pressed her hand against his heart too, the other arm around her waist, looking warmly at both the oddities that had crashed by his door and refuse to leave until they were part of his once dulled life.

“We can make this work.” Mayu whispered, eyes closing.

The little tears that escaped sent the boys into a mild panic, letting go before hugging her, sandwiching her frame between a warm body and cool metal, reassuring. Chortling she struggled, complaining. Genos released her, concerned. Saitama squeezed her, making fun of her objections as the cyborg told his sensei that he should not do that so much that while she was zapping them mercilessly in her happiness Mayu’s body was still frailer by comparison.

There was rushing into things and there was building a solid, clear, honest base to grow love from care and companionship. And there was overdoing commitment when Genos started to consider that they should contact the landlord and put on a request to take down the common wall of their apartments.
“Why is Sensei’s entry so small?” Genos asked, peeking over Mayu’s shoulder as she wrote, his arms around her waist, keeping her tucked between his legs. With no disasters, no chores and Sensei insisting on patrolling alone for credit sake Genos had walked into Mayu’s apartment and pretended to be a chair. The sparks whispered pleasantly against his body. The clicking of the keyboard was soothingly regular. One of her scents had changed. High probability of shampoo being the source.

Mayu stretched, the moonstone coloured sleep T-shirt climbing up, making the polka-dotted shorts peek from beneath the hem, leaning against him fully, electricity prickling pleasantly, arms winding up around his neck, playing with Genos hair, staring at the draft, shifting the lolly in her mouth, getting a new burst of watermelon flavour, the stick resting against the left corner of her mouth now.

“I have to follow the rules of the new layout.” She opened the guideline document for him. Genos zoomed and scanned it, scowling. “C-Class has four heroes per page. B-Class places two entries per page. A-Class get a page each and S-Class gets a two page spread. Number ones get double their allotted rank space except for Blast because there is little to none to add.” She pulled out the pop and twirled it around, looking at the glossy surface, searching for the depth of the cherry gum within. “Same layout with notorious mysterious beings.” She held the piece of candy against Genos’ mouth, tapping it against his closed lips. Leaning further down the cyborg took it, rolling the sphere on his tongue.

“You highlighted the essential and made a point of debunking the rumours with facts.” Genos decided. The booklet would be read and the new profile would be uploaded to the online page as well. And as they were officially backed by the organization the people would have a harder time believing the cheater rumours. And Sensei wouldn’t stay in C-Class for long. Next year he would probably have taken the S-Class two pages. Or even the four pages that Blast was not occupying. Mayu nodded, closing guidelines, maximizing Saitama’s entry, the messy bun brushing against his chin as she reviewed it on last time. “You could refer to notebook #30…”

“The notebooks helped but I am not about to gush about his character or physique. Not with your words, not with mine.” She chortled, saving, closing. “Can’t do it for you either.” Mayu opened his file, letting Genos read on the expansion and correction of his own the web profile. “Would be accused of favouritism. Especially because I am not doing that to Amai Mask.” Whose massive fan-base would surely breathe down her neck prior and after the release. “But it’s coming along.”

“How about yours?” Genos asked, accepting the lack of gushing praise as a professional choice, reaching out, closing his file after a tactical save. Silently Mayu opened the file with her name, getting back her lolly. “Bare basics?” Association numbers and the original bland description. Name, powers, nicknames given by fans, note that official hero name was pending.

“I am struggling a bit.” Mayu admitted, tapping his arm away from her waist, pressing on his legs to boost herself to her feet. “Everything I type down sounds braggy.” A slight charged double open-handed slap on her thighs echoed as she wobbled towards the kitchen on numb and prickly legs. Electricity and movement seemed to do the trick as she returned to the worktable with an easier gait and bottle of pomegranate water.

“I can lend the notebooks on you.” Genos offered as she sat back down. There were handwritten drafts everywhere. Some were unrelated. Others were lines to be appraised. There was slight crunching sound as she stared at the screen and her teeth cracked the thin compromised structure of the hard candy surrounding the gum. “Although I only have eight volumes so far.”
“I have your duplicates.” Mayu ignored the misplaced apologetic tone, snuggling, trying to find that comfortable position once more. Three notebooks she had. Yet he said...

“You have the abridged versions with the condensed and useful information itemized clearly for easy access and use.” Genos clarified, leaning, resting his head on her shoulder.

“Now I am scared to think what you put on yours.” Mayu teased, pulling the cleared stick tossing it into the bin, gleefully gnawing the gum, cherry and watermelon mixing on her tongue.

“Well…” Genos murmured, adjusting, moving behind her very carefully, his hands ghosting over her thighs slowly, focusing. “Everything.” The admission brushed against her skin softly as his lips glided against her neck, following the path it presented to her ear, biting lightly, just enough to sting, to elicit a whimpered gasp, holding her against his body. “The fact that you are untrained.” Hands ran over her waist, slipping under the shirt, over the skin, still warm, the warmth metal absorbed from her and kept. “And that it makes you soft and frail.” The lazy caress of the polished hard metal of his hands found the bra, stopping. Mayu shivered, her breathing changing, wisps dancing against his leg as she ran her fingers over it, lightning crossing right through the fabric, just shy from scorching. “Instead of durability you are supple.” Her arm laced over his neck again, hand caressing his jaw with the same sparking play, tingling, teasing, turning his face to hers. Their noses bumped. She laughed, kissing his cheek instead, the spark sending a jolt of alarm into his circuits. “But considering your abilities it hardly matters.” Genos continued, skimming over her breasts carefully, over the fabric, enjoying the sharp jabs of lightning sent from the hand that clutched his thigh. “Anything that is a threat and gets too close can be killed by electricity, sound or heat.”

“Cannot and will not put that in writing,” Mayu sighed, turning, his hands slacking enough to let her. Geno’s arms remained within her shirt as she turned, kneeling to stay at eye-level, following her spine, down to the bottom. Gold and black looked amused. “Her combat style relies solely on the lightning powers acquired on the accident during the Sea King’s raid of J-City?” Mayu formulated, palms open on the cyborg’s chest, fingers moving, each tip delivering a spark as it tapped on the hard surface. It sounded short enough and clear enough without being overwhelmingly schmaltzy.

Genos hand gently fell away from her bottom, reaching up, grasping her wrist, following, fingers sneaking over the tangle of the Lichtenberg figures. Wisps charted the path, tangling around it. The flush over her cheeks was starting to grow red enough to clash with her hair. Parted lips and gentle eyes. Focused on him. The kiss started a soft brush against his mouth, tingling, her fingers burying into his hair, body slipping closer, pressed nearer by his arms closing around her frame with a pleased hum as her tongue sneaked between his zapped lips, bringing sweetness wet and warm. Synthetic his may be but there was no reason to respond, teasing smoothly, capturing a purred groan and a sharp jolt courtesy of the hand that slid down Genos’ neck, following the ridges of his spine, sparking each spot, as their lips smacked apart.

The readings changed abruptly.

Mayu sagged against him, the disarrayed heartbeat and shaky breath of arousal calming and turning deeper.

“I’m sleepy…” She murmured hoarsely, habit making her recognize her own condition acting up, warning him as her eyes closed.

“I’m keeping the gum.” Genos answered, lowering his voice as well. It was a choking hazard. A small chortle was cut by the loss of consciousness. Mayu slumped against him, arms lingering around his neck, snuggling closer, trusting. Mindful Genos adjusted, reaching for the computer, entering her words about her hero self, saving the file, closing the laptop and pulling a light blanket over them, head resting against her fluffy bun, eyes closing contently.
Chapter 9

A blanket burrito was not the usual way Mayu found herself after a narcoleptic nap but the weather had grown chilly and Genos tended to overplay how much of anything was really needed when in protective mind-set. And it was comfortable in the end, she admitted, snuggling, blinking to shake the sleepiness away. There was a paper pinned to her pillow, possibly an explanation why the cyborg was missing. A sneaky hand moving out of the blanket to grab it proved there was not much of a thermic shock waiting when she chose to abandon the snug, almost sleeping-bag-like construction.

“Awake?” Saitama asked, voice low, giving an explanation to the small noises coming from the kitchen. He placed a blackberry milk carton next to her cocoon, sitting with a groan, legs crossing, leaning on one arm, taking a gulp of his mug’s contents before putting it down, poking her bun until the messy threads cascaded undone, smiling as she looked up huffy and sleepy.

“Why are you shirtless?” Mayu spoke up after a moment of moving hair away from her eyes, staring and shuffling to sit up, glancing at his face before her line of sight lowered again of its own volition.

Saitama was prone to two things that made people less aware of his actually sculpted physique. As in magazine worthy muscle display. Baggy clothes and bored slouching. But a bared torso was at the moment properly displayed along with the arms to match. It was still paired with the loose blue and white stripes of the pyjama pants but those were less view-blocking than a sweater.

“Want me to put a shirt on?” Saitama asked with an impish smile, clearly noticing.

“No.” Nibbling her lower lip Mayu answered, smiling, glancing up for a moment, bobbing her head to the side.

“Just came home, took a shower and found this.” He gestured towards yet another paper tossed amidst hers. Possibly just a reminder to check on her. “Any idea where Genos went?”

Mayu glanced at the note she was holding, breaking away from the staring, opening it, frowning.

“Something about giant cockroaches.” She deciphered, shuddering. Most things when «giant» was added tended to be bad. Or just nasty. “Any sales today?”

“I checked your fridge.” Saitama took another gulp, opening her laptop, opening the news. Mayu’s lack of TV was one of the points that made him more accepting of the still too early idea of breaking down the wall. But the computer when not in use for writing served the same purpose. “Between us we have enough to hold down the fort until the end of the week sales. Where are you going?”

“Shower.” Mayu answered, gathering new underwear and house clothes in the shape of a mint-green T-shirt and ice-blue shorts. “Get things ready for planning.” Saitama seemed to have settled for her apartment that day.

“Do you think I should patrol more often?” Mayu asked as the news reports showed Genos incinerating a group of creepy-looking crawlies, separating the flyers of the incoming sales. “Or at all?” She murmured watching as the cyborg walked away from the roasted pile of roaches with little
more than thorn clothes and a few scratched on the metal of his arms and chest. “Done.” She had organized the stacks by store.

In five stores within reasonable range there were morning sales, afternoon sales and all day sales. All had timed sales for premium quality items. There were limited stock sales and a few things that had a maximum per person. And the bulk of the profitable ones were happening Friday. So Mayu grabbed the papers of the first store and started checking times and items, circling them for price comparison.

“Genos brought that up again?” Saitama looked up from the list he was writing, blinking, stretching. The shopping goals had to be clear for maximum efficiency. Especially when several of the timed sales overlapped. It was showing plainly as Mayu drew a schedule.

“Sort of.” Mayu sighed, letting go of the milk, playing with the straw. “Considerations about the ranking system, its faults and the advancement parameters. Was working on the catalogue.”

“You felt guilty for not caring about ranks or rising up for the sake of moving up.” Saitama gave his impression on the straw fiddling. “Why are you a hero?” Mayu looked up, placing to flyers side by side. The timed sales overlapped by twenty minutes.

“To keep from being experimented on.” She answered tartly, mostly jokingly, nose crinkling. Then a chortle broke the frown. “Upper rank does mean better pay but if I move I move if I stay I stay.” Mayu knew she didn’t have a set answer beyond safety, need and enjoyment. Control was what she once needed most but that could hardly be pinpointed as the reason why she had stayed.

“Not your dream.” Saitama plainly pointed out the obvious. “You are a writer, right? So being a hero is a hobby. You are not doing this for the recognition or to grow stronger. And a hobby is to be done for fun, when you want to do it.” The sale situation could be resolved if they grabbed the advertised items ahead of the start and went to pay as the sale was occurring. “If the situation calls for it you never ran. You just don’t rush headlong or look for trouble.”

“So what kind of hero am I?” Mayu asked, curiosity taking the place of the mild discomfort, tapping her mechanical pencil against the schedule.

“The kind that knows when to step back and let others step up but does not back down when needed.” Saitama considered, finishing his task. Vegetables, meat, fish, soup stocks, cupboard staples, cleaning supplies. “Why are you writing this down?!” Mildly concerned he stood up, circling the table as Mayu picked a new piece of paper and transcribed his words.

“So I can give it to Genos and make it law.” Fun… The word choice caught her attention a moment later as Saitama sat down next to her, groaning to express his frustration, perusing the flyers once more now that they were marked and divided. Mayu stopped, glancing at him, tilting until she was resting against his shoulder. Saitama was immediately warm and smooth feeling. And he always tilted his shoulder back enough for her to just slide down further into his chest, cuddling his side. Mayu wasn’t sure he noticed but neither had she until recently. “How was your patrol?”

“Unchallenging.” It was a partial complaint.

“But you still do it even though you are no longer C-Class and need quotas. I know you don’t even report most of the encounters.” Which was at odds with his claim of just wanting recognition. And what he had done with the Sea King’s defeat and the backlash that was still crowding the forums. And when faced with the doubts the examiners themselves had placed on his file, about cheating, about coasting on Genos’ achievements… Saitama didn’t care. Not anymore it seemed. “You just keep doing it. The fights may be boring but you do it because you are a hero.”
“You say such embarrassing things. The two of you.” Saitama grumbled looking down, growing a bit red.

“I can quote too. «Sensei is…»” Mayu teased, seeing his mood lift into a look of absolute alarm, turning, gripping both her arms, red all over, pulling her abruptly.

The desperate kiss of prevention of further embarrassment was blunt and hasty. Mayu chortle was muffled by their pressed lips and a slight struggle to breathe through the amusement. Separating did very little for her laughter.

Mayu attempted to calm down, pressing her fingers against her lips, taking a few deep breaths, glancing at Saitama. He was looking down, face and head red. There was a smile tugging at his lips as well, pulling them into a sheepish smile. He was still holding her arms, keeping her partially hoisted in the air. Mayu extended her legs, pushing her feet against the floor, pushing herself up, leaning over Saitama, kissing the top of his bald head.

“You are adorable.” Mayu murmured sweetly, slacking her legs, falling, straddling his lap.

“Shut up.” Saitama answered in a grumble, letting go, circling her waist, pulling her closer.

“Sure, sure…” her amused answer was followed by a sharp prickling against his skin as her hands roamed over his back and she complied through yet another press of their mouths, leaving nothing but the sound of the droning news, their mingling breaths and the sizzle of lightning triggering the occasional SPD in the appliances in the room.
[Target Acquired] The machine beeped to life, systems linking, the mechanical body aligning, moving from sleeper to standby mode, as the sensors picked up the programmed readings.

[Objective: Capture] It waited for the signal and orders.

[Engage] Standby shifted to approach configuration.

A robotic thing slammed into the pavement, cracking and cratering it, dropping out of the sky like hail. Big, round robotic hail. Not even freak weather events had grown quite that extreme.

Mayu yipped, hopping backwards, startled. Her reaction was mild when compared to the panicked people now scrambling and screaming around her, running down the wide street, into the stores along the way, wherever they felt it would be the safest place to be.

Sirens rang after a moment in a wordless warning. A store owner or someone else had contacted the Association. There was no level determined yet but people needed the sign anyway. At least those that were not close enough to see the hunk of metal.

“Ooo boy…” She whispered as her breathing settled, rebalancing on both feet, reaching for the storage cell, unclipping and tossing it in the bag, putting it down against a window display, sparking.

It was much bigger than any of the others. Not that it was a hard assessment to make when six thick metallic tentacles were coming out of a sphere the size of a human supported by four thick legs coming out of a hole trice as big.

Two consecutive blasts charged up fast and shot out of her hands, the energy shushing the alert chime.

The basic attacks fizzled on the hard shell, dissipating.

Grimacing at that turn Mayu ducked, avoiding an incoming tentacle whipping towards her, curling on the empty space left by her crouch. Her relieved sigh was short lived as the thing came down, whipping from her left.

Scrambling to stand and running to the right she tried to charge up, go beyond the averages, wisps moving over her arms, where she stepped.

Was it immune or just resistant to electricity…

Lighting arched, tangling in a barrier against the tentacle that slammed right in front of her, cutting her escape path. Pebbles shattered into dust against the electrical charge.

Peeking from behind her raised arms she unleashed a blast, curving it, chaining the plasma into a long line of strikes along the metal extension.

Mayu jumped, avoiding the sweeping motion of another appendage, aiming to grip her legs, grabbing the skirt, pulling it up, out of the way of her knees.
Mom had always said that if she wanted to run and play and still wear a skirt she should wear something more than the panties. Winter and tights were a given. Spandex shorts were the summer and warmer weather option.

Feinting to the right and dashing to the left allowed her to up the charge.

[Warning: Numbers Climbing] The display within flashed red.

[Warning: Target Faster] The calculations were off.

[Data Incomplete] The drones that had made it back were wrong.

[Recalculating]

Whatever it was it was still a machine. Mayu considered, hiding behind a car for an instant. Sparking positive always wreaked havoc with systems even if they were protected. The machine picked up the structure easily, tossing it away to give chase.

The building wall was slashed as she managed to roll away from another attempted grip, flopping on the ground with a groan, pulling the skirt down, peeking up as the ball turned on it too many legs, dashing for her, slamming more cars out of the way, against walls, against other vehicles. As much as she liked the sparkly blue shattered glass pattern of today’s shorts they should not be out of the skirt.

The problem with changing polarity was the need to build up some substantial lightning and then reverse it by implosion and let it grow. But whatever charge she mustered was being zapped away in instants because there were too many arms to dodge and deal with. Some of them were showing burn marks, meaning whatever material it used as an isolator could be worn away by persistence.

They coordinated abruptly, moving against her from all sides.

Mayu looked all around for a way to scamper out of that, defensive reflexes kicking in, when the shadow of the attack loomed over her, holding her breath, curled over herself. And she found herself unable to breathe for a moment, feeling her whole body heat up. A gasp brought air back into her lungs, tinged with ozone.

Opening her eyes she found herself by the lamppost, away from the robot, near the shoe shop. Blinking for a few moments, sitting on the sidewalk creativity provided an answer along with a little happy chortle.

If she had just turned herself into lighting for a small burst of time… seemed probable as the area around her landing and starting point was damaged, as of a strike had occurred… Dodging and traveling issues seemed to be resolved. Could be if she learned to control that and got away from that thing scanning around for her in what seemed to be robotic confusion.

[Skill Not Registered] The warning flashed again.

[Data Incomplete] It flagged once more.

[Target Not Found]

[Scanning]

The scanner beeped.
It turned.

Standing Mayu gathered lightning, starting the implosion.

The machine emitted a startling shrill sound, legs flexing, hopping upwards.

Mayu’s eyes widened, startled, gaze darting to an empty spot of the road, holding her breath, closing eyes, testing the theory.

There was a rumbling of impact with nothing felt on her part but heat and breathlessness.

Peeking, and breathing in urgently, Mayu found herself in the place she had aimed for with cracked and burnt pavement and the robot in a crater across the road.

With a giddy clap, two hops and a little bottom wiggle of victory she resumed sparking. Seemed whatever she did to do that “lightning hopping” left charge around her body, brighter wisps. Enough to ball it.

The machine got out of its hole.

There were crushed parts on the outer coating.

Maybe it was sufficient to conduit.

Thunder roared around Mayu, the ground shattering and melting in the high temperature and sound generation. She smiled, clapping hard, triggering the shift. Lightning burst around her, electricity and pressure pushing back the tentacles that tried to reach, extending. The wisps sharpened, growing thicker, making everything electric around react, responding, overloading, shattering. It was hard to move amidst the electricity and shaped plasma.

She just needed to keep concentrating the energy that could be shaped while the wilder surges danced around her.

Wait for the thing to come.

It would do just that.

It had been programmed for it.

It did, the arms moving, opening the clamps for capture, seeing her still on the same spot.
“The Hero Tank Top Tiger enters the scene!” The C-Class hero dashed, too invested in being a hero to see that stepping between a hunk of metal and a live wire was a bad idea, tackling the ball.

Muscle mass vs metal had a predictable outcome. It was cringe-worthy and painful looking.

Unfortunately the robot could think.

The tossed hero was aimed at her.

Mayu barely had time to hit the ground, dissipating the lightning as best and as fast as she could. Hero or not he was unlikely to survive slamming into her in a positive charge storm.

Mild electrocution was the best outcome of the moment.

For the robot the goals had been achieved.

[Target Nullified]

[Intruder Nullified]

[Reengage Capture Sequence]

Mayu groaned, pushing the hulking, unconscious, and now slightly darkened and charred, muscle man off her, trying to get to her feet.

Metal slammed her down, closing around her waist, extracting a pained shout from the girl as she was hoisted up.

Legs dangling she pushed against the thing, trying to slip out, sparking, charging, lighting dancing around her, shielding, swirling, striking.

The machine barely reacted.

Holding her breath and trying to zap out was not working. She was touching the insulator material.

[Capture Complete]

[Secure Target]
A robot attack is ongoing on Z-City’s South shopping district. The Hero Association is still trying to determine the threat level but it seems newcomer Aida Mayu, currently B-Class rank 80 was on the scene and immediately engaged the threat. Civilians are to stay away or leave the premises as soon as they can. Saitama looked up from his manga, his attention to the news shifting from idle to sharp, watching the images of Mayu hopping and zapping about, following the bounce of her skirt. She seemed to have everything under control.

The book was put down as he watched Mayu charge up.

The image started to distort, crackling, creating some panicked comments of the reporters that didn’t understand why the equipment was suddenly going wild. She was ready to blast it down along with everything even remotely electronic in a kilometre radius if he bothered to listen to Genos’ explanations.

We got word that C-class rank 13 Tank Top Tiger is close by and announced his intention of helping out. The journalist informed chirpily. And then that big guy appeared.

Forced to cut the flow on account of the human projectile Mayu was bowled over.

Using that moment of stunned immobility and suppressed lightning the machine caught her, tossing her sparking and struggling into its sphere body.

“Genos!” Saitama jumped to his feet, tumbling towards the hero suit. “Mayu got abducted by a robot!” The shout was short and abrupt as he fought the fabric’s unwillingness to get worn.

“What?” The cyborg walked in from the veranda where he had been hanging clothes, almost ripping the curtain apart.

Mayu groaned in frustration upside down on the slippery dark insides of the sphere. She blew messy strands of statically fluffed hair out of the way rolling to a sitting position, pushing the skirt out of the way.

Looking around and blinking didn’t fix her sight so she just had to believe all was dark.

There was a wobbling motion around her.

The metal felt cold under her hands.

Of course it would be protected in a manner similar to the outside. At least it felt like what she had pushed against while trying to get out of its grip.

Pouting she crossed her arms, slumping down against the curved walls, legs stretching, the ballet flats dropping from her heels, hanging from her toes.

Well… no longer under attack meant she had time to test some theories.

Sparking Mayu started, straightening, shoes back on her feet properly.
Wisps illuminated the chamber.

The same dark coating, as expected.

Lightning burned hotter than the sun’s surface. But a natural strike was so fast that the temperature wouldn’t register as such unless a machine measured it and even so it would be hard to keep up with the dissipation of energy.

Scorch marks were already cutting through the coating made by the wild tendrils splashing and fizzling around. She clapped, changing the polarity idly.

Natural was too fast. But she could just keep going.

It wasn’t a matter of electric power either. That was still dissolving against the walls, lingering in the parts that had melted away.

Safely imprisoned within the enemy with no need to stop, hop, dodge, flee or think about strategy and no reason to do it either.

Heat was building with the charge.

Sound roared, reverberating against the metal.

The things movement seemed to have slowed down into a jerky sway.

Mayu chortled as the sound seemed to the first thing taking effect.

Cracks were spreading on the thick shell, rattling her inside. And where that weakness spread heat began to take its toll, melting the fissured edges, the isolator and the metal itself.

The expansion due to the temperature was also making the structure brittle.

The machine’s distressed beeping became fully audible beneath the thunder as she placed her palm against a wall, the isolator melting, dripping beneath her fingers, leaving only nice conducive metal beneath, sizzling and bubbling, primed for the positive blast.

Shaping and slamming the plasma through the weak spot seemed to be enough to send it over the limits.

It stopped moving.

The heavy thud that reverberated inside when it slammed down knocked Mayu to her knees, patting around for a way to keep her balance. Still storming, the charge barely spent but back to negative polarity she waited until it was motionless before kneeling straight, staring at the weakened walls around her.

The air was getting too heavy to breathe with ozone and fumes.

Coughing, panting, feeling the sudden bite of breathlessness and exhaustion Mayu sparked once more, white light filling the area, eyes closing, the lightning swaying and sphering around her, shielding, expanding.

With an intake of breath lighting roared outwards, accompanied of immediate thunder, the plasma unshaped, wild, meant to devastate the area.

The bot fell apart around her.
Debris scattered through the road.

Unfortunately some hit the cars and windows.

Fortunately no one was lingering near enough to be harmed.

Fresh air came flooding although it was accompanied by the scent of burning.

Tentacles fell down, unsupported, cracking the burnt road.

Mayu looked around, trying to find her bearings.

It hadn’t gotten too far down the street.

Actually she could still see the prone body of that poor hero guy if she squinted.

The lightning had attracted out of the blue strikes if she was interpreting the surroundings right. A few fulgurites were raised up. Scorch marks peppered the road and the area.

There was a drone hovering about.

Sighing Mayu gathered a new spark and blasted it down, still standing on the cracked shell.

The hit was clean and hard and enough to disable it.

Unfortunate it was also enough to make her lose balance, landing on the road with the arms crossed to protect her head.

Groaning and sitting up she spotted man on a bike, approaching fast. Mumen Rider was easily recognizable. And being in Z-City of course he would come to try to help. It was his beat after all. Still that did not meant that he could barge in the fight as well. Fight that was over anyway but…

“Wait!” Mayu warned, waving her arms. “Don’t get close yet!” She called out.

“Is it still dangerous?” He stopped, parking the bike, rattling it, staying where he had stopped, heeding her advice.

“No. I am.” Mayu chortled, smiling, patting her hair down, still sitting amidst the debris.

“Are you alright?” The question was sweet, his tone a bit puzzled by the admission of what was going on.

“Yes.” She nodded, still smiling, trying to be reassuring. “Can you get my bag over there and see if that guy is ok?” Mumen Rider nodded and walked towards the end of the street, where the fight had started. People were slowly peeking from their hiding spots. The warnings had stopped blaring. “I think I managed to get low enough to be nonlethal but…” Mayu called out, turning, watching as the C-Class number one returned with her rose-shaped powder blue bag.

“He is unconscious but alive.” Mumen Rider tossed her the bag carefully crouching nearby, watching over her, staring at the wreckage around.

“Oh… good.” Clipping the cell back into the earring produced an immediate chirp of completion. Mayu dug for another, replacing the full cell, getting the same chirp barely seconds after, prompting the search for yet another crystal. Carefully she tried to lower the charge. The third was filled just a bit slower and the fourth returned to the normal level of absorption. “Thank you.”
“I just fetched you bag.” He smiled, nodding, standing again.

If there was no need for him he should go back to patrol.

“No. For J-City.” Mayu clarified. “Your arm seems to have healed nicely.”

“I… I see.” He smiled a bit. “Thanks.”

There was nothing but debris and the Association cleaning crew when Saitama and Genos got to the shopping district, scouring the streets in search for the battle.

The cyborg headed towards the men and women, asking for the information on the destroyed robot to be sent to him, using the S-Class ranking to his advantage.

Saitama looked around, searching for a fluffed up pink head amidst the reporters and onlookers.

“Mayu are you hurt?” The question echoed in the small apartment along with the slamming and cracking of the door.

“No, I’m…” Mayu answered, turning, letting go of the pan she had just taken off the heat, smiling slightly, recognizing the voice before yipping as Saitama picked her up, holding her under the armpits, upright above the floor, facing Genos.

“Scan!” Saitama asked bluntly, ignoring her wriggling protest.

“Scrapped knees and bruised arms, waist and legs. No broken bones.” Genos approached, eyes glowing. “Heart rate is up, the lightning under control.” Mayu pouted, glaring. “Are you sure you are well?”

“Yes.” Mayu crossed her arms, sighing, exasperated. Saitama finally allowed her down on her own feet. “I have these for you.” She offered the storage cells to Genos.

The cyborg groaned, pulling her against him, hugging her tightly, eyes closing, sighing in relief. She had not been at the scene or sleeping in any of the stores around. The news said nothing beyond the destruction of the robot and referred to the incident in broad strokes along with so many others.

“Were you looking for me?” Mayu returned the embrace, hesitating, tone softening, rubbing her hand over the cyborg’s back, leaving a little charge behind, trying to reassure him. Saitama nodded. “I came home. Made dinner. I didn’t think…” Didn’t think they had seen or heard about the fight until the afternoon news. And by that time it would have been clearly resolved. “I’m sorry this worried you… I sent a text too.”

That had been what had resolved and rerouted the search.

The text had been marked from three hours earlier, gone unheard and unanswered in concern.
Mechanical menaces and Genos were a bad idea together along with someone taken away. Saitama placed his hands on their heads, ruffling blond and pink hair, looking very serious.

“We agreed that the wall is coming down.” He informed her.

“Leave my wall alone.” Mayu called out, trying to untangle from a reluctant Genos.
“Too close to home, huh?” Mayu asked, placing the hot chocolate with small marshmallows bobbing on its surface in front of Genos and on the table for Saitama, returning to fetch hers, petting the cyborg’s arm as she sat down. “But let me ask you a question before the interrogation.” Mayu avoided looking at the suddenly big room they had been clearing, vacuuming and sweeping for the last hour after the poor wall came down. “Would you react this way if the one taken was Saitama?” There was a gap that needed floorboards and coarse edges that needed to be redone.

“Yes.” Genos barely hesitated, staring at her. That was a bit surprising. Both the speed and the earnest tone of his response. “It was not about ability, training or power.” Genos began to explain, reaching for the cup, breaking eye contact, fidgeting. “I saw you vanish inside something that was equipped to fight and suppress your powers specifically. In a similar circumstance I would worry for Sensei as much.”

“Alright…” Mayu sipped her cocoa, letting go of the nagging suspicion her gender had anything to do with the rescue attempt. Although if it was to score heroic boyfriend points she could turn that into «flattered». “What’s your excuse?” She teased Saitama as Genos drank, looking less troubled.

“You’re squishy and non-rebuild-able.” Saitama attempted, chewing on a marshmallow, looking sheepishly at her, making deliberate eye contact.

“Fine, fine.” Mayu chortled, amused. “Ask away.”

“When did this start?” Genos produced a notebook and the mechanical pencil, readying a new entry.

“Just after I joined the Association.” Mayu’s eyes narrowed as she thought back.

“Always robots, correct?” The page was quickly being filled, the graphite screeching as it scratched the paper almost too quickly to continue in one piece. “Drone-like.”

“First they seemed harmless. Then they got annoying. Then aggressive. I started zapping them down.”

“So they’re stalkers.” Saitama stated in all seriousness.

“I guess.” Mayu shrugged, catching a marshmallow.

“I had a stalker a while ago.” Still keeping his serious look Saitama leaned forward, elbows on the table, resting his chin on his hand.

Genos choked on the cocoa, eyes widening, trying to conceal both the cough and reaction behind the mug’s edge. Predictably hot chocolate was dripping around.

“How did that end?” Mayu frowned, reaching for Genos, taking his mug as the inner mechanisms whirred, attempting to correct the mishap and reroute the drink, patting his back, concerned.

“I punched the guy and warned them that if they want to come after me just come. Directly, head on.” Shrugging Saitama picked his mug again. “Are you ok Genos?”

“Yes Sensei…” the cyborg wheezed.

“Breathe carefully now.” She advised, rubbing his back still. “Can’t say they aren’t doing that
already.”

“True… So what else?”

“You did see a few I scrapped. I didn’t think much of it amidst the crooks, mysterious beings, monsters and usual mayhem of a normal day out.” Swirling the cocoa she remembered another detail. “Though I did notice that every time one escaped the next ones were harder to bring down.”

“Any idea of who they might be?” Genos was once more in control of his voice, sponging chocolate away from the notebook before resuming the writing stance.


“I’m waiting for the reports on that machine.” Genos tapped the notebook. “And we will destroy the bastard.”

“No need to get overexcited.” Mayu smiled and glanced at the TV. The images bounced back on the screen with the news, displaying the whole fight, screen distortions and all.

“These attacks do make it easier for you to train.” Genos relented a bit on his stance, closing the notes, watching the scene. “It’s impressive.”

“That is a lot more lightning than I was expecting.” Mayu murmured, blushing a bit, watching the last part, what she had not been able to see. Blasts and strikes all around the machine, hitting the earth and the machine. Likely attracted and/or formed by the heavy charges she was sparking inside.

“Looked awesome though.” Saitama commented.

Genos woke up with a gasp, vitals flaring alerts as if he experienced extreme stress, breathing shallow, staring at the ceiling, trying to calm down, hands closing, deactivating the blasters. Everything was quiet as the cobwebs of a faint dream remained, lingered.

No proximity alarms had been triggered.

No signs of organic life.

No pulses of mechanical presences.

Sensei was sleeping, covers askew, flat on his back on the futon to his right.

Mayu’s futon was there, between them but she was gone. A faint light was coming from the other side of the now big room, in the nook created by the part of the wall that was structurally important for the building’s stability. It was accompanied by the tapping of keys. She was there and working.

Reassured he sat up, covering his face with both hands, hunching, focusing on fighting the last vague feelings of pain and uneasiness, trying to keep quiet as well, to disturb no one. It happened from time to time.
“Genos?” Mayu called softly. He must have made some sound the cyborg thought, eyes closing. “Sorry if I woke you. This narcolepsy thing is silly when it’s supposed to make me fall asleep but gives me some nights of the worst kind of insomnias…” Her joking, hushed tone as she walked back into view was dropped abruptly as Mayu caught sight of him, rushing to his side, kneeling between his bent legs, taking his face into her hands. “Sweetie?” He didn’t open his eyes, gripping her wrists hard for an instant, as if making sure she was there.

“I’m… I’ll go patrol.” The cyborg let go, starting to move, to stand.

Mayu pulled him down by the waistband of Saitama’s borrowed pyjamas, unbalancing Genos back into the futon, flattening her palms against the metallic plates of his chest, keeping him down.

“Stay still.” She asked, voice still quiet, trying to keep the disturbance to the minimum. Not that it would make much of a difference to Sensei. Her thumb gently wiped away the first hints of oil gathering in his eyes. “We’re here.” Mayu kissed his forehead, standing, walking away, turning off the light. Wisps sparked on occasion, escaping the absorption mechanics, leaving a pale light as she moved, returning, hugging Genos, curling around him as if he was a sleeping pillow, pulling the covers over them, making sure there was a comfortable cocoon around, sparking, warming him. “Bad dreams?” Only when he relaxed did she ask.

Sometimes the fear only came later, after everything had happened, after thinking about what had been done and the *what ifs*.

It would pass.

Fear would go away in time whether it was faced or assuaged.

Dismiss, ignore or crush it.

Move forward and leave it behind.

That made it small.

That made it vanish.

Sometimes it took over.

But from that courage could come.

Take on the challenge.

It was just a moment.

But it was best to face it or share it than to let it fester and grow.

“I think so.” Unable to explain Genos turned, keeping her close. The way they were he could see Sensei as well. “Mayu…”

“Rest sweetie. We’re here.” Mayu murmured reassuringly.
Chapter 13

Suzuna’s J-City penthouse was huge but that was not the only reason why they used it as headquarters. The chef was another big part of it. Cakes, sandwiches, snacks and drinks of all kind peppered the table amidst papers, colourful pens and sticky notes. Nostalgia was yet another part as they had all shared the apartment throughout the university years, in happy semi-freeloding. It was also the birthplace of their writing project.

Proofreading was the all-day event that gathered the group at least once a month at the place of the person whose obscenely vast wealth made their self-publishing possible. Mayu had physically missed the last two months due to the high voltage. Video chats and mails were good but cake did not travel electronically. Until the doctor’s earring had arrived Mayu just felt insecure about control.

“Congratulations by the way.” Suzuna mentioned, turning the page of Nanako’s pink romantic story, reaching for a chocolate macaron. Her usually neat straight black fringe was caught in a bunch tilted to the left to stay away from her eyes. The rest of her hair was pulled into a pair of short and spiky pigtails. The grey t-shirt she was wearing over frayed jeans showed the snarling tiger of the ROAR metal band.

“On what?” Mayu asked, peeking over the story she was dealing with, one of Tsubaki’s thriller style tales around the theme Hoard. Her lemon dress was draped around her crossed legs, the three-quarter sleeves making her feel a little less conscious about the bruises left by the bot and the slightly colder temperature. The weather was weird those days.

“You got a hero name, didn’t you know?” Hana looked up too, proofreading Mayu’s story of fantasy, love and larceny. The scent of bitter black coffee surrounded her, strong enough to give everyone in the room a rush, coming from a mug that was only an inch short of a bucket.

“I did?” Frowning Mayu lowered the papers. “Didn’t get the letter yet though.”

“Check it.” Tsubaki in shorts and crop top and tartan hoodie used her foot to push the laptop her way. “It sounds badass.” She announced, returning to Suzuna’s desolate apocalypse.

“Now I’m disappointed.” Consulting the Association page Mayu chortled. “I really liked Sparkler.”

“The way they name stuff you’re lucky you didn’t become The Pink Polka Dot.” Tsubaki teased.

“Aren’t you doing the Catalogue too?” Nanako asked making pink annotations on Hana’s drama, adjusting her metallic-lilac glasses.

“I am.” Mayu nodded, reaching for the spiced carrot cake. “Not too time consuming. Good money.”

“We will use that to boost sales too.” Hana mentioned, sipping her coffee. “People hear Hero and buy.

“Amai Mask capitalizes on that like crazy.” Suzuna nodded in agreement. “Time to makes us a third fortune.” She cackled in exaggerated glee.

“On other hero news how are your boys?” Tsubaki smiled and sat up.

“It got awkward this morning with the lack of wall.” Mayu mentioned, reaching for the chocolate milk.
“They knocked down the wall?” Nanako covered her mouth, eyes wide.

“I didn’t tell you?” Mayu frowned, rethinking the previous night. No… she had been working but Genos waking up had interrupted her before sending the mail and because of the clean-up there had been no chatting before bedtime. Or at least what would have been bedtime if not for narcolepsy saying you slept too many naps so today you don’t sleep. “All right… they panicked when they saw the fight on TV and went looking for me. Didn’t check the phone and wandered about for hours convinced I had been abducted.” Hana made a sympathetic sound, nodding. “So when they came home they were in a state of panic and had agreed that I needed more protection than privacy. So now there is no wall and we have a one room apartment instead of a study.” With the extra luxury of two kitchenettes and two bathrooms.

“You slept together.” Tsubaki stated.

“Three futons.” Mayu defended. “And I didn’t sleep.” She paused. “No. No. No. Down.” Mayu tried to correct the obvious way that declaration could go. Tsubaki was laughing.

“Do you want to?” Hana asked quietly.

“Too early and I don’t think Genos has the right upgrades.” Mayu defended looking around. “War-built.”

“I’m getting the catalogue.” Suzuna stood up.

“I’m not buying a sex bot to strip for part.” Mayu called out as her friend marched to the bedroom.

“Silly you can buy the parts as replacements.” Suzuna answered, returning with a glossy, thick book. “You two browse the catalogue, see what you like and then installation if fairly simple…”

“Suzuna!” Nanako called out, blushing.

“Mayu is trying to run away.” Hana mentioned.

“I locked the door.” Tsubaki smiled. There was a loud frustrated groan from the entrance and a rattling of the double doors. “There was no way we would not question her like you did me when I settled down with Tomoe.”

Mayu returned and sat down, lips pressed together.

“Fine. I haven’t been with anyone in a year or so.” She admitted, untying her hair. “Saitama has been single for the last three-to-four years and Genos doesn’t even know if he ever had sex before. I’m not sure… we haven’t talked about that yet.” Mayu sighed. “Let me borrow the catalogue.”

“So why was it awkward?” Hana rerouted the conversation.

“Underwear choosing. I guess it’s different from just wearing it for some reason. Then they got tense at every sound outside.” Mayu rubbed her cheeks, trying to dispel the embarrassment Waking was, however, different from whenever the boys joined in in one unplanned nap or other. Saitama woke groggy and grouchy, perking up with green tea. Genos was a disoriented mess of clicks and bed-hair before he focused and offered to make the aforementioned green tea. “Anyhow they went to meet Silver Fang. His dojo is nearby and it seems he has an interest in Saitama.” Genos said it was going on since the incident with the meteor. The old man called them, trying to make them join the dojo but always offering something in return. Meat was usually what made Sensei more amenable to visiting, he said.
A roar in the distance broke the conversation. Smoke covered the horizon. There was a huge dark shape on the distance. Sirens started to blare. Mayu approached the windows, staring. That way was A-City. There were no spoken warnings yet. Opening her cell and checking on the boys' location gave her a knotted gut. A-City. While she had felt the tracker app was overkill on Genos part… Gently she took off the storage cell, looking for her flats, picking up the bag.

“When the warnings tell you what this is about please be safe.” Mayu asked, opening the window, looking down, seeing the street very far, gripping the candy-shaped bag.

Grimacing she jumped off, zapping, charging up, breath held, lightning hopping, vanishing in a flash of light and roaring thunder.
Chapter 14

Silver Fang didn't have anything to actually show but a sales' pitch, as Sensei put it, in the shape of yet another martial art demonstration. Not that Saitama-sensei was surprised or impressed. After all the old man had been showing off and trying to get them to join for a while now. Genos no longer felt the need to sit formally although he still listened with a serious look. It was of no use attempting to follow the motions as their defensive nature was not what he needed.

The last disciple left took offence at their disinterest, challenging, quickly finding himself severely outclassed. Really. All Genos did was stretch his arm and hoist him up a little. Which begot the question of why he was the last and only one when the dojo had a reputation.

It seemed that one guy had gone on a rampage, crippling other students.

Out of fear everyone but the shrimp had quit despite Bang's severe disciplining and expulsion of the troublemaker.

That perked Sensei's curiosity for a bit.

And trigger another little angry soliloquy from the disciple that also did not like the lack of recognition.

This time Bang scolded him, acknowledging sensei's strength and ability, earning Genos' approval. After all the self-inflicted damage to sensei's reputation it was good to see that some were not so easily fooled.

A panicked and severely winded Association staff member barged into the dojo, calling for Silver Fang with an official request to attend a meeting at A-City headquarters, extending the same request to Genos when his wheezing allowed him to see that the old martial artist was not alone.

Faced such urgency it seemed logical to ask for Sensei's presence.

It would have been faster to leave the dojo by foot and sprint to A-City but the glasses guy was in such a state of anxiety he needed to have the heroes on his car, in sight, and driven to headquarters post-haste. He lost no time, opening the way with the official announcements and driving like speed limits didn't matter. It did curb the possibility of getting lost.

From the underground parking area they took a lift that stopped where the hero meeting would take place. The guy that had guided them there closed the door after them, wishing them good luck.

"Oh? Silver Fang." Hearing the door close a hero that had just arrived turned, dressed in samurai clothes and a red cloak, arms tucked into his sleeves.

"Atomic Samurai. It's been a while." Bang greeted a bit more cheerfully than he had been on the car ride, even showing a small smile under the moustache.

"I knew you would come." Atomic Samurai shrugged, biting his straw, examining the other presences. "And this is the Cyborg Genos" Easy to recognize not only because of his look but also because he was obviously new. "And… who is this?" He asked, drawing a blank.

"This is B-Class hero Saitama." Silver Fang introduced him with a bit of oddly placed pride. "His exceptional talent will one day place him on top of the S-Class, I'm sure. So I've asked him to come."
So the old man saw potential in those two if he was willing to be seen with a B-Class. As Genos was already S-Class he could only be with Silver Fang to hone his skills.

"Hi, middle-aged hero dude." While not the most polite way to address someone of an upper class it did show self-confidence and will.

"No handshakes." Still Atomic Samurai had to abide by his principles. "I only acknowledge the strong. Once you reach S-Class I'll greet you properly." Genos' eyes narrowed. The man was not dismissing Sensei outright but that was to be expected from someone who had not seen him in action. He did leave a promise. "Besides I'm not middle-aged yet. I'm only thirty seven." Addressing the second part of that greeting Atomic Samurai left with a self assured scoff.

*Thirty seven isn't middle age? I had no idea.* Saitama considered, frowning. Well… he did remember being younger and think people his age were old so maybe it was an actual thing. But that old man was an old man, he considered as Bang resumed walking towards the conference room.

"Hey! Who brought a B-Class nobody along?" A shrill demanding tone cut through the hallway. There was a small girl in a black dress glaring at them, legs wide in an aggressive pose, gesturing with a appalled frown on her face. "Don't you think it's beneath us?" Bang simply ignored the question, proceeding. Finding no grip the green haired girl turned to Saitama with renewed scorn. "And even if you were invited a polite person would decline the obvious pity offer. The nerve." Tilting her chin up she continued with derision. Saitama blinked, confused. "I bet you're here for some creepy reason like getting closer to us S-Class." Finishing she pointed, grimacing. "You disgust me. Leave."

"What's with this sassy lost child?" Saitama asked, pointing back at the tiny bratty curly haired girl, confused.

"That is Tatsumaki, S-Class. Rank 2 Tornado of Terror." Genos glanced at sensei, calming his temper as he seemed to be unaffected by her ranting, providing the identification.

"That?! I'm not a thing!" Tatsumaki shouted, hands closing into fists, shaking them in the air, huffing, arms crossing.

"She is an Esper, defeating monsters with her psychic powers." Finishing Genos glanced at the room. "It seems everyone is here. We should join them."

Sensei nodded followed.

"Hey! Stop ignoring me!" following were the annoyed shrieks of the number two hero.

The S-Class was looking around in suspicion of each other, asking questions as to why they were there or just focusing on attempted mind reading of those sitting around the shiny holographic-display table. There were no windows and no lights other than the able itself. There display showed nothing but statistics and numbers, beeping and changing occasionally.

"Can I have some tea?" All in all most were taking that situation as seriously as Saitama was when he requested the beverage.

A little roundish bot complied to his request quickly as the door hissed open and then closed.

Three association members entered the room, all formal. A portly big-nosed guy and two thin guys, one bearded, one with glasses.
"My apologies for the delay." The portly one started, looking grim. "We can't contact Metal Knight and Blast can't be reached. No sense in waiting any longer so let's begin this meeting." He took a deep breath, looking around, making sure he had everybody's attention. "My name is Sitch and the Association assigned me the task of briefing you. You were called here because amidst the heroes you are the best of the best. What we ask is that you save the earth." Saitama sipped his tea. Sounded interesting so far. "However even with you S-Class skills there is no guarantee of survival. Walking away at this point is also an act of courage and we would like to think of it as insurance that there will be someone left to fight if the worst comes to pass. If you chose to leave this meeting you rank will not suffer for it. Those who stay and hear out our request will not be allowed to leave until the briefing is over and a decision reached." Mayu had promised them a barbecue dinner. She said she knew a place. Hopefully this thing wouldn't take too long. Missing dinner was not good for the body. "Are you willing to hear me out?"

The silent pause was cut by the rough voice of the guy with the black pouf and a bat.

"Whatever. It's better be worth it 'cause I'm missing my little sister's piano recital." Metal bat growled out, baring his teeth in a scowl. "If this is a load of crap I'll rip this place apart."

"Like you could do anything with that skinny stick of yours." Tatsumaki dismissed his threat.

"Yeah?! How about I bash your head open?" Hot headed and quick of trigger the challenge was not left unanswered.

"If you think you can get on with it pill-bug head." Tatsumaki hissed, banging her fists on the table.

"Can we move this along before Mr. Pompadour gets killed?" The blond guy spoke up with a tired sigh.

"Oy! Bobby pin! Why are you siding with the brat?" Changing target Metal bat stood, swinging the bat over his head.

"Brat?!" Tatsumaki floated a bit off her chair, shrieking.

"The great Seer Madam Shibabawa is dead." That statement killed the aggressive mood.

"Dead? Was she killed?" Zombieman spoke up, as startled as most.

"No." Sitch shook his head, straightening. "While looking into the future for the next six months she became agitated and had a coughing fit. She tough a cough drop and choked."

"I see. So we are here to find a way to prevent disasters and fight monsters without her foresight and guidance." Supperalloy Darkshine attempted his interpretation of the situation.

"No. Madame Shibabawa was only able to predict a fraction of the disasters that occur every day." Sitch began, expanding his explanation in boring drone.

"Excuse me… you there." Saitama asked the beefy guy to his left. No use disturbing Genos. He seemed to be paying attention. "Who is this Shibabawa? A hero?"

"You don't know?" Keeping his voice low despite the surprise of the stranger in the room and the lack of knowledge Puri-Puri Prisoner answered. "Madame Shibabawa is a seer, a great one. She correctly predicted disasters and monsters attacks."

"We have made it through many crises without Madame Shibabawa's predictions. Even so we provided protection and gave her special treatment." The glasses guy cut into the long winded
explanation, noticing the bored looks of some of the S-Class.

"Yes. Because what predictions she made were 100% accurate. The problem lies in her last prophecy." Saying this Sitch took a paper from his pocket, placing it on the table to be scanned and displayed. "As she choked on the cough drop she was able to leave this note."

*The earth is in trouble.*

It was what was scrawled in that piece of paper. It didn't look that impressive. The earth was always in trouble from where Saitama stood.

"What? That is so stupid." Child Emperor was the first to speak up, scoffing at the notion. "Can I go? I have cram school." Of course after such a disappointment announcement his mind would wander away from the hero duties.

"I know you are a prodigy Child Emperor but if you cannot grasp the danger it reveals how immature you still are." Sitch stated, looking concerned, ignoring the angry protests from the kid.

"Listen." In conciliation the Association worker continued. "Madame Shibabawa's predictions were 100% accurate. She had predicted many catastrophes. A few resulted in the loss of countless lives. But not once did she use the word trouble. Something more dangerous than a Dragon-level catastrophe is on its way and it will occur in the next six months!"

"That's fine but we have no idea when in the next six months." Watchdog man lifted his furry head, looking bored.

"Yes. It's hard to plan for that." Lightspeed Flash agreed.

"You are correct. But I want you all to be ready for a fight in the next six months." Sitch nodded.

"In the next six months means that it could be tomorrow or even today." Saitama spoke up, seeing the situation grow into something interesting.

"That's true." The man agreed before squinting, trying to place him. "Who are you anyway?"

"Good thing I'm here." Saitama grinned, serious, focusing.

A rumble echoed through the corridors, the whole structure shaking.

"The building is under attack." Genos called even before the alarms started to rumble, standing up, engaging the defensive protocol.

"That's impossible. This is the Hero Association HQ." Darkshine answered, looking around. All heroes had stood up. All association workers had fallen under the shaking.

The rumble stopped for a second.

And then everything went dark in one single roaring shake.

Silence filled the room.

*Emergency power activated.* A female computerized voice announced as every light and piece of equipment came back to life. The tea had been a causality, spilled all over the table and floor.

"What was that? What's going on out there?" The glasses guy murmured, standing.

"I don't know… all communications have been cut off." The bearded guy was putting a wireless
device to his ear, starting the protocols, trying to reach out.

"Damn..." Sitch stood and slammed his palm on the table, staring, wide-eyes. "Impossible... destruction levels at 99.8%... A-City has been destroyed in an instant!" he panicked, staring at the warnings, hands on his head. "Who could have known her prediction would come true this soon?!

"Why was this building spared?" Bang asked. Most were already on their feet. Atomic Samurai was heading towards the door with a grim expression.

"We assigned Metal Knight the construction of this building. That is why it's stronger than the average shelter." The glasses guy explained.

"So that's why there are no windows." Metal bat nodded, understanding.

"We should go outside and see. To be sure it's the prophecy." Child Emperor took planning into his lollypop-carrying hands.

"Sensei will you..." Genos began to ask, noticing those that were heading out. Stopping as he found the space next to him empty. Looking up he found a tunnel. "ah. Sensei..." Searching for the fastest way out so there would be no delays or trouble. It seemed a sensible course of action if they wanted to get things done before they escalated. A delay, waiting for a door, could be disastrous. He should record that though for later transcription.

"That's huge!" Saitama stared at the ship that hovered above the ruins, cape fluttering in the wind. A flash of lighting struck down in the distance, from the mostly clear sky. "Are they aliens?" he murmured, hopping, aiming for one of the canons.

If they were shooting things out it could be a path in. a huge shell passed by him. He watched it go, frowning. There was a crisscross of lighting striking it down, coming from the earth. No explosion where he had been shot at. But it was obvious that had to be what that was.

"So that's what blew the city to pieces." More were shot. Maybe they were trying to get him. Some sort of proximity trigger. Dodging most, kicking one to a crumpled mess Saitama returned fire. "Go back to your planet!" He shouted.

Unable to explode it ripped a path into the ship.

Reaching it Saitama looked back.

Balls of lighting hovered above the city. in a ring around the ship. He could see the shells that had been shot shattering without explosion. It seemed Mayu had mastered that accidental lighting balling when sneezing. They were like little mines of lighting and electronic interference. She had killed Genos's legs and the microwave last time.

Turning into the ship Saitama went to hunt the boss.

If they wanted to pick a fight he would oblige.

And hopefully they would be as strong as they were boasting.
Chapter 15

Lightning struck, thunder roaring as wisps broke apart, spreading outwardly in a circle of irregular edges. Most remained, dancing about, scorching the stones, crackling on the dusty air, growing on their own. Some moved against her skin, tangling in her hair, keeping close.

Mayu breathed again, wobbling as her feet found solid ground.

Uneven, shattered, brunt ground that she was fairly sure was not her doing.

The blast had been so bright, so visible.

Eyes wide, looking around and up took away her intention of discharging the electric build-up of the few hops that had taken her to A-City. What was left of it… It was barely recognizable except for the big black tower in the distance under the enormous ship.

The dust was settling.

Broken buildings.

Steel poking from the ground.

Rubble.

Few things were recognizable in that world of brown, grey and black, stained red by fires.

Wind swirled ashes.

Ashes burned to nothingness as they flew close to her, disintegrating in a raspy sizzle.

There were no sounds beyond creaks, crackling and whispered howls of hot air.

There were no sirens.

No warnings.

There were no people.

No monsters.

Just a vast expanse of desolate ruins topped by that massive ship and a lone tower.

It roared to life, lighting up on the side.

Something had triggered it.

Mayu stepped back, grimacing, gathering the charge, shaping the plasma upwards, striking down the shell, bomb, missile or whatever it could be called, before it reached what it was targeting. Or farther away from the city.

But the ship was rumbling again.

Sparking fast, Mayu reversed polarity, arms opening, expanding the wisps around her, pouring the charge out. Pulsing a blast around her broke the overly charged tufts into little growing angry balls of lightning, feeding on the still mounting lightning dancing around her, shiny, hot and blinding.
The air was starting to break down into unbreathable.
More than it had been.
More harsh than ash, smoke and death.
The wisps were pushed up by purposely frailer plasma links that still fed them.
Once released they lingered.
Some of the incoming missiles crashed against the balls, disabled by the charge.
Others were caught in the blasts of the exploding wisps.
A few cracked and crumbled as a result.
Apart from the craters they formed no further harm came to the city.
For all the good that did them now.
Mayu sighed and released the brunt of the humming energy, most of it being attracted to the lightning remaining above. Like mines staying roughly where she had sent them. The balled lightning behaved on its own, growing, collapsing or exploding, reshaping, dividing of fading on a whim. To leave a trap or a defence they seemed appropriate.
There had to be survivors.
Somewhere.
Somehow.
However she was ill-equipped to find or help them.
Her steps echoed on the empty area as she moved away from her arrival point, trying to get her bearings, think of a plan.
Rescue missions were not for someone who was continually sparking. Giving up high voltage. And she could not stop or replace the earring storage cells because the ship was still there. What if something came out? She was not strong enough to lift boulders and trying to destroy shatter them could harm those beneath, behind. If… there… were…
The ship had gone quiet, dormant. Smoke was rising from it. But it didn't look like a weapon getting ready to wreak more havoc.
There just had to be survivors…
Mayu thought again, closing her eyes for a moment, taking a deep breath, shaking sparks of her hair as the lightning remained close to her skin, trying to keep from falling asleep with the aid of blueberry gummies, stopping, covering her face, groaning.
Getting the phone she rechecked the reasons why she had dashed to the city.
No signal.
But the tracker worked independently. And it was telling her they were both right at the source of the issue. Really it wasn't unexpected.
Sparking she stared at the tower, holding her breath, hopping, zapping away.

Iaian groaned, pushing the concrete slab off of him, looking around, disoriented, coughing, pushing the smoke out of the way, eyes narrowing behind the slits of his helmet.

Was that... A-City?

Hard to believe.

Stoically he looked around, standing, gripping his katana, ready to strike whatever came.

The only thing that was recognizable was the tower or the Hero Association.

He had accompanied his Master, Atomic Samurai to the city when the call had come for the S-Class heroes to gather. He had been waiting for the end of the meeting. But then all he had heard and felt was thunder and destruction. It seemed that thing above, projecting a wide great shadow was responsible for it.

There could be no doubt.

There could be no forgiveness for such a heinous act.

They crying of a child nearby guided him to survivors, slashing down a thing's spearing claws before they reached a father and a boy, standing in it way, blade returned to its sheath, stance assumed.

"Get away now!" Iaian ordered the civilians, glancing back for a brief second. They got away. And in that distraction he was almost caught by a crushing force. His helmet was crushed between two massive hands, falling on the ground as the hero evaded, scoffing. "You thought I would not sense your bloodlust?" he attacked, slashing it. "Was this your doing?!" Rightfully enraged the strike landed.

The blade felt like it had cut through mud.

The thing was murmuring to itself, several heads carrying a conversation as if he had not felt the cut that split some of the heads from the body. As if it was not noticing the slashes that followed. It wanted to kill. Iaian had attacked to kill... but his strikes were having no effect. Like mud it felt, like clay it shaped itself, smoothing over cuts, creating weapons...

And when it struck back Iaian knew each of his strikes would be lethal.

And how outmatched he was.

His arm... was clipped off by a single strike, bleeding heavily against the palm he had pressed to stop the pain.

The thing was splitting into several.

I can't win...

A single bright slash cut the thing to pieces.

"Master!" Iaian called out, surprised, relieved.

"Iaian, you ok?" Atomic Samurai asked, frowning. "Your arm..." It was all he needed to see to know that that enemy had been strong.
"Master! Swords have no effect on this monster!" He had to warn him before the thing regenerated. "Forget me! Retreat!"

The alien surged, attempting a surprise attack only to be cut down to pieces once more by a very displeased Master.

"Iai. The path of the sword does not end for you yet." Master encouraged with a shout, sternly. "Stop bleeding. We have work to do."

"Yes Master." The threat remained. It had to be punished, destroyed.

The thing regenerated into a single entity, more solid, smugger.

"So there is a life-form on this planet that can fight." It called out, giggling. "Excellent! Try to withstand our invasion!"

"Invasion? So they are aliens." Atomic Samurai scoffed. "And you have you companions on that floating toy eh… Because, you see, I doubt you alone have the power to do all this to the city."

"Atomic Samurai, count us in." Silverfang joined him. As an old man he had walked out of the tower at his own pace, no less determined to strike back.

"You the bastard that smashed this town?" Metal bat joined in, glaring, tapping his weapon of choice against his shoulder.

"And if I am?" The alien taunted.

"For all the beautiful men you killed I claim vengeance!" Puri-Puri Prisoner charged, flexing and ripping his clothes in a full frontal attack. "Dark Angel Flash!" Redemption from failure. Attack to kill. Intent to destroy. This time he would not fail. This time he would defeat what hounded him.

The ground team was complete.

Time to fight back.
Chapter 16

Genos approached the edge of the building, staring at the ship that hovered above them, gathering what readings he could. Sensei had indeed carved the fastest way out of the meeting room. He had followed as soon as he had been able. A few heroes had headed down, towards the entrance of the tower. Others had stayed in the meeting room, uninterested. Within the Association workers were scrambling.

Sensei's point of entry was obvious enough, above and across the building. The direct path once again. From the acoustics alone, eliminating the rumble of the motor and power source, it was obvious that a battle was taking place within the vessel.

It was easy to see why it had had such a high percentage of destruction.

The ship was armoured and well armoured all around. Before a corridor could be seen in the breach there was a vast expanse of fortified metal. Extrapolating and conjecturing about the mobility and speed along with its size… Genos frowned, examining the numbers, facts and guesses. It was more of a moving fortress than an attack vehicle which would suit intentions of destruction or conquer quite handily.

Keeping those in mind for the notebooks he broadened his senses, looking around. Visual confirmation backing robotic analysis process. The Association's readings of 99.8% of destruction were matched by his own.

The destruction was much more extensive than what he had witnessed so far. More… uniform.

Lightning was dancing around the edges of town, creating a net of exploding balls and traveling bolts. A closer look made it clear that they were not from the ship. The cyborg had thought within the Association was still trying to come up with a plan… But that looked like Mayu's work. Had they called her in as a living missile deflection system? Electromagnetism, EPM's and overloads were all things that could work and she could handily generate. Checking his phone showed the communications were still down. He search for the GPS.

"Four S-Class heroes should be enough to clean up any enemy on the ground." Child Emperor approached, glancing down where small points were engaged in a conflict, nibbling on a lollypop, looking up grimly, interrupting. "The problem is that." Tatsumaki and Darkshine joined in, staring at the ship, taking a look at the city. "We can't take it down. Any aircraft would be shot down in seconds." By his assessment they were too low to trigger the proximity alarms. "Those…" thunder roared as some balled lighting collapsed on itself and shot out, around, dividing and multiplying.

"King." Darkshine turned slightly to the hero that was joining them, shimmying through the hole to reach the roof. "As the top fighter of S-Class give us your opinion."

*King. S-Class Rank 7. Said to be the strongest man on earth. Well respected by the other heroes. Kills reported… too many to accurately list.* Genos put the phone back on his pocket. They needed to focus on the ship now. And he was curious to see what the hero had to say. Observation was a valid way of learning but he had learned that direct action and asking was better than remaining in conjecture and guesswork.

"There is nothing I can do." King spoke up after a moment of calm though. "It's too high in the sky for me to reach. There is no way to attack it from the ground. But at the moment it seems to be dormant." He pulled himself out of the hole, sitting on the edge, slouching slightly, sighing in
resignation. "That gives us time to think of other options. My take is that our best choice is to call Metal Knight."

"What?" Tatsumaki was unimpressed, turning, chastising. "That's pathetic! Aren't you supposed to be the strongest man?"

"Tatsumaki... please calm down." Even though King was showing no signs of anger or annoyance Darkshine attempted to cool tempers. "If you get him mad he'll kill you..."

"The city has been blown away and you are just going to let it be?" The hero esper was in no mood to be quieted or let the offence of inaction go. "Unbelievable!" Done with her rant she turned, arms crossed, pouting, sulkily, glaring up. "Forget it!" Tone dropping to a growl she shook her fists. "I'll take care of it myself."

"Wait." Genos activated battle mode, the conductive channels diverting power to the needed functions. If she was willing to be the first to start attacking the ship following would be beneficial for the amount of damage they could inflict. Crippling an enemy to prepare for the last take down... "I will go too. I don't know how effective it will be but I can attack it from here." Arm cannons and energy blasts mostly. If he focused the attacks on a single point at a time he could in theory breach the defences, weakening them progressively until...

"Maybe you didn't hear me." Tatsumaki resumed her growly glare. "I said forget it!"

Genos' expression grew blank for a moment, shutting down the charge up progression.

"Take it easy Genos." Darkshine was waving his hands conciliatorily. "I understand your feelings but if you get her mad she'll kill you." Still not very helpful.

*No matter.* Genos exhaled and turned to the ship again. *No need to team up. Sensei is already inside the ship. Whatever is attacking is no match for Sensei's power. There is nothing he can't defeat. If there were humanity would have perished long ago.*

Thunder clapped as lightning struck behind them, out of the blue, startling the group.

Sparks skittered about, the material of the tower impervious to the strike.

Mayu took a deep breath, shaking her head, getting rid of static and overcharge, smoothing her hair, looking down at the edge of the building, back turned on the S-Class group.

"Alright..." She mumbled. "Can I consider this overshooting, undershooting or on target?" Aiming for the doorway had landed her on top of the building. But attempting to land lightning without line-of-sight target was trickier. Almost like pointing and saying «I want to go over there, over there, over there». "Phone, phone, phone..." Mumbling she patted her bag.

"Mayu." Genos called, breaking from the others, approaching, waiting at the edge of the dancing wisps. She turned and smiled, reducing the charge, running to him, hugging the cyborg. Without hesitation his arms wound up around her waist, a smile appearing despite the situation.

"You're still in one piece." Mayu whispered, cupping his face with both palms, electricity around her fingers spreading warmth over his synthetic skin, a little watery shimmer in her eyes before tiptoeing and kissing him, lightly, dispelling her concerns.

"Hey Mayu." Child Emperor called, teasing, breaking them apart. "Changed your mind about experimenting?"
"Nope." Mayu answered, leaning against Genos, yawning. "I'm fine." She assured the cyborg when his eyes narrowed. "Saitama?"

"Sensei is already in the ship."

"Shouldn't be long then."

"Another nobody trying to get closer to us S-Class." Tatsumaki scoffed and floated. "I am dealing with this thing now. Useless. You are all useless." Huffing, puffing and complaining she left. As expected even if she was flying she was not registering as a threat to the hovering ship. Too low.

"I have fruit leather and marshmallows." Mayu negotiated, searching her bag again, turning to the Child Emperor. Sugar, coffee or energy drinks were needed. Both to keep going and keep awake.

"Strawberry, peppermint and cherry lollies." Tilting his backpack the boy answered after a quick survey of his own supply.

"Cherry for mallows?" She asked, stepping away from Genos, looking up. "Plan?"

"We don't have one yet miss." Darkshine answered. "Nice to meet you. I'm Superalloy Darkshine."

"Mayu." Smiling she greeted them, unwrapping the cherry lolly. "Me and Genos can actually start blasting from here. It's well within range. Of course that may provoke it into blasting back and the esper that could make a shield just floated away. My lighting traps may be able to catch most of the artillery that flies off but..." She popped the lolly in her mouth. "And there are the survivors to consider if that thing falls too soon." Her cellphone started to ring. "Yes? ... I'm on your roof actually... King, Child Emperor, Cyborg Genos and Superalloy Darkshine. Tatsumaki flew off. I think she went..."Mayu stopped talking. "Yeah..." She closed the phone and returned it to her bag. "We can't take it down yet. They are asking for you two to monitor the ship while the rescue teams act and send an alert if anything changes."

"Issue an evacuation warning to A-City and all neighbouring areas. No civilian is allowed to enter. Not even reporters. The roads have to be closed." Sitch has stayed in the meeting room. The two assistants had retreated into the coordination room to try to make the best of the situation. Calm the panic. Relay the news. Make sure heroes were available if the worst came to pass. "Redirect and expand the M-Systems to monitor the vitals of the whole A-City area. Find survivors and deploy help. We need an accurate count and location." That was priority one. "Contact the S-Class heroes. Keep them from bringing the ship down until the all clear is given."

"Threat level?" A lady asked by her station, ready to input.

"Dragon, no doubt." The other worker answered, pushing his glasses up, sitting on his station, opening the contacts of the news networks. If people were to trust the association they had to be told enough. There was no hiding the destruction or the massive flying craft. Drones had already entered the area, filming. More than a few had been shot down or were experiencing image issues.

"No... this might be God." It was the only answer he had. Grimacing the bearded man shook away the uneasy feeling and began to reorganize. "Activate the backup signal providers and contact every hero. Every registered hero. Call them to help." Some would be close enough to be of immediate assistance.
Above, within the ship Saitama was making a lot of noise and damage, running around, looking for the boss. Smoke rose from the metal shell on occasion, signalling a successful barrage of destruction but there were no signs of the thing budging from its ominous hovering.

Mayu pressed her lips together when the noise was enough to not need Genos’ sensors to identify. Sparking idly on the edge of the building she had been tossing tendrils of lightning to pull her traps closer to the ship, ready for the sign, checking her phone, the association updates and the news.

King and Darkshine had retreated back into the building. Unless someone was willing and strong enough to toss them into the ship and hope they breached the outer shell and started wreaking havoc with the inside their options were limited and their uses null. Tossing them would most likely cause an attack seeing they would be high and close enough to trigger the defences.

Down below the battle seemed no closer to be resolved even if all she could see were moving dots around a darker dot. It seemed so odd that the best were having such a hard time but if it had been too simple, if the aliens were too weak, having been unable to prevent the destruction would suddenly become inexcusable no matter how one separated power in physical, trained or technological.

"This is bad…” Child Emperor gasped and stopped inputting data, eyes wide, biting down on the lolly, when the portable PC held by one of the metallic arms sprouting from his pack chirped an alert, the image of the ship superseding the calculations he was working on, showing spikes and changes in the dormant ship.

Not that the tech cue was needed when the massive thing was hissing, the underside lighting up as weapons came alive. At least the ones down there were threat enough to warrant an air strike.

"How long?" Genos asked, uncrossing his arms.

"A minute at most." Child emperor pulled another screen working. "Seconds if…” The energy kept climbing, diverted from a core that was too deep within to be struck down.

"The Association is recalling every rescue team close to the tower. Bio readings say the area directly beneath the ship is cleared." Mayu read the update. Wisps crackled against her skin as she upped the charge. If she was going to it she might as well throw a bit more of spark into the strike. "Time to take it down." It was getting aggressive and there were no defenceless people for it to fall on. The tower should be able to take the impact.

The ship roared, initiating the bombardment.

Mayu released the blast, startled as the artillery fell.

It had no effect on her aim.

Multiple balls of lighting flew against the hull, sticking to it, crackling, exploding. Lightning bolts struck the sides of the ship, bursting and melting the metal, multiplied and feeding off her blasts consecutive, waves of electricity sneaking around, sneaking in.

Thunder rumbled around the repeating bolts, the acoustic damage becoming evident as well.

The oxygen was breaking down into ozone, reaching a dangerous concentration.
Genos' eyes narrowed, shielding from the bright light of his lightning shrouded girlfriend, his sensor picking up the readings of the still shells.

They glowed green, still in mid-air.

That was Tatsumaki's doing, most likely.

They inverted, shooting right back at the ship.

Shell after shell hit, lodging precisely back into their cannons, exploding, imploding and tearing the bottom of the ship into shreds by the discharge and fire.

The cyborg primed his blasters.

The ozone concentration was high enough for the gas to turn slightly bluish, visible.

Genos shot against one of Mayu's strikes, joining fire to the electricity.

Ozone in high concentration and lead to its boiling point detonated.

Flames engulfed the bottom of the ship, roaring, joining with the explosions, following the gas trail.

They returned to the tower through the gap drilled by Sensei. With all that the bottom of the ship was now its most vulnerable part. If they reached the ground strikes from bellow should in theory be enough to bring it down.

"Maybe I should have just hopped off the building…" She murmured, embarrassed, glancing around while running, her charge setting off alarms and small power outages in her way.

The people that had been saved were being treated in the rooms and corridors available. Darkshine was amidst them, helping out with the weight lifting and wounded relocation, reassuring them with the presence of an S-Class and his easy-going manner.

Staff ran around, trying to provide what was needed and keep the operations running as smoothly as they could.

On the ground level the destruction was as bad as she remembered. Genos stopped, hesitation, staring at the rubble before continuing. Child Emperor kept up easily in metallic spider legs. Drive knight joined them as they found higher ground on what he ben a skyscraper.

Rubble was flying towards the ship in floating waves. Tatsumaki was making use of her power relentlessly.

Mayu sighed, breathing in and out, trying to calm the lighting.

Genos looked impressed, scoffing and looking away.

"At this rate she will destroy the ship all by herself." Which was the same as saying she had not been boasting about her power. Psychic power… It needed to be investigated further even if it was a source of strength unattainable to him.

"It's taking damage but it's not budging." Child emperor adjusted a pair of goggles to shield from light, dust and to zoom in. "The system is different from what I have seen so far…"

"Can you locate the power source?" Mayu asked, hands squeezing them hem of her dress. She yawned, covering her mouth quickly. "With the underside so compromised I may be able to blast my
way up to it and cause a disruption."

"I'll be going now." Drive Knight spoke up, his voice distorted and metallic, having reached the conclusion that his aid was not required.

"Go ahead." Child Emperor shrugged and barely registered the request. "Some others have left already too." He looked up and adjusted the goggles once more. "I can tell you where it is…"

"Genos." Unexpectedly Drive Knight approached him. "A word with you…" Curious Genos nodded. Mayu glanced over her shoulder, noticing his silence. "Metal Knight is your «enemy». Be careful." The other cyborg whispered, red eye moving cautiously from him to Child Emperor, making sure he was out of auditory reach.

"What do you mean?" Genos called out, eyes narrowed.

"You'll know soon enough. But for now stay away from him." It was all Drive knight had to say about the issue as he walked away from the alien threat.

"Genos?" Mayu called, approaching him. "Are you ok?"

"He offered some information." The cyborg answered "And I don't know what to do with it."

"Do you need it right now?" She asked, offering her wisp-licked hand.

"No." Genos took her hand, working through the hot feel of electricity against his fingers. "Let's do a little target practice while Sensei deals with their boss." His palm blaster whirred into position. Mayu chortled and gripped his wrist, sparking into his system, overclocking and feeding the charge directly.

"Just a bit." She agreed. "Child Emperor agrees that I may be able to zap through into the core."

"Worth a try?" Genos asked, moving her closer for stability.

Previous attempts had been lower in power, simple experiments.

"Why not…" And even then a few had knocked them down and damaged equipment and surroundings.

Fire and lighting struck the ship, aiding to its disruption.
Under the relentless bombardment of the available and willing heroes the ship's underside was finally wielding, falling apart in chunks, the damage spreading more dramatically from the spots where its own weapons had collided against. Metal was burned, twisted and ripped away, crashing on the debris of the city. Parts of it dragged the screaming, terrified crew inside. Those that could not blast upwards were rounding them up. The aliens were putting no fight, scared out of their wits. Well… those lucky to fall to the ground alive. There was a gory collection of splattered bits on the corridors that had managed to stay somewhat intact on impact.

Green glowing bits of the same space rubble occasionally stopped mid-air and were returned as projectiles, accompanying chunks of buildings, cars, trees, whatever Tatsumaki caught in her telekinesis and thought heavy enough to toss.

Lightning crackled and crashed against the armoured bits. Balls of it lingered, exploding when hit or collapsing, left to their own designs. Mayu stood at in a puddle of lava, the rock molten under her feet, superheated, lighting moving around her, loose and wild. Smaller wisps lingered close. Shaped plasma shot upwards and fanned out. The ozone dispersed easily in the continuous motion of flying chunks in the area around.

Fire struck, in one focused beam and burning high. Genos lowered his arm slowly, eyes narrowing, taking the readings, the blasters returning to neutral on his palms. The noise and energy reaching his sensors indicated a one-on-one battle. Sensei had found the boss.

But whatever alien mechanisms kept it aloft had not failed yet.

Child Emperor frowned, away from the action, comparing the information he had once again, trying to pinpoint the accurate location of the device to move on with the plan to fully bring that thing down for an S-Class raid.

The energy readings he was receiving from the ship were shifting dramatically, making it difficult to identify which source was the core. It looked very different from when the weapons came alive. Unstable and in constant, random motion…

There was an alert chirping from Child Emperor that caught Genos attention. Through his goggles the young hero surveyed the field, looking pleased, searching.

"Mayu!" Child Emperor shouted. Mayu looked over her shoulder, dispersing a bit of the bright shroud of electricity, squinting, hopping, zapping herself near the kid.

Before instructions could be given the ship groaned loudly, a sound of distress they had had yet to hear, sagging as if something had slammed against it from above, triggering a new series of alarms. Fire, smoke and debris trailed the far away edges of the ship, raining around it.

All action but the raging fires, explosions and hull disintegrating stopped.

"You're doing it Tatsumaki!" Darkshine shouted, amazed, pumping his fists in victory.

Mayu smiled, sighing feeling at ease. Saitama had to be doing his thing.

This has to be Sensei's doing… Genos considered, stepping back. It was best to be out of the crash radius, readying to enter the hull.
Tatsumaki frowned. That hadn't felt like her strikes at work… the angles were wrong.

"It's not down yet." Child Emperor grumbled. "Go there."

"Where?" Mayu asked, staring at the pointing finger's general direction.

"See that bump?" there was a jagged area around the under curve of the ship. The readings showed it to be thinner.

"Yes..." Mayu nodded, wetting her lips. Above the ship was shuddering. It shouldn't take much more to make it fall. Tatsumaki had resumed her throwing.

"Strike it. Go up. You should find the core there."

"What about Tatsumaki?" Mayu asked carefully, growing nervous.

"Out of the way!" the Esper shouted, throwing Darkshine off the piece of rubble she had selected, making it float.

"I see..." She murmured as the Child Emperor raised a sarcastic eyebrow.

Sparking Mayu took a deep breath before holding it. Short distance and line of sight guaranteed a clean landing. Further under the ship things looked darker, smokier and the oppressing sensation of being an ant underfoot was much more intense. Looking up showed that while the area was dented and cut it had not yet been sliced through.

Yawning she swayed a bit, getting some marshmallows, sitting down on the rubble while the lighting shaped itself and charged up. To make it up and through in a single strike it would be best to have a single wide bolt. That meant several bolts taken to what extremes she could actively control joined together into a single upwards blast.

Genos watched, taking the readings, storing them. Child emperor was stretching, watching too but he didn't seem to be taking data from Mayu. Good. She had said no to him and his Association-sanctioned tests.

The lightning bolt exploded abruptly, sending a circle of jagged bolts around Mayu. They hissed and regrouped, being sucked into the positive sparking. She had stood up, widening her stance, hiking up the yellow dress slightly, arms open before shoving the upwards with a grunt.

Electricity followed the chosen path, spearing through the ship. She vanished with it.

Barely seconds had passed when the Child Emperor's alarms and his sensors picked up the energies above. Sharp peaks and then nothing.

The ship rumbled and groaned, falling slowly, no longer able to sustain itself.

Those bellow started to retreat.

Mayu fell next to them with a deep breath, eyes wide.

The core was so damaged it had taken very little to shatter it completely. The alarms within had been very loud and urgent. And where she had landed looked like a wrecking ball had danced about, walls, columns and machinery gutted and punched through. She actually doubted the weakened thing had needed her final kick to go belly up. Not with how much it was trembling from something roaring above her head.
"As soon as it's down let's move in." Darkshine announced.
Chapter 19

How did A-City end up like this. Slowly walking through the ruins Amai Mask mused, looking at the remnants of the city in disgust, using the Association Headquarters' as the guiding marker. There as a meeting of S-Class. So there was no reason for the city to be left in that state. Even if the attacker was a grand as the downed ship announced. He could see some of them gathered in front of the wreckage in a disgraceful state of disarray, seemingly doing nothing but staring at it.

"Care to explain Metal Bat?" He called out, watching as the supposed S-Class hero turned, frowning rudely. "Explain so I can understand." The A-Class number one continued, keeping his voice under control, keeping from glaring. He counted Five S-Class. One A-Class. One B-Class.

"Handsome Kamen, Amai mask." Scoffing Metal Bat spat out his recognition, head tilting. "Where the hell did you pop up from?" the angry growling barely phased the new arrival.

"I was filming a drama in the next town. There was a roar and tremors so I came and found A-City wiped out." Recounting the story made the anger apparent just beneath the surface. "Care to explain?" He demanded once more.

"Monsters in that huge-ass ship attacked up." After an annoyed click of his tongue and a slight shift on his weigh Metal Bat did explain, pointing with the weapon that gave him his hero name. "They fired artillery at us and did all this…" he shrugged, putting the bat against his shoulder. "We took care of it."

"Took care of it?" Anger distorted Amai Mask's features, voice dropping to a grow. Then he laughed in derision, looking down on the group. "Is that so? You call this victory?" his arms opened wide, showing the ruins around, dismissive, abrasive. "Such incompetence. I'm completely appalled at all of you!"

Most frowns deepened at that. Metal Bat, the one being addressed directly took it poorly. Child Emperor shrugged and stretched, putting away his toys, just staring at the newcomer. It was not that simple but grown-ups could be stupid about things.

"Hey!" Sneering he gripped the bat harder as if ready to brawl. "You didn't even get here on time so don't act like you're a big shot."

"True I did not get here on time but you were all here." He answered in all seriousness, still lecturing. "Even one S-Class should have sufficed. You weren't able to save a single brick."

"We were having a meeting inside the headquarters building." Atomic Samurai considered that one jab too far, especially from someone who had not been there to witness the circumstances. "We went outside as soon as the enemy attacked but the city was already in ruins."

"So what?" The older man's eyes widened at that offhanded dismissal. "You think if you tell the media that they will just let it go?

Image was key.

Image was crucial.

And the Heroic image was being destroyed by sheer incompetence.

"You..." Puri-Puri Prisoner hesitated, taken aback by that assessment. The media? What about those
people? What about... "Whose side are you on?" He asked quietly, offended. "We did our best." And in that kind of circumstance there was not much else to do. They could be heroes but only a handful were superhuman. And none of them was omnipotent.

"I'm on the side of justice." Theatrically Amai Mask announced, standing, sliding down the piece of debris to stand at their level, sneering for a second of appraisal. "Having S-Class heroes this pathetic is an embarrassment." He decided, pushing his hair away from his face, gesturing towards them, making sure to include the group in his contempt. "Anybody this useless should voluntarily retire."

"Hey don't start talking crap with us." Metal bat had endured one too many snide comments, strutting over, swinging to point while sporting a murderous glare. "Who's gonna care about a pop idol with a face busted all to hell?"

A little dismissive smile drew itself on Amai Mask's lips.

"Do you have any idea why I don't move up to S-Class?" Sweetly he retorted, unaffected, amused even. "I remain A-Class Rank 1 so I can prevent weak good-for-nothing pieces of trash like you from moving up to S-Class." The murderous mood was interrupted by the crash of a capsule and the activation of a human-shaped robot. It was a simplified model, made for investigation. "Metal knight." Amai mask called out, his disappointment with the available heroes that should have been the elite growing. "You skip the meeting and only show up now?"

The scolding was absolutely ignored as the robot accessed the downed ship, its many eyes and sensors flashing.

"This is magnificent." Metal knight considered, the mechanical contraption broadcasting his voice.

Genos observed, his eyes narrowing slightly, the suspicion that had been planted making him watch the thing more carefully. If Drive Knight was right... Ignoring the rest of the advice the cyborg advanced.

"Metal Knight!" Genos called him out, standing above the robot. It seemed like an unarmoured, unarmed model but caution was still warranted. "What are you doing here? The battle is already over."

"Genos, right..." The unit turned, accessing him, answering quickly.

Obviously is displayed no emotion but the recognition echoing in the voice it projected.

"Don't tell me you're here to recover the ship so you can create more powerful weapons with the alien technology?" It was as much an accusation as the previous statement had been.

"Precisely." An accusation that the S-Class hero did not even bother to deny. "Powerful weapons are a necessity for the sake of peace." The unit turned fully the three sensors within a circle that could serve as an eye beeping for an instant. "Ah... I see the living battery." Mayu flinched stepping back once again, using Bang as a half cover. Since the pod had activated she had moved as far away from it as she could while keeping discreet. Geno's eyes were narrowed, his distaste mounting. "Have you changed your mind?"

Mayu glanced up, shaking her head, placing the storage cell in place on the earring, lips pressed together when it chirped, looking for another, eyes downcast. While Child Emperor had been playful in his curiosity as she took the tests supervised by scientists Metal Knight frightened her with the idea of experiment and containment.

The robot walked away when met with a negative, the controller's interest turning once more to the
huge ship and its alien bounty of knowledge and possibility.

"Mayu?" Genos frowned, walking back. There was really nothing that he had taken from that conversation besides the greed and self-serving nature of the man behind the machines. But that he had known about already. She gave him eight full crystals, still looking down. At a loss he reached out for her empty hand, gripping it instead.

"Even with powerful weapons in the hands of heroes like this they'd be wasted." Amai Mask was willing to let Metal knight go without further rebuke. After all he had not been present to start with.

"You're mine later pretty boy. Watch your ass." Metal bat growled, growing beyond annoyed.

"Hey! I rounded up the last of the alien survivors!" Darkshine called, coming out of the busted hull, dragging chained aliens of all kinds. He looked slightly surprised when he spotted Amai Mask.

Amai mask on the other had pressed his lips into a thin line and walked unflinchingly towards the helpless group. It took him only a few strikes and a slashing motion of his hand to separate heads from bodies. Green, blue, black, yellow and red blood sprayed on the ground, mixing.

The heroes around looked appalled.

"Amai mask! What have you…" But the only one that spoke up was Darkshine.

"They did not deserve to live." Amai Mask shook the blood away from his hands, showing his eyes. "They were evil. I swiftly implemented justice, that's all." Shrugging her turned. There was nothing else to be done for A-City. Only destruction and cleansing. "I'm sure you understand this. Genos…" The A-Class hero stopped one last time, staring the cyborg down, face once again controlled and calm. "You've been busy since the exam. But from what I saw of the Deep Sea King incident and today you've mostly been a disappointment."

"At least he was there helping instead of bragging on a wide screen." Mayu retorted, glaring.

"B-Class Rank 42, Tempest." Amai Mask turned, staring at her. "You should be careful not to follow the same disappointing road." That was all he added to his judgements before continuing on, chased by an annoyed metal bat shouting threats.

"Best leave it." Bang advised as the man left in silence.

"Do not worry I'm fine." Genos answered to the tow people that were looking at him with concern, flattening the fluffed out parts of Mayu's pink hair, feeling the static against his fingers. He reminds me of myself before I met sensei. A man on the edge. Too eager to fight and eliminate what he perceived wrong. Just like me he must have gone through something horrible in is past. "Sensei…"

Startled the Cyborg looked at the wreckage. Mayu shook their hands free, picking up the phone.

"I got his signal… That way!" taken by the same concern they abandoned the scene, sprinting towards the location where Saitama should be.
Chapter 20

Tatsumaki floated near the fallen husk of the ship, staring silently at it.

Something had been off on the way it had fallen after a series of massive explosion within and without. It hadn't felt like her doing at all. She had smashed rocks against it, lifting them from the ground with ease, only hampered by the presence of some obnoxious and powerless idiots getting in the way, smashing a path to the inner mechanisms but the rock had not actually been driven that deep into the thing to damage the nerve system, so to speak. She had noticed that the flashy newbie had blasted the underside, burning through some of the rocks she had been busy aiming but that didn't look like it had been it either.

Now that she was having a good look at it the damage seemed as widespread above as it was below, if not more.

Which was odd because there had been no heroes able to go high enough to take the fight to the aliens.

Some of them had been rounded up already. It meant the more powerful one should still be ready to continue the fight. When the boss crawled out of the wreckage Tatsumaki was ready to pound it to a mushy paste smeared on the pavement.

Snapping, creaking echoes caught her attention. It was coming. Calmly she hovered lower, hands moving, readying the field for a swift battle, eyes scanning for the best clutter to toss.

A piece of the armoured panel popped free from the side, the massive tear projected several metres away from its source, clanking against the rubble. Dust and smoke poured out along with that yellow-clad B-Class nobody that was looking around with a raised closed fist.

"Oh? I'm out." He murmured, slightly surprised, arms lowering, hopping out of the hull, looking around.

"Hey... what?" Puzzled Tatsumaki released the tension, peeking behind, searching for any signs of an alien, floating down to sort out that situation. "What is was a B-Class like you doing inside the ship?"

"Sensei!" Genos called out, spotting him, running to him, relieved. While the tracker had told them they were close it was much more evident from the sudden appearance of flying metal.

Mayu put the phone away, sighing, releasing the worried tension that had build up as they ran, zapping in a hop, falling on Saitama, holding his cheeks between her palms, kissing the top of his head, smiling.

Despite his initial surprise of the electrified tackle Saitama caught her, letting Mayu sit on his bent forearm, waving the free hand to Genos, calling him, voice lighter, noticing the unbeaten state of both of his cohabitants.

"You are safe!" The cyborg stated after a quick analysis, nodding, relieved. Despite the dishevelled and sooty state of his skin and clothes Sensei was indeed free from damage.

"We're done here." Saitama shrugged, starting walk, meeting Genos halfway, where he had stopped, hesitating on what to do and how to greet him after the battle. Mayu had her arms around Sensei's neck, smiling, keeping her balance. "Let's go home."
"Did you defeat their leader?" Genos asked as soon as Sensei was next to him, accompanying his step.

"Yeah." Sensei nodded. "He was really strong. Maybe the strongest I have ever faced." There was no glance back but it was very rare of Saitama to remember who he fought, much less talk about it with something resembling respect. Which pretty much cemented the alien leader as something else.

"He had to be... look at your clothes." Mayu tugged at the remnants of the white cape.

"I see." Genos theorized, factoring in what he had seen and knew. "So without you the prophecy about the earth's destruction would be..."

"Nah... turns out you can't trust prophecies..." Saitama shook his head in all seriousness.

"I could have told you that." Mayu chuckled. "It's a plot device." And one that was more fun to use if the results varied from the original prediction.

Are they... ignoring me?! Tatsumaki saw her questions and very presence being sidestepped without a single acknowledgement. And for B-Classes to do that was unacceptable!

"Hold it right there!" Temper boiling over the Esper shouted, turning, pointing accusingly. "I don't know how you did it but you went in the ship on your own? You're just a B-Class! How dare you butt in like that! I don't need you! I could have handled it on my own." Despite the content it was remarkable how she seemed to be saying everything without a break to breathe, leaving the trio in a stunned watchful silence as the complaints became a string of insults. "Baldy! Octopus! Boiled egg! Light bulb! Avocado! Baldy! Lame face! Bug! Goblin! Ping pong ball! Rice grain! Bean head! Pin! Kettle! Baldy! Kneecap!"

Through the diatribe Saitama's face was going blanker and grim.

Genos was fuming, actually letting a bit of steam out of some of the warring components, glaring.

Mayu was tilting her head impressed and growing troubled at the variety of the vocabulary to insult that particular trait even if baldy was being given multiple repetitions.

Moving like a rheumatic old man under the strain and shock relentless barrage Saitama placed a frowning Mayu down and began to nudge Genos, asking for a defence.

Serious to his core the Cyborg turned fully and raised his hand, heath gathering on his palm blaster, standing between Sensei and the S-Class number 2.

"Listen you shitty brat!" His tone was angry, eyes glowing golden, priming for battle. If he couldn't say it to those that sent the letters there was an acceptable target right there for all the infamy sensei was put through in the letters and with those that doubted him. "Shut up and get lost or get beat down." Or at least a very convincing intimidation.

"That's it! Yeah!" Saitama cheered, animated.

The telekinetic push was abrupt and hard, a moment of green glow propelling the heavy metallic body against the nearest boulder, slamming it into the rock hard enough to leave a deep human-shaped indentation incrusted by the frame that had made it. The grinding of the two elements was a grating sound. Genos groaned, eyes opening after the impact, attempting to move.

"Unforgivable... me? A brat?" Tatsumaki's tone dropped from the high pitched whining to a chilling guttural growl. "I'm older than you!"
"Genos?" Saitama shouted the name, started, eyes wide and concerned.

"You're next B-Class!" Even though she was aiming for threatening the menace was ignored by the one targeted as he was rushing to the aid of Genos.

"Lay off my boyfriends, tiny tits!" Mayu shouted, snapping out of her shock, looking away from Genos, fixing squarely on the other woman, sparking, lighting hissing and spreading around her wisps and tendrils growing into jagged ribbons, roaring and striking the ground, wrapping around her body.

"You wanna fight thunder thighs?!" Tatsumaki yelled right back, the glow that kept her afloat intensifying, rubble floating up behind her, ready to strike down the offender.

"Cut it out both of you." Silver Fang approached slowly, defusing the tension, looking stern and disapproving. Rubble fell back to the ground in the lessened concentration. Lightning fizzled free and burned itself out. "You are part of the Association. Heroes should be conscious of their behaviours." He scolded without changing his volume. But it was very clearly a reprehension.

Mayu lowered her head, blushing slightly, tapping her feet against the ground, dispersing the charge in a few strikes, turning away. Not the time to pick a fight even if she had insulted them and hurled Genos into a boulder. Power and temperament-wise was inviting a catastrophe no matter how badly she felt about the offences.

"Whatever." Tatsumaki huffed and crossed her arms, flying away, interest lost. Still sore but no reason to continue the posturing or remain where she was no longer needed.

"Why are there so many troublemakers amongst the elite heroes?" Bang murmured, sighing, watching, making sure she was gone. "My back is killing me..." The grumbling continued as he walked towards Saitama and his disciple. And, hazarding a guess, the girlfriend. Ah youth.

"Genos... your joints are all bent the wrong way." Saitama was saying, holding onto the rock, having climbed to see the damage. "Here I'll fix you up."

It should be a simple matter of pulling him free.

A clanking sound echoed abruptly, falling into a contrived silence.

"Oh... sorry... your arm came off..." Saitama murmured sheepishly.

Mayu made a little distressed yip, reaching up, grabbing the torn off, disjointed arm, slapping Saitama's head with it. It had no more effect than a napkin to the face both on the metal and on the skin. Sensei took it as an appropriate manifestation of unhappiness on her part.

"Stop hurting him more!" She asked in a concerned tone, approaching to check the damage for herself.
Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

(Revised)

The news had been rambling on and on about the alien attack and the razing of A-city. It was just a nonstop thing every time Saitama turned on the TV after a few hours of it being off in a fed-up huff. Reports, recaps, analysis, interviews, specials about the heroes involved, speculation and multiple theories about the importance of the event. It was tiresome how much of the same the media managed to shove in such a short time span.

Saitama took a sip of his tea, the thing on again, scratching his bum as he walked into what was now the living room, sitting down, in front of the screen, staring blankly at the images flowing, putting the mug on the table, sighing, glancing over his shoulder.

The hole was looking a bit better now that the framing for the partitions was installed. The panels themselves were still pushed against the wall on the other side of the second room, waiting for their turn to be placed. The old man's invitation had had a lousy timing.

Mayu had collapsed while relaying Genos' location and impairment to the doctor through the cyborg's phone as he was unable to do so. Sometimes it took a while for the sensors to pick up his sign when smashed into immobility. She was worried, comforting Genos despite his assurance that there was no cause for concern, that the damage was not too extensive. The cyborg was amused despite still being imbedded in the rock.

Saitama had caught her. She had been perched on a boulder while following the instructions, poking and groping joints and plates, describing what she found so the parts were ready for install. Before Genos could worry Saitama had ended the call and sat down to wait for retrieval despite de cyborg's insistence that they should head home. True he had wanted to go but a few more minutes of keeping company until his lift came by would make no difference.

It had been almost a full day now. His mind went from wandering to the screen where Amai Mask as being interviewed and droning about a new movie based on the events. They didn't even stop to announce if any other threats were ongoing. Most likely there were.

Saitama reached for the tea again, taking a gulp, staring at it with a frown.

Really boring, his mind supplied the situation outline.

The cup returned to the table with a dull clack.

With Mayu asleep and Genos away for repairs his boredom was once again taking over… not even hero business to fill the time. Well… he turned off the TV, stretching.

Unexciting.

There were four mail boxes left by drones on the balcony. It had taken a bit of glaring to discern if they were Association or threat. Not even feeling like sorting through that.
In the silence the voice of the alien came back, provoking a crease on his brow.

He already knew that.

Still this time it had been a bit more of a struggle than usual.

Just a bit.

Enough to get serious.

And from what he seen to get a bit more of notoriety. This time the news were not doubting he had helped. Just saying he helped. Without giving the name. Or anything other than "the bald B-Class hero helped."

Saitama glanced at the letters waiting inside those boxes.

Maybe.

It had felt nice to be on the receiving end of the concern for once.

Genos had been in one piece.

Mayu had no new bruises.

They had…

Eyes closed he shrugged. *Too strong.* But there were people as strong or stronger. It was a persistent, although usually forgotten hope. His fight would come.

The air was pushed out of Saitama as Mayu flopped on his stomach, after dropping on her knees right next to him, groaning, stretching, just out of the shower, after a grumpy awakening and a quick summary to ease her mind and fill in the blanks the blackout had left in her story.

Sparking hands were tapping his chest playfully as she adjusted, climbing on top of him to escape the floor, muttering about the lack of pillows.

Saitama peeked, feeling the shiver of electricity warmth and girl on his skin, propping up on the elbows.

Mayu crossed her arms and rested her chin on them, snuggling closer.

The mood seemed to have improved. She was smiling, no longer tense. Or asleep.

"Rain check on the restaurant until Genos is back or do you want to go on a date and bask in my adulation?" Mayu teased softly, smiling, scooting up to kiss his chin, warm palms delivering a shock as her fingers spread to give some push for reach. The touch of her lips was no less charged. The earring kept chirping. Whatever energy she had built up was still bottled. With all the worry because of Genos’ broken parts she felt a bit guilty about overlooking Saitama after the big battle. A battle he had cared to remember after. Then again she blamed the interruption.

"Rain check." Saitama chuckled, that small, seldom used sound behind closed lips. Attention taken he leaned down, bringing Mayu closer, patting her back softly over the baggy pale shirt, whatever colour it was. One hand pushed away fluffy pink hair, knuckles caressing the blushing skin along the way, rubbing cheeks with a small smile curving his mouth before resting his lips against hers. A slow
brush, convincing them to part in a warm gasp before pressing harder. Saitama's open hand slid down her thigh immediately enveloped and prickled by stray, uncontrolled wisps.

Lightning trailed on his chest, following Mayu's hand, fingertips drawing patterns, still amazed he was unaffected by them. A bit of a scuff mark from time to time but mostly...

"Saying no to free food?" While forming words clearly took a bit of focusing as the need to breathe overcame the lazy nuzzling and electrified kisses, Mayu was able to, arching away from Saitama, arms still around his neck where they had come to rest.

The joking tone vanished through the last syllables, feeling his heartbeat pick up under her palm and toying. Feeling his hands running over her skin, slow, steady, sure, muffling the wisps back into her with a pleasant shiver following. They crackled between them, actually. Whatever escaped singed the floor and fabric around. And feeling her own heartbeat grow painfully fast in response to the combination.

Saitama was focusing on her, dark eyes sharp and unflinching.

Mayu held her breath, surprised, recognizing want.

Carefully she balanced, sitting on his hips, sighing, releasing one arm, taking the storage cell out or the earring before it burst. The little chirp remained but she ignored it. It was Saitama. It was safe to be without insolation.

Moving slowly, arms pushing against the floor until he was sitting too, hands never leaving her body, simply adjusting to the motion, from thighs to bottom to waist, fuelling the ache, inciting a shivering whimper, her hands curling against his skin, scratching, sparking.

"I still want praise." He murmured huskily, the humour vanishing in favour of intensity, leaning down, forehead against hers, one hand used for balance, letting go, leaving a tingling, yearning sensation, the other continuing its path along her form, cupping her cheek, warm and strong.

Mayu chortled, blushing, recovered, finding a matching colour on him despite the sure look, rubbing against his palm.

Closing the distance, the hand that had been still on his chest, feeling his heart echo his mood, slipping a bit down, tugging at the waistband to scoot closer, dragging and bunching fabric between them. Her kiss muffled a startled groan, eyes closing, balance foregone for a tighter embrace, the sudden movement of the falling heroes knocking down the tea.

A nip on his lower lip coaxed a raspy gasp, hands gripping her bottom in response, jolted by the difference, a sudden squeeze followed by a languorous caress, open palms feasting on her curves. Warm, sure, gentle, reciprocal, fluttering pricks of stray electricity dancing over Saitama, sneaking where they could.

Slow motions, curling bodies, immersed in each other.

It made it so easy to feel how hard he was under her.

Smiling Mayu pulled back slowly, lips parting with a wet smack, holding Saitama's face between her palms, the white-blue light from them mingling with the fading sunlight.

"My hero." But despite the joking request for praise if she said more Saitama would get flustered and claim to be disgusted by the compliments. So Mayu said just that as her lips touched his forehead and trailed down the nose, sparking, fingertips exploring his chest, lightning dancing where she shaped
the plasma, watching his reactions.

Seeking, exploring, wanting to hear his voice, see his expressions.

In answer his hands dove into the shirt, wanting more, pulling it, head diving to her bared neck, lips and tongue following the throat she exposed with a moan.

He stopped, hands growing still on her hips.

"...tama..." Mayu murmured, half inquisitive, half moaning, blue nails scratching over his scalp, freed from the short sleeves' confinement, looking at him with heavy lidded eyes, managing a smile.

"Can we?" Saitama whispered, looking up at the bared skin, hesitating, flattening himself against the floor, waiting.

The odd squiggly pattern of the light green bra offset her skin nicely. There were little bows on several spots of the thing. The lightning flowers along her arms and around her neck shimmered with wisps following the paths, unrestrained. She looked soft, inviting. And damn if he didn't want...

With a smile, reassuring and amused Mayu moved her hips against his, slowly, stoking the craving, falling against his chest, hands going down his sides, ticklish, nails teasing. Encouraged he responded, keeping that slow and steady petting wherever he could reach.

"If you want." Her voice was husky.

That Saitama was willing to stop and ask was sweet.

Mayu cupped his cheek once more, kissing him deeply, parting with a sigh, letting the hot breath dance against his skin, moving down his throat with nips and open-mouthed kisses, tongue sneaking teasing licks through the chosen path. She stopped a moment, by his nipple, pinching gently, enjoying the moaned sigh Saitama allowed out. It was a nice sound, coupled with his racing heartbeat and fast breathing. To be the cause of that was elating.

"If not I can zap out and bring food." Mayu offered, reaching the bellybutton, leaving a kiss just under it, arms crossing, chin resting on them, stopping altogether, waiting, watching. The warmth left behind still having its effect on Saitama, a shiver, pleasure, anticipation, desire. The apathy had melted away. There were few times where he looked so flustered and undone. A lot of those involved Genos being overly complimentary or touching the sensitive button of his smooth scalp with the tact of a sledgehammer to the teeth.

"Won't that burn the food?" Saitama reached down, playing with her hair. With a little frustrated sound due to her current state of mild unreachability he tugged. As his gestures proved it was just actual curiosity rather than a refusal of the offer.

Chortling Mayu moved, going back to sitting on his hips. His hands were immediately back to her exposed skin, hooking on the shorts, tugging them down her legs slowly. She moved along.

"I have enough control for that not to happen." Mayu placed her hands on his stomach, pushing herself a bit up to kick away the shorts, the sensations coiling on her stomach, calling a pleased hum of anticipation, sighing, following the ridges and dips of the muscles, zapping him, upping the amps until he twitched and moaned. It was not enough to harm. It was enough to cause the TV to turn back on though, the mumbles of the reporters indistinct, far away. "And..." She asked, voice softening, waiting.

Saitama reached out slowly, taking her hands, stopping the current, his serious look turning cunning
and teasing, guiding them to his pyjama pants, keeping eye contact. They were baggy enough to not need much than a pull and a couple of kicks.

Unremarkable with clothes on.

Sculpted like some sort of deity off of them.

Mayu couldn't help the chortle as the thought crossed her mind, reaching down, to the lack of underwear proving that laundry day was close, grasping him, stroking slowly, enjoying the sharp inhale, the smooth skin, the way his caress over her inner thigh stopped with a jerk, eyes closing, back arching, teeth finding his lower lip, muffling a groan.

In the distraction a harder tug where Saitama's fingers were sneaking under the panties snapped the elastic. Such a small sound, barely discernible under the onslaught of sensations. Mayu stopped, releasing him, chortling low, reaching up to rescue the bra, tossing it away carelessly, capturing his hands, guiding them over her sides, to her breasts, letting them be filled. Taking the cue fondled the soft mounds, pinching the hard nipples, turning the tables, teasing, caressing and exploring, returning the pleasure, feeling her, relishing on the soft sounds of surrender and on the bite of the wild wisps.

Mayu undulated biting her lip, the shiver running along her spine intense, pooling the sensation between her legs, nails sinking into Saitama's skin, guiding herself down on him, mounting, arching and holding her breath in a hiss, lightning shivering along her movements, sparks rewarding her gestures, electricity tingling along their skins.

Saitama moaned under her, hands on her waist, steadying, gripping hard for a second, letting go when she flinched, a bruised pressed, cupping her face, gently, concerned, adjusting, stopping, propping on his arms.

"Mayu?" He asked, making sure, eyeing her body, looking for the marks that he should avoid. They were… still there. Still so recent. Mayu barely complained.

"I'm all right…" She sighed, smiling, returning the gesture before cheekily rocking her hips, watching as his face contorted in a pleased groan, hands falling to the floor, blunt nails scratching the boards.

Mayu's breath was shaky as she kept moving, matching his, keeping herself upright as she rocked slowly, building the heat, watching the usually so apathetic heroic man grow into an agitated lustful mess of moans and longing looks…

"Saitama…" Mayu whispered, moving down, kissing him hard and deep, coming in shaky broken breaths and positive lightning, shattering the light fixtures, snapping the surge protections into working overtime, unable to control. His hands dug his hands deep into the floor, cracking and snapping the structure under them, muscle bunching and flexing under her, coming undone with a drawn groan, panting heavily, heartbeat running, letting go of the crushed debris under his hands to cradle Mayu closer, kissing her cheek as she chortled, noticing the mess around them.
Chapter 22

This felt like being called to the principal's office. A request with no explanation and a strong undertone of «don't dare to skip it». They wanted a meeting at J-City branch, where she initially had been enrolled.

The Association had been insistent in their efforts to contact her from a couple of letters to several e-mails and calls. Most of them missed due to a day-long nap, an unwillingness to sift through the mail and a computer left behind at Suzuna's. One of those was just to make sure she hadn't exploded another drone.

Unfortunately they had cut in cuddling time in the last ditch attempt to establish contact.

So she had agreed, assured them there was destroyed robot for them to take care of and returned to Saitama with a blanket. Being sprawled about like starfish was all well and good until someone sneezed.

Mayu sighed, following the lady in a business suit after a short wait in the lobby, sitting on the chair that was assigned to her in front of the panel of Association Examiners behind a long desk, staring at the tip of her polka dot shoes waiting. She had counted four people and one screen. There were cameras somewhere too. Associates, backers and advisors would be watching.

Could be about the investigation on the robots.

Could be about her performance as a hero.

Could be about the catalogue drafts she had updated so far.

"Aida Mayu, Hero Name: Tempest." One of the men, slender, pale and sharply dressed spoke up, bringing the chatter of the others to a stop. "During the events in A-City you were B-Class Rank 42. Of course those that went directly against the Alien threat are having their ranks revised. You will receive the files when those changes are finalized."

"So this is about the catalogue?" She asked, fidgeting a bit. If that was all a mail would have sufficed.

"No." The woman in a prim pink dress with a formal jacket stated, joining the tips of her manicured fingers. "This is an A-Class hearing." A small smile appeared on her painted lips, appreciated the bewildered state of the interviewee.

"There is no way that what I did in A-City bumped my rank that much." Mayu stated. The rules said that for moving class the rank had to count down to one. And she was not even actively trying to do that. She had been placed in B-Class for convenience and to keep her within the Association.

"True. But there are several circumstances on your file that have led to this interview." A chubby man with glasses answered, placing his phone on the digital table, bringing up the aforementioned documents. "This hearing is to review this and to assure you that moving to A-Class is the best decision."

Another not-a-choice. Mayu sighed and settled.

"Very well…” She murmured, waiting. If it had to be she just had to listen and make the best of it. It was a promotion in the end and it came with more money. And fame. Fame sold books.
"The most obvious thing to take into account is the nature of your powers." The fourth member was also a woman, tall and thin with a robotic augmentation beneath her eye. "The file says unstable but judging from footage taken from several confrontations that is clearly no longer the case." The information was swiftly updated before her eyes, easing her fear. "However consider this: Metal Knight still keeps his offer available. S-Class support does count for a lot and we strongly believe you should consider this proposition for the benefit of the Association and by extent humanity."

"No. I don't want to... take that offer." Mayu hid a shiver, looking down. There were murmurs. But they wouldn't really understand why. It was scary enough to have powers she could not control or contain and be told by a robot that the easiest way to deal with it was simply for her to be locked away in a box that would drain and repurpose the lightning. While showing several monsters in similar situations. There was an idea that came from the woman's phrasing. If S-Class links were beneficial to keeping her out of the monster dungeons... "I have however begun training with S-Class Genos. His methods are more in-line with what I needed to properly wield my abilities."

"Can he provide your readings?" The chubby man asked, making a contact note.

"Yes. As soon he is available." Mayu assured them, relieved that they believed that.

"Amai Mask also believes that because of your occupation as an Author A-Class would not be wasted on you." Mayu tilted her head at that. Seeing that she had been rather rude to him a recommendation was the last thing she expected. Maybe it was just an off-handed comment because Tsubaki had been hired as the screenwriter of another of his TV series. Boosting Mayu boosted himself through the connection of the written work of both women. "That also weighted in in the setting of this hearing."

"The amount of hero work you produce is above the A-Class average." She pursed her lips, glancing aside. There really was no need to look for hero duties when the threats came to her and looked threatening enough for everyone around. And she was not telling that to the skinny man until they sent her the results Genos had asked. "Not to mention the prompt response to the alien threat. On the scene almost as quickly as the S-Class that were not called away on other missions."

"Along with this we have to take into account the public image aspect. It would look very good for someone like you, a young woman, to move up to A-Class because of her efforts against the aliens and before that all the fights against monsters you have been involved in. We have the images to back up the decision if skill was all it took." The woman in the dress smiled as she spoke, enthusiastic.

"And of course your friend and co-author Mori Suzuna being one of the people whose parents make regular and sizeable donations. We can only assume that giving a good position to a friend would only help the Association." Mayu bottled a chortle as the lady with the augmentation scanned the updated profile.

"In all seriousness there is also the pressure B-Class is subjected to due to the hero factions." The chubby man intervened. "And that makes a lot of people quit..."

"I have no intention of quitting yet." Mayu answered softly, smiling, relieved, brushing the issue aside. It was all about publicity and money. Not worth worrying about. "Do what you have to do and then leave me be."
The text was not cooperating. Mayu squinted at the screen and its mostly blank brand new document and its annoying blinking bar, grimacing reaching for the jellybeans. Hoard was already sent for print after the editing had been finalized and the new theme had been chosen. It was very close to final form before she had to zap herself out.

So far she had Madness a handful of ideas on the papers. But none of them seemed to be going anywhere. Which was maddening and keeping up with the theme. Humming she made another note on the nearest paper. Sighing heavily she closed the documents and went to revise the hero catalogue. While it required no standing up it was a change of gears of thought.

Saitama wasn't home. Out on a walk. Likely bored. His hero suit was cape-less and drying on the balcony. Maybe he was hunting for a replacement. She hadn't been paying attention, focused on the uncooperative brain-screen-hands-keyboard combo.

The body of text was mostly closed. If anything of notoriety happened she would be informed and whatever it was would be added and adjusted as the space and word limit permitted. There really were no changes there.

Some entries had just needed a tweak and some additions. Others had to be reworked. The mark of several styles hung over the catalogue. Three years. Consulting the previous three versions showed that whoever had made the second was mathematical and methodical to the point of dull. It read like a manual to assemble a kitchen cabinet.

In the first there was no S-class, having been established sometime after the book, but the writer was keen on making it look appealing, exciting, almost like the character guides of a manga or show.

The third was a copy-paste job with minimal adjustments and adding. Just a minimum effort mess she was attempting to hammer into shape. She stopped, staring at the black and white displayed, nipping her lower lip.

A-class...

After the tests, after the interviews and the certificate Mayu had gone to Suzuna's to retrieve her laptop. Her friend had apologized up and down that her donation had been seen as a bribe. She had walked out of there with the catalogue and a joke, assuring her of no ill will or lingering annoyance.

The Association would use everything to get the individuals they wanted. In the files she received there were several entries documenting those measures of persuasion and keep. It was how they worked. Industry, business, money, power. A need was being answered but there were those mooching on it.

Frustrated, unable to face the keyboard, she stood and headed towards the piled boxes of mail, dumping the papers on the empty spot, away from her notes. She used the boxes to sort them after, to keep things tidy. It was just something different to do. Kind of mechanical, to clear her head.

Genos' pile was massive and full of scented girly stationery paper.

Saitama was receiving more and more admiration instead of threats and accusations. Those would have to be hidden for their sender's sake.

Hers were a mix. Fans, questions, request for autographed stuff. A few creeps with stupid
propositions. Those, much like people questioning Saitama's heroism needed to be disposed of before Genos ever found out about them.

Despite her fast track no one was accusing her of cheating. Perhaps due to the flashy nature of her powers. They were obvious, visible, loud and the earlier coercion campaign for her joining had left marks on the public perception.

The door clicked. Mayu jumped, startled, peeking at the corridor, finding a familiar figure there.

"Genos..." she called out, running to him, arms around his frame, barely giving him time to straighten after taking off his shoes. The cyborg hesitated for a moment before returning the gesture.

"I'm home..." Genos murmured. The new arms responded readily to the movement and intent, correcting pressure and position. He pressed his cheek against the fluffy hair, feeling warmth through the wisps and contact. It seemed the doctor had indeed implemented his request. While shock and heat resistance were increased in the new material the sensory input was not affected. With a bit of tweaking and adjustment he was sure he could create a "keen" mode, much like the basic arms he used for housework. Self-indulging, yes but...

"Welcome back." Mayu answered, smiling, curling around him, kissing his lips soft and slow, eagerly returned, hands caressing his arms, examining them. The wisps left no marks on the material but their snap of static and energy remained, lingering sweetly.

"It took longer because the upgrades were ready so I chose to go through with it instead of just replacing them." Genos explained as they settled. He pitched in the mail sorting immediately. Mayu nodded, reaching out, forgetting the task in favour of exploring his new chrome and black arms with soft strokes and gentle fingertips, conscious of her sparks. Amusingly, almost to a nostalgic degree, it felt ticklish. "Were you ok waking up?"

"Yes." Mayu nodded. There was a comfortable silence between them as she explored. "We need to talk." She spoke up after a moment, discarding the official Association letters. That issue was already dealt with. Mayu stopped her poking about placed her hands on her lap and faced the cyborg until his attention was fully on her. "Saitama and I had sex." Calmly she explained what had changed. It wasn't something grand or momentous. But it was something they hadn't planned or talked about much before. And for everything to work they needed to discuss certain things be them as simple as not liking one soup or as intimate as who slept with whom and when. How was pretty much mechanical at some point. If Genos didn't want to talk about it she would wait until he did but for everyone sake it was better if he knew.

Genos stared, stopping, processing the information, spotting the broken areas of the floor, and some burnt marks that a scrubbing hadn't been able to fully eliminate before looking at her, assessing for alterations. She was nervous but not fidgeting, looking at him, waiting.

"I see..." the cyborg murmured, the neutral answer filling the sudden odd silence. Mayu was in a relationship with both. There would be different levels of intimacy between them as things progressed. Each individual had a rhythm and others would have to either adapt or ask for an adjustment, work through the wants, desires and needs as they came. "It makes sense that sensei would be the first choice, being older and theoretically more experienced." Mayu pressed her lips together, keeping the laugh in, the slight worry of a jealous outburst fading. He was overanalysing again. And glorifying Saitama. "Of course sensei would not disappoint..." There was a long pause. "Of course if something were to be unsatisfactory I am sure Sensei's diet can be adjusted as well as some research can be conducted as to…"
"That aside..." Mayu slapped the top of his head with a bundle of papers, chortling slightly, feeling her cheeks redden. Genos stopped making his serious investigation face and looked at her, blinking. "Are you upset?"

"No." Genos shook his head thinking it through. "In its essence nothing has changed. Sensei and you were simply more comfortable to go a bit further. I am not equipped..."

"Genos that doesn't matter." Mayu approached and hugged him, sparkling harder, letting him feel the heat and the scorch of a little lightning. "No need to rush into anything."

"I want to talk about this." The cyborg decided, adjusting. Mayu was now sitting on his lap, arms around his neck, eyes-to-eye. "There are sex-bots..."

"I know." Mayu sighed as the catalogue came back to haunt her.

"Huh?" Genos stopped, as embarrassed as she looked.

"Suzuna is rich. Obscenely so. She thinks men would want her for that money. So she built-a-boyfriend. Toma is a partial AI with a basic personality capable of evolving and a single programed order: To love her. He loves her and she loves him." Mayu smiled as took his hand, playing with the articulated palm, watching it move under each stroke. "It weird and sweet."

"Why is it weird?" Sex-bots were very human-like down to a simulated circulatory system that made them able to blush, flush and feel warm to the touch without need of prolonged contact. He had been researching too, both curious and wanting to know. But if she though robot-human relations were...

"He has this flirty persona that just goes overboard... We were sure he was human, a gold-digger and cheating two minutes into the first meeting. He calls us dollies. Suzuna is babydoll. Other girls are honeys. Turns out she likes the idea of a rake without the rest of the risks." Mayu sighed and placed her palm flush against his. "This is being said because she made me borrow the catalogue."

"So we have that option along with asking the Doctor..." Genos seemed a bit cheered.

"True but... I..." Mayu blushed and looked down, holding his hand. "Kind of wanted to see how far I could take you... as you are." She smiled, finding his eyes, reaching up, brushing hair away, cupping his face. "Then if you want we can go beyond."

"I..." Genos moved her closer, eyes closing, the awkwardness fading. She felt warm and soft. His body was tingling along with the lighting playing over the metal. "Would like that."

"When you feel ready, ask." She kissed him again, reassured, free of the earring, hugging him close, discovering that a spark on the elbow activated the cooling systems. "Welcome back, sweetie."
"Where is the fabric softener?" Genos asked, cabinets open, glaring at the appallingly empty shelves, balancing the basket of white clothes. It was overflowing. Probably he would have to separate it into two loads.

Sorting had taken a while as well.

It had been a few busy days and they had fallen behind on some housework.

It seemed the work around the Hero Association tower was close to finished and they were eager to erase from memory the debacle of the aliens annihilating a whole city.

Meaning they had received a lot of calls and requests.

"There is a sale tomorrow. We are stocking up." Mayu answered, looking up from her phone after rescuing her delicates from the several piles. Genos was hard on lacy fabrics. But she had more undies to camouflage the fact that a few had ended up being used as cleaning rags after being weakened and torn apart.

A message was promising extra pay and ranking to heroes that answered a particular request. Knowing a bribe and a publicity stunt on a glance she turned on the TV to investigate, leaving the phone on the table, pulling the flyer from under another pile of papers she wasn't sure she had put there, showing it.

There was a list too, somewhere, divided by store. With her ability to zap she could reach more sales in a timely manner and adding a big enough duffle bag Mayu was also able to hold and zap back with the supplies.

Saitama's preferred channel popped to life, giving an update on the situation. The implications took what should be a demon-level threat to a higher level of scrutiny in the public's eye.

This is an unprecedented catastrophe. A reporter was announcing, standing at the site, beyond a security barrier. According to our information a single monstrous being is attacking and about to annihilate the entire Z-City police force. It seems they have requested help from the Hero Association. A line of heroes was already in the background, getting ready to advance. Even the police calls on heroes in times of need. The reporter continued her padding of the situation, pointing to the broken windows, describing the attacks that had previously occurred and the many theories about them. It seemed an ongoing threat that had been left alone for too long.

Genos joined her in the centre of the room, staring at the screen as well, basket tilted against his hip, taking the promotion announcement.

"Should we go?" He asked carefully, examining the images, getting the coordinates. A slight beep marked Sensei's position. Before he could inform her Mayu answered softly.

"No." Her tone was bit regretful. It would help them if they were saved but the police's reputation would be damaged. The consequences for the public would be too dire.

True, they were in Z-City.

True, monsters attacking the police was a bad thing.
But it was also true that going to them now even if with good intentions would only further the Association's particularly petty and mean-spirited stunt to assert some sort of stupid dominance.

There were ways the public would have benefited of an alliance of heroes and the police.

Monsters were not news.

They had always appeared.

What if the Association with the government had created programs to educate children to fight, to be able to self-defend, growing into a generation of self-reliant adults?

Could even make a few hero-advancement programs.

People who knew how to fight and how to run if the monster was too much instead of just screaming for a hero.

But as a story weaver she could also flip those ideals.

What if the generation that was trained turned into super criminals, overwhelming police and heroes?

What if that training or scientific exploration bread more monsters?

What if…

Madness…

Diving for the papers she started to scribble.

Someone is coming out of the police station. The pen stopped when Genos responded to the announcement with a muffled «Sensei». Mayu looked up and smiled, seeing he had found the solution to the standoff between private and public services of protection. He is carrying something. Saitama looking very serious and solemn in a police uniform walked out of the station carrying a huge blobby mass of a monster, tossing it on the steps like trash, shoulders rolling, clapping his hands to get rid of the dust, That… that's the monster. The police was able to handle the monster in less time than it took the heroes to act. Who is that officer? Give us a name! Please allow us to interview him!

Genos nodded prideful as the reporters tried to talks to the police and breach into the station. Sensei had resolved the situation perfectly. Seeing they had no materials to proceed with the washing up it was best to leave the sorted clothes lined and ready to proceed to the next phase as soon as the items were acquired.

Vacuuming could be easily done now.

"I have been meaning to ask…" Mayu frowned as the TV was turned off, staring at her notes, leafing through them, stitching a plot together, feeling a little relief. "Saitama doesn't have a phone but he has a signal tracker… what did you do? Sew it up to his undies or just injected a chip in his arse?"
A terrified shriek echoed shortly after the cheerful chirp of the phone. Genos opened the panel with a jerk, blasters ready, stopping without a target, watching dumbfounded as Mayu ran around picking pieces to throw into her purse, fixing her outfit, hunting shoes. She stopped on the centre of the room, looking around, bunching her hair into a bun, bouncing while looking around, burning scuff marks into the floor with stray nervous sparks, murmuring, finding him, smiling a bit bashfully.

"I overslept..." she murmured, returning to action after her hair was in place and everything accounted for in her head, opening the widow stepping outside, putting shoes on, tapping tip and heel to fix the fit. Her head poked back inside, the grin less self-conscious now. "Don't wait up," Mayu blew a kiss, winking, hopping on the balcony's rail, zapping off with a short backward skip.

"Was it a wasp again?" Sensei peeked into the room, toothbrush in his mouth, mug in hand.

Genos shook his head, relaxing, returning the systems to standby.

"I believe she may be late, sensei." The cyborg deduced, walking into the room to tidy up.

Mayu took a deep breath, freefalling above the city, finding the nearest building, zapping to its top, attempting to dispel the lightning before touching the surface to keep the landing damage to a minimum.

Checking the time she bit her lip.

A couple zaps would be enough but the landing would be tricky in a crowded area.

Sighing she looked down.

Might as well go down and run. She had already cut the bulk of travel time in four hops and about ten, fifteen seconds.

Vaulting off she zapped down, landing like a lightning strike.

Right on top of something that was crawling out of the sewers that let out a very shocked screech before fainting, charred and fried.

Two heroes she recognized but whose names she couldn't remember stared at her, confused, lowering arms.

Letting out an embarrassed chuckled Mayu hopped off the unconscious mysterious being.

"You can go ahead and claim the credit..." She offered, starting to run.

A truck backing away honked, startling her into a side jump but not slowing her down.

A mugger attempting to steal from an old lady was tasered down by a slap on his back.

"Call the police Ma'am!" Mayu advised, still running, staring to feel her breath go ragged and panting.

Stopping, hopping from foot to foot as she waited for the light Mayu grimaced, looking right and left seeing nothing but traffic and no people.
She hopped forward, zapping to the other side, resuming the run. A man was startled enough by the sudden appearance to drop the boxes he was carrying.

There were four drones following her.

Mayu sighed and stopped, sparking, forcing the plasma into a strip before electrifying it, whipping wit in an arch, trying to get all of them at the same time without letting an electrical pulse that could damage the surroundings or the time-consuming task to going after each flying nuisance.

Two fell in one swoop. The third needed a bit more juice to the strike and the fourth fell without her direct interference, going down to the crisscrossing shards of lighting left by the explosion of the first targets.

Confirming she resumed her mad dash to the dome.

The line was huge, filled with people in black and metal.

Deflated Mayu checked the time after another scan of the fans waiting, shouting songs, competing and calling friends to them. She had been ten minutes late before zapping off. She was now fourteen minutes and everyone had crowded to get the tickets. And she couldn't see anyone…

"Hey Pink Dolly." Toma placed his arm around her waist, kissing her cheek. In that crowd he fit in, synthetic skin tattooed with blocky stylized thorns and black-and-red hair. Leather and chains made up most of his outfit. His eyes were gunmetal grey, the pupil metallic with no lenses to mimic humanity. "Babydoll is already in the line. Sent me to hunt you down. You aren't as late as you thought." He teased.

"Can we get the ticks?" Mayu asked, hopping up and down.

"Sure. She isn't that far from the box. I was here all night snarling at those place-stealers." Toma smiled, metal dimples glinting and patted the small of her back, pushing her towards the line. "Let's go Dolly."

It wasn't like Suzuna couldn't get the three tickets they needed in other ways but ROAR refused to sell online. They aesthetic called for a war to get the tickets in the place where the concert would be held. But seeing it would only be her, Suzuna and Toma going they were meeting on the line to hangout, trade ideas and then go attack a sweets café with the others that refused to go near the shouting.

Usually Mayu stood out because she was the girl in pale colours that roared as loud, if a bit off tone, as any other fan. Much to Genos and his perfect pitch despair.

That day, much to her confusion and semi-constant blushing, the others weren't looking at her pastel colours for a moment longer than needed as much as they were calling out for Tempest, asking for pics and autographs.
Chapter 26

Hot spring vacation.

Nice gesture or attempt to butter up?

Mayu was inclined to choose nice this time around, just a way to say thank you to those involved in
the alien incident now that the aftermath seemed to have been sorted out. And in a way that was the
association saying «It's fine, we dealt with it and let us never speak of this, or the city that was blown
up, ever again.»

Also it didn't hurt that all those that had been called had either been featured on the news screens or
belonged to S-Class. That was the suspiciously cajoling part of it but seeing the three of them were
included she didn't actually mind. A day off and away sounded good.

While the men side was packed the girl side of the springs was only occupied by Mayu, two ladies of
the Disaster Coordination Department and Tatsumaki. She was rather surprised Tatsumaki had come
but after all a day of pampering was a day of pampering no matter how aloof one acted.

The water felt nice and warm and the earring crystal was new to make sure no one would suffer from
leaking electricity if her focus lapsed. With other people in the water it was just not an option. Even if
one of them was the psychic brat and some payback was due.

The extensive scarring on Mayu's arms and neck had garnered attention from the younger girl with a
sympathetic wince to boot. The other lady probably was senior enough in the Association to have
had access to her files. Tatsumaki had narrowed her eyes at the sight of those too. Or it could have
been the chest. Hard to say.

The ruckus on the other side made the esper huff as she caught snippets of the subject while soaking.

"I could have handled those aliens all by myself anyway." Tatsumaki muttered proudly.

Choosing the non-confrontational way seemed the best course Mayu thought, stretching without a
word as the other women smiled in half-agreement, half-appeasement and the other side erupted in
shouts and splashes. Not worth disrupting the peaceful water just to point out that S-Class number 2
Terrible Tornado, The Great and Powerful Tatsumaki hadn't and the B-Class had beaten her to the
punch. Literally.

"I initially did not recognize the prophecy that the Earth was in great danger was foretelling a real
threat. But you fought against that threat and I gathered all of you here to thank you." Director Sitch
started his discourse as dinner was being served and drinks poured in the big hall. S-Class and
operations personnel wearing the Ryokan's guest yukata listened, glasses ready. "I am grateful for all
your hard work the other day. For today I want all of you to let go of all your stress and burdens and
just enjoy the night to the fullest." He raised his beer glass, smiling to the group. "Cheers everyone!"

"Cheers."

The answer was immediate and dinner started, booze flowing over the exquisite meal prompting
silliness, muscle contests, weird dares, odd questions and showing off. They broke into groups, each
with their own style of drink or talking.
It was not a good dinner for drinking. Mayu decided as she tasted the dishes with sips of the available spirits, just tasting them. Usually if she was going to be drinking she liked layering the alcohol with curly fries to lessen the blow with grease. Timing the greasy food helped with the resistance when they were out partying. Also she preferred sweet drinks or jelly shots or gummy bears soaked in booze.

"Are you all right?" Genos looked a bit gloomy as she asked, leaning against him, the pink of the haori, the pink of her hair and the pink of her cheeks close to matching. Before he could answer Tatsumaki mumbled, red and tipsy, cutting in without a care.

"I'm sleepy. Here take this. I guess I really am a lightweight." Stretching her arm to impose the beer to whoever was standing next to her the heroine hiccupped slightly eyes narrowing in search of focus.

"You just need practice and fries." Mayu answered, chuckling, hugging Genos by the waist, leaning forward in conspiracy, reaching for the offered beer.

"What do you mean lightweight?" Saitama walked by and stole the cup from both the women's grasp. "This stuff for adults. Underage kids aren't supposed to be drinking, you know? Children should be drinking orange juice instead."

"I could go for juice." Mayu murmured shortling kissing Geno's cheek, standing a bit wobbly. "Been a while…" Murmuring she headed towards the bar area, greeting some of the heroes in her path, startling a few when the fabric rubbing against itself snapped with static.

"I'll order some." Saitama offered, leaving the bottle of good sake, following, leaving Tatsumaki steaming.

Genos closed his eyes with a sigh.

Even if Sensei believed he was being considerate it was clear that Tornado's pride was being challenged.

But that was none of his business the cyborg thought joining Mayu when she grabbed his hand and asked for a stroll, smiling with a bit of mischief, leaving the hall for the moonlit night, curling against his side. Sensei joined them in stargazing a few hours later, also tipsy and sharing a new bottle of the good stuff. And a glass of apple juice.
chapter 27

Of course things had to go wrong.

Mayu blinked and yawned, pulling the yukata and haori into place, keeping from grumbling about its runaway sleeves, as the lady that had been asked to retrieve her explained the situation, voice filled with nervousness, trembling and faltering.

One of the S-class had been murdered just outside the dining hall and everyone was to meet by the crime scene so the culprit could be found. Personally Mayu would be inclined to believe Zombieman had killed himself by running around with swords while drunk. That was all she got from the conversation: skewered Zombieman. And as death for that particular S-class hero was a temporary state she wasn't too sure as to why they were making such a big ruckus about it.

However when reaching the scene there was a problem with the positioning for the theory of self-inflicted fatality unless some cartoony antics had taken place. Such as tripping, losing the blade, having it twirl about in the air before falling sharp side down on the Zombieman that ran in circles in an attempt to catch it. And that seemed too silly somehow.

Who was gathered was looking suspiciously at one another, most sporting crossed arms and narrow eyes that darted from frowny face to frowny face.

Child Emperor was impersonating an investigator. He seemed mildly enthusiastic about it.

Atomic Samurai and Iaian were the first addressed. One because he owned the sword and both because blades were their weapon of choice. However they would have been unable to perpetrate the murder as the student and teacher had been boozing in the company of Bang and Darkshine.

Their alibi was further confirmed by Tanktop Master that added director Sitch as another witness with a very reliable testimony. Insurance maybe. Credibility restored and reinforced Bang used his age and acquired wisdom in an attempt to keep tempers quiet as Child Emperor tried to find another angle.

But it was a group that had too much suspicion, too much competition, just too much... politely put maybe she should say testosterone poisoning...

Darkshine frowned and turned to Puri Puri Prisoner, as a memory of the previous day surfaced. As it turned out it was just hunk watching but his life sentence made him shadier than the regular hero-business bloke. And while he had an alibi for most of the night his memories of following and watching Zombieman through the party landed on Saitama asking about the victim's inability to say dead through stabbing, immolation, crushing, drowning...

Genos reacted at once, hands on hips, glaring heavily, golden eyes at the level of the pint-sized kid for further intimidation. Mayu glanced at Saitama who didn't bother with the implicit accusation, nodding, telling he did ask about it. Curiosity at the amazing ability. Even if it was for a test run she doubted Tama would try it. Also from her documents offing that guy was nigh impossible. And that line of thought made her wonder why was he still laying down on the floor, eyes closed, unbreathing... wait... the sword was rattling slightly in a steady rhythm.

Child emperor was trying to placate the cyborg through logic, pointing out that little was known about Saitama and at he could be a spy. Even as he denied that possibility as ridiculous by insulting his indolent face. That got a rise from Saitama and served to further Genos threatening glare.
Chortling Mayu petted the insulted man's back, easing his frown.

Genos' defence attempt went as far as he could take it before collapsing in the realization that sensei could have indeed stabbed Zombieman for the sake of confirming the information he had been given. Drunken as most heroes had been it could have even been a dare. However reassuring sensei that he would say that much in court seemed only to increase Saitama's annoyance.

Mayu pointed out in a quick whisper that suspecting him to the point of willingness to commit perjury was not as helpful in the least. He did apologise after sensei’s gruff denial and annoyance rang genuine.

The inquiry turned to her. Admitting to being in a make-out session with Genos in the garden came with a small blush and a smile. The cyborg glared at the group, challenging a reaction. Targeting Sensei and Mayu was not something he was willing to endure.

Met with silence the inquiry continued.

With most of the people to his right properly accounted for Child Emperor turned to the others.

Pig god was away with the food.

Watchdogman was asleep.

Flashy Flash was deemed too quiet for innocence.

Metal Bat was too chatty that morning, when attention fell on him claiming to have been a beacon of sobriety last night.

With most heroes having some kind of proof they had not done the deed the suspicion should turn to the staff. They were there simply to report the event, waiting to know what to tell the proper authorities. And as stated before it would be unlikely that normal, untrained people would be able to take down a hero of the highest rank.

Who else was missing?

It was rather obvious.

King was at the end of the corridor, amidst the shadows, staring at the group, silent, a pounding sound emerging from his way when addressed. Evasive answers and disclaimers even though he admitted to be the one that had found the body and contacted the hotel front desk.

Tatsumaki, the other missing bit of S-class, made her grand entrance and claimed everyone was suspicious and should be restrained.

The issue was resolved by the murder victim's awakening and being rather confused by the commotion around the blood puddle the stabbing had created. He did request that the katana was pulled out. It was hard to do that bit himself, after all. Not enough arm. Even though he had been stabbed he had remained in place to sleep off the alcohol.

The guilt shifted quite quickly to the shocked person whose powers glowed green and made things float.

Easy-going Zombieman had forgiven all due to the boozed up state of the people that had killed and died. Even if Saitama murmured that all that was less than common occurrence as everyone went about to enjoy the rest of the hours offered by the Association.
Going home Saitama wondering about the flow of events.

Particularly on how a little girl had gotten drunk.

Genos and Mayu exchanged a small glance. She adjusted the pearly green straps of her travel backpack.

They had linked the murder case to the Terrible Tornado's wounded pride. Both by the age and condescendence. While most liked to be thought as younger there was a line between pleasantly youthful-looking and just a brat.

"So you were snuggling?" Saitama teased, stretching, walking backwards.

"It was a pretty place and I was tipsy." Mayu chortled, skipping to match their pace. "Also big part of coming to that was to relax and get lovey-dovey." Even with all the commotion.

"Yeah... it was nice." A smile crossed Saitama's face as his hands went into the pockets.

Genos nodded sharply, decisive in his agreement.
Chapter 28

The lightning strike slammed into the road, burning and roaring, fizzling away around Mayu as she breathed in, flats touching the pavement, dismissing the lingering wisps with a wide wave of her arms, the built-up charge responding smoothly. Her hair flopped down and all crackling stopped, suppressed. Getting easier. The radius of the hit was also nicely reduced. Less harmful for arrival at regular places.

It was dark already.

The meeting had dragged on forever and she had drawn the short straw. Her turn to face the annoying money-people. It was a rule Suzuna's parents had instituted when they had started to publish, just a way to make sure they knew how everything was being organized, spent and earned. While logical it could get tiresome and nowadays quite unnecessary. So luck dictated who would go. Who did go was free from the next game of chance.

The street was dipped into pitch black as usual.

Not that the lamps didn't have power but most had been broken by the many roaming monsters that came to bother Saitama.

But it was strange that the apartments were dark as well.

A faint light was moving in a zigzag beyond the wall that secluded what had once been the apartment complex's parking lot. Hopping with a light zap she got on top of the bricks, looking down, head tilting as she processed the sight of her boyfriends crouched on the grass sorting pebbles by the light built into Genos eyes.

"A moon rock?" Mayu asked, puzzled as they finally abandoned the search and came upstairs, home. In that time she had changed and curled into the futon with the laptop and attempted to progress with the month's tale. It was not going swimmingly but neither was it blocked anymore. Reaching the end was the objective. It could be worked out after a base was built.

"They pay a lot for those you know." Saitama answered, looking a bit pouty, stretching and changing before raiding the fridge. Leftover noodles were reheated and devoured as he hunted for a movie, grumbling about the misfortune.

"You could have waited for popcorn." Mayu mentioned, bemused, typing.

"Sensei was actually able to acquire it after hitting the moon." Genos joined her in writing, recording the event along with all alien related in the notebook. There was a sketch of the ship, annotations linking to several other sections of his comprehensive work of study.

"Well..." Mayu chuckled, closing the uncooperative work. "It had to be." Made sense.

In the end it was the first time in a few days they were able to be together. Between publicity, work, monsters and weird sleep cycles. Every day there seemed to be a new menace popping up. Oddly enough there was also a bit of a welcome lull in the machine's fixation with Mayu.

Popcorn, movie, cuddles.

Just a nice time.
Still waiting for the restaurant date but at that time the place would already be closed.

Genos stared at the screen, saving the link and keeping his research neat, scrolling down to see if it had a bibliography or directed him to another trove of sources, documents or information. It had not. Sighing he maximized the search engine and reworded his research topics.

While growing stronger was his main priority that his life was also changing and branching, developing and Dr. Kuseno did encourage him to live as much as a human as he could while keeping the goal in mind.

Before Sensei he had disregarded that advice but it was proving a good mind-set to have. Even if Sensei himself sometimes seemed disconnected from human-kind himself. Less and less these days. He had noticed that slight change, a bit more of a willingness to have others around even if other than he and Mayu few seemed to be given the authorization to linger.

That site was purely made for entertainment purposes and no doubt its contents would be fantasy of the possibly rather inaccurate kind. Genos closed it and tried once more, deciding to start where a human would when choosing a sex-bot. As expected there was a lot on how to proceed but it was focusing on the assembly and use of parts. It was less helpful than he expected.

Mayu had said "as he was" but there should be no harm in making sure he had absolutely all the information needed before proceeding and that included asking Sensei as a teacher, a man and as part of the relationship. Of course his advice would be much more valuable than anything the internet had to offer. Short of asking Mayu herself, something he did not want to do until he was sure he understood what that spark of want, of need truly was and how he could manage it, there should be no better source.

The annotations on the notebooks reserved for that purpose were not…

It looked as if he had not made that great of an effort.

"Sensei." Genos called, closing the browser.

"What?" Saitama answered, looking up from the newspaper.
"Stop laughing." Saitama grumbled into the of assorted croquettes and sauces plate after pouring his mortification to Mayu. While serious at first, patting his arm in understanding and support she had long since dissolved into a fit of unending chortles. There were attempts to contain, hide and drown them in the parfait but to no avail. It was not what she had been expecting of that attempt to lift Saitama's odd mood.

"I'm sorry but that was..." Mayu stopped and placed the spoon with raspberry sorbet in her mouth before the chortling came out once more. "Kind of cute." Sidestepping the funny side of the whole story she focused on the concern at hand. "He hasn't said a thing and I promised I wouldn't press."

"So I'm just going to have to answer awkward questions until he feels ready?" Saitama grumbled, dipping and biting one of the fried treats. In a way he was already resigned with that fate. Most of the time he didn't actually mind. But it had kind of blindsided him.

"Pardon me for mocking but isn't that the whole basis of Genos' training with you?" Mayu teased, finding the blueberry layer.

It was part of the explanation of why Genos had questioned Saitama.

The other reasons were tied to the admiration and trust on sensei.

A chortling Mayu made the embarrassment a bit better. Slightly easier to bear. Knowing that Genos would ask her too soon also had payback written all over it.

"Smartass." He muttered, resting a cheek on his hand, dipping another morsel. Yet it did manage to pry a smile from Saitama. Satisfied by that Mayu returned to her parfait. "Where to next?"

"The park?" Mayu considered glancing outside. Sunny day. Monsters popping up everywhere. "We could…"

"What is a cutie like you doing with a loser like that..." For whatever reason some muscle-bound bloke in a black T-Shirt decided to barge in, trying to sneak his arm over Mayu's shoulder. "Ow" With the predictable result of a very nasty discharge of static making him rethink that idea with a bit of a squeal.

"Dating. Go away." Mayu answered curtly without looking.

"Can't you feel the spark between us..." Undeterred the man tried again. "ouch!" And this time the discharge didn't even wait for the beefy arm to approach.

"That was almost as bad as joining Lightning Genji and Lighting Max and calling ourselves the Zap-Zap team." Mayu muttered to the strawberries moving part of her fluffed hair out of the way.

"Did that happen?" Saitama asked, signalling the waitress, asking for some tea.

"No." Mayu chortled, moving the spoon in the air, covering her mouth. "Sounded too plausible though."

"What..." Ignored the guy was staring to get angry through the confusion of being shocked and ignored. As hints went Mayu's were rather obvious. Coupled with the blunt statement at the start of the harassment one could start questioning if audition problems were in play.
Screams outside caught their attention.

People inside the restaurant began to grow spooked as well engaging in the usual hide-about protocol.

Mayu sighed and placed her spoon on top of the glass bowl.

"I'll go." She told Saitama, hopping down the chair, walking outside, going by the window and down the street.

Thunder roared out of sight, bright flashes of light following a beanstalk monster desperately fleeing scorched, crying and cursing, while shooting explosive fava, whipping string beans against walls of electricity, growing winged beans to flee into the sky.

Mayu struck it down, running after it, reappearing at the restaurant's window, with a wide blast, the wisps around her blasting outwards, crisscrossing the area above, disintegrating the falling lentils, protecting the people still ran and hide in the street, calling out for them to clear the area where the now grilled monster fell.

Confirming that it was done she returned, hopping back on the chair, still surrounded by wisps, humming.

"Are you sure you don't want a bite?" Picking up the spoon and digging into the crunchy cookie layer she turned it towards Saitama, offering.

"Just got my tea." Saitama raised the cup. The waitress smiled nervously, staring wide eyed at Mayu. "You're panting a bit."

"There were a lot of people not to hit." Mayu shrugged, taking the spoonful with a smile. "Fine handling like that is" She made a little grunt, grimacing, chortling after.

"You're a hero or something?" Despite the earlier stunned silence and terrified look the guy didn't seem willing to back off, plastering on the same smile he had worn on first approach.

"Something like that..." Mayu answered, pressing her lips, glancing up in a rare look of annoyance, tapping the glass top of the cup.

"Then you really shouldn't be with that uncool baldie sweetheart..." unrelenting the man continued, flinching when the static snapped, wisps moving along the spoon more aggressively. "He is trying to use you."

"Sensei would never do that." Whatever smug answer the man had prepared for that died as soon as he was confronted by Genos' scowl. Even if he was paying him no mind it looked very impressive.

"Weren't you at the doc?" Saitama asked, sipping.

"There was an oddity in the readings..." Genos explained, kissing Mayu's cheek, the frown melting into a bashful look for a moment before straightening and returning to the issue at hand. "Have you seen one of these?" He was holding a small squirming bot.

There had been no new attacks and suddenly the drones seemed to have vanished. Using the scraps Genos has asked the doctor for something that could find the threat. When Mayu had started the fight with whatever was outside that had activated and Genos had received the signal.

"No." Mayu answered. "Is it one of them?"
"Yes." Genos crushed it swiftly. The metal twisted easily, the power source emitting a small explosion.

That startled a bit the people that were still cautiously recovering from the monster scare. It also fully called attention to them. The murmurs started.

The wannabe charmer squeaked and fled.

"Do you want to join?" Mayu probed, offering a bit of ice-cream.

Genos smiled, bashful again as the place started filling with whispers, shouts and a crowd of onlookers.

"Isn't that the S-Class hero?"

"The cyborg Genos…"

"Oh wow."

"So handsome!"

"Go ask for a handshake!"

"Picture! Where did I put the camera…"

"Isn't that Tempest?"

"Are they dating?"

"So jealous…"

"Please give me your autographs!"

"What's with the egg?"
"It is much more spacious than ours..." Genos considered as he looked around, quieting, frowning. After the door was closed and the blinds opened faint light showed a neat, plain, elegant, almost hotel-like setting, bereft of more personal touches. Yet there were traces of what it had been, hints of her choices.

"Yeah... but in the end I barely used it all. Except when the girls invaded." Mayu mentioned, walking around, taking note if anything needed more than cleaning. Holing up in her room with the laptop and books, tapping her stories, bathing, eating and sleeping. Those were the uses of her apartment. Kind of lonely especially when moving out of the penthouse with everyone. But it had just seemed the next step to adulthood. Clicking a button in the controller in her hand made a plain section of the wall slide open to reveal a door that matched the others. "My room." She smiled slightly, letting him in. The area was under lock and key, stuffed with the things she couldn't take to Z-city's hiding spot. Or needed, really. A good choice for renting out without needing a storage unit. "Ignore the dust."

Anticipation and awkwardness were starting to materialize.

Genos had finally asked.

First time or not they had agreed that privacy was needed, not only for them but also for Saitama. Intimacy-wise they were not ready for that much. Love hotels seemed a too embarrassing option to consider. Convenient or not that was... There was no way she would return to her room at Suzuna's. Not only was she there Toma would also be ready to poke his nose, following her lead. Quiet would be out of reach. So when the tenants that had been renting her apartment left it had felt like the better choice. And quite convenient.

Quietly Mayu watched as he walked into her room. That he didn't walk out to ask for tidying up supplies was a good sign. Still nervousness kept playing its part. Sighing she turned away to go through the place while letting Genos get used to the room. Or the idea. Or decide if he really wanted to try it.

The bedroom was oddly arranged. Clearly to maximize storage area. Bookshelves and books hid a great chunk of the lavender walls. The few titles he could see Genos recognized. Most were duplicated in her storage of e-books. Possibly bought or downloaded when Mayu chose to leave the heavy paper behind. The windows were closed. The curtains were a darker shade of violet. There was no natural light spilling from the closed blinds. With the setting sun there was no point in opening them either.

Burn marks traced some spots. The lack of control she had first exhibited had, of course, manifested just as strongly there as it had in the first days of her moving in next to them. She had been scared.

Nervously Genos wondered about the lights as he avoided looking at the bed. Some were shattered. A few were blackened. The ones that were still working were enough to see by but weren't the brightest. Yet there really was no avoiding it. Although why she needed such a wide bed was strange when Mayu slept curled around herself under a blanket. The soft grey cover was speckled with colourful pastel rainbow dots in a swirling pattern. There were no bedsheets. A few charred handprints tattled on the lightening accidents.

It was dusty as she had said. But not by too much. Still...
"You didn't have to play maid." Mayu chortled as she walked into the room with a small list, closing the door. There was a slight smile ghosting over Genos' lips as he finished placing her cotton candy bedsheets neatly in place, sitting on the edge of the bed, looking down. She climbed onto the mattress as well. By the looks of it he had no trouble finding them. And she was sure most of the drawers were empty of anything too embarrassing. "Thanks anyway." It was a nice touch for both of them even if all they ended up doing was curl up to nap.

"I researched." The cyborg spoke up softly, carefully, organizing his thoughts before placing them into words. There were some things he had discovered and wanted to do. Others seemed too strange to even consider. Some just came to mind when he looked at her. At times if he could blush he would. "Asked sensei." A soft tug convinced him to fully climb on the bed, the sheets rustling under him. His attention drifted from what he wanted to say to the movements right next to him, to what she was doing, how Mayu was moving. The electrified touch moved through the metallic plates, registering as sensation. Heat. Mayu was behind him, embracing, arms around his neck, pressing against his back, chin on his shoulder, waiting, watching, listening. Lightning was wisping along her arms, a low hum following the little arches. And because it was her he saw, because it was her starting that spark, his brain comprehended it as pleasure. "In the end what I understood was that I should not …" That tiny smile reappeared on his lips. Mayu tilted her head, waiting. "overanalyse."

The partial joke made her smile a little brighter as she chortled quietly near his ear, letting go, moving in front of him, arms sliding around his neck, kissing Genos' forehead gently, cupping his face between her palms. Light wisps crackled where they connected, stronger. The earring chirped in alert.

"I feel a bit flattered by all the thought you gave this though." Mayu leaned, kissing the tip of his nose. "Although I do have to say that, for Saitama's sake, next time you have questions about what I like in bed you should just ask me. "I'll be happy to tell you." Mischievously she chortled. "Or show, if you want."

Genos looked away for a moment, feeling a hint of awkwardness at the extent of his research efforts. But it had been necessary. Her palm brought him back to eye level. A smile.

Reached up, touching her ear the cyborg pushed the hair away until he found the bit of technology that aided her in keeping her powers in check. She was with him. No need to be restrained, to hold back. The loop came off easily, the storage crystal glowing slightly with snapping static.

The readings didn't immediately climb.

Mayu sighed and smiled, hair fluffing up slightly in response to the unbridled current as she caressed his cheeks, down the neck, pressing palms against his chest. Lightning danced around them, pale and light, just a hum of thunder making his body tremble.

Genos embraced her. So that was desire. It was strange. Just above the craving for contact, for a kiss. To touch, to be close.

The relatively frailer house arms were smoother and Genos had thought they would be perfect for a more intimate moment. They were more reactive and sensitive to touch and were capable of much finer handling than the battle models.

The kiss was serious and determined, the synthetic mesh that covered his lips warming up against hers quickly as they touched, asking. Mayu made an odd, small sound, moving against him, trying to get closer, gripping the fabric of the shirt. Her tongue touched his lips lightly. The pressure lightened until it was just a brush over Mayu's parting lips. A sigh and a whimper rewarded his effort, lidded eyes opening to see why he was moving away, confused as to why he didn't take her offer, widening
as Genos’ kiss found her neck, a hot puff of breath dancing over her skin, following the scars slowly as his hands caressed a path from her waist to her thighs, over the dress.

Wisps bounced off the metal. Some were absorbed. The current formed was very different from the touch of a human. Mayu whimpered, arching. Genos stopped every time he found fabric. His hands had found their place on the small of her back. Lightning snapped abruptly.

Genos stopped smiling slightly, watching. He was able to do that much... She was blushing, panting. Her heartbeat was in disarray. The body temperature had risen. The lightning was growing wild. It grew fevered and intense as his mouth returned to hers, bringing her body closer, feeling the heat, responding to the electricity between them, sensations blooming on his body, in his mind.

He could tell she was smooth.
He could tell she was soft.
He could tell she was sweet.
He could tell she was warm.
And he could tell she was asleep.

Surprised Genos placed her down on the mattress, staring. That was something his planning forgot to account for. Mayu's narcolepsy acting up. Sometimes it was predictable. Others it could be random. Sometimes she fell asleep for seconds without noticing, continuing to do a task or conversing even. Perhaps it was because of the energy expense. Or just it had been a long time since the last episode. Or maybe she was just tired. Monsters and fights seemed to be daily. It could as easily been him shutting down due to a surge from her lightning or... when was the last time he had charged? Unconcerned Genos closed his eyes.

Slowly he lowered himself into the mattress as well, moving in a way that would gather Mayu in his arms, closing his eyes, powering down. They had time. And that gave him a bit to go over the data and the plans. Moments went by as he thought an analysed. His core hummed, in overdrive. There were small alarms for overheating and power surge chirping. It felt strangely nice, much more than the warm feelings their kisses elicited.
"Oh..." Mayu woke up slowly, drowsy, nestled between metal arms. They were smooth, warm from contact, traced by small asterisk-shaped burns. Absently she traced them with her fingertips, moving deeper into that familiar, comforting embrace, the crackle of electricity against metal hissing, surging and resting. Of the two Genos was more likely to cuddle she had noticed. Perhaps because his body was not at all prone to cramping from any kind of position. The clutter around the bed created an intimate nook. The few lights left still gave a hazy glow to the room. Room. Genos. "Oh no..." Realization came slowly until she was murmuring in shock, sitting straight, abruptly, gripping the bed sheets, confused, mortified. "I'm sorry..." It could not be good for that to happen. She had tried to give him a nice time and then... was he upset? Was he angry? "I'm so sorry..."

Genos opened his eyes, slowly, out of standby, reacting to the motions and whispering, taking in what was happening, watching calmly. She looked flustered, blushing, eyes watery and worried, alternating between gripping his arm, letting go, looking away and attempting to apologise. It was something she had little to no control over but...

When his fingers brushed her cheek Mayu quieted, shivering slightly, and allowed his palm to guide the direction of her gaze. Genos hoisted himself to eye level slowly. A shy look crossed her features, watching as he moved, the sound of metal and mechanical parts filling the silence. Fascination filled her eyes for a long moment, taking them away from his face. Mayu reached out, touching the marked surface, in a caress before realizing and retreating, gaze returned to his, lips parting in a new attempt to say anything to make what had happened right.

Before she could continue the string of frantic apologies Genos ducked his head, covering her mouth, pressing gently, quieting her voice, worries and doubts, waiting until she relented, kissing back, eyes closing peacefully with a sigh, the tension leaving her body.

The smell of hot and singed metal along with the scent of home grew sharper as Genos' free arm moved around her, drawing them closer until her body was flush against his.

It was hard to tell when to breathe sometimes. At the beginning more often than now. His own breathing was a matter of keeping a maximized sensory input running along with some pieces of internal machinery that benefited from the ebb and flow of air pressure and some of the Doctor's decisions to allow him to behave as humanly possible even as he went from human to cyborg. Mechanically speaking the system was not so different from a human's automated biological response to the need of air. And through being her and electrical disruption Mayu could cause him to miss the signals that kept the cycle flowing.

Then there was the desire to just keep a kiss going, to allow those sensations to linger and register. A whimper usually preceded a parting. A small trembling sound. It was part of a code that had grown between them. Mayu pulled away slightly, doing what the warning represented, resting her forehead against his, going limp in his arms, settling.

"Am I forgiven?" She murmured quietly, looking down. Even though a sigh usually meant they could continue it was out of the context where that meaning was applicable. Mayu's fingertips brushed his hand, before covering it, nuzzling. It still rested against her cheek, convincing Mayu to look up.

"No need." Genos answered, serious and solemn. "I am well aware of your condition. Overexertion can lead to either an immediate collapse or to insomnias that will then culminate in a long sleep."
Mayu chortled quietly. Of course. The studious and dedicated side of him. "There have been fourteen combat situations in the last three days. Your regus One of those days was spent entirely without sleep and you were working on the story for most of it." A small caress usually signified he could deepen the kiss. Still it was out of context. "Do you want to continue?"

"I should make amends even if you think it was only natural." Mayu smiled lightly. "Do you want to continue?" Adjusting her position, moving slightly away from the cyborg, she cupped his face, staring into those hawkish eyes. He nodded, decisive.

Mayu approached again, reaching out, bright sparks following her caresses, moving slowly over his arms, towards the shoulders, exploring, watching his reactions carefully. He was not the only one overly fond of research. Writing gave a wonderful excuse for the oddest assortment of knowledge to be hoarded.

E-stim seemed to be surprisingly widespread. Not as much as sexbots though. Online there was all to be found.

So she applied a charge where she touched with fingertips, palms, knuckles and lips. If his brain was still as organic as he had implied electric impulses should theoretically trigger all kinds of biological reactions, even if they were ghost sensations that had been re-wired and repurposed for the cyborg body.

It was different. Smooth, hard. Different from flesh and blood. But she was finding spots where he, to her delight, reacted. His eyes closed when the spark sizzled over the black parts. Lips parted wordlessly when the wisps danced over the grey areas. Groans followed as her palms flattened on his torso, on the more flexible armoured mesh, moving under the shirt, lifting it as the lightning tangled.

Under the chestplates the core hummed, the area around it heating up without her aid. Genos took an involuntary gasp as Mayu pulled his shirt free, over his head, tossing it away, fastening her lips in the metallic tubing that framed his neck and shoulder, the static snap of a peck and a fluttering brush. It was a beautiful low growl as he tilted his head back, exposing the neck, unable to fully control his response. The arms that he had raised to aid in diverting himself from his clothes fell with a heavy thud, making the bed shudder and groan.

Mayu's hands dug into his hair, playing with the fluffy blond hair as she found his lips feverishly, kissing him deeply, tongue teasing his closed mouth until he responded, moistening his as they glided against each other. Shivering in delight she sucked his lower lip, feeling the weight of his embrace around her waist.

Electricity was wreaking havoc with the circuitry. Between the jolts sensations moved through his body, finding paths through the wiring, pooling and pulsing in his core. Things were whirring, moving, twitching within, producing a rush of readings and sensations, triggering warnings ad overheating. Euphoria gripped his mind, ruling over the body, drowning him in a daze as the kiss continued, tangling them together, his breathing pattern suddenly driven to match hers, fast, panting. The feeling humming through what should be unresponsive, the sensations that were both strange and wanted... more... how could he want more? Was it like power, a driving need, something that never seemed quite enough...

Mayu parted from him, surprised, watching Genos' expression in that light headed state. His arms were heavy, resting on her waist as he lost the ability to move, slumping against her shoulder, trying to figure out if a cyborg really needed to breathe in that situation.

"Genos?" She murmured, calming the wisps, caressing his back, lingering on each ridge of the spine,
amazed. That was a lot farther than most theories had predicted. "Are you ok?"

"Yes." Genos murmured, moving slowly carefully regaining control of his system. "I... broke protocol."

"Protocol?" Mayu asked, tilting her head, confused as she straightened to face her.

"Ladies first. That is the procedure." Serious Genos explained. It was something he should have considered before giving into her touch. He had a plan. And they had strayed so far from it. Likely she would be upset to be left uncared. "Sensei said it was important. My research agrees. I need to correct this."

Mayu pressed her lips, trembling, covering her mouth and looking away, stifling a laugh. He mistook her attempt to conceal an unkind amusement for an upset shying away, pulling her closer, trying to soothe the sadness away. It only made the shaking worse as Mayu attempted to find the words and quell the shortle.

"This was about you." Although it was very hard to shake of her mirth she was able to keep it in. Or at least soften it. "Remember?" His expression was back to normal. Perhaps softer than what he showed to the world but serious, eyebrows drawn down. He had looked beautiful, lost, open. Caressing the side of his face Mayu kissed his cheek. "To see how far I could take you?" Genos frowned. "Besides this is more to make each other feel good..." She paused, wetting her lips. "Was it good?"

"Mayu." Genos smiled smugly, moving abruptly. Mayu fell on her back, hair spreading around her, the dress bunching around her thighs, her breath coming out in a heavy, surprised sigh, staring up at Genos as he moved closer, caressing her thigh slowly, pushing the fabric away, the contact eliciting a gasp. "I can tell that you are excited still. My readings show all the signs of arousal." She arched, reacting to the touch, eyes closing, proving that desire still lingered, that just giving was not enough. "I need to reciprocate. Can I?"

"...yes." Mayu murmured after a moment, shivering as she stared into those determined eyes, sighing deeply, relaxing. Just let him see, let him explore. If he wanted she was willing.

There wasn't that much knowledge involved in taking off a dress. Grab the hem, pull over the head and toss away. She was expecting that. Need-fuelled impatience. Genos moved differently. He knelt next to he, watching the blush grow before leaning, palms touching her thighs, climbing slowly, finding the fabric, moving under it.

The warm and smooth metal drew wisps. Mayu whimpered, eyes closing in bliss, opening wide in startled surprise, gripping the sheets when the cyborg's lips descended on her neck, brushing slowly downwards, nipping carefully, allowing her reactions to guide his touch.

Trembling breath, shivering body, increased heart rate, climbing temperature, flushed skin. Those signals spiralled highed along with her voice as Genos' hands found her waist, caressing, holding, slipping under her back, encouraging her to arch, to get part of the fabric out of the way.

Kissing the base of her throat allowed him to feel the vibration of that pleasured groan. Her arms wound around him, caressing his back before nails and sparks raked across it. The bumpy movement was halting and careful. He was not human. The edges could cut. Mayu knew and played with it, jolting each dip, delivering a pleasurable impulse through him, almost enough to be distracting.

Returning the distraction with a sudden descent of his palms, sneaking under the waistband of her turquoise shorts, tugging them away as he cupped her bottom made those arms fall back on the
mattress as Mayu moaned, twisting, growing disoriented, dizzy.

The stretchy fabric was a bit of a fumbling effort to remove. It tangled and gripped, dragging the panties along. That made her chortle, amused as he struggled and she attempted to help. Vengeance came as a kiss under her bellybutton, the tongue wet from their previous kisses tracing a path upwards, hands returning to his task of removing the dress. That made the chortle break into a long sigh. The rustling of fabric and the lightning that started to surge and pulse around her was more than enough to vindicate his pride.

Genos eased the fabric away. Her arms remained listlessly stretched above her head. Readings showed that she was no longer in control of her breathing. Or her lightning. Sparks burned new marks on the sheets and walls. He registered a few more lights shattering. The room that should have darkened at the loss was growing brighter because of the lingering buzzing balls of pure energy. Parted lips, closed eyes.

Good. He was returning the received pleasure. All his research was being good to her.

Methodically Genos continued, staring at the bra for a moment before using some simple calculations to unhook it. Gently he cupped them, thumb brushing the pert nipples, a surge of heat registering along with the sharp snap of lightning.

The electricity was paralyzing for a moment, eliciting a groan, triggering a moan, a tangle of sensations.

Genos dipped his head, starting where he had stopped, focused, following the dip between her breast before brushing his thumbs again, freeing the hard nub, taking it into his mouth, carefully applying pressure with his lips and tongue, calculating.

Mayu's reaction was a fierce twist of her hips, gripping the sheets hard, as if keeping herself from reaching out and electrocuting someone to a charred husk.

Repeating on the second mound lead to a very similar response.

Perhaps a bit more voltage on the arching electricity.

Or maybe that was just the small implosion of one of the lightning squiggles that floated about.

The ticklish sensation continued down her torso, to her stomach. His hands moved unhurriedly along, moving her trembling frame to make it feel as good as he could.

Mayu gasped through her haze, eyes widening when his mouth brushed along the edge of her sex, as his hand coaxed her legs apart, as he moved to kneel between them.

"Genos... why..." Why was he going that far for a first time when she had tried to make it about him? Few men actually cared or wanted to... he kissed her inner thigh, moving down to the knee, adjusting carefully. She shivered as a feather light touch mirrored the moment on her bent leg.

Trying to move, to hoist herself on her elbows to look at him, to try to calm down, Mayu was stopped by his firm hold on her lower body.

"I lack some attributes but my research lead me to conclude that you would enjoy this." Genos stopped, looking up at her, keeping his eyes fixed on hers. Mayu blushed deeper, beyond the excitement, beyond the embarrassment, her rapidly beating heart receiving a sharp, painful tug. "Let me make you feel like you made me feel."
This was what he had felt? Mayu's eyes widened, surprised, finding herself nodding. She had been sure it would not be so intense... A bit more of touch and go with a few facts and lots of guesses. And how did he know how she was reacting to the... did he install some sort of program?

Those questions fizzled away as did the strength in her arms as Genos' lips brushed against her folds, dragging her down into him more firmly, the bed sheets whispering beneath them, her hair fluffing up with her own jolt and settling around her like an electrified halo. His tongue dipped into her, stroking, in long lingering caresses.

Sweet. All about her was somehow sweet.

Mayu mewled, gripping the hand that was resting on her stomach, returning the spark, pulling a moan from him, from the buzzing core, steam escaping from the cooling grid on his back. It was startling, their finger entwining.

There was a spot that made her twitch harder, move and moan. Satisfied he continued, the sensor picking up her state, telling him that Mayu was succumbing, the quick breathing, the tender, careful strokes pushing her to the edge. She unravelled, surrendering, screaming and arching. If her body had been hot before it was now a furnace, sensitive and tender, drowned in a hazy tangle of pleasure.

Recovery was slower on her. It should be considering the inner workings of a human body compared to the cogs and gears inside him. She was trying to breathe slower, still flushed, a smile on her lips. Wisps danced over her skin, dimming, fizzling away as calm returned to her mind. For a moment her eyes closed and everything stilled. Genos felt concerned, thinking if she hadn't slipped into some sort of coma. But that worry soon vanished when she opened her eyes and sighed.

Carefully he moved, climbing to the top of the bed, falling next to Mayu, reaching out to caress her cheek. She covered his hand, keeping it there again.

"You went way farther than I would expect." Mayu whispered, trying to convince her now very happy boneless body to move. He moved it for her, drawing closer, spooning as usual. Maybe not as usual. His free palm kept caressing parts of her, softly, for an instant before resting against her skin. "Was it good for you?" She asked again, still uncertain.

Genos stared at her, reviewing the events, the simple memories enough to recall the feelings, the triggers, where she touched, how, the way he had wanted to... the things he had though he would not need or feel after he had turned into a cyborg of justice with a mission.

"Yes." He whispered tenderly, calm and content.
Chapter 32

Fan clubs were not a new thing.

Loony fanatic clubs were also not as rare as one would hope or like.

Mayu sighed, tossing yet another overeager letter from a newly formed fan club asking for a meeting to the pile, stretching, glancing at her half finished work and shuddering. It was going at a very slow crawl and the deadline was approaching.

It was less upsetting nowadays, as the lightning permitted her to get away from the madness quite quickly but it still could feel unsettling. Or jealousy inducing if she peeked at Genos’ fan-page. Or heart-warming when she found people that actually appreciated Saitama despite calling him that bald hero. On her side with the books published she had trained herself to deal with it. Suzuna had also helped all of them, used to the spotlight by virtue of existing with money.

Yet zapping herself did not make the ideas happen. Mayu considered, divided between thoughts about the letters, about needing to answer a few of them, and about the work that was still there, on the same place she had left it.

A raid to the fridge wielded a thin cheesecake slice. The last of it. The poor thing was almost empty.

A glance outside showed another golden mail drone approaching the balcony with a quiet buzz, dropping the box. And with a frown she noticed a glint in the crumbling buildings on the other side of the street, found as she watched the drone flying away.

Odd. She thought, stabbing the cake, sitting down on her writing nook ready for another push.

After a while and a handful of paragraphs Mayu closed the document and turned to the planner.

While not exactly a break it was something else that needed to be done and checked.

There were a few book-signings and appearances planned for the group in five cities.

Hero work happened when it happened. Unless the Association called some showing off. A-Class was annoying that way. Notoriety had to be paraded for profit.

Robotic threats had calmed down a lot. Which still made her suspicious. Last time she had weeks f nothing that giant ball thing had dropped on her head.

Mysterious Beings appeared when they wanted. More and more frequently but unless paths crossed or she was called Mayu tended to ignore them.

Saitama was out, hunting for the sale flyers to prepare for a big incursion to fill the pantry.

Genos had been called to handle some sort of major disaster in U-City.

Parts of those events required hair and nails to be done.

Well... might as well go out now, she thought, standing, rummaging through the drawers for clothes.

Bored and uninspired was bored and uninspired wherever the poor mood was.
Tempest was no longer hard to find and identify in the eyes of the public. Even if her hair was not the first thing people noticed, natural or died it was easily found around the towns, there was no ignoring the scars, especially when Mayu didn't feel the need to conceal them. Or it wasn't cold enough to wear long sleeves.

It was quiet in the hair salon. Well... Not too quiet as she got scolded for the split ends months without a trim had created. It was not news. Wakako was her usual stylist and she always went on and on about how to care for hair. At least she was able to keep it static-free for the whole treatment and snip. A couple of girls entering the salon noticed but they behaved until she was ready to leave to ask for attention. The nails were also done without incident. The lilac was soft and matte, like a petal.

Relaxing in a bakery after made a few shards of story pop into her mind, quickly jotted down on the phone for later use. It was then, sitting with a cookie milkshake and a mille-feuille, that the oddities started to add up in fan behaviour.

A group was staring on the other side of the street. That was fairly commonplace along with the sneak photos and the calling of friends. Some people didn't want to be a bother. Just a pic and a glance was enough. Maybe a wave.

The milkshake was really good. Mayu considered, sipping, pretending to not notice. It was another skill that had to be learned and perfected.

They hadn't swarmed yet though.

But somehow those were looking stranger than just the usual hero-hunting people. The most insistent in staring were usually the youngest, fuelled by dreaming, stories and hopes. Also the hardest to please in what they expected of a hero.

The whispering and gesturing grew until a woman was singled out, smiling widely under the frowns of the others, straightening her clothes and approaching. It was a slow, skittish movement. Uncomfortable Mayu sipped her drink, watching, considering the hypothesis of new android spies for whoever was sending those probes after her. But the woman didn't have any of the robotic markers. And when she was close enough there was no reaction in her lightning that indicated metal.

"Miss Tempest... It's really amazing to meet you." She started, bowing quickly, oddly. It only increased Mayu's prickly feelings. Smiling through it she returned the greeting. "Have you received our humble requests?" Eagerly the woman asked, big wide eyes focused on her. "Requests?" Mayu whispered, head tilting. The meeting requests? "Oh... I have. But the Association is very strict about their workers, hero or otherwise, meeting organized groups outside official requests." Dodging the sudden upset look at her lack of reaction and hiding behind the rules Mayu fabricated an answer that sounded real enough. "I am very flattered but such requests are not for me to answer."

" indiscriminate. Mayu hesitated, staring at the woman's forearm. Lightning flowers were burned into her skin, red and recent. And looking very much deliberate. And untreated. Blistering edged the burns. Still smiling Mayu made sure her wisps were under control, shaking the offered hand. After all she could have just accidentally shocked herself... "Could you show me some lightning?"

"I try very hard not to zap people." Mayu played it off as a joke, letting go, watching as the woman
giggled, walked away and was received by that strange group on the other side of the street. It was now on the list of weirdest encounters she had ever had. The phone rang with the Association tone. Putting the encounter aside she answered and asked for the coordinates of the backup request against a giant rodent invasion.
"It was disgusting." Mayu complained to the screen where Nanako appeared, ready for a bit of brainstorming, taking off the earring and placing the filled crystal on the cushioned storage box for Genos, along with twelve others scooped out of her upturned bag. The time it took to fill one was shortening very dramatically. She had run out after the rat fight and had to rely on focus when reporting. It was very bad for the nerves which only made the wisps increase. "I didn't think I would have a problem but when the buckteeth are your size it gets repulsive quick."

"Have you written that down on the reference archive?" Nanako smiled a bit, adjusting her glasses, still looking slightly concerned, shuffling papers, getting ready.

"Yeah." She sat down, plucking some candies from the bag's messy insides, pulling her hair back, opening documents on the side of the screen. The big pile of red-spattered papers was still there. "So… I read through it and they do feel the same." Sending the highlighted doc made Nanako squint and nod along, searching for the wanted corrections and insights she prayed for.

"I know..." Mayu had indeed stumbled on the same areas Nanako had found problematic. "It's frustrating." Admitting easily to the feeling her friend sipped some tea, grumbling lightly when her glasses fogged.

"But the theme is wonky itself." Mayu waited as she cleaned the lenses, going through her comments once more, writing and sending some extras on the side chat window. "Have you thought about making it the same?"

"Embracing the accident..." Nanako murmured, replacing the glasses on her nose, squinting, adjusting and reaching for her keyboard. "I don't know... it looks darker than my style."

"If anyone can fluff it up is you." Mayu encouraged. "And it's not as dark as you would think if you uplift or remove the implications or work through them."

"Working through does pad the text a bit... you linked it here and in the reference archive." Hana was the source of the original research. There was a long silence as Nanako typed and got into some sort of rhythm, agreeing, scribbling the notes to shift the issues into part of the story. Mayu watched the screen with a bit of envy and left to grab a marshmallow milk from the fridge. "From here I can do it. Mayu?" Nanako's voice left the screen, bewildered as she found nothing in hers.

"I'm here. Refuelling." Mayu called out, returning, sitting back down. She sent extra links, going through the list of what he had gathered for the theme and for Nanako's request.

"About yours..." her friend started, eyes moving as she organized her screen, opening documents to return the favour.

Saitama walked by, fresh from the nap, leaning, kissing Mayu's cheek. She smiled, reaching up, returning the gesture along with a caress before turning back to the screen. Nanako was smiling. Slightly embarrassed Mayu smiled too before refocusing.

"Struggle." Sometimes it was just hard to fit the random theme. Always happened to one or more every month. "Tear it down." She asked, picking up a pencil to scribble any stray ideas that the talk sparked.

"It's not bad Mayu. Here." Nanako clicked something on the other side.
The e-mail chirped the received message.

Mayu opened and scanned it, nibbling on her lower lip.

It didn't look all that trimmed or touched.

"Clean-up?" It was the only conclusion she could reach. But what she felt towards the text was not... she believed it needed something more dramatic than touch ups and tweaks.

"I made a list: where I found your wobbly spots and linked the suggestions. "Nanako nodded, looking down at her papers. "But for a reader it feels finished. Even if it drags a bit where in pointed out. Deal with that and it should be enough." A sharp nod and a little adjustment of the glasses closed the issue.

"It will never be enough to save this." Mayu made a face with an ominous tone.

"By the power vested in me by you I say it's good enough and it will go to print on schedule even if we have to hold you down while pressing print." Nanako giggled into her palm after mimicking a sterner person than she was.

"I'll trust you then." Defeated Mayu chortled as she saved the files. "How's Persnickety?"

"Just fine and fluffy." Nanako held up her chubby squirrel to the screen, wearing a big smile.

"So you finally gave up?" Saitama teased as they prepared for the hotpot. Genos had promised to bring crabs. When she was done with a monthly text it was obvious. The mass of paper vanished from view and there was a self-pampering of some sort. That time it just happened to involve him as well. Not that Saitama would complain about it.

"We had a council. They deemed it ready after editing." Mayu sighed fetching sauces. "I'd still rather burn it down and forget those words were ever typed. Ah well..." She glanced at the time, frowning. "He is a bit late."

"Really late." Saitama agreed, looking at the clock too, frowning.

Genos walked down the street still focused on the failure of that day. If he had more power or even psychic powers the crabs wouldn't have exploded. He had already experienced them being used against him.

There should be a way to ether obtain them, even if that was outside Doctor Kuseno's area of expertise, resist or nullify them. Some research could help but if he was to grow stronger he should make himself ready to fight every kind of thing.

Puzzled he stopped.

There was someone there, snapping pictures of the light in the apartments.

He ran away when the cyborg called out.

Even in the dark Genos was able to see his face, memorizing it.

Feeling the suspicion creep into his thoughts Genos stepped back, looking around, considering.

Cautiously he turned back and started to sweep the area, looking for the sensors, collecting the data.
They had been fine-tuned to detect monsters and mechanical threats. If humans were about, even if they were just overeager fans that had somehow gleaned their address something had to be done. The area was far from safe for civilians.
Chapter 34

"Doctor Kuseno..." Mayu spoke up when the phone was answered, chortling when the conclusion of the man on the other side was that his charge had been horrifically dismembered and damaged. Yes, she had used Geno's phone because it was a secure line but it was true that she had only used before he spoke when an accident or bad fight had happened. It took a bit of reassuring to dispel that concern. She managed to do so without laughing in-between overwrought concerned suppositions. "It's about the earring and the storage cells... yes." Finally she was able to explain the issue, glancing up, at the ceiling, stretching her free arm and her legs, falling back, on Geno's back.

Genos was not exactly smiling but he was looking slightly amused as he glanced behind him, away from his book. The cyborg had grown concerned when he saw the amount of stored energy and asked for the details. Infected by his concern and probing questions Mayu had agreed to do the call even if she hadn't thought much of the growth.

"So... it's like training?" Explanations done and considerations taken in she tilted her had, speaking up after the long silence on her end. Genos closed the book and sat up, leaving her unsupported in the process before hugging her waist, leaning down for a clearer listening.

It was an ability she possessed and had been grooming. According to the Doctor an increase on control and use unlocked potential. Much like any other training of abilities and skills. But it was not so much the ability that concerned them. It was its potential lethality if left unchecked.

"Yes... even after the crystals ran out I was able to keep it contained..." Pride snuck into her voice. Genos had a similar reaction of satisfaction and praise when told. Saitama had been a bit less enthusiastic but manifested some relief in knowing that what he had to teach was truly useful and beneficial, even if it was not the thing he believed that had influenced his strength. "But it is a bit nerve wrecking." To the question why was she concerned about gaining that boost Mayu just had that to say. Nerves. Fear. The scare she had been given in those first days was not fading fast.

There was a bit of silence.

Then Mayu picked up paper and pen.

The tables were tidy. She had been robbed of the finished work and the new theme had not been picked yet. So everything was looking neat, tidy, stacked and as professional as an office supply store.

A colleague that specialized and studied bioelectric magnetism was indicated thusly. It was out of his main area of expertise as Doctor Kuseno had pointed out and if she was that concern a specialist's opinion could go a long way in easing the discomfort.

Doctor Esumi had advised in the creation of the original earring without too many details shared. And he trusted that it would remain thusly. It was out of his main area of expertise as Doctor Kuseno had pointed out and if she was that concern a specialist's opinion could go a long way in easing the discomfort.

If Mayu needed something more specific he could be of help.

Kuseno would still build it he joked after the edge of seriousness had been lifted, telling Genos that gifts of jewellery made girls happy. The old man seemed to feel better when vengeance was not consuming his boy.

With a thanks she turned off the call, staring at the contacts scribbled down.
"The doctor wasn't concerned?" Genos asked, confirming.

"I think he feels this is a natural progression." Mayu sighed, placing phone and paper down. "Gave me the name of a colleague, the one who helped him craft this." She touched the earring, holding the loop for a moment. "You shouldn't worry."

"Very well." Genos relented, kissing the top of her head. "Let's put the program to the test then." Standing he grabbed the suitcase, opening it to install the combat arms.

"Welcome young lady." Doctor Esumi was a middle aged woman in colourful pants and a long wool sweater, brown and grey hair pulled into a simple ponytail. At least her lab was not filled with creatures to be experimented on. It was a bit more reassuring than it should have been. Her assistant closed the door after Mayu with a big smile. "So you are Aida Mayu... I see..." She stared for a while, reviewing the documents she had on her before moving on. "The effect of the figures is quite striking indeed." She sat down at the worktable, pouring tea. A tin of cookies was open there, half full. "Kuseno said you were worried about an increased output of energy, then?" Focusing on the problem at hand the specialist began her questioning.

"I am able to control it but I feel rather nervous without support." Mayu explained, sitting down, hiding the limp the training had left. Falling on a crater had been a bit of a blunder but it was hard to see where she was zapping herself to when dodging fats punches. "And it makes others nervous. Some of them I'd rather give no reason to be." Threats still lingered, even if understated and hidden.

"Yes, I quite understand." Esumi picked up a cookie and sighed. "Humans who are able to acquire powers are always being seen as weird or experiments. Or objects of absolute admiration and the dangers can be quite similar." The doctor shook her head. "I have your data and based on that I can extrapolate. Give me the developments.

Mayu sighed, relaxing.

The Doctor had a good demeanour, calm and unthreatening. It made it rather easy to trust.

"Training and use was bound to strengthen not only your grip on the abilities but also their range and utility." Repeating almost word for word the conclusions Kuseno had reached, Esumi typed some notes on her laptop, eyes narrowing.

"My boyfriend is incredibly strong..." Mayu considered, head tilting, speaking of a conclusion she had been toying with after the phone call and reviewing the notebooks. "If you ask he claims it was obtained through training and that the change was gradual." Genos didn't believe it. To him there was bound to be more to Sensei than just strength training. "Saitama has amazing control over that even if sometimes finer handling escapes him."

"You were unprepared for the power surge when it was triggered." Doctor Esumi confirmed her suspicion, smiling calmly. "He sounds like someone who gained his abilities gradually, overtime. Of course it can be easier for someone who obtained abilities that way."

"I need training wheels." Mayu summarized. "Or safety gear."

Going through the reports of the faithful was sometimes nothing more than a recap of the day's news. Sometimes there were interesting discoveries like the Z-City apartments.

The coffee meeting.
The sightings.

Unfortunately the Association had no yet agreed to their requests.

And then there was something as momentous as *Tempest has come to the lab.*
Bioelectromagnetics.

Bioelectrogenesis.

Electroreception.

Electrophysiology.

It was all very confusing in terminology but Esumi babbled on, clearly excited, as she explained her specializations, inclinations, interests, theories and plans for Mayu as a favour, a test volunteer and a patient.

All of that while cooing lovingly at a group of electric eels in an aquarium bigger than most aquatic park pools. Some of them sported sparkly collars with heart-shaped name tags.

Also kind of sounded interesting in spots, Mayu considered, linked to several machines while she sat in a containment tank. A boxy thing with see-through panels that she was assured that she could leave at any time. Sighing Mayu glanced around and pressed her lips together as the doctor left, closed the door and activated the... whatever they were called.

Machines responded.

But there was no stressful sound of locks hissing and keeping her in the box.

But if she wanted to write something fiction or tech-y that seemed like the ideal setup. The archive and apocalyptic-minded Suzuna.

"So if we follow the logic we've been prattling on about all that should be needed is a new measurement that compares the progression and then to work those numbers into a more flexible tool or tools to leave you at ease even as things progress and you mindset adjusts." Esumi finished, stretching, ready. "Go."

"I'm dropping as low as I can now." Mayu nodded, speaking for the recording and started, taking a deep breath, eyes closing, calming.

It was her most practised trick to date.

The slow and steady decrease of electricity and keeping it that way.

Easily she followed the process and waited.

"Right..." Esumi spoke up, staring at the screens. "This is how little you can produce..." Comparison brought little surprise as Mayu's training went both ways. "It's lower than the first readings. Very good." Tugging on her sleeves quietly after inputting the comparisons the Doctor turned. "How does it feel?"

"Without the earring to warn me or the crystal to drain it takes a bit of effort to do it. It's like holding something." When first grabbing very aware and then it becomes natural, automatic and yet a distraction, a lapse and the item would fall. "A while to focus, a while to do and then I have to keep checking. And in that span..." Mayu opened her hands and sighed, glancing down as if following something that had been dropped.
"Let's see how long..." Esumi challenged.

It could have been tedious if she just sat and wait but the tests needed the distractions of reality to be accurate.

Mayu went to the distraction course, with conversation, puzzles and mind traps.

So they talked.

Watched the news.

Watched a few episodes of whatever was on.

Tsubaki's work was looking good and even if his personality was sour Amai Mask was both a good actor an easy on the eyes.

Read.

The numbers fluctuated but only once left the safe range.

The assistant, Akina, joined them after a while. At first she observed silently as nothing happened and the numbers appeared, from harmless to slightly life threatening to people with heart disease to able to knock out someone and back to nothing at all.

"Are you trying to get rid of your powers Miss Tempest?" Akina asked carefully, looking concerned.

"No, not really." Mayu answered hearing the alarm beep, responding to the Doctor's go-ahead, letting herself spike. "They just spike at odd times."

"Don't worry so much." Esumi chuckled and changed the settings after recording the ever changing numbers into the newly prepared database. "Even if someone touched or bumped you the shock would not be too serious." Startling, painful and unpleasant yes. "It seems to take a while to climb on its own after you make it lower." Three hours, fourteen minutes and eight seconds, according to the display. "When it crosses to truly dangerous we start to see some electrical manifestations... what do you call those?" Esumi typed the observation, setting with her teacup down, legs crossed, squinting at the bursts of brightness.

Mayu glanced at her arms where squiggly arches of lightning appeared, danced and vanished around the flowers.

Akina seemed fascinated, hands clasped, eyes wide.

"Wisps." Mayu answered, smiling slightly patting a few down, creating a small explosive spark.

"Is that why the Association refuses fan meetings with you?" Shrewdly the woman asked.

Mayu hesitated as she noticed a lightning flower on the girl's wrist, scratched fervently, eagerly, too worried about such a trivial matter.

"Very likely." Dodging the issue again Mayu carefully suppressed the wisps to finish the experiment and step out of the chamber. "Why do you ask?"

"I'm part of the Storm Lady. We really are looking forward to having you with us." Smiling she named her fan-club, happily, the attention welcome. "Would you sign an autograph?"

"Sure..." Mayu sat down next to the doctor, waiting for the appreciation of the skills. Akina left,
excited to fetch her autograph book or whatever she wanted signed. "When did she burn herself?"

Suspicion and relief. Mayu left the lab with those two feelings.

Dr. Esumi made her feel at ease after the numbers were interpreted by explaining, dismissing and debunking doubts and concerns that would have fallen into a frenzy of research and hypothesis. Genos was not the only guilty one there.

Seeing data told her she had much more grip on her abilities than she believed. It felt liberating, actually.

Akina however was giving off a weird sensation. Supporting the idea of being safe but pushing and asking for a lightning display worthy of a storm. A fan was a fan though and both the group and Association had some rules about interaction and Mayu usually didn't like to be dismissive when directly addressed.

"I'm home." Mayu called out taking off her shoes with a sigh, sitting on the step.

"Welcome back." Genos called out from the kitchenette amidst the sound of sizzling pans and boiling pots. "Sensei's in the bath." He informed her as she walked from her former apartment into what was now designated as the living room.

"I need one too..." Mayu smiled, pecking his cheek by leaning through the opening between the divisions, reaching out, ignoring the heat, caressing his face, headed towards the fridge, stretching. "What's for dinner?"

"Grilled fish, rice and steamed vegetables." Genos answered, glancing at the box of flavoured milk she was sneaking away. It wouldn't spoil her appetite, he was sure. "Did you bring the data?"

"I did... It's really not dire." Mayu poked the straw through the pack and turned on the laptop, flopping down, glancing at the disaster channel. "Busy day?"

"Not exciting." Saitama answered in Genos' stead, walking out with a towel around his waist, pretty much just showing off, drying out with another, taking her milk in the stunned moment while she stopped to contemplate his exit, patting her head as Mayu reached up, making a sad sound of complaint.

The ransomed treat was returned after a greeting kiss.

"Sensei seems to have an easier time claiming kisses." Genos considered as Mayu rescued her milk and Sensei rummaged for clothes.

"He is easy-going." Mayu answered, turning slightly. "You are intense." She stopped, thinking on how to explain it. "It feels very different to approach."

"Do you have a preference?" Genos pursued that line of thought, leaving the kitchen.

"Not particularly." Shaking her head Mayu sipped. "Sometimes it happens with moods..."

"Meaning when you seek one or the other based on how we influence your demeanour."

"Yes. Sometimes you seek me." She soothed him, unperturbed. "Is there something you want to ask?"

"Sensei..." Genos sat with them. "I have a few questions I would like to place now that we have
been intimate."

Mayu coughed, biting the straw.

Saitama paled suddenly, falling into the conversation after the abrupt call, having been consumed in the search for a shirt, a slight smile breaking his blank face as he sat down as well.

"Can I go have my bath before we start this?" Mayu whispered, hopping the embarrassment hurdle first.
Chapter 36

Mayu chortled quietly when the list began as she sat down and patted her hair dry, brushing it to smooth out the wild ruffled state water and lighting left it in. A long day of usage had left her prone to sparking outbursts and static snaps. Luckily the backlash was lessened more-or-less on those present. The quest for good products for frizzy hair continued, however, bottle after bottle, sale after sale. A few combinations had proved worthy of repeating even if Saitama had to be the one to buy them under odd looks. And the occasional question about shampooing wigs. Genos had not been amused by the snide edge of that one.

Dinner was being steadily finished as the itemization went on.

It had indeed not started until she returned from the bath. Whatever had happened in-between was not known to her.

Each question was also written down in new series of notebooks without a label. Still on number one, luckily. It sounded less daunting to clarify a couple of pages instead of a couple of volumes even if said pages were filled with neatly numbered and written rows of pencil characters.

The creation of such a thing really came as no surprise by now. There was the training notebooks, Mayu's coaching notebooks, the compact coaching notebooks for her use, the relationship notebook, the household chores registry, the coupon binder for Sensei's sake, the sale folder divided by hour, day and week. Saitama gave great praise for the last two. Made planning easier.

Genos plus need for information equalled research, systemization, notes and relentless questions. Period.

Saitama was growing red and redder as the specifics grew. Whatever had amused him at first started to fade. It came down to muffling groans and slightly concerned looks into the kitchen. It was not as if he wouldn't answer but it was funny to see him get rattled. Last time she had not been privy to the first hand witnessing of "the talk". He was able to calm down after a pat on his back and they started to actually address the questions.

The meal went on in a semi-awkward exchange of solutions, ideas and clarifications. Started with the basics, touching, kissing, electricity. Ticklish for Saitama, enjoyable for Genos, unrestrained for Mayu.

Talking about sex with the girls wouldn't be odd. It could get awkward amidst details and teasing too but it wasn't as blush-inducing. Certainly it was more sharply worded. Doing it wasn't that blush-inducing either if they were not counting the basic biology involved in the event. Even just talking with them about it one-on-one wouldn't be too outlandish.

But together?

It felt peculiar.

Where did some boundaries began?

They found some quickly, as expected.

Mayu found herself hesitating in the wording, saying things that would have been easier said to the person she meant instead of to the air for both to hear. Genos never lost his straightforwardness, almost too sharp but they were used to it. After a first run of short answers Saitama began to say
more about whatever he was being questioned about.

They also learned to skirt them swiftly enough as the meal went on.

Some things didn't need to be talked about, at least not right away. The catalogue didn't even deserve a mention.

Though it started to loosen the tangled mood as the conversation flowed and grew. Words became less heavy and their meanings more direct, less constricted.

It got easier.

The exchange didn't stop as they finished and put things away, washing dishes compatibly, leaving them to dry, settling in the clear room. The conversation came to a sort of a natural end as each turned to a task or a hobby in a comfortable silence.

The TV was on, murmuring news, giving a backdrop to the scribbling, as Genos busied himself with taking notes. Trusting his memory but committing it to writing made sense to him- Now that things had been made clear some of the doubts could be marked as resolved.

Mayu leaned against Saitama, scooping spoonfuls of marbled pudding, balancing a book against bent knees, diving into it, cuddling Sensei's back.

Sensei's attention was drifting to the screen, the woman's weight meaningless to his balance. The arm he had place back to prop himself braced her as well, close to cradling.

Looking up, stopping for a while Genos considered. What more to add? To say?

Preferences, differences and tastes aside they found ways to work.

Funny how it seemed to blend with their practices.

At first they worried about Mayu.

Body-wise and sleepiness-wise.

Lately she was making strides in matching their pace.

It did match Mayu's first attempt to explain…He glanced towards them. She looked up too and smiled, lowering one leg, patting the thigh.

The cyborg found himself doing the same, expression changing, closing the notebook and picking up his own book, taking a place nearer to them, falling back, placing his head on her leg, feeling the soft brush of her fingers through his hair along with the tingle of wisps moving through them. Sensei glanced at him and showed a smile too.

«At this time we are issuing a Tiger level alert for H-City's outskirts.» The Disaster Channel chimed in with the emergency jingle playing to catch the viewers' attention. The three looked up from their entertainment. Genos sat up, turning, glaring at the screen, focused. Mayu draped herself over Saitama's shoulder, looking at the TV Saitama sighed and waited. «A worm of gigantic proportions is digesting a path of destruction wherever it crawls...»

"Are we going Sensei?" Genos was half-ready to stand.

"I'm already in my pyjamas..." Mayu murmured, slipping down Sensei's back, picking up her book again, unwilling to zap herself to some wriggling, sure-to-be-gloopy mess without shoes.
"No one is calling." Saitama noted, stretching, yawning, slouching. "Maybe they have it handled."

Sure enough the Association had dispatched their best to keep shoring up their reputation after the alien debacle. The fight was transmitted live, exciting and as sticky as Mayu had suspected an exploded giant creepy-crawly would be.
Chapter 37

The dreaded day dodging failed to work arrived in the form of a schedule created by the Association to answer the requests of the fan clubs that had followed procedure and managed to jump through bureaucratic loops galore. Clubs only. Interested individuals were outright refused and kept asking for meetings for cakes and chitchat over cards, e-mail and weird notes. The nice ones. There were a couple of guys who had had a visit from an angry Genos. Saitama was more likely to laugh it off with her.

It came, tucked in amidst the rest of the mail for the three inhabitants of the place, found by Saitama who was on sorting duty and read by Genos as it was marked as urgent correspondence and she was sitting on the other side with cookies and research, before Mayu had a chance to dispose of it and feign innocent in saying she had never received the piece of paper, after the book signing.

As she had been present it must have given them some idea on how to proceed and how able and available she was.

It was unfortunate that Genos did support the opinion that she was capable of doing it, of dealing with her powers readily. With S-Class endorsement it made it even harder to think up excuses, to keep being afraid. Saitama was of no help. He too thought she could handle the spark. Although he did offer to go along if it made her feel better until Mayu pointed out that the schedule was cutting through some sales they really wanted to jump on. The trust of both did make her concern lessen even as she complained about doing it. All the facts were pointing for success, were they not…

That event had gone as expected. The group already had had a few to compare to. It rarely changed in the way of preparation. Fans of the book series and some that had made the hero-connection of one of the authoresses swarmed and wanted smiles, handshakes and signings. So they did. Run-of-the-mill.

To be paraded as yet another symbol of success on the Association's part in front of fans, media and prying eyes was the next week's purpose.

The first place to stop was personal.

And Mayu had not noticed they had asked.

Thinking back she hadn't returned there at all had she…

The people she had left behind in the bakery in J-City when the sea-folk had attacked. The staff and the kindergarten class.

It was both awkward and grateful as meetings went. For the adults there seemed to have a bit of guilt left. After all her powers had occurred after she had ran out, risking herself to draw the creatures away.

The kids had drawings.

And there were cakes.

Both of those elements lightened the mood as the meeting progressed.

Showing wisps and making hairs stand on end made the kids happy enough.
Then she zapped herself to M-City, falling off the perch the downward strike had charred. The stone had shattered where she stood, under the weight and spark. It resulted in nothing but a slight hindrance and a bit of amusement as she straightened the skirt and tapped her flats to shake off any pebble, making sure no onlookers had seen her fall on her bottom. Unlikely. She had gained some care on where to land and keeping it to deserted areas. The discharge tended to be wider when she slammed into the earth instead of zapping to the side.

The meeting was arranged at a bakery as well, although one that catered to fancier tastes.

It felt like stepping into a battlefield even if it would be a place Mayu would usually enjoy.

Rumours of Mayu's relationship had reached had reached the fangirls of the cyborg prince. Either they would try to skin her alive or be very curious and glad to hop right into snooping questions. Some would like to murder her on sight for making Genos unavailable. Others would see it as Mayu proving that the cyborg prince was attainable and bided their time until they broke up and the distraught man needed comfort.

Despite the daydreaming in whatever direction they preferred they were actually kind of a sweet group.

Even if more than half was plotting ways to steal her boyfriend.

The highlight was when she got her revenge forcing Genos on the phone to say hi to the delight of the girls.

The T-City meeting with the female hero fan-club, an all-girl group as well, felt a bit more formal perhaps because they were a group as old as the organization itself and had their own quarters. They seemed to function as much as a fan-club as a helpful place for the women that had gone or wanted to go into the hero profession. Part of it also seemed to advocate that the genders splintered into two different Associations to ensure equal treatment but that was likely just a complaint because of the low ratio. Still they held Tatsumaki's rank as proof that a woman was better suited to be heroic and powerful.

Mayu was unsure if she should agree or not because it was tiny tits but she smiled and listened. And answered when asked. She did feel the break but she was not exactly a hero through regular admission. The way they treated Tempest was different from how they treated Tank Top Girl for example.

It was funny being offered a hero makeover but Mayu wasn't sure she wanted to try a "trademarked superhero costume" just yet. She did take the gym membership. It had spa access included.

Something pulled her down.

Winded and startled Mayu stood up, looking around, frowning. How… She was just zapping towards the next meeting in the schedule and… she had felt a pull, startled she breathed in and the lighting became her and she was suddenly down on the ground and not on the air.

In the middle of an empty field there was a robot amidst a cluster of lightning rods.

It seemed inactive still, tucked into a boxy form. There were no lights on or in it. No movement.

Been a while… She considered stepping back slowly. The fastest way to leave was… cautiously but
wanting nothing more than to leave Mayu zapped herself away, grunting when the same pull brought her back to the ground.

This time the thing whirred to life, unfolding, turning towards her.

[Tempest. Target Confirmed.]

The rods…

Trap. It had to be a trap. A lightning trap.

[Engage. Objective: Capture.]

Mayu glanced at robot. If the rods had pulled her down they would be able to pull her attacks away from the main threat. It was obviously not a common lightning rod. Those simply were struck because they were tall. That was built with the purpose of pulling lightning to it.

Which meant…

Gritting her teeth she risked it, sparking for herself, building up charge as she ran away from the hub of rods, listening to the robot crush the underbrush as it gave chase. The wisps started to turn blue, growing, thickening.

Glancing over her shoulder she made sure her speed was enough.

It was not.

The robot was coming closer. She barely had time to dodge a net-like thing thrown her way.

A different thought came into her mind

Risking a zap brought her back to the hub, slammed down amidst the pillars.

[Target Lost.]

Freeing the lightning in a halo around her Mayu fed her energy into the wide-reaching blow, overloading the rods around her, capturing the errant energy back into her with tendrils of plasma whipping about, recharged, the thunder roaring, bluer than ever.

[Target Found.]

[Engage]

It was coming straight at her.

Mayu pulled the electricity to her, eyes narrowing.

Everything was bright.

The lightning was forced between her palms, compressed, aggressive in its concentration, barely staying contained, controlled. Struggling a bit she stared at the robot, breathing out slowly, widening her stance.

[Energy Overload.]

[Outcome?]
The robot had stopped.

The polarity was shifting, negative and positive, turning and reverting without her active control.

Tempest released her strike head on, hoping that all she had gathered was enough to overcome the defences she found on those things.

The lighting shattered the metal, melt the insulator and stopped it on its movements. The thrown netting fell short of her.

It was enough to receive a phone call asking if she was fighting.

Storm Lady was the first fan club she was visiting that was dedicated to her just because of the fuss over her powers. Mayu had researched, trying to find out more after Akina had named it and she did notice that in the request the Association had sent before they appeared frequently.

There didn't seem to be that much to it than just another group that had seen a hero on TV being talked up while displaying some flashy powers and decided to grab on the figure and proclaim themselves in awe. Genos had that too. Tatsumaki was known for the chaos of her monster hunting. Amai Mask cashed in on that side of the business.

If it weren't for the continuous appearance of people listed as Strom Lady members coming to her with electrical burns severe enough to leave lightning flowers. She remembered her own pain well enough to know how hard electricity had to hit. With the numbers, voltages and whatever else explained by two scientists and a cyborg she had enough to know that survival and getting powers were two of the greatest long shots in the scale of randomness.

But at the moment she was scheduled for a visit and there was no longer any point in attempting to avoid that fate even if something felt wrong.

The inconveniences of narcolepsy were quite obvious. For one falling asleep as her feelings grew more and more clear on how she should just turn away when faced with an empty, fog-filled pavilion was certainly a downside. The part of falling, seeing that the hard floor was the only thing there to break the fall, was no fun either.
Mayu woke up slowly at first, flinching with the sudden onset of light striking her sleepy eyes, groaning, sitting, looking around, sighing with some measure of relief as she found herself still in the pavilion she remembered falling asleep in. The memory was not a very good one. So the nervousness returned as her attention sharpened, pouring into the surroundings. Without the sense of security of being at home or someone she trusted her to tell her what had happened while she was asleep... the prickly concern returned fast.

It had changed from an empty area to a place ready for the sort of activities one could expect from a fan-club. Chairs, pillows, puffs and benches were placed in a ring with her as the top, visible to all in the ring but slightly set apart. There were little tables with snacks and drinks to divide between two seats. Someone had picked her from the ground and placed her body on a sort of divan. Like a bauble on a ring. When talking about the books in a less crowded event sometime they did adopt that setup... authors visible, people around to ask things.

"Lady Tempest..." Someone called out, bringing her attention from the environs to the moment, the voice echoing in the still empty area. It didn't sound like a threat or a challenge. But it had a lot of relief and excitement. Steps crossed the space and a man appeared, carrying supplies. More cookies and candies. Association-sanctioned posters. So it was really just conversation and some signing. He was still assembling the space for the Association-ordered meet-and-greet...

Had she been too early instead of actually late?

Mayu considered, sitting, feet touching the smooth floor, watching.

Sparks had burned a few spots on the upholstery.

Possible... She had no clue how long the fight had taken out of the day's schedule and travelling by zap was very, very fast so... It was very possible she was running ahead of schedule. After all the Association had not accounted the velocity she could go from place to place when creating her week of meet-and-greet. Otherwise it would have more things stuffed in each day.

Maybe the uneasiness was really just in her imagination and they were nothing more than a bunch of overeager fans too willing to copy her marks as a tribute. And if that was the case perhaps a simple talking too could prevent that self-harming behaviour. Show off and try to set the example if Akina's requests were the norm they sought.

"Just Tempest, please." Mayu answered the call automatically, turning, smiling politely. If they started with hero name she responded that way. If they addressed her by given or surname she responded accordingly. "Are you Okuda Umeji, the founder of Storm Lady?" She recognized him from the site. A slender bespectacled man with narrow features and a t-shirt crisscrossed by lightning. His hands... wisps moved around Mayu gently, tangling in her hair, playing over her arms. Recent burns. Had he… picked her up? Well... someone had done it because otherwise she would not have found herself on the divan. If so she should apologise... even if there were fading flowers showing on other areas of his exposed arms.

"I only gathered people that looked at you and saw the storm." He smiled, sounding excited as he chose a chair to sit down, staring at her with wide curious and admiring eyes. "I was a storm chaser for years."

"I'm just a girl who became a hero so people wouldn't think me a monster." Blushing slightly Mayu
looked down, pressing her lips together, sighing. "I'm sorry I burned you."

"Don't worry Miss Tempest." Okuda said, shaking his head, chuckling. "You were quite early. I was surprised. Everyone should be arriving in twenty minutes or so..." He stood up and continued to arrange the space. Mayu stood as well and offered to help.

Fascination. The theory about the flashy powers was correct. Some were star-struck by the hype and videos going around. Others... others still had that strange, feverish look in them, as if they wanted to be struck by either her lightning or by something falling from above. Most understood her concern. For others Tempest telling them to avoid electric burns only cemented the idea that she had to be the one to zap them for them to get some sort of blessing.

Listening and nibbling on the offered cookies Mayu felt torn. Were they a fan-club or the budding start of a cult with her as some sort of storm-god avatar? Hard to decipher. But it was not as bad a time as she was dreading.

"Genos? Yeah... I'm done. Is there still any sales left to raid?" Mayu called walking through a park, leaving the pavilion behind, looking around idly, stretching, done with the visits. "Send me the place." Vegetables and fruit... Mayu made the annotation and smiled. "Then I'll join you two." She promised, closing the phone, looking up, sighing. And she had managed to do so with only one loss of control and one accidental burn. It was a good day then. The thunder roared as she zapped herself away, the lightning flowing upwards and then flashing, vanishing towards the received coordinates.

Tempest had been chosen by the storm but she was still unwilling to assume the role. Or even chose someone as a proper representative. Perhaps some persuasion was in order to make their Storm Lady understand that she was meant to be more than just a hero, bound to the rules of others.
"All right!" Saitama mumbled to himself, closing the washer's door and pressing the buttons, stretching as the machine started to hum and churn. "And with that laundry's done." Going over the list of things that needed to be taken care in the apartment he sighed, pleased, seeing it growing shorter. They would be done in no time. "Genos, did you get the clothes from the line?" He called out, walking into the main room.

"Yes! I have finished collecting them, Sensei." Genos announced, returning from the balcony with a couple of baskets piled with the now dry items, putting them down, scanning the piles, adjusting the placement, sitting, ready to start the next phase.

"Awesome… so after folding the clothes we're done with the chores." Finding a spot Saitama reached out. "I'll help with the folding."

"No, it's fine!" the cyborg shook his head, preparing the empty basket where the freshly folded items would be placed before being delivered to their proper storage spaces.

"If we do it together it'll be much faster." Saitama countered, keeping his offer. "Give me a few so I can help out." He asked, taking a some t-shirts from the pile.

"You really don't have to. I am very confident in my folding skills." Genos announced proudly, picking one of the articles, staring at it, prepping. "Look, Sensei." Genos folded the shirt with the precision of a retail worker, fast efficient and neat.

"You're super methodical." Saitama praised folding one of the shirts he had taken, flipping it over itself, placing it on the basket, moving on to the next.

"What was that?" Stunned Genos stopped his progress on the next item, eyes wide as he stared at the three shirts Saitama had already managed to fold and put away.

"Is something wrong?" Catching on he stopped while reaching for the next thing on his pile.

"What just happened?" Genos was mumbling, eyes jumping from his folded laundry, to Saitama's folded laundry, from the pile that still waited. "What is the meaning of this…the speed of Sensei's folding…it's not normal!" There was a short silence after that flow of increasingly faster words that could only mean he was calculating. "Two seconds!"

"Why are you suddenly shouting?" Sighing, he stopped, leaning back, listening.

"With my calculations, even at the fastest speed, folding these t-shirts would still take five seconds." Confusion made Sensei tilt his head slightly, staring blankly. "But then with this over-accuracy, there is a possibility that I would damage the fabric of the shirt." Genos continued his consideration toward the method of folding that would be preferential, failing to notice the growing confusion by his side. "But sensei only took two seconds and..." And in his dissertation there was barely any room to interject. "Not only that, but not an inch is out of place! The shirt is perfectly folded!"

"Genos, what's wrong?" Saitama finally managed to ask.

"How is this possible?" In all serious earnestness Genos turned and stared straight into Saitama's eyes, fidgeting in curiosity.

"Why did you grow so serious all of a sudden?" Not a new thing but it always felt slightly awkward
to be questioned so excitedly about something that others would deem trivial.

"Sensei!" And there it was.

"Waat?" Knowing that there was delay coming Saitama dragged his answer.

"Please fold this t-shirt one more time." Genos took the folded shirt from the basket and unfolded it, presenting it completely straight, all progress undone.

"But I just did!" Complaining Saitama took it.

"Please once more!"

"Why are you interested in how I fold things?" Asking that question to no one in particular Saitama decided to play along if in the end it would create a pile of folded clothes and a task finished. "Okay… so one more time…I'll demonstrate." Hesitating for a moment he changed the aim, deciding on a step-by-step to prevent follow-up questions or delays. "So you take the two sides of the t-shirt like so, put them against each other and then you just kind of flip it over and look!" A folded t-shirt was back into the basket. "It folds instantly! Amazing, right?"

"Amazing…as expected of Sensei!" In awe Genos praised, eyes wide.

"You're that surprised?" Chuckling Saitama reached out to continue the task.

"Sensei, where did you learn such an amazing method of folding shirts?"

"I was watching TV and saw this show about how to save time by doing…" The shirts he had just folded were being taken out, unfolded and rumpled as Genos attempted to replicate the folding flip. "Hey! Why are you messing up the clothes I just folded jeez?" Catching sight of one of the previously dealt with items being unfolded, rumpled and attempted to be flipped Saitama called out, complaining.

"I see now…" Genos was ignoring him, attempting to recreate the folding with minimal success, going through the already done, messing up all the effort in the attempt to emulate. "With this t-shirt folding mechanism in place, I seem to be stuck on a more cumbersome method…"

"Are you even listening?" Saitama asked, noticing the ignored pants, skirts and dresses in the folding and unfolding frenzy.

"I understand now, Sensei!" Genos announced, redoing yet another crooked attempt at mimicking the flip-method. "For a normal way of folding t-shirts, you would first place the back of the shirt facing up, fold the two arms in, and then fold the shirt in half. Just like that, right?" Saitama nodded faintly, unsure of what to really answer to that. "But Sensei's method is different! Faster. More efficient." Another failed attempt was discarded and repeated in search for folding mimicry perfection.

"Uh…what are you talking about?" Mumbling and pinching the bridge of his nose Saitama sighed, seeing time stretch too long for comfort.

"For the sake of speed and progress, you changed the way you fold your clothes." Filled with admiration Genos nodded, stopping his attempts, a messy pile of now wrinkled shirts scattered around him. "It is an impeccable change of thought process! As expected of you, Sensei!" Praise like that always felt awkward. Almost more than talking about sex.

"Like I said, people who know how to do it this way would do it like me." Shrugging and dismissing
the skill, taking it for the regular and accessible thing that it was Saitama started to attempt his own progress on the chore by folding and storing the ignored pieces that were not shirts. "And besides, I just saw some lifestyle improvement tips from the TV that included this anyway…"

"Please wait a moment, Sensei." Starry-eyes Genos stood and rummaged through the notebooks. "I need to write this…"

"Just memorize it normally." Saitama asked in despair now that the task was seemingly abandoned.

Thunder roared outside the window, a brief flash of lightning and a sudden silence. Moments later steps were audible on the stairs, followed by the turning of a key.

"I'm home." Mayu called out, freeing her hair from a slightly neater bun. It had been time to listen to old man and tell them no. As usual it was boring, patronizing and aggravating. "Tama? You still want to go to that thing at the park?" She stopped, staring at the warzone. "What happened in here?"

Saitama looked defeated, carrying a basket of the clothes that had managed to be dealt with.

Genos had a notebook with instructions open on the floor and was comparing folded shirts, folding new one and placing it in the line before restarting, murmuring about unsymmetrical lines and calculating angles for the flip.

"Genos saw me fold clothes and decided he needed to adopt a new method." Saitama explained, part of him not understanding why, the other part a bit flattered about being an inspiration and a third bit rather concerned about the time lost in that upheaval of change. And of course seeing he had a thing he wanted to go to there was a portion of him also concerned about the timing.

"The flip-fold?" Tiptoeing and kissing his cheek as he made the trip back from the drawers Mayu asked. "He never saw it before?" Strange. Laundry was a constant in anyone's life. Although it was true that more often than not Saitama only did the washing and drying. Folding was sometimes forgotten in an emergency or another. Of just mismatched timings. Genos did have a way of claiming most of the chores too.

"Looks like." Saitama sighed. "He needs to relax."

"We had planned to take him but seeing this it looks a bit more urgent than just dragging him along for fun." Mayu nodded, agreeing. "Genos?" She draped her arms around his shoulders, pecking his cheek too, sparking him. "Come on. Get dressed. We want to go…"

"What?" Startled it took the cyborg a bit to refocus and drag his attention away from the now clumsily folded shirts. The method was still not sinking in. "Sensei did say he was looking forward to some event today, right?" Task accomplished. Mayu thought, letting go, winking at Saitama, watching his smile appear too. "What kind of event was it?"

"Oh, didn't explain? Today is..." Saitama began to explain. They weren't in a rush yet. Outfits still had to be changed.

Geno's phone began to ring, interrupting.

"So Sensei, what was this important thing you were trying to tell?" Ignoring it the cyborg kept his attention on what was important. Mayu chortled and stood.

"Wait, aren't you going to pick that up? I'm interested in what's going on." That ringtone was what had been selected for the Association. If there were monsters big enough, or close enough, for them to reach out for an S-Class it was bound to be interesting. Or at least promising.
“Yeah, it’s me.” Acquiescing to his sensei Genos took the call “Where?”

“A monster appeared?” Mayu asked, sporting new undergarments, choosing her outfit, and shoes for the outing, looking over her shoulder, away from the choices.

“Yes, today in Z City a single monster has been advancing within the premises.” Genos informed them, closing the phone. “At the moment, we are waiting for confirmation. According to witnesses, this monster does not seem to be a major threat.” Saitama nodded as he changed. If it was like that there was no reason to try his hand. “The level of the monster is low, so Sensei will not need to be involved in such trivial matters.” Genos mirrored his thoughts, nodding to himself. “I do not think that it is necessary for Sensei to get involved seeing you are looking forward to the event later today anyway. If absolutely necessary, I can handle this alone.”

“Really?” Slightly disappointed by the unravelling plan Saitama glanced at Mayu.

“Even if you do handle it alone we want you to meet us after.” She suggested, adjusting the bouncy frilly skirt of the pastel mint dress. “One of you could please help with the zipper?”

“By the way, where is the thing located?” Saitama mentioned casually as Genos agreed to the plan.

“It’s in Central Park.” The zipper stopped midway through Mayu's back as Saitama looked up, the little metal heart twisting in his grip.

“What…did you just say Central Park?” Slowly he asked.

“Yes. I did.” Genos looked confused.

“Please do not burn down the cotton candy…” Mayu whispered, horrified.

“We need to go. Now.” Saitama agreed, closing the rest of the zipper, determined.
Chapter 40

"Ehehehe! I finally made it to the festival!" A lonely single monster was shuffling through the stalls set for the summer festival, gangly, pale and wobbling down the main route of the soon-to-be festival, squinting at the colours, lights and smells. "All of this stuff was made for me to destroy!" People had fled the area at the sight of the awkward thing that threatened the area. "Yes, I will never forgive the stupid summer festivals for ruining me!" Angrily it shouted, swatting at the banners and lanterns overhead, hissing when a few fell on his greasy head. "I'm going to destroy it all!" It shrieked, shredding the fallen items clumsily. "I became so jealous of all these girls and boys attending the festival, and then so angry that I became a monster!" Striking a pose in dull sweatpants before the scared workers the creature made its grand announcement. "I am the Loner Festival Monster!"

"Hey, you!" Someone called out in an annoyed tone, causing it to turn around with a toothy sneer.

"Who are you? Some kind of random bald priest?" It taunted. Then it grew angry as he saw the pair following the bald guy. "And a couple." Venomously it hissed, distracted by the manifestation of his hatred.

"So what if I'm bald!" That moment of distraction was enough for the solid punch to land, sending it flying away. "And this is a yukata!" Saitama shouted at the fading speck, straightening the obi with a huff. Mayu was looking up, clapping a bit. Genos relaxed and his weaponry was once more concealed. "Seems like the monster didn't interrupt the preparations of the festival!" Cheers and people were returning, finding the way free to finish the assembling of the booths, games and food stalls before the time the Festival was scheduled to start. "Thank god we made it in time." Saitama sat on a bench, watching, looking a bit excited at the prospect of joining the festivities.

"We took longer because you really wanted to come in a yukata." Mayu sat down next to him, adjusting her skirts, straightening the star-shaped cut-outs around the edge to show the peach of the underskirt. "And the obi took forever." To find and to tie. It was a tangled mess before she intervened.

And then Genos wondered if he should try a yukata but there was only one.

Then they had tried to understand if she should be in a yukata. It was agreed after a quick discussion that Mayu looked cute with that dress on and hair pulled into a tail with messy, runaway locks around her face. Plus the only yukata she had was torn and forgotten, old and probably wouldn't fit right any more. Summer festivals had been forgotten while working, curled with the AC, the PC and the theme of the month, along with the video chat and the frazzled conversations of the group as they made it and grew as writers.

"But it was super risky! If this guy were to really mess things up, the Summer Festival would be cancelled!" Complaining Tama stretched, placing his arms over the back of the bench, sighing.

Which guy was unclear.

The monster or the overzealous cyborg with incendiary tendencies?

"Sensei…do you mean that the event you were very excited about was this festival?" Genos asked, attempting to confirm and investigate. A small affirmative nod allowed him to continue. "That's what I thought." By that time it was obvious. A few of the people working on the booths approached, thanked them and offered some festival food. "I am not sure what makes festivals so fun, but if
Sensei says so, then perhaps there is something more than meets the eye at these ordinary events that might be linked to why you are so powerful…"

"It's not about power or training." Mayu called softly, patting his arm, before taking a bite of the offered taiyaki. "It's about having fun, relaxing and hang out with friends." And a massive sugar rush at the end.

"That's about it." Saitama stated in agreement, seeing the return of the usual core issue, gesturing with the skewer of dango. "Stuff like this is just fun! It helps you forget the bad times. "Festivals are the epitome of Summer! Look at all the kakigori and yakisoba, and all the food stands!" And the lights, and the people and the sound that would come later, when it was time for the event to actually start. A few more offerings were delivered to their bench with cheery thanks. "For a normal young person, this kind of stuff really gets you in the mood, right?"

"Which mood?" Mayu teased, offering a bite, shuffling to make room for the boxes of grilled sweet potato, tiny sponge cakes and takoyaki. Sample size but still nice to have.

"Don't you start." Saitama blushed slightly, chucking, exchanging dango for the warm sweet bite of the paste-filled pancake-fish.

Genos watched carefully, thinking, observing the area.

Some people were already gathering.


"I am sorry." Genos murmured. "I am not like other normal human beings as I have artificial parts and…"

"This has nothing to do with parts!" The natural and offended tone Mayu and Saitama used in absolute synchronicity, the same words overlapping and snapping him back from the attempted explanation as to why the idea was not the best felt warm and reassuring. They stopped, glancing at each other, apparently surprised by the shared vehemence.

"I know you're always fighting monsters and taking all these notes, always being so serious and putting yourself under stress." Saitama explained. "We thought that maybe going out to places like this more often would be good for you. And it's free too…"

"Lately they have been giving you a lot of work and we don't get to just relax together as often as before."Mayu continued, taking his hand. "Take a moment. Just because you are in this quest for justice does not mean you can't enjoy life. You said it yourself. Your doctor encourages it. Just like any other time we go out together. Please. Just… relax, have fun."

"I see…" Genos whispered, his expression losing some of the bewilderment, a smile finding it way there.

"I guess you're not really into these kinds of things?" Saitama opened the still piping hot box of takoyaki, using the pick to get one. "Well, it's been a really long time for me as well…"

"I haven't been to a festival since the first year at the university." Mayu mentioned, eying the cotton candy makers displaying their wares, both the packages and on the cone, fresh from the spinner.

"No, it's not that I'm not interested but I don't know much about it." Genos admitted. They were concerned. It was reassuring.
"You've never come to a festival before?" Saitama asked, standing, straightening his yukata. The stalls were open now and the crowd of festival goers was starting to form.

"No, it's a bit different." Genos stood as well, looking back at the structures that now occupied the central path of the park. The sun was setting. The glow of the lamps was bright and the music was starting to ring about. Calls, advertising, rings, conversations echoed. Frowning he stared harder, hesitating on what to say. "I do have memories of coming to a festival when I was very young... with my family..." He hesitated. Mayu laced her fingers with his. "But I am not sure if that memory is real or not."

"Oh, I see..." Saitama murmured, placing his hand on the cyborg's shoulder. "I'm sorry if..."

"No, it's fine!" Worried he was making sensei concerned with no cause Genos shook his head quickly. "I'm interested. So this is what a festival is like!"

"We just need to make some new memories for you." Mayu mentioned, still holding hands, keeping him from wandering off, from getting lost or mobbed by girls in pretty yukatas. "What do you want to try first?"

"Seems like the Bon Odori is about to start over there!" Saitama pointed out, getting caught in the excitement of the crowd and festivities.

"Right!" Finally allowing himself to be convinced to take that time to be free of responsibilities "And if we hurry and participate in all the events and go through the booths in a clockwise way we can go back home and fold the rest of the t-shirts."

"Wait, you're still thinking about that?" Saitama laughed.

"That would defeat the point sweetie." Mayu laughed as well, aiming for the cotton candy, tugging Genos along.
Chapter 41

Explanations on the go were being given as they made their way through the attractions. Genos had no place to write it down but his memory should suffice even when confronted with the plethora of novelties presented. There indeed some echoes and recollections he could rely on, even if they seemed very faint, very distant. Later he could make a report of the experience through it all without the play-by-play he usually employed when investigating.

Sensei was excited about the whole setting, showing it much more pronouncedly the deeper they went into the festival area, losing his usual bored look, smiling as he spoke and sampled the foodstuffs. He walked a bit ahead, returned to them, gestured, pointed and spoke of things they saw, that were too attention-grabbing to ignore. He was hard to lose in the crowd due to the glare of light bouncing off his head.

Mayu gravitated towards the sweets, giving off the occasional spark, hair fluffing up when she noticed something she particularly wanted, standing on tiptoes to track it, still holding his hand. She would be easy to lose if he allowed their hands to unlink. Fortunately the tracker and her unique energy readings would make it simpler to find in the event of a separation.

The excited pair exchanged most of the words, teasing, ribbing and making sure Genos was enjoying his time with them even as the festival swept them in its animation. It made him feel gratitude, happiness and allowed a smile to start cracking his stern expression. That seemed to make them happier than the things around them.

"What is that round thing you are chewing sensei?" Genos asked as Saitama returned from an incursion into yet another booth. The candied apple he and gave Mayu was recognizable. That dark round thing he kept was harder to place. Logic would dictate it to be something of the sweet or candied sort.

It seemed to be working. Mayu considered, biting into the weakened crust of caramelized sugar, reaching the apple beneath.

Under the lights, the sounds, surrounded cheerful people Genos' stance was relaxing. When he looked around he wasn't scanning the area for threats. His eyes were just following one thing after another, lingering on whatever captured his interest. When he asked it was a tone laced with genuine curiosity rather than student-like diligence. His hand on hers has relaxed into a loose grip, interlacing fingers instead of a stiff, engulfing hold. His gait had also gone from a harsh marching trot to relaxed steps, matching her rhythm and the ebb and flow of the crowd.

"Ah, oh this?" Pulling and holding out the lollypop-like piece of fruit sensei chuckled, twisting it around on its stick. "It's a ume ame." Sensei explained, holding it against the light, turning the sugar translucent, showing the dark fruit within more clearly.

"That's the first time I've seen it." Puzzled Genos scanned it and stored the information, head tilting. "Is it edible?" It was so small it looked questionable. Few people seemed to be wandering around with it. Other foods-on-sticks were more prevalent.

"Of course it is. Why would I put something that's not food in my mouth?" Saitama chuckled, popping it back in, crunching the sugar around the fruit, taking no offence in the question. It was after all a matter of taste.

"Perhaps for jaw strength training..." The cyborg suggested, still struggling with the concept of fun
and doing things for no reason other than enjoyment, still digging about for the secrets of strength.

"What do you think I am, a dog?" Scoffing Saitama took another crunchy bite, now slightly miffed. Mayu laughed, tugging Genos away from a group of hurrying high-schoolers, reaching out, tugging Saitama by his sleeve for the same reason. "There are a lot of foods that are only available at festivals, so it's pretty fun to eat them." And that was why so many people were drawn to the area and created walls before the vendors.

"Is that so?" Genos considered and nodded, watching the physical proof of the statement all around them. It was a matter of unique specialities. Buttered potatoes, chocolate bananas, and savoury items like grilled ayu fish, squid, chicken... Indeed some of those things didn't appear too often on the streets and now the signs were advertising them happily. "Mayu? Why aren't you having one?" He questioned.

"The plum is so sour no amount of sugar will fix it for me." Mayu answered honestly, shrugging, licking her sugared lips, smiling. Understanding allowed him to let the issue go. It was not to her taste and Sensei had offered a candied apple instead. "Do you not have something you want to eat?" There were a couple of bites missing from the apple in a pattern that did not belong to her teeth. Sensei had taken a piece at some point.

"Not particularly…" Genos murmured, looking away from the commotion, down at his feet. With all that atmosphere centred around food it seemed a bit wrong to not actually want to try some of those foodstuffs. "I do not have any particular likes or dislikes."

"That's kind of a let-down." Saitama sighed, tossing the stick into a bin. "Anyway there are a lot more things to do in festivals other than eating. What about fireworks?"

"Fireworks?" Genos looked up again, curiosity overtaking the fear he was doing the festival wrong.

"Yes, fireworks!" Saitama smiled and continued, looking up. The sky was still dark. "The fireworks are spectacular here in this festival! There are even two areas that shoot them to make the show!"

"Is that so?" murmuring the cyborg looked up as well.

"We need to find a spot to watch beforehand." Mayu finished her apple and joined in the conversation. "It's still three hours away though." Peeking at her phone watch she sighed. "Have you even seen fireworks before?" She asked softly as they resumed walking, leaving the food area, finding the sounds and sights of the games.

"No, I have not." Genos shook his head, eyes going from Mayu to Saitama. "However, I do know what they are." He assured them, trying to take away that slightly saddened look they shared before focusing on him. Mayu gripped his hand harder. Sensei patted his back.

"Seeing fireworks in person is super thrilling!" Sensei assured him, laughing easily, pushing his shoulder slightly, playfully. "Also Genos, look carefully where you're stepping on the floor. During festivals there are a lot of coins that fall from people's pockets."

"Sensei!" Genos looked horrified.

It was almost like they could see the spreadsheets and budgeting starting to open in his head along with calculations and possibly a letter to the Hero Association to increase Saitama's payment.

"Tama..." Mayu poked Saitama, chiding him playfully.

"No, that was a joke!" Noticing the same Saitama attempted to stop the incoming onslaught of
helpful hints and offers. "Want to try Goldfish scooping?" Diversion tactics were in order.

"Goldfish... scooping?" The term seemed to have caught Genos by surprise, breaking the

"Carnival games are popular at festivals too." Saitama looked around, examining the games the festival had made available. The classics were all there. It seemed the festival had grown bigger that year as well. A few new things here and there. Kids were begging their parents to play. Guys tried to impress girls with prizes. Girls showed them that they were better at getting prized by themselves. Groups challenged each other to play. Everyone seemed to be excited and carefree. Exactly how they should be at a festival.

"Sensei, what exactly is fun about these games?" Genos was back to being puzzled by that new area and new piece of information.

It was like taking him on a date sometimes. Basic information and what he had previously investigated were things he knew how to do, how to act. Confronted with novelties and Genos had to make notes and try to understand before going with the flow. It didn't get in the way. It was just his manner. Keep it light and keep the information flowing and letting him sift through it on his own way usually yielded cute results.

"It's about having fun, remember?" Saitama reassured him. "Don't think about it too much and try one."

"I see..." Genos took a deep breath, glancing around. "There are a lot of games to try." Indecision appeared again as he watched the signs and the players.

"Yes." Saitama agreed, relieved when he noticed the interest. "I used to work at festivals part-time when I was younger, and big festivals even have haunted houses." With a bit of sadness he noted that there was no haunted house on that festival.

Mayu opened the bag of cotton candy she had been saving, letting go of Genos, allowing him to wander the crowd, peeking over shoulders to check games. Maybe it was for the best that there was no haunted house. Genos might have incinerated it all, startled and possibly unable to tell at a glance fake danger from real danger. And she could have electrocuted everything in the area while spooked. And that would have made a very bad dent on Saitama's night. It wasn't just for Genos that they tried to have fun.

"I don't have any money on me right now." Genos returned, shaking his head.

"Come on. I can..." Mayu offered a piece of cotton candy, annoyed when a wisp burned it down to gooey caramel on her fingers before she could offer a few games. Thank goodness heat was nothing to her nowadays. Sugar burns had been bad once. Now she just had candied fingers to lap at.

"I'll pay for you." Saitama took her turn, winking, whispering that it was his idea as Genos once more watched the variety, sorting through what he would like to try.

"Thank you so much, Sensei." Genos was now enthusiastic about the festival game. It was promising. "That one!" he pointed, grinning, a bit cocky.

"The shooting game?" Saitama tilted his head, searching for his wallet.

"Yes, just by glancing at it, I feel like it's meant for me." Genos now seemed to be getting into the spirit of things, stepping near the booth. The crowd noticed the new arrival. And then the buzz about the S-Class hero being there started. Genos, as usual, ignored all that, sizing up the challenge.
"The rules of a shooting game go like this..." Saitama followed, money ready. There were a few people with the guns, having their turn. "You aim at the target above the prize you want and have to knock it down. It looks easy but it's really hard to get it to fall. Let's wait for the guns..."

"I do not require a gun, Sensei." There was a slight whirr as he primed the al blaster, taking a wider stance to withstand the recoil. "Please stand back." Focused, Genos' eyes narrowed. "Target locked. Inciner..."

"Stop that!" Saitama shouted, stepping in front of the line of fire, tapping Genos' arm down, sighing in frustration. "You'll burn the place down!"

"Why did you stop me, Sensei?" Confused Genos relented, looking a bit sulky. But the arms went back into hiding, obeying his sensei's order.

Mayu chortled and approached, petting his now smooth metal, taking his hand again.

"I was right the shooting game is not for you and far too dangerous." Saitama preached.

"This are games for fun Genos." Mayu explained. "That means you can't use the same weapons you would use to take down monsters."

"I... see..." Genos murmured, looking around again, taking in the ambiance.

Fun.

He could see that.

Sensei walked away, following a nice smell, telling them to wait by the games.

Mayu was trying the shooting booth, aiming for a jelly bean dispenser.

This smell is...gun smoke?

Genos stopped suddenly, still amidst the moving crowd, looking around more sharply. There should be no such smell in the area. Charcoal powered most of those grills. Gas fuelled the others. The guns were toys, powered by air.

What if this is from a monster?

No.

It couldn't be right.

Sensei had defeated the only reported threat.

A bomb maybe?

Scanning the surroundings using the smell as the guide Genos counted five dangerous presences nearby. Sensei was not close. Mayu was playing. And they had tried to make time for him to relax. He should return the favour and make sure the festivities would not be disrupted.

Turning away the cyborg that fought for justice tracked down the threat.
"I am sorry." Genos' voice was quiet, almost a murmur, as he headed towards the bathroom, discarding the blackened clothes and what had been boots into a pile of torn, unusable rags, leaving them outside so the smell would not spread inside their home, sitting on the floor, staring at the tiles.

It was the first he spoke after they had found him, after the loudspeakers had made the announcement. It did strike them as odd that the festival would call them like they were calling the parents of an unruly child but after seeing Genos and the old man complaining about the fireworks it made sense.

His body had withstood the explosion with ease, as expected of the new upgrades. Blackened but unharmed. Nothing had cracked under the heat and shockwave. Unfortunately there was no escaping the sooth, the ash, the char marks and the overwhelming scent of burnt and singed surfaces. And there was no way to ignore the fact that he suspected that he had ruined Sensei's night and efforts by mistakenly targeting the firework display's launch area as if it were a mysterious being or a threat to the public.

"Don't worry." Mayu answered his sad tone soothingly, returning from the supply hunt, changed into house clothes, hair bunched out of the way, placing an armful of brushes, scrubbers, paper towels, actual towels and buffing fabric pieces next to him. "With that bomber targeting Z-City it was a reasonable reaction to have." Even if incinerating an explosive cache was a bit of overkill.

"It was a good display anyway even if it was cut in half." Sensei unloaded his armful of soaps, solvents, solutions and baking soda. He had gotten out of the top part of the yukata, letting the sleeves hang loosely from the obi so he could move his arms more freely. "Here." Next he fetched the briefcase where Genos stored the house arms, opening it, revealing the tools tucked into the upper part of the lid.

If the cyborg was to help in the clean-up they had to disassemble the dirtied battle models and replace the limbs before doing much else. That mean a bit of dirty work before the clean-up could really start.

They had searched for Genos after returning from successful expeditions into the festival's provided entertainment. There had been a message on Mayu's phone indicating that a threat had arisen and the cyborg had left to deal with it before it could jeopardize the night. So, returning the text with a good location to watch the pyrotechnics' display, Mayu and Saitama had wandered the grounds, allowing time to pass, plotting a way to make Genos feel a bit less stiff in those situations. There had indeed been one moment where something akin to a tiny, muted explosion had brightened a speck of the sky but they shrugged it off as a dud, a premature or a test launch before the event. It wasn't until after the actual show, a display that seemed smaller than it should be, that they received Genos' communication of mishap and the call from the event's organization.

"Can you run a search on how to clean burnt metal, Tama?" Mayu asked, prepping the tub with hot water, the shower, the sink and the buckets along with the tools to take off the mechanical bits. "Ready?" She asked, aiming the shower. Genos nodded. Cold water was focused on the joints so she could see the screws, clasps and gears. Taking a set of keys she used her fingertips to search for the right spots, lightning trailing her touch lightly.

"Sensei I'm truly sorry." Genos spoke a bit more forcefully, spine straightening as Mayu worked on removing his left arm from its socket. It was a lot sturdier than most battles lead onlookers to believe. It was hard to get a grip. Some parts were slippery, others were incrust and she had to dig through
the grime. But they had found themselves in worse states before and Mayu had been able to do just that. So combining shower, sponges and brushes she managed to fulfil part of the task. There were also a few sequences to go to deactivate fuel and energy delivery systems before being able to pop them free safely.

"Really, don't worry about it." Saitama shrugged, doing as asked, following the instructions that he found online. "Did you have fun though?"

"Yes. I now understand the sheer power of fireworks." Reassuringly and dutifully Genos stated, nodding, listing ways that the raw power could be harnessed and how he should write it down soon.

"I'm going to fold the rest of those clothes." Saitama murmured, turning away, sighing in exasperation.

Mayu chortled, sighing, scratching her nose, leaving a smudge, placing the dirtied allen wrench down, getting the needle-nose pliers to pull the last pins.

"No, that's not it..." She murmured, wobbling under the weight of the now free arm. Genos reached out and helped her to get the limb to the floor. The area within was clean. Quickly wiping the grime away Mayu installed the left arm. It was lighter and more manageable. Genos supported his own elbow so the limb was steady in its place and she did the reverse. "I understand your eagerness though." Using cold water again she started her work on the right arm as Genos rebooted the use of his left, fingers moving slowly, adjusting,

"This is about your appointments?" The cyborg asked. "About wanting to control this?" His fingertips brushed the flowers gently. Wisps followed as usual, attracted to the metal.

"Power. Control. We want it fast." Mayu nodded and went for the pliers. "So we do pretty much everything we can to try and achieve it." Grunting she balanced the freed arm and placed it down, next to the other, sighing, her hand leaving a black imprint as she rubbed her neck. "But... I think we should take each other's advice more. Especially Tama's."

"Relax and have fun." Genos repeated dutifully. "But I feel... It's not enough. If I were to confront the cyborg that..." His hand closed into a fist. "I need more power. I need Sensei to show me how."

"I'm scared. There are days that I feel I'm back where I started." Mayu sighed and tightened the last piece, allowing Genos to have the use of his house arms. "I keep doubting..." handing him the paper towels they started to clean up his body, tossing the blackened pieces of paper into the bin. "But then I come home and you two are here and..." Shrugging she smiled.

"Things just fit right." Genos murmured, completing the thought.

"See? It's ok." She whispered, caressing his cheek, rubbing a bit until the skin showed under the sooth, smiling, letting go, picking up the shower head and the dish soap. "I'll do the back you tackle the front and when water stops being too black you go to soak."
"Tempest witness me!" The mysterious being shouted, big, blue and see through, sparking as it made its way through the main thoroughfare, shattering light fixtures on the way, making cars shriek and people run away in terror, sending waves of electricity around, striking at whatever was conveniently close. A few people had fallen, struck by the current as it moved, making a show of its newly gained abilities. No one dared to get closer to help. Most ran or huddled behind whatever was available. "I ask for the blessing of the Lightning Empress!" It shouted to the sky, shaking thick arms with a thunderous boom and a crackle of static. Screams followed. It was fortunate that it seemed to be ignoring those around him, focusing on mayhem for its own sake, calling out, preening, prowling, presenting.

Mayu's lightning strike came down fast and precise, leaving her on the road, hair tousled and tangled with wisps, shards of electricity dancing around her body. She prevented it from shattering the concrete beneath her flats and kept the discharge from fanning out. The sharp blues and whites made a very striking contrast with the frosted lilac of her skirt and top. The flowers were pale on her skin, traced by the edges of the energy, shadowed and highlighted. She took a deep breath, staring at the thing cautiously, moving, controlling her wisps, shaping them, attacking as the elated monster took a fighting stance, seemingly grinning, seemingly pleased, charging up and barrelling down the wide path.

The people started to cheer. And the sound of the fight as it was displayed got toned down and the screen split as the reporter continued her narration, looking cute and chirper. Mayu hopped out of the way, balling lightning on the way, leaving little wisps on the creature's path. They fed of the static, trapping it with its own electricity in a chain reaction of explosions.

"The Electrifying Threat as we have been calling these monsters clamouring to challenge Tempest seems to be of no consequence to the A-Class heroine, currently ranked 18th, as she easily overpowers them." The fight came to an end, the bright light clearing away, leaving Tempest alone in the charred battlefield. Mayu was smiling, unaware that the cameras were around, shaking the wisps from her hair and getting them under control as the crowd swarmed. A slight worry crossed her eyes as the approach was too fast, changing the storage cell, frowning for only a second. The images stopped and zoomed on a big plane of her face, placing it in a small square on the corner of the screen. "Although this is the sixth beast exhibiting this type of behaviour only two have been captured by...

"They are getting all hyped about this..." Saitama changed the channel as the reports went on, stretching. Mayu and Genos were sitting on the table, ignoring the TV, leafing through some sort of catalogue, discussing something, comparing notes in a hushed tone. The cyborg had pulled her away from a very grimace-filled working session in front of the now closed laptop. It was weird seeing him as being the one responsible for relaxation but it gave Saitama some hopes that Genos was learning. Which that idea born from the publicity going around on the screen tied into. "Summer is almost done and the water parks are having big discounts."

"Doubt does not help you." Doctor Esumi mentioned, going over the results as Mayu put the new earring in place. The crystalline reservoir should be able to store more energy. No major changes, just an adjustment. And if the numbers kept growing more adjustments to the storing capacity would be needed if Mayu kept feeling unable to properly control her own output without a crutch. It eased her mind but how much of it hampered her ability to judge just how much was too much and how able she was in the handling of her own electricity? Esumi had decided that she could at least try to
steer Mayu away from relying too much on the devices. And now along with powering up Genos’ arsenal the storage could be easily adapted to powering the apartment if she ever felt like going off grid. "And it seems to be what is interfering, actually."

"I know..." Mayu murmured, sighing, tapping the dangling bit. "I'm improving. I know I am." She grunted, turning away from the mirror, sitting in front of the table and the offered snacks.

"And yet, right?" Esumi chuckled. "It's a natural reaction, true but there is no need to have it. Not when data and daily life show you to be perfectly able to manage your powers in both ends of the spectrum."

"We'll see how they behave in a pool." Mayu smiled a bit.

"Bold. Good." The Doctor smiled, pleased. The idea of a toaster in a bath hadn't crossed the young woman's mind. Nor should it. From what she had seen there was no way Mayu would cross that line of output without a reason like a fight or a fright big enough to startle her into sparking. "By the way... I was able to make a mouse able to generate electricity with the data gathered from your performances."

"Glad to be of assistance." Mayu smiled slightly, responding to the sheer enthusiasm the doctor was displaying as she explained that the process was mostly harmless and the effect lasted only for a day. "Where is Akina?" She noticed after a time, when the subject came to a gradual halt.

"She called in sick a few days ago." Esumi shook her head with a little concerned sigh.

[About the A class 18th place... check who is 17th and 19th. Kinda counts as an in joke. Zap.]
"I think we're done." Mayu went over the list as they walked down the street, crossing the last timed sale they had pounced upon, balancing the bags, tucking pen and paper back into her purse. It had taken a bit of planning and slight cheating with the use of superpowers but they had secured every item needed. "My turn to cook, right?"

"I can do that if you'd rather focus on finishing the catalogue." Saitama offered, glancing at a store, taking a flyer, stuffing it near the leeks.

"I got rid of that burden yesterday." Mayu chortled, stretching, bags rustling. "Felt good. You can go off and pay attention to Genos."

"According to your biometric readings you have not have a restful night." Genos interjected. "Sensei's offer…"

"Hush you." Mayu bumped the cyborg lightly. "I know you really want to try those new toys with Tama."

"I'll be happy to play along." Saitama chuckled. "So why didn't you sleep?"

"Detail work. Fine tuning. Legal advice." Mayu mumbled. "There were a few entries I had to protect."

"Sensei." Genos spoke up abruptly, stopping, staring at a hooded man walking ahead of them on the road. "That person… it seems to be King."

"Who?" Tama stopped too and tilted his head, following Genos' gaze.

"The S-Class hero." Mayu answered softly. "He has earned the title of the strongest man on earth. Although there was something weird about his accomplishment list when I was working on the info..."

"We crossed paths with him at the S-Class meeting and that vacation the Organization offered." Genos continued. "Of course they are not considering Sensei's strength when they granted that title." Quick to come to Saitama's defence Genos frowned, considering the location, time and the day's reported occurrences. "What is he doing in a place like this?"

"Shopping?" Mayu suggested, shrugging, shaking the bags that proved they were doing much the same moment ago.

"Going for a walk?" Saitama offered, equally convinced of the normality of such a stroll.

"Right…" Genos nodded. "Heroes for all their duties are still normal people with hobbies and needs that derive from their nature." Options considered the cyborg theorized. "After all we came all the way to M-City for the hijiki sale…"

The heavy familiar rumble of a gigantic robot falling from the sky and landing primed for combat echoed in the street, followed by the usual panic and scattering of regular people that did not want to be caught in the crossfire. Bipedal, armoured and armed. Like a fancied-up suit of armour in a furry cape and imperial regalia. And apparently a personality programmed to match the grandiose shell.

"I am G4." It stated in a booming voice, the metallic echo clear and sharp on its synthesis. "I am a
machine God created by the Organization." Plainly it stated, straightening, towering over the S-class hero, scanning and making sure the target was right. "You are King, the strongest hero. I have come to eliminate you."

The announcement of that the strongest hero was present stopped some people from running and turned them into a hopeful, cheering wall, just down the road, behind the man's back. The fear seemed to have poured out of them when watching the man's stoic reaction and hearing the echo of the King Engine.

"Organization?" He spoke up, turning, hands in pocket, looking less than impressed. Slightly miffed, actually. "You know who I am. Why challenge me?" Most things ran if they heard the S-Class number 3 name.

"I stated it clearly." G4 said, drawing a humongous sword, its motion's aftermath enough to knock the cap off of King's head, the flat, triangular tip inches away from the hero's face. "I have come to kill you. This is a performance test for my battle AI. There will be no sound data if I were to kill you in a surprise attack. So I challenge you to fight."While it was indeed a straightforward explanation the S-class hero seemed rather confused, standing on the middle of the road in a lax stance.

"Sensei could probably wipe it out..." Genos considered, putting the hijiki box down. "Still... This might be a good opportunity to see King in action." Sensei had said that it was also important to see how others fought. "Let's watch."

"I loved that speech. It's so standard bad-guy-upper-class-minion it deserves to be in a book. Or show." Mayu muttered, taking out the phone, opening the notepad, jotting it down. "Also I'm curious. For all the hype about him I've never seen him fight. No vids, no news, not one phone-caught clip online."

"Fine." King sighed heavily. "But let me use the bathroom first. I can't even bring out half my strength if I have to hold it in. That won't give you satisfying data." The request seemed weird. Even a bit awkward.

"I don't know..." Saitama murmured. "If I'm holding it I just kinda rush through everything in my way to get to the..."

"Yeah..." Mayu nodded. "If you gotta go you gotta go..."

Genos stared in mild confusion as they found a watching spot.

The machine god seemed to share the confusion but it sheathed the blade on its back and relaxed its stance into a waiting, neutral stance.

"I will wait for 10 minutes." It granted after weighing in the options and deciding that the best course of action for its data collecting mission. "For every minute after that I will kill 10 people." That statement rekindled the fleeing from the bystanders. "If you try to escape this town is history." It finished its threat as King walked away, heading towards the nearest bathroom.

"That thing looks strong." Saitama considered.

"High energy readings... that thing is indeed a robot. And an amazingly strong one." Genos finished his own analysis of the thing. "He might even outperform me, who was built by the genius scientist of justice, Doctor Kuseno." It was not an easy admission. The frown was back on his face. "He is at least a demon level disaster threat..." Considering all that the Association should pick up on it soon.

There was a chirp on his phone.
Genos picked it up, scrolling the message.

"I got the water park tickets." He announced.

"Seriously?" Saitama spoke up, peering. "There was a huge waiting line for those."

"Do you have a bathing suit?" Mayu asked, hugging him, staring at the phone too.

"No. I had no need for..." He paused for a moment, frowning. "The signature…" Genos noticed something else in the careful scanning for weaknesses as he put the recreational message that was getting the other two excited, ignoring the moment for planning. "It's partial… Mayu."

"Huh?" She glanced up, away from Saitama and planning and going through the recently acquired supplies and discussing the idea of a picnic versus buying at the park.

"Does that thing look familiar?" Genos asked, guiding her attention towards the G4 robot, trying to make sure. She frowned, understanding abruptly, moving to peek around the pole they stood behind of.

"Do you want me to go poke it and see if it has the same carapace of those coming after me?" She suggested, eyes narrowed. It was a robot but that could be where the similarities ended on the issue.

"Let's wait for the ten minutes to end." Genos decided. Sensei seemed enthusiastic about watching King fight too and if things turned weird they could use the data anyway. "I still want to evaluate King's performance."
"He is really taking a long time." Saitama mentioned leisurely, having quickly grown bored with the peeping around the corner at a robot that had not moved since finishing its threat, returning from a nearby vending machine, giving Mayu the raspberry-lime soda she had asked. She smiled, looking up from an e-reader, reaching out, taking the offering, opening the can, sipping, glancing at the completely immobile robot on the centre of the now quiet road. She too had suffered from the same feeling of disinterest albeit a bit later.

If anything it looked like it had shut down completely into a statue of powerless but impressive looking scrap metal.

All nearby people had fled.

King had yet to return.

"Maybe he was buying medicine for a stomach flu." Mayu mentioned as Saitama's attempt to open his own soda was foiled, giving him a dented can and a ripped ring. Sighing the hero attempted another solution to free the beverage from its metallic cylinder. He ended up simply poking the top of the can in, spilling a bit in the process. It was a possibility as to why the celebrated hero was taking so long when a heavy threat had been placed on his appearance and performance.

"There are less than three minutes to the deadline." Genos calculated, his voice low, leaning against the wall, behind the thick lamppost that was hiding them. His expression was even sterner than usual. He had gathered all the data he could from the idle form of the robot. More would come from when the course of action was set in motion. Range of motion. Weaponry. How fast the AI thought and reacted. How strong was it. How strong he needed to be to destroy it if the target was originally the one that held the title of strongest. "If King fails to return there will be need for me to interfere."

"Do you want me to do the thing first?" Powering down the device she stuffed it back into the purse, standing, peeking sparking nervously, making the lights above lit up, responding to the surge. There was no reaction down the road.

"If you would." Genos nodded, approaching, placing his hand over her, receiving a shock, closing his fingers around hers.

"Say when." Mayu agreed, eyes narrowing, staring at the thing, trying to find a weak spot or a similarity. Might as well charge up a good one from the get-go, she though, taking sips from the juice while it was still an option.

A sound started to echo in the street.

A countdown.

Mayu sighed and stepped out of hiding, leaving the bags on top of the box, charging up, placing herself in line for a direct strike, wisps moving around her body, gathering. The machine was ignoring her. It seemed part of the current programming. It wanted King so everything else should be ignored or quickly eliminated.

"Time is up." G4 announced as the countdown ended, straightening, powering up once more, gears, cogs and generators readying for the combat, scanning the area without looking around. "King has not returned. Vitals are not within range..." The soliloquy of situation analysis was cut short by Mayu's strike.
It clearly unbalanced it. In jerky motions it attempted to curl and endure.

Unprepared robotic threats were vulnerable to her simply because of the sheer amount of energy and heath. Overload was a major danger. As was melting.

The blast was fast and wide, the plasma controlled and shaped into several tangled bolts, direct and straight, the roar of the following thunder shattering glass. The bright intensity seared the area before fading slightly as Mayu lowered her arms, shaking wisps away, taking a deep breath, charging up once more to face the results of her poke. It had been plain lightning with a quick charge-up. Not too threatening if the thing shared a few traits with the others. But that was what they were trying to check.

G4 was hunched into a ball of metal and cloak, protecting itself with the massive, armoured forearms before standing once more, shaking of the after-effects. It was noticeably slower. So electricity had scrambled it robotic sensors a bit. The shielding was melted down to the core metal and showing cracks. In spots the strike had dug into the wiring.

It straightened, turning to them, recouping, refocusing, reanalysing.

"Tempest." It stated plainly. "Requesting a capture drone for my coordinates. I will resume the search for King to complete the data gathering."

Genos frowned, approaching, hands fisting, baring is teeth in anger.

It was them. They were after Mayu. And he was not about to take that quietly. No other robot was going to take anything from him. Ever.

To his clear interference the sword was swung. To sweep the interloper away before resuming its task.

Mayu stepped back quickly, giving him room and pulling her electricity away. Even if he had been built to resist her after the first few disasters she didn't want to risk a stray bolt harming his abilities.

Sensei approached, carrying the bags, partly curious, part ready to lend help if needed or asked.

A well placed punch shattered the blade. Genos smirked and used the momentum and the calculating pause of the bot to strike, twisting, closing his fist around a storage cell, lightning wisping around his fist, throwing a hard blow forward, extending his reach with the new upgrade. The electrified, boosted blow stuck the triangular jaw of the G4, propelling it to the air and then backwards into the asphalt.

"What was that, a rocket punch?" Saitama asked, impressed.

"You used me to charge it up." Mayu clapped, chortling. "You're amazing sweetie..."

G4 attacked, boosted by its own back rockets, stomping down. Genos stopped it, keeping from being squashed. A crater creaked under them as the cyborg strained to keep the crushing force away from his core. The synthetic skin mesh of his face had cracked in the few seconds he had struggled with the momentum.

"Genos do you need a hand?" Tama asked.

Mayu bit her lip, concerned about to offer as well.

A familiar noise made her look up.
G4 had indeed called one of the toys that usually gunned for her.

So maybe she should just zap off before the bots decided to team up and make thing harder for both if they kept not wanting Saitama to bail them out of the fight.

"No." Genos snarled, slamming through the foot, shattering the plates, the plaques and the systems. "In order to reach my goal, the goal sensei gave me, to reach S-Class's top ten, I need to fight." He jumped and began an unrelenting attack. "I need to win against opponents like this." He pushed G4 back before throwing in an incinerator blast, singing what lightning had left of its cape. "It must be defeated by my hand."

"Okay then…" Saitama sighed and pushed his hands into the pockets, balancing the grocery bags on his wrists. "But don't you lose you hear?" He teased lightly, turning away, walking down the streets.

"And please be careful." Mayu asked, stepping further back, glancing up, hopping, vanishing in an upwards strike of lightning.

The new robotic arrival didn't touch down, confused by the sudden absence of its target, scanning, trying to follow.

_This is an emergency evacuation. A robotic weapon is running wild in near M-City's park. An S-Class hero is currently engaging. All nearby residents are advised to evacuate. The threat level is currently Tiger. The threat level may escalate to Demon._

The warning started to echo, reaching farther away from the few streets that had witnessed G4's arrival, as the fight escalated.
The need to breathe dictated how far Mayu could go whenever she zapped without a target in mind. Usually it was not as constraining as it sounded. Lightning travelled fast, faster than the need for air manifested at times. When she slammed down the intake of breath and ability to see once again told her that she was far enough. Empty area, rural road. Not a single person around.

Shaking away the energy surrounding her she shaped it into a fluid ring around her, heating the air, breaking it down, growing into a protection. If she needed to breathe she could just hop around and have the energy following.

So there was actually a robot faction called the Organization. Why would they want or need a human battery? Or data on King. Independent AI? Robotic rebellion? Evil scientist army doing its bidding? Testing the waters, acquiring power... That much was plain and obvious. For what was the big question.

Eyes closing Mayu listened, searching beyond the roaring thunder for the hiss of the machine giving chase.

Wisps broke free, balling, floating around her without a care, growing, crackling.

The robot G4 had summoned for the mission unrelated to his, the one that touched down was an improved model. The round design had been exchanged for a prism-like body core. Still multi-armed and thickly armoured. No protruding parts other than the limbs. Less likely to be knocked away and a balled lightning slipped inside. Unlike G4, whose first trial run had been thwarted by Genos, keeping him away from the actual target, this one had been made, tailored, adapted and tweaked to play with her. It already knew if it took her inside conscious she would melt it. It already knew that she could zap around so the limbs provided a wide range of motion. And judging from that new blinking spot it already had those traps she had found recently installed so she was pulled into range every time she attempted to flee.

So far no upgrade had been enough to take Mayu down and away but caution was always warranted. Especially as it became more and more obvious that they were veering into the "beating her by exhaustion" attempts.

[Target Located]

[Engage]

Mayu pressed her lips together, charging up to strike directly. For all its analysis there was always some way to bypass the protections, the SPD's the insulators and sock at the core circuitry. Heat was the go-to answer. So far not one of those toys had been prepped for the searing temperature of the sun's surface. Even if that was cooler than its core. It did take a while to get that hot though and keeping on the move diffused a lot of the energy Mayu could be using to blast though.

The ground shook when a second bot touched down, hissing behind her, barely seconds had passed since the other's arrival, activating, striking with a thunderous blast from its closed fist, pushing the first robot back. It didn't look like it had had that much of an effect on the first robot's platting.

"The living battery is propriety of the Hero Association." The unit relayed.

Mayu turned, jumping, startled, sparking, fuelling a set of explosive chains of lightning, wisps and ribbons, roaring thunder and sonic blasts. Both things seemed affected by that sudden stormy
onslaught. Through the light she spotted three red dots set in a triangle pattern on a round, smooth head about four metres above the ground, mounted on a huge combat unit.

Metal Knight. She though, feeling a cold shiver down her spine as she stepped back, sparking harder. It was not Bofoi's voice in live broadcast. It was pre-recorded. Thank goodness for that. It took a bit off the edge of fear the goddamn scientist always brought with him and his drones and his clearly not-heroic intentions.

[Interference]

"Threat Level Assessment: Tiger." The unsupervised robot readied to fight. "Retrieve."

"Lightning Empress!" Between the two robots getting ready to wreck each other, ignoring Mayu much to her relief as she tiptoed away to be able to zap off, an electric wolf-like thing hopped from behind a brick wall and bowed to her. "I'm not worthy enough yet to ask for the blessing of a challenge my Lady Tempest. Please allow me to place my life on the line to defend you."

The bots turned their attention towards the new arrival, both clearly considering the new interference.

The beast that was now growling, spikes surging from its coarse shoulders, charging up, as electric as the others had been before it.

"Huh?" Mayu murmured, head tilting in absolute confusion, the decision to leave forgotten.

G4 didn't seem to be taking him seriously, turning its back even after the damage Genos had dished out.

It was keen on insisting that King was its primary target and anything that was not that particular S-Class hero was a nuisance.

It took a bit more of fire power, a couple of punches and a ripped out back decoration for the machine-god to turn and actively fight the cyborg instead of just attempting to crush and sweep him away.

Its heavy, clumsy strikes were no match for Geno's speed.

The massive body, deprived of its main weapon made for a very easy target to a barrage of blows.

Very easy to dodge.

While its high energy and good performance data were relevant it seemed it was programmed to fight another kind of combatant so it was having a hard time adjusting.

Each jab Genos delivered was charged with electricity.

They affected the performance of G4. The surges messed with the systems, with the response time, with the manoeuvring. Hit a sensitive spot and something even more damaging could be triggered. Mayu and him had worked on that for a while. It had made a number on him but showed Doctor Kuseno exactly how he could be reinforced for a better performance and greater efficacy.

The fist of the robot slammed through concrete, pinning it in place as Genos somersaulted, landing on its shoulder, wrenching the head out of the way, smashing through the softer connective plates that allowed the head its range of motion. With the stuck arm and the slowed down motor skills it was not able to react, to knock him off before the incinerator blaster on Genos' palm was unleashed.
within, supercharged.

A robot's heavily reinforced exterior could only protect a very delicate interior.

Some robots were built like that.

Most were actually built like that with full confidence that the defences would never crumble.

Genos jumped away from the fiery ball his attack had unleashed, standing in the end of the road where a few curious onlookers had failed to flee, watching in awe as the G4 was turned into a melted mass of metal and circuitry, cheering for the cyborg, taking pictures, complaining about the abrupt rise in temperature.

"It should not be able to move again." Genos stated coolly, confident.

The system should be completely unsalvageable.

G4 started to crumble.

The metals with a lowest fusion point were liquid by now, dripping from each joint and crevice, splashing on the ground, steaming, lumps of unrecognizable mass.

The parts that had been reinforced for the extremes of battle were severely cracked and damaged.

It was collapsing upon itself.

Yet there was something off in it.

The energy readings were still high.

Something smaller was coming out of the wreckage, pushing aside the useless parts.

Something obviously made of the most resistant materials the outer shell had been cast from.

It was not a pilot.

It was its true form.

So the initial idea of a suit of armour had been correct.

Furthermore what electricity had damaged had not been the inner connections but the outer controls.

It was either immune or extremely heat resistant.

And it was charging up to attack as soon as the last bit of debris blocking its range of motion was pushed aside.

"Everyone!" Genos shouted, moving to block the incoming blasts. "Get away!"

Saitama's eyes narrowed as he faced the enormous building.

It seemed to be the right place.

But the intercom was broken as soon as he had pressed it and no one was opening the door and the doorbells were not ringing either.
So... how to get inside?
The click of the lock signalled that a secure area had been reached.

After the long run, the ride in the elevator, the corridor that had never seen so long...

King slumped down its frame, trying to calm his noisy heart and the panting breathing that came from furiously pumping his legs to achieve the distance necessary to reach safety. He was still shaking, making the frame rattle loudly.

Those encounters were always so terrifying...

And yet somehow they still hadn’t noticed that he was a cowardly bloke that got lucky one too many times.

And who would believe that now with all the hype they kept pilling on his head?

If he walked out and got recognized it was always the King the Association publicised that was seen and cheered.

"I got home safely..." Muttering the statement out loud made the feeling of accomplishment and shelter even more real as he curled, sinking as deeply into the floor as he could, kicking off the shoes slowly, listlessly. Everything was feeling heavy and painfully pinchy. "That robot is going to give me nightmares..." The image of the blade coming down towards his face sent shivers down his spine, kicking up another rattling beat of his loud terrified heart.

Deep breaths.

Slow deep breaths.

Quiet his noisy, hard-beating heart.

At least the need to heave had been a one-time thing as he hid in the restroom while trying to figure out a way to deal with the pressure.

And how to get out of there with his life and limbs.

Gulping down the guilt over the threat the robot had issued King sighed, body creaking as he used the door to steady his standing up.

The Association would send someone else to fight it.

They had to in the effort to un-tarnish their image after A-city and the alien invasion.

The TV and the pile of games and gaming systems crowding it beckoned like a haven. With them in their line of sight he was able to relax a bit, approaching, even if his steps were unsteady and clicking them to life. He had managed to retreat while holding the prize he had ventured out to retrieve.

Doki Doki Sisters. The limited edition with the swimsuit photo mode. Before the robot he had been contending with the unbearable excitement that preceded a new game acquisition, struggling to keep his stride normal instead of a rush to get home and fire up the consoles.

Cheery, sweet and catchy the theme song filled the room, washing his worries away, as it should. As the intro played his shoulders lost their stiffness and his heart reduced its beating from terrified
pounding to excited pulsing. Even if the voice actress had changed and sounded a little off and bland it would still be a part of the Doki Doki Sisters series and so far those dating games had never let him down.

"Now... the name entry screen..." Pushing the toggles idly King sighed, leaving the line blinking and blank as his hesitation circled characters and combinations. "Using my real name is too embarrassing..." a little chuckled escaped him, finally calm enough to focus on the choices before him. The default name was too plain. "I'm 29 after all..." Too old for some things some would say. However is he enjoyed it what the harm in doing what he liked. "Can't think of another I like and haven't used yet..." Getting comfortable, staring at the screen King sighed, staring at the random button, clicking it a few times for suggestions. "Tough choice."

"Why not go with King?" Someone asked, answering to his current dilemma with a seemingly sound suggestion.

"Nah." King answered almost automatically, shaking his head, trying a few combos, muttering them, matching to see how they sounded. "Using a hero name is a bit..." Grimacing he glanced back, catching sight of the other guy, offering a disinterested look, turning to the screen once more. "If I hear a game character call me King Onii-chan I'm gonna kill myself with... huh?" His heart stopped for a second before it started to pound in frantic fright as he turned to face the intruder that had been chatting idly about the game no adult man would want to be seen playing, no matter how much enjoyment it brought him. Who is this guy and how... What is he doing here? Trying to find a an answer as he dropped the controller and hopped on his feet, turning to face the intruder despite the fast beating of his heart and the sudden fright of the whole situation.

"The window was open." The intruder stated calmly, justifying his entry point.

"This is the 22nd floor." King answered, the bafflement growing, overlapping with the weird feeling of confusion and fright.
A battle was always fought differently depending on the adversaries.

If dispassionate analysis was being used it would be classified as a three versus one. It could also be argued that those odds were clearly skewed to her advantage. But Mayu felt that those two were not there to be as helpful as they proclaimed. Words and allegiances did not match at all and were definitely not enough reasons to trust them anymore than she would the other bot.

The Organization drone actively pursued her. Nothing to expect there but their predictability.

Metal Knight's machine was programmed to interfere on her behalf but it could occur to it or to its manipulator that this would be a good time to take her down and away, to make Tempest disappear with little suspicion on the Association's side, blaming the kidnapping on the other group without shame, pause or compunction.

As for the electrical beast it was part of the same group that challenged Tempest with gleeful fervour. Even if it had proclaimed itself as a protector in that instance who could tell what a mysterious being was actively pursuing when freed from the obligation?

So as it happened Mayu felt that she should take them all down for her own sake.

The crackling wisps grew, connected by angry bursts and bolts of unchecked energy surrounding her, protective and aggressive, pelting whoever came close with an unrelenting barrage of energy, heat and sound, following the direct strikes as jagged aftershocks.

Thunderous roar echoed with each strike she made, with each move she performed, with each step she took, pursuing or avoiding the many arms of the threat. The lightning strikes flowed within the heavy blows of Metal Knight's machine. It seemed made for overwhelming force, enough to breach to the cage-like core of the capture drone.

The escape-preventing technology it had developed to keep her from hopping away made it easier to target, charging up to the point where she could barely breathe, surrounded by spiralling ribbons of tangled lightning, faking a retreat, slamming back all that energy into it.

All the while keeping herself cocooned and shielded

There was no way she would allow any of them near.

The mysterious being noticed that aversion right away and surprisingly acted accordingly, never getting too close but also keeping the others at bay when the need arose. The heavy electric charge around Mayu could also warrant the cautious attitude but the semblance of respect was quite flattering.

With cracks to sneak through the disruption of the lightning was getting more and more overwhelming to the systems that guided the bots. Her constant generating and deterioration of the surroundings, being it the explosive ozone, the melting rock and fiery grass, the aggressive bolts dancing in the air and falling from the skies, attracted to her massive display of stormy weather were not helping matters.

Mayu exhaled slowly, arms opening, steadying her stance, letting the polarity change on the bolts around her, ignoring the Org-bot as the Knight and the Beast attacked it head on. Brilliant white began to turn sparkling blue and shimmering blood-red, spidery lines growing, tendrils dancing in the
A hop forward triggered the trap.

From a breathless lightning back into her body right in front of the org-bot.

Mayu reached forward, tapping the metal, the barest touch sizzling and melting the surface, unleashing the full blast, some tendrils blackening for an instant as they coursed through the insulator, the shielding, the bypasses and straight into the circuitry. Parts cracked. Some melted.

The carcase of the robot fell to the ground as Tempest hopped away, sighing, coughing, breathing in some clear air, away from the main fight.

Metal Knight's bot was still for a long while, scanning the fallen enemy. Then it turned and approached, staring at her with the same intensity. Possibly scanning her to see if there were measurable changes. Feeling it she pulled the energy towards her, masking, suppressing, gentling the charges.

"For your own protection accompany me to the study facility." The machine's monotone suggested.

Chortling Mayu stood, shaking her head, adjusting her flowery skirt.

"No." Reaching out she slapped the machine's leg, jolting it. Unprepared for a direct strike from her, even if the energies were not comparable to what she had just done, the bot hissed, fumed and crumbled to the ground, shutting down, systems fried. One big spark and it was down. Attracted by the lingering energy another out of the blue bolt fell on the shell charring it further. Sighing she took a pic with the phone, checking it for messages or calls. Nothing… Were the boys all right?

The lightning beast was watching, approaching shyly, bowing.

"Just go." Mayu murmured, tired, swaying. Sleepy again… Figures.

"Thank you mistress. I saw your power. I was honoured to witness you." It stated, looking up and averting is eyes. "We will strive for your blessing Lightning Empress." It bowed once more before scurrying off, to wherever zappy monsters holed up. From the looks of the field maybe someday she would have to join them. Especially if Metal Knight decided to start up some campaign to get a battery.

"No chance of just leaving me be right…" Smiling slightly Mayu turned, crushing a yawn, picking up the groceries, checking if they had been kept from the storm. They seemed to have survived but were a tad warm. She texted Genos and checked locations, pinpoint the bots as well. If he was still interested in examining parts there was a good source of scrapped technology to scavenge.
Chapter 49

G4’s attacks were made of concentrated light. If the bigger shell had been built to withstand heavy impact that small one seemed to be suited for long-ranged strikes made of weaponry and mobility. Quite different from one another indeed. Layer within layer to force an adjustment if the fight lasted beyond the armour as it was happening. And it was soon made clear that those rays spawning from the circular indentations in the robot’s shell were well above the average cutting lasers used in most things. Thicker, flexible, multidirectional but able to focus and orient. And they were all shooting forward, even the ones shot from the back of the ring-like mount around the round head.

People were running away but still well within the striking range. So he should strive to protect them.

Genos charged, dodging the beams, jumping upwards. They followed to his relief and strain. He was fast. But it was soon noticeable that it wasn’t enough. Some avoidances were too narrow, scarring the metal, ripping the cloth off his body. Going up made G4 follow suit, aiming, focusing, narrowing the number of lasers he used, diverting the energy, feeding it into only those four, five beams, making them even sharper.

Finding the high ground on a telephone pole the cyborg scanned the area, searching for a way to pounce and strike. The first strikes had only scuffed him despite damaging the clothes. The others were clearly slicing though anything that was on the way. Mayu fought the same way, striking from afar, fast and hard. As soon as something got closer she usually got away by hopping. If that thing was built with a similar mindset... Knowing the connection now it was altogether possible that it had indeed been modelled after...

A second too late. Between search and reasoning his reflexes and inbuilt scanners and triggers failed to warn him of the incoming attack and were off by too much. Abandoning the post, watching as everything was sliced on his path as Genos fled for another spot cost him his right arm.

I have to get rid of those lasers... He reasoned, ducking into the nearest building, taking a breath, eyes narrowing, accessing the damage. or I'll lose my limbs before I can strike. Lost but still mostly functioning. He had not lost yet and refused to do so. He would not disappoint Sensei. Mayu on the other hand would be cross at him for being harmed. Not for too long usually but...

So how to disperse something that was both offensive and defensive especially considering his current condition. Get close and crush the source was the best bet but there was a bit of a hassle when approaching would get him sliced into scrap. A glance up gave the cyborg the first hints of a plan.

Light... Annulling the source of harm...

Quietude replaced the sound of the fight for a moment as G4 powered down, searching for the obstacle. His position was secure enough. Threats could not sneak upon its form. Visuals gave him no confirmation of the obstacle’s new position. Changing to heat-seeking produced better results. Behind a solid wall that could hold the laser for a few seconds longer than the surrounding materials, thus giving him a couple more seconds to attempt an escape and relocation in case of a strike.

"Come down." It called out, locking on the position. Interferences of any kind should be swiftly disposed of. Completing the mission was the priority and the goal had been severely compromised as it was. "It’s a foolish waste of time to worry about bystanders.” G4 considered, readying the strike to end the nuisance. Target was locked. The machine hummed, priming. "I am only after King." It reiterated, blasting the nook into oblivion.
The sounds of a weapon ready to be unleashed were not unfamiliar. It usually signalled both the most dangerous and the most vulnerable moment of those using it. Waiting for that second, adjusting for the delay his system seemed to be experiencing by comparison, Genos timed both his jump and the start of his impromptu plan to take down a machine that had been custom built to take down the one that was acclaimed as the strongest.

Using the smokescreen he tossed the canister at G4. The laser shifted from the wall to the incoming object. The explosion both released a shockwave that made the robot stagger along with the massive wave of sight-stealing foam that grew when exposed to air as it had been made to behave.

Moving fast Genos ripped a water valve from the wall, unleashing a geyser, following the water with a blast of the incinerator, creating an eruption of boiling mist, enveloping the area, kept going by the gushing water and the still molten former body of the Machine God.

"This will not work." G4 freed itself from the sticky foam, looking around, scanning the area, deciding the attempt was a way of cloaking for a sneak attack. Its laser sources hissed to life, ready for an area blast. Escape from the slashing, circling light would be impossible. Projections guaranteed a 99.9% chance of success. As soon as the scuffle ended he would have to return to base to acquire a new shell and resume pursuit.

Unleashing the laser brought nothing but a sizzle and disperse light dancing on the steam.

Steam... recalculating...

"Do not bother. Moisture disperses lights so your lasers cannot form." From the thick layer of fog a cable whipped, capturing G4 into a steely hold. The cyborg approached, pulling, bringing it down. His arm was gone but the inner systems of the and the long cable for grappling was as functional as ever. Genos slipped a crystal into the slot right under his shoulder, the electrical current within unleashed though the connection, making G4 produce mechanical sounds of deep distress. The tugging and struggling was replaced by uncontrolled writhing. Static formed, escaping from the cable, aided by the wet environs. "You want King but I know someone stronger." Genos stated, hand closing into a fist. "And I am stronger than you." He roared, striking down.

Even if G4’s movements had released his arms to strike back at him, even if they were both reduced to punching at each other backed only by raw power, even if his incinerators were too wet to generate a flame, even if he was out of Mayu's lightning, even if Sensei's teachings about mental fortitude and goals were not useful for that situation, Genos was going to pound that bastard into scrap.
"This is quite bothersome…" Pretending the sudden jump of absolute terror was part of a fight-ready stance King puffed up his chest and donned the look that made monsters flee without a fight, staring back at the intruder. "You can't just walk into someone else's home." His voice was steady and firm, the deep gravelly tone concealing the shiver of dread. The intruder's expression barely shifted. Gulping down the feeling of uneasiness he tried the next bit of intimidation. Pulling rank. "Don't you know that I am an S-Class hero?" Smug and condescending. Sometimes thugs tried to approach him for a fight. It usually worked.

"I know. King, right?" Tilting his bald head the man nodded along, unimpressed, curious. Recognition struck a cord in King's memory.

It… It's that guy. The B-Class who ordered tea at the meeting.

"But I have to say I didn't think you'd be into this kind of game." He was at ease, if slightly confused by the character that was asking for a name input after the timed loop.

"Stoooop! No, no, no…” Panicked King forgot the intrusion in favour of protecting his hobby.

"Is it fun anyway?" Ignoring his frantic attempt and clear embarrassment he picked one of the many other boxes scattered around, chancing on a hack-and-slash. "Oh… this is an action game." And another. "Do you pilot robots in this one?"

"Yes. Yeah." Grasping at that lifeline King nodded and continued his campaigns of hiding it all. "I'm really into those action games. I thought this one was one too. Turnout out it was a dating sim. I bought the wrong game." Faked outrage in the middle of a very stiff acting, fear forgotten in favour of a deep crimson blush and hasty packing. "Well I have to turn off the power. They charge a lot for electricity, you know." Mumbling excuses he covered up all he could. "How embarrassing. A 29 year old buying a dating sim by mistake, can you imagine…"

"It says Doki Doki Sisters right on the cover." Flatly the intruder mentioned.

"Really?" King snatched the box away, turning his back, hunching over it as if devastated. "Here I thought it said Doki Doki Shooting Star!" Reinforcing his statement seemed the only way to salvage the situation. "The lied to me. I'll have to return this…"

"Show me this one then." He suggested, looking interesting, bringing King's panicked cover up to a deflated stop.

"Yes, right… that's how it should... Eh?" Blinking he took the box from the stranger's hand. "You want to try this game?"

"Is that a no? I thought you were bored." The guy shrugged, hands in pockets, glancing at the TV and controllers.

"No…” what is this B-class thinking? He shows no respect even though I am clearly older than him, the jerk… why is he here anyway?

Of course he had heard about King on the news. And he knew a bit more about him through Mayu
working in the catalogue with papers strewn everywhere with information about everybody and Genos discourse over strength, technique and ranking system and their war over the worthiness of the guy and the title of strongest while picking up and said papers and adding his own notes and auxiliary notebooks. Both disagreed with giving the moniker but while Mayu dismissed it as the association preserving its image and mystique, harmless publicity stunt she called it, Genos called for a justification and a competition to prove Sensei as the strongest.

King was hospitable after the initial shock, getting juices from the fridge and starting up the game Saitama had picked.

"Hey King you are really good at videogames." He noticed as the fight went on and the bot chosen by the S-class was upgraded into an unstoppable fighting machine, flashing and blasting through the levels with speed, ease and skill.

"Well... I've topped a few game tournaments when I was younger." King answered, suspending the pack by its straw, tiling the controller as he began a combo, glancing back slightly, frowning. Just how long is he gonna stay? Can't he leave already? Saitama, as he had introduced himself, seemed to be no threat after the initial shock had passed but he was really overstaying what little welcome an unexpected houseguest should be given.

"Wow you topped?" Impressed Saitama nodded, glancing out for a moment before returning to what had brought him there in the first place. "Not only are you strong in real life but also at videogames. So... why did you run away before?" King spat out juice, looking back, wide-eyed. "Genos is fighting in your place right now." The cyborg newcomer... wait... Fighting for him meant they had seen or knew that the robot had come for him and he had just... That it had not been the association calling for a sudden threat... "Aren't you super strong?" Saitama asked, his tone hopeful. "You're an S-Class hero right?" King looked down. Was that an accusation? "Why did you run away from a big robot?" A recrimination? Guilt was a big part of what he felt when praise came for those things but he never... "I came only to ask you that... But you started playing games. Is it because monsters bore you?" Confused by the sudden turn of the conversation King stared. "Have you become so strong that fighting is too much of a hassle for you?" Finally asking the question that had brought him across M-City Saitama waited. "Please. Please tell me."

Emergency evacuation. A giant bird has been sighted above M-City. Please do not go outsider. Disaster threat level Demon.

"Another alert..." Distracted by the sudden blaring of warnings Saitama stood, looking outside for an instant, sighing and looking back. "There's been a lot of them lately..." Picking up his bags Saitama looked at King that had once more hunched over the game. "What will you King? I'm going. Aren't you heading out as well?" No answer. Maybe that was an answer. About being too bored to fight. "I'll come back later. Saitama decided, failing to notice the massive toothed flying threat that flew towards them until the moment when its massive body slammed against the building, beak and claws sinking into the apartments.
Chapter 51

There was a place in the woods nearby where lightning kept falling, unending roaring and bright, thunder echoing throughout the area. However the skies were clear, a beautiful, cloudless gem-like blue. Not even a hint of an approaching misty veil or rain in the horizon. Yet the bolts fell from the sky, uncaring about how they should have been behaving, cutting through the air, striking downwards and rising from the ground in tendrils that broke into several jagged forms, joining, dispersing, lingering in balls above the area, shimmering, almost blinding.

Fires started and died, sparked by the electricity, smoke and red joining the spectacle. Some feared that the woods would burn down and the blaze would approach, threatening their houses.

The people that lived in the community nearby had grown worried enough to communicate the strange happening to the authorities, to the Association, to anyone that might have a chance to solve whatever that was.

Who knew what kind of weird thing was up there, ready to attack and destroy humanity. A monster? A mad man? A science experience gone wrong? A project on energy generating that had gone haywire?

In response there was a warning issued. A bounty for capture. A reward for investigating. And a sudden appearance by several glory hounds, a few concerned civil servants and a couple of beings that did not want to be seen while peeking.

Mayu woke up in confusion, abruptly, coughing, blinking in confusion, looking around with a slight frown, the dead leaves and ash rustling beneath her movements. The smell of ozone lingered but it was not too concentrated or suffocating. All around her was burnt, charred, splintered and electrocuted. Smoke mixed with wisps, sprites, bolts and ribbons of pure electrical mayhem. Sparks drifted with the ash. They danced and shot upwards, wild, free, greeting bolts from out of the blue. Everything burned brightly, the crackling of electricity and thunder drowning whatever sounds had been left by the destruction.

Had she...

Mayu closed her eyes, groaning, rubbing her cheek, teeth gritting, feeling the sparks around her play against the marks on her skin, the build-up within answering in tendrils and wisps.

Well the only explanation she could find was that she had fallen asleep mid-hop, taken a breath, plummeted to the ground, and while unconscious lost control over her powers.

Corroborating evidence included her sore bottom, the itch of the shallow cuts made by an exploded crystal, the lack of knowledge on where she was, and the obviously wrecked surroundings.

It was a very big surge even if she had been unconscious, without the reservoir and without the earring active to actually divert or suppress the massive amount of energy that had wrecked that clearing into a smouldering grey-and-light hole... Even for an after-battle discharge it seemed pretty massive. A few bolts to the sky coupled with calming breaths, meditation, a slap to the earth was usually enough to get rid of the overage. Positive charge did take a few more kicks and zaps to get rid of but this...

Carefully and flinching due to the aching parts of her she adjusted the earring, checking for damage.
It seemed whole, chirping as soon as she touched it, resetting it into safe-mode. Apparently it had assumed she was in battle. Not that the technology could be blamed seeing the surroundings.

Her bag was nearby. To her dismay it was damaged, the lace edges blackened, a couple of rips throughout the butterfly pattern of the outer fabric. And the heavily surge-protected cellphone was dead. Worried she tried a couple sparks. Technological CPR failed to revive it. But the groceries were only slightly warm. The tree behind the bag was shattered and smouldering.

Sighing Mayu looked up, reaching out, playing with the wisps, thinking, storing the phone back into the bag, picking up the groceries, walking through the wisps that clung to her, playful, hungry.

What if she had been acting like a reservoir instead of supressing the energy as she had assumed? Instead of annulling the energy it had been stored within, waiting, dormant... and then overloaded and discharged as soon as she was too electrified and unguarded.

A possibility.

If so it was a good thing the place seemed uninhabited.

It was also good that it had not happened before.

Not to her knowledge.

Something else to report to the doc.

But if it worked like a battery it could be good as a backup source for when she was too tired to properly generate and direct. Like a crystal for Genos supercharging weapons...

Still sleepy... Mayu noticed yawning, standing on sore, wobbly legs.

Fortunately no one had approached although she was sure it was only a matter of time before someone overcame the fear or called for help. So it was best to just go and let the electricity around that place dissipate on its own.

Home was still empty.

Neither Saitama nor Genos had returned.

The apartment was quiet, just a bit too hot. Bright sunny days that would end soon. And they had the tickets... It was a good thought.

Tired she walked to the bathroom and started to undress, cleaning the scratches, the ash, the twigs and the sooth, throwing the dress into the basket, stretching, glancing at the mirror, at the unsettled hair and the scars. Pressing her lips she touched one, the shimmer of electricity dancing hot and white for a second. It looked a bit battered…

Hesitating she stepped back, recovering the dress, walking towards the sliding doors of the balcony, slipping the clothes back in place, putting on the shoes left next to the empty flowerpots, hopping out of the building, zapping away, leaving the groceries behind, in the fridge an a note pinned to the TV.
"Dr Kuseno." Genos called out from the access elevator. The doctor looked up from the meticulous programming, planning and fine-tuning that went into the basics of a new weapon, standing, startled. It was unusual for Genos to return unannounced. The machines and alarms had already announced his approach and descent. But he could have been returning simply to gather some backup parts. The call however hinted at something more serious. Even when damaged that boy always called first...

The older man stopped, frowning, concerned when faced with the extent of the damage the Genos sported. There was a very grim, determined frown on what of left of his face. Vitals were exposed. Things were missing, broken, shattered. A loud clunk echoed when his remaining arm tossed the scrap he had dragged from wherever that fight had taken place against the floor. They were mangled but in a much worse way than Genos was, rendered inactive. "These are the parts of a robot named G4." His speech was low and slow. But it seemed the result of emotion rather than any damage to his mind, body or circuits. "It was incredibly powerful and intelligent." It had to be. But for Genos to admit it told Doctor Kuseno that the challenge had pushed him. And he had not liked the results. "They are damaged but use them as you can." Genos asked, mouth closing into a thin line, pained by the implication of weakness, cracked pieces falling away from his cheek. The shell, the head, the burnt and dented remnants could indeed wield information that could be worked, replicated, reworked by a scientist with the know-how. "I want to be stronger."

"These parts... where in the world did you..." The Organization... it was the first name that came to mind when Kuseno shifted his attention towards the remnants. The lines beneath the damage were unique enough to be recognizable. "Very well. You have room for improvement." The doctor agreed, digging through the pockets of his lab coat, pushing buttons within, approaching the nearest panel, inputting codes, making the corresponding drones carry away the remnants for analysis, approaching Genos, making sure it looked worse than it actually was, guiding him in. Kuseno had seen him worse. He had had to rebuild him from much, much worse. It was still not easy to take. "Genos... you became a cyborg to fight for justice but don't push yourself too hard." Gently he tried to remind the young man that through the mission, purpose and training there was more to do, to live, to experience.

"I must." Quiet, sure, stern, serious. And so frustrating. The cyborg stepped into the platform, waiting as the machines to surround him and start taking the readings, assessing the damage, linking him to the lab's systems. The bulk of the damage was swiftly removed and prepped for replacing. "I have to rank in the top 10 of S-Class."

"Yes, yes... you say that a lot nowadays." Kuseno grumbled, glancing at the screens, prepping sequences, reading the first data from Genos, deciding on what had to be done before even starting to develop the new parts from that G4 Machine. He had to stabilize the core and prep it for an added surge of energy. Maybe if he built slots for extra electrical charge like he had done for the arm... What was clear was that the material needed to be strengthened and the weaponry improved upon without losing mobility. "That sensei of yours sure gave you a reckless task." Genos was fully lying down on the operating table, all systems linked and stable, eyes closed for a moment, the hum of his core slowing, quiet. The list of malfunctions created by damage, overclocking and straining was piling on the screen to his right. "On that subject... I want to meet him. Bring him here."

"To the laboratory?" Surprised Genos opened his eyes, propping himself up on one elbow. The joint creaked and cracked, making him fall back into the table, unbalanced. The Doctor rushed to his side, straightening the limb.

"Yes. More importantly..." To keep him both distracted and focused Kuseno brought up what had
started that relationship while wielding the tools that could not be used by the computers, disassembling the parts that were beyond repair. "Have you found any leads on the mad cyborg that destroyed your home?" Despite the broken joint and phalanges being crooked the fine motion of his hand was intact enough to form a fist. "You have been focusing on hero activities lately and while that is fine you also thought that the visibility could bring you clues, hints, access to databases and resources…"

"I have been unable to track it." Bitterly Genos admitted it, looking away, the destroyed side of his face showing nothing. "But no matter what I will find that cyborg and destroy it with my own hands."

Even with his sensei, a purpose, a girlfriend and becoming a hero his hatred has not faded... Kuseno sighed, concerned. There a picture in one of the screens. Mayu was kissing his cheek, smiling, capturing with the outstretched arm and a click of the camera a shocked and confused expression on the cyborg as Saitama picked them both up in a hug, laughing. The background was hard to make out but it seemed some kind of incinerated monster near some brunt trees. Maybe it's a matter of time. He hoped those new additions to Genos' life could do what those years had not been able to do.

"Genos... I am worried." The Doctor admitted, glancing at the information that was being extracted from that enemy bot. It was something he always stressed and oftentimes when the boy returned to the table for parts seemed to have been forgotten. "I have pursued that cyborg longer than you have. I know how dangerous it is. If you do find it don't be rash. Instead report to me. If you keep calm and think strategically you will be more than able to take it down. However youth can invite disaster. Do not fight it alone."

"Dr Kuseno. I understand this is our fight." Genos answered steadily, eyes closing, ready to rest as his body was rebuilt. "This cyborg has taken many lives. I will not let it live." And once more he failed to understand the crux of Dr Kuseno's advice.
"Woah. It flew straight to your place." Saitama was slightly surprised that was the case. He had had a bit of time to react from the second he heard the screech and the flapping of the wings but it was still baffling to be that accurate. Both for him and the bird. "It's like you attract monsters." Like him. The robot had tracked him down. The bird had just swooped and clawed its way into the apartment. Before he was too bored to bother fight. Now... "Well... now what? It's in your house so you have to fight it." Like that Praying-Mantis thing that once had bust through his ceiling.

But turning towards the S-Class hero just showed someone who looked unbelievably terrified. King was staring at the bird, wide-eyed, terrified, seeing nothing but that fanged beak, breaking into a cold sweat, fidgeting, pressing himself against the counter, trying to scurry away. The door was a few steps from the kitchenette... I've always been unlucky but lately it's been getting worse. Is this punishment for all my lies? He couldn't fight them. Not a single one of those things that... It shrieked, startling him into scampering, trying to make himself smaller. Please forgive me god! All those times, all those monsters... I was a helpless victim. I ran away and someone else defeated them. But the Association contacted me... they gave me money for those battles. I was merely present but they thought I did it. I've never even been in a fight. King. They named me like that to suggest a heroes' power, overwhelming strength... it's like a bad joke. Shivering he tried to think through the terror that was showing, through the memories that were unwelcomely shuffling though his mind. It was all a misunderstanding that turned into a lie... I am not the person they admire... but that person must exist somewhere... I have to say it, come clean, if I don't I'll die... If that B-Class expected him to fight, to save them both... he... they... they needed to run, to find someone to deal with that threat...

"The truth is..." King started to speak. It was a chance to come clean, to make sure all of that would go away... The beast shrieked suddenly, turning his confession into a scream of terror, eyes closing, all of his body tensing, ready to run or hide.

There was an abrupt crushing sound and a rush of fresh air where before there was only the smell of that thing's bad breath. Through his scream King shivered, coming to a halt, taking a shivering deep breath, still not daring to open his eyes. Had he left? It had to, right? What was that sound? Was that B-class... why didn't he run? He didn't run because he believe that King Would protect him, right...

"Was it... I was here. I am sorry." The words came out, shaky, murmured in the silence that the beast leaving had generated. "I didn't have the strength to protect you and was too slow to admit it..." Sighing he shook his head, crying, sniffing. "Forgive me..."

"Is it true?" The B-Class's voice answered to his confession, sudden, startling. "Your strength and battles are lies?" There was a little pause as King opened his eyes. "Did you seriously wet your pants just from that?" There was confusion but no mocking in that guy's voice as he glanced at King, face and hands bloodied by the fight. "You ok?" Saitama asked, turning, surveying the other man, trying to see if there were wounds or bruises present.

But he wasn't the only one confused. Why... how... where is the bird? Did he... he beat it? A demon-level threat... King stared as his thoughts swirled and suddenly came into focus, the words and the situation too similar.

That voice...

The octopus thing...
Back then he had tried to run and a clawed tentacle gad slashed at his face.

King remembered that pain.

He also remembered the guy that had helped him.

Wounded, grinning and amused, claiming to be a hero for fun, helping him, checking the wound...

That B-Class was a bit older and balder but the guy looking back at him with puzzlement plastered across his face was...

Sobbing King mumbled apologies, throwing himself on the ground.

The confusion only grew as Saitama tried to make heads or tails of that reaction.

A handful of minutes filled with explanations later and an uneasy, guilty silence was broken by a question.

"Is it fun being a hero while scared shitless?" Saitama asked. It was not the answers he was looking for but King seemed like a nice guy. A negative was mumbled along with a vigorous shake of his head. The guy was still looking overly guilty about it all. "Well it's none of my business and I don't like to preach." Shrug he stood and got his bags back, looking out. Cleaning crews were already gathering, removing the big bird's remains and appraising the damage around them to rebuild and pay.

"But I benefited from your battles." King tried again, still apologetic.

"It's not about that." Saitama sighed, looking back. "You're everyone's hero. People believe you are the strongest." It was what people believed so to everyone else it was the truth. "So either you keep lying, quit or become the real deal. Like get strong and make it all real again." Fairly simple, actually. But it would be up to King. "I'm leaving now. See you." Feeling a little less bummed over the whole deal Saitama looked out the window. Not the answers he was looking for but it was some sort of an answer anyway. Reputation could get as boring and bothersome as working hard for no recognition and as being overwhelmingly good at it. Good to know.

"Wait!" King stood, reaching out, shouting as Saitama hopped off the hole in the wall. "Aren't you angry? You worked so hard to become a hero but I..."

"Nah. I'll stop by to play videogames sometimes." The greatest hero no one knew about smiled brightly for an instant as he dropped to the ground with his groceries, going home with a lighter step.

"All right..." Confused but grateful King turned to the door, greeting the Association Insurance forces that once again just assumed he was to blame for the saving of the city. This time he did try to tell them he had had a guest.
"And it has been two days." Genos concluded his careful recap of the chain of events that had transpired during his absence, staring at the note that Mayu had left behind. It seemed she had failed to return home in the timeframe specified by her own calligraphy. And not contacted once since that outing to change the contents and outline of any variation.

Sensei had been staring at it too, standing on the balcony, looking towards the sky, frowning, triggering concern and curiosity on the cyborg's ground arrival.

Rebuilding had been a fast and fairly standard procedure even as improvements were added here and there. The machines and doctor reverse-engineered his fallen foe into usable parts, components and information to be installed later. New weapons and tools would be steadily delivered and swiftly fitted. It was a work in progress but the new tactic would be better in the long run, providing the cyborg with the means to self-rebuild and be less tied to the laboratory in the aftermath of a battle. A bulk upgrade of the main body and then customization as needed.

Genos had had no contacts in that window of time, being powered down for the parts of the work that had to be done with his nervous system and conscious thought disconnected. It was not a good moment to bring up the Dr Kuseno's invite.

For now they had to act on their concern and find Mayu. He reached for the phone, inputting the data. It gave the no signal to track. Sensei's was still there. Mayu's sign was not there no matter how wide he set the search range. Could be due to electromagnetic interference. A glitch in the system. Damaged components. Being too deep underground.

Untraceable.

It was the only conclusion to be reached no matter the reason.

Calling was the next step to assuage the increasingly troubled thoughts. They had gone through some work to make the device resistant to surges and damages. No sign, no answer, not even a connection. Not even a beep or the ability to leave a message. From there he could state with no amount of doubt her phone was dead, not off. And that only increased the chances of something bad being the reason.

"Anything?" Sensei asked, observing his actions, leaving the balcony, closing the door, turning to the second source of information in the house. The TV was on, showing disasters and monsters. But nothing that caught their interest or called for their interference. Not even a hint of pink hair that told them its owner was out fighting something that had crossed her path. Nothing saying that there was an event mandatory to A-Class. Nothing on his newsletters.

"No." Grimly Genos gave up on the phone. "Whatever happened made it impossible to call."

Taking into account recent events they were growing increasingly worried. There were a myriad of reasons for her phone not to work. Some harmless. Some less so. And as they had parted after a pursuit had been initiated they had reason to think that whatever had happened was abduction by the Organization whoever they were. If it wasn't for that note telling them she had gotten home... but it also said she had left again. So what had happened after that last attempt at keeping in touch? Another ambush?

A little tune chirped from her computer, tucked into its working nook on the next room, announcing an attempted contact. Rushing to it, answering the call, fumbling with the machine in the hurry, the
pair came face to face with a pale haired woman with dark purple eyes. She frowned, head tilting, reaching for the screen, adjusting the camera, staring at them more sharply. Soon she focused on Genos and the expression changed to interest. A little robot swooped by and split into a projected screen.

Unsure on who she was or on what to say they just returned the look.

"Logic would dictate that whoever you are you are close enough to know my child's passwords so I'm assuming you are either friends or boyfriend." She spoke up, breaking the awkward silence of measuring whoever sat at the other end of the screen.

"Boyfriends." Saitama clarified, glancing down. If she was calling for a video chat odds were she had already tried the phone and found it dead. Standing he started to pace the apartment.

"Really?" Arched an eyebrow the woman glanced at him, following the retreat. "I will ask for a clarification later on." She sighed, writing something on the device with a stylus another bot offered. "Is it that time of the year already? Mayu always holes up with her friends and it's hard to contact for a while." That casual titbit of information gave the two males another lead to follow and yet another spark of hope that the worst had not come to pass.

"You are Mayu's mother, right?" Genos managed, hesitating. "She may indeed be with her friends." It was for the best if they told her that until the situation was resolved.

"I see… Well then… My name is Aida Masami." Nodding absently the woman smiled, introducing herself. "Tell her to call me. I'm no longer under a «no outside contact» clause in the project." Then she focused on Genos again, eyes bright and curious. "Also, cyborg boy. You are Kuseno's work right? I recognize those edges. Anytime you want new parts call me. I would love to put some nano-bot tech to balance your builder's design flaws." She winked and logged out.

"Her friends…" Saitama murmured, stopping, returning to the laptop. "Maybe I lost another note." Also a possibility that discarded the chance of anything bad.

"Yes, Sensei." Genos clicked on the first contact, agreeing to the hypothesis. "There is no reason to think the worst. As I know the phone is easily damageable…" even if he felt that that argument was grasping at straws. So far they were still in the early stages of the investigation. Every mundane chance should be discarded before diving into the less common.

"What do you need Mayu?" Off-screen someone answered through voice commands, calling the name associated with the tune. Steps approached the screen fast and a flustered young lady appeared there, her happy smile fading into a worried pout as she found them on the screen instead. Nanako took a deep breath, putting the juice down, sitting slowly, worry etched in her features. "Is she hurt?"

"We don't know." Saitama sat down as well, hunching over. There went that chance.

"There was reason to believe she may have been with you." Genos continued. "It's not so, correct?"

"Oh my goodness…” Covering her mouth the girl mumbled her worries. "Let's think…"

"Hey. Is Mayu online?" Another window opened with a second woman, short haired, casual-looking came into view, sporting the same surprise followed by suspicion at the people that should not be in the screen but were.

"She's missing Tsubaki." Nanako placed her glasses a bit higher on her nose, biting her lip in worry.

"Who is missing?" A third window came to life side by side with the second, linking the chats. Hana
did a double check and hid the mascara, one eye done the other halfway there. They seemed to have chosen the group option Mayu used for the work meetings.

"Mayu is." Tsubaki snapped sharply.

"Hey Mayu good news." The fourth appeared finally, smiling smugly. "The package arrived… Oh look it's the boys." Then she looked around her screen to the various faces of worry, distress or flat-faced concealment of concern and settled as well, hiding a box away from the camera's range. "What is happening?"

"Mayu has been missing for a couple of days and we can't find her." Genos repeated the situation. There were the authorities and the Association to warn but first they should do things on their own, just in case.

"Missing?" Suzuna looked immediately worried, looking around. "Toma! Go to the apartment." She shouted. The robot boyfriend retorted something but the door closed as he left.

"You believe she may be there?" Genos tilted his head. It could be considered a safe house. No one in the Association, as far as he knew, had been informed of her former residence and they were only aware of their shared living quarters. "In any event don't worry. We will find her and make sure she is safe."
There was a suspicious person stalking the hallway where Mayu's apartment was located, staring motionlessly at the door. Was he a thief? A creep? An obsessed fan? An ex-boyfriend? He certainly looked like he would be part of the crowd that enjoyed the kind of music Mayu was into. Saitama narrowed his eyes, tensing, shoulders squaring, fists balling, ready to deal with it if needed. Genos stopped as well and stared, initiating a scan. Just as a precaution. The building's security was good but sometimes it could not be enough. It was not human even though the appearance was similar. Not a cyborg even though it was designed to look as close as possible. Deducing from their conference in front of the screen that had to be Toma. He smiled, nonchalant turning. His metallic eyes flashed briefly, registering their likeness. Face recognition prompted him to speak up.

"Our Pink Dolly is inside. I've got a lock on her vitals." The bot informed them, shoving his hands into the pockets, walking away. "I'll tell Babydoll not to worry." He chuckled, leaving.

"What's with that guy?" Sensei asked, still frowning.

"One of Mayu's friends boyfriend." Genos explained, letting the tension drain away. Indeed Mayu was inside. Her vitals indicated she was either asleep or lacking consciousness. The sharp spikes of lightning and electricity grew and faded within, steady, low. A slight echo of thunder made the walls tremble. She was found but why was she hiding, unfindable, untraceable?

"How do we get in?" Reflecting on the damage made to what once had been a wall Sensei stared at the front door, reaching out to press the buzzing bell. It did ring, loud and clear within but no answer.

"I have the key." Mayu kept it in a glass bowl on top of the desk. They had been welcomed to it if ever there was a need while the place was not rented out.

The apartment was silent and looked as empty and cold as last time. But the connection to her room that would otherwise be hidden was left open. Meaning she was indeed home and hadn't just collapsed in the hallway, injured and exhausted from a fight. While a sigh of relief made its way to Genos' lips he did have to wonder why there had been no call. Why couldn't he find her… The room was lit by wisps, peeking through the clutter, guiding them towards the bed. She was curled in it, still wearing the same clothes they had seen her last in. Bags and her purse were left nearby.

"She's asleep." Sensei's voice was filled with relief as he approached the bed tucked away between furniture and books, glancing around with a hint of curiosity, sitting on the edge, reaching out, touching her hair lightly, barely jumping when static snapped. Copying him Genos sat down and redid the scans, just in case. Her temperature was off. Slightly higher. That was usual. But it was just a smidge above the regular readings. Was she running a fever?

"Should we wake her?" The cyborg asked slowly, voice low.

"We can try." Saitama chuckled. Mayu was very hard to wake. But why do it right now. "Or…" Sensei fell backwards on the mattress, stretching and relaxing. "We can just wait." Mayu shivered and moved closer, sparking a bit, wisps dancing over her skin, burning new marks into the surface of the bedsheet.

"I see." Genos hesitated then rethought. No need to be hasty now. They had found her. She was safe and that other guest would make sure everyone else was informed that there was no cause for concern any longer.
Mayu woke up between a smooth shiny bald head making reflexes out of her dancing tendrils of loose electricity and the warm nip of heavy metal pressed behind her, attracting those same wisps of freed energy, storing and quieting the buzz. Both had wound up with their arms around her waist, as if to shackle her to the bed, just to make sure any movement would be noticed. One was asleep. The other was on standby, tense, vigilant.

Chortling as quietly as she could Mayu sat up, pressing her hands against their wrists, petting their arms, glancing at the nearest clock. They stirred almost immediately, sitting up with her, keeping their arms where they were, secure, bracing. Both had this oddly concerned look on their faces. It was harder to sort Tama's out. It was really an expression he seldom wore.

"Boys..." She frowned slightly, despite finding that amusing, trying to make sense of the situation. It was good to see Genos undamaged after a big fight. Saitama was the same as usual even with that look. "I was out for three more hours than my note said. It's no reason to rush into a panic." Even if the recent events had given them reason to think the worst of her not returning. Still they had to be congratulated to think of her apartment when it was rarely used or mentioned. Or when they would directly link her absence to the Organization pursuit. They stared at her, as if trying to process what was being said. Her frown deepened as somethings started to look off. Their clothes were different. Wait... The parts the cyborg sported were different. Her hand traced them, finding the texture and shape unfamiliar. "Date..." Mayu murmured slowly, softly, dawning on her that the time the clock showed might not be telling her the whole story.
Several training devices and towering structures within the colourful complex seemed to be available for the public of all ages to try. A few had restrictions of height and age but they seemed reasonably applied, considering the construction and the level of the skill tested for each of those devices. So far Genos had spotted G-force simulators, disorientation drills, water combat and impeded movement areas. There were also spots for resting, refuel, for preparing and for waiting. Much like the festival it seemed crowded by a wide array of people looking for their favourites. However there seemed to be less focus placed on the food and more on the entertainment.

Sensei seemed ready for any of the trials, wearing the same clothes he had worn for the Hero tests for maximum mobility and less laundry after. Mayu was in similarly flexibility-enhancing piece she had called a trikini made of lavender fabric with little white bunny-head shaped dots flecking the surface. They had acquired swim trunks for him. Recalling pool outings in his hazy memory Genos added a white t-shirt.

Now he looked around, to the crowds dressed in similar attire, laughing, eating, walking under the warm sun, deciding they did not stand out too much. Some stopped and stared as Sensei and Mayu discussed the map and plotted the order on which the slides and simulators should be tackled. They seemed excited, gesturing, smiling. A few of those people joined them for a brief second, glancing at the map, asking for a direction or opinion before re-joining their own groups and leaving.

"For a place made with leisure in mind there is a broad array of training tools available." Genos noted out loud, bringing their attention back to him. "I was not expecting it." Clearly water parks had different standards than pools despite sharing a similar premise.

"It's not a boot camp..." Mayu chortled and hugged him, sneaking her hands under his shirt, gripping the hem. "Why are you wearing this again?" So far they had manged to get rid of a big floatie and arm floats along with a pool noodle, a straw hat and oversized sunglasses. There were no pools deep enough to swim in in the area they were aiming for, able or not to swim was a moot point. More to the point most rides forbade those things for safety reasons. The hat would get in the way. And the glasses had snapped when Saitama tried them on. So far the «ashamed to show skin at the pool» kit was still posing a challenge on the baggy shirt and curled inward attitude.

"I recall it being a sensible way to dress to prevent sunburn." Dutifully Genos answered.

Mayu smiled before the honest and preppy answer, pecking his cheek in affection, letting go, turning towards the first goal, the tallest and twisted ride of the Drop.

"Did you put on sunscreen?" Saitama asked, eyes narrowing as if trying to detect any hints of the mix slathered on the metal. If that was the reason perhaps Genos had committed to the whole thing. Probably researched it too along with the supplementary materials they had found home before leaving for the day.

"The only way he is getting sunburned is if someone kicked him into the sun." Mayu teased. Or his own incinerator backfired for some reason. "Also yes, I did put on sunscreen."

"So did I." Lured away from the subject by the lack of answer Tama continued. "My scalp would get dry and itchy if I didn't." Sensei stopped. "There is a line."

"It says ten minute wait..." Mayu looked up at the stairs that lead to the launch platform. The blinking screen telling the time changed for a few seconds, making a little countdown, an animated loop of a
video and resuming telling time. "Seems reasonable from here to there..." And there were already five people behind them in the brief seconds it took to join the line.

"I have neglected the sunscreen..." The cyborg murmured in concern. "Mayu... Sensei..." he called, resolute. He had no bottle now but they had left them in the lockers offered by the park. If Genos retrieved it... "If one does the back and the other the front we could be done..."

"No." Sensei sighed, looking up, not letting him finish that thought.

"You would need water-seal before you ever came close to needing sunscreen." Mayu teased, managing to pry a small smile out of the cyborg as the line moved.

Seriousness and a jittery nervous energy turned into laughter and gleeful shrieks. The screams echoed on the line increasing the stress and adrenaline of those waiting. Some gave up midway and scurried down the stairs, abandoning their spots, increasing the anticipation of others by implicitly naming them braver.

It all was designed to sharpen the instincts of those that partook on the ride while keeping them safely inside the exercise. Much like the booths at the festival it provided the training and experience without the dangers and lethality.

Genos seemed to have taken a shine to the fastest slides, riddled with loops and disorienting turns. Enough to request to ask if he could continue to go on them after the others had declared that they had had enough for the moment. So agreeing to a meeting place they had parted.

Mayu sipped her drink, looking up, towards one of the towering spots, wearing the too-big T-Shirt, legs crossed under it, drying. Tama had gone on a few more rides before re-joining her and sprawling on the sunchair. He was looking there was well, soaking up the sun.

"This is going well." He weighted in. Nothing had come under threat yet. "How are you doing?"

"I'm good Tama. And yes. It seems we finally managed it." Reaching out she placed her hand on Tama's shoulder, sighing, letting go a bit, sparking. "People are still staring at you." She winked, joining him on the chair, using Tama as a lightning rod and safety measure. "Genos got confused on whom he should protect with his shirt." The three were getting ogled. The cyborg misunderstood his share of the looks and decided they needed to be shielded.

"How did end up being you?" Saitama balanced on his elbows, propping himself up.

"I sneezed." Mayu answered in a playful monotone. Safety and health procedures he said, shoving the shirt down her head, messing up the ponytail. "So you ended up making a new friend. Tell, tell." The subject had barely been brushed in-between the preparations for the outing and the many explanations of the aftermath of the G4 encounter. Saitama had mentioned following a whim due to King's rep but barely anything else other than he could visit and he would visit him.

"It's just an acquaintance." Shrugging the issue Tama sat up and sighed.

"Fine. Have it your way." Mayu leaned against the offered shoulder. "Still it is good for you to have someone else that can understand." The loneliness at the top. Tama didn't seem to have issues with people chasing him. More often than not he trusted both her and Genos to go through whatever assailed them on their own, growing concerned only after something went wrong or was off. King, by all accounts, had no one. Seemed the loner type that kept people at bay because his reputation and power attracted the wrong sort. "You said play videogames right? What kind?"
"Do you play?" Saitama asked without answering. Wasn't really sure what to say either way.

"Not often… It's a time issue mostly." Mayu shrugged. "I liked shooters."

"That kind of explains you aiming skills." Saitama took her drink and stole a gulp, noticing the crowd that followed Genos as he returned from his attempts of fun. He seemed to have taken it as both entertainment and an attempt to compensate his self-proclaimed lack of swimming skills and tactical water manoeuvring.

"Who knew it would come in handy when shooting lighting out of me…" Mayu chortled. "Neither of you have any clue of your own appeal, have you…" She murmured softly, watching the flirting attempts fly right over the cyborg's head even as they made his expression cloud in puzzlement and his stride slow in confusion, attempting to see ways out of the conversation. Saitama possibly would have noticed but just kept walking, questioning what was going on but without making a big deal out of it. "I'm rescuing him." Mayu stood up, took off the shirt and threw it over Tama's bald head, leaning down, pushing up the fabric, kissing the tip of his nose. "Do you want anything on the way back or did you just settled for claiming my juice?"
"Thank you for this Suzuna." Mayu spoke up, opening the delivery, surveying the discreet boxes, reading the name and quick description in a glance. From that alone it seemed to be the right items.

"Not a problem." Snuggled with Toma on the couch Suzuna smiled, turning a page, multiple coloured pen in hand, ready to review. "If you made a new account just to buy parts they would badger you to buy a matching bot and I'm sure you don't feel like adding to the harem."

"Very funny." While she was able to keep a straight face for a few moments Mayu broke down into a chortle, shaking her head. "Well it actually is." Admitting she continued the careful unpacking.

"I know." Toma sniggered, moving a bit, leaning to peek. "Babydoll did you get us anything there?"

"No. Didn't want to muddle the order." Suzuna turned yet another page with a knowing sigh, putting the pen down. It was rather plain by the usual standards but Mayu and her cyborg were beginners and apparently had gone through the choice together in a lengthy discussion of specs and comparisons. No need to risk a mix-up. "I notice that you didn't get the sensation pack."

"It would be incompatible with Genos. He is still bio-cybernetic as opposed to a full synthetic like Toma. When I talked to Mom she got all abuzz with the idea and sent me a medical-grade neuro-connector and sense replicator." The same kind that returned sensation to amputees. Now she had to replicate the stern and lengthy lecture about turning it off when going into battle. The kind of damage the cyborg exposed himself to should never be felt. Not again.

"You were able to reach her already? What about the project?" Mayu mother's government-issued kidnappings were nothing new. For all the time they knew her the group had never once met Aida Masami in the flesh. Her dad was even more of a no-show, disappeared when she was young not even leaving a surname.

"She is excited about it. Apparently is entering the full actual experimentation phase where it can go out. Nanotech weapons and armour bonded to your nervous system, living and aiding the organic body, able to replicate living tissue as well as creating synthetic one through self-replication and material expansion. Sounds like the next big thing in self-defence looking at how monster-crowded the world is getting."

"Wasn't that supposed to be a secret?" Toma considered, stretching.

"Not anymore." Mayu tilted her head and opened the box, finding the manual first. "The press conference will be tomorrow, unveiling the project and the prototype and so on and so forth."

"It really sounds awesome but have you considered..." Suzuna took out a notebook and scribbled, finding an interesting angle for future use.

"Super-criminals." Mayu nodded, completing the through process, stopping, glancing up.

"Like that Hammerhead guy a while back." Maintaining a steady rhythm to her scribbling Suzuna nodded.

"Well... It's not like they don't exist now without market-ready parts to use." Shrugging Mayu glanced at the sky beyond the window. "But anything that can help has the potential to be twisted."

The order was made of four packages.
The main one so far had wielded the manual, the new catalogue and she was now reaching the part that contained the penis. They had gone with the reasonably proportioned, smooth and fairly flexible, avoiding the ones that publicised "real feeling", gunmetal grey and mostly metallic. It was one piece. It came with several functions such as health, optional fluid dispensing, vibration, extension, a set of adjustable rhythms and a slot at the base that would be hidden after assembling for the extra components-in-cards. Like the sensation packs, the auto-reader for the enhancement of female pleasure that adjusted according to the partner's needs, the medical diagnosis pack… There were multiple options in the overall stock.

The second one was a box with the specialized tools for assembly. Any tools would do but those were finer and a good bit more specific. Like the cut of some of the heads that matched those bolts exclusively. Like Suzuna had said she had been badgered into that particular purchase but it was a lesser monetary sacrifice than a full-fledged sex-bot would be.

The third pack was sort of a free add on. The brand's own fluid mix in four clear, decorated phials tightly capped and sealed. Opening those created a slight crease.

"Word of advice." Suzuna sat next to her and pushed the thing away. "Don't use the goo. No mess to clean up after and it prolongs the warranty." Amidst the now spread out contents up for inspection she spotted the catalogue and picked it up, leafing through the glossy pages. "What are you going to do about the surges?"

"Doctor Esumi went to work on a different kind of SPD that not only diffuses but also collects and transforms the untamed electricity into usable energy." Mayu opened the hardback manual and checked the index. "Be my own power source for my tech. No more Uh-Oh no battery."

"You sound like an ad." Suzuna snorted. "Toma is that kind of backup storage for me. You just plug him." The bot laughed, answering to the obvious way one could misconstrue that wording, standing, walking to Suzuna, cuddling her.

"This seems very model-oriented." Mayu considered after a skimming through several sets of assembly instructions correlated with a specific type of construct.

"That's how they keep the quality standards and a death grip on the market." And that was also why the fourth box was full of parts, adaptors and extra bits and pieces to any situation that might arise. "Do you wanna try a quick assembly trial on Toma?" Suzuna patted his leg. "Drop the pants sweetie."

"Babydoll you are shocking the poor dolly." Toma laughed, kissing her cheek roguishly, standing slowly, caressing Suzuna's side, moving to comply.

"I am not installing my package on your boyfriend's junk Suzuna!" Mayu protested, chortling, looking away as Toma teased, playing with the chains and buttons of his pants.

"Fine. I'll show you with one of our spares." Her friend stood. "Toma. The pants." Heading towards her room there was an explanation following. "The brand tutorials make for a very uncomfortable rattle-filled fit even when…"

"No." Mayu stood and started packing. "I'm leaving." Hastening as Toma laughed, midway through showing off skull-dotted boxers, she shoved everything in the bag. "I am the daughter of a tech-mad scientist. I fixed a toaster when I was seven. I've got this. We've got this…"

Suzuna peeked from her room as the door slamming, marking the flustered retreat. Toma laughed along, turning to his mistress, waiting for a moment. She beckoned him closer, amused, calmed. If
anything happened she was confident Mayu would reach out. Teasing was fun however. Also the concert was growing closer so they would have to coordinate the schedules.
The address the Association provided, after a few questions and prolonged surprised stammering of the person on the other end of the line as the Strongest Hero rarely, if ever, reached out to them for answers or questions, seemed to be somewhat derelict. The reaction was unsurprising. After all his reputation was of «almost as reclusive as Blast» so he could not fault the poor guy who had no way of knowing that there was as much stress on King's end of that call. The admiration and praise raining as he searched for the information did not help.

King tilted his head, re-reading the scrap of paper. It was clearly penned. He had double checked each and every word, making sure his writing was legible enough to be a reliable reference. Then he had transcribed it to the phone. And then did a questing run of the digital map adding the precise twist and turns and points of reference. And from that alone he knew there was little room for mistaking the location he where he had ended up.

The plaque proclaiming "DANGER" on every metallic gate cutting the fence was very foreboding.

But what else was to be expected of a closed off district that had been designated unliveable? It was not the only one however. It was also not uncommon for the places to actually have people living in them. The grid, electrical, water, gas remained plugged. Many older people refused to leave their places despite the many warnings. Others looked for the areas because of the now low renting prices. Others were daredevils that challenged the rumoured monsters that roamed the areas with no humans.

Nervously he fidgeted, trying to decide.

On one hand he did have an invitation.

On the other that place...

Spooky was the kindest word he could use but it still plucked his concerns.

King gulped and stuffed his hands into the hoodie's pockets.

Taking a first step inside he kept noticing the silence, eerie, absolute, thick, blanketing.

Step after step, remembering the directions the nervous King muttered names and double-checked the places.

And then the ruins. A few kept him from using the references taken from the internet correctly.

Another step and his rhythm that was growing faster in the search of the end goal.

And then the signs of battle everywhere contributed to the sickening feeling of fear pooling on his gut.

Broken walls.

Indentations.

Impact shapes.

And he was starting to feel slightly disoriented.
Lost almost.

Lost? The through crossed his mind like a rubber band snapping against bare skin.

Was he lost?

When had he…

Street names.

Buildings.

Where to turn?

Cold sweat broke out when he found nothing to give him guidance.

The cracking, creaking and hissing of the wind caused him to jump. The silence that had accompanied him was broken, ominously so. There was this low, echoing, rumbling pounding echo in the air. Like the most terrifying thunderstorm in the distance. Those that threatened the gaming systems and cause blackouts that prevented playthroughs.

Turning the corner with caution on his movements skittish and ready to flee revealed a grisly battle scene of charred monsters, shattered and melted materials and flickering lights.

That sent a shiver down his spine.

Tempest was easily recognizable, fluffy pink hair fluttering around her face and shoulders as she stood there, looking around, ready to keep fighting if needed. The pale sort-of-green dress looked both undamaged and out of place. Bright electrical wisps rumbled about, snapping, dancing, hissing. Ribbons and little balls floated, flowed and vanished. She seemed distracted, staring at a dark card, nibbling on her lower lip.

Scurrying sounds hinted that those blackened figures were not all the mysterious beings that had converged in an attempt to contact the girl had been dealt with in electrifying fashion.

Last they met she had greeted Genos like a girlfriend.

The cyborg called Saitama Sensei.

Following that logic seemed to give credence to the idea that she would know where he lived.

And in his current directionless state...

"Excuse me..." Steeling his nerves King took a deep breath and came out of the corner where he had cowered. He had had years to practice the scowl that concealed his unease and to control his voice so it didn't shake. She looked up, blinking slowly, half startled, hiding the card. It took her a few moments longer to rein in the wisps that had been keeping him a respectable distance away. "Would you happen to know where the hero Saitama lives?" Very calm, sounding logical enough and not panicked or worried at all.

"Yes."

"Yes." Tempest tilted her head and smiled, friendly. "He did say you would come by to play Mr. King." That reassured him. It meant she knew where to go. Thank goodness. "Just follow me. I'm going home as well." She turned picking up a cutesy bow-shaped bag, turning away from battle easily. His gratitude was conveyed in a nod. He didn't like the idea of going alone, following more cloudy instructions of places and things that could have changed. But he kept himself from reaching
out in a sobbing, hugging mess of thankfulness.

Tempest was a soothing presence, oddly enough. Or at least she became one as soon as he grew used to the sparks and wisps and the little snaps that played along her scars. And the sickening view of dead monsters along with the toxic smells was behind them. She didn't ask questions or gush about his hero reputation and popularity. Didn't ask for an autograph. He tried to do the same. Aida Mayu had written in collaboration a few of his favourite routes in the adventure Sims. Probably was acting like she would like others to act when meeting famous people. And going by the e-mail contact for his entry of the Handbook asking him if he wanted changes or just the plain text it seemed to be just her personality. Also being with someone made the place look and feel less threatening.

Following took him to a better looking area that finally matched the research he had conducted beforehand. It was a big relief to spot clothes on the line, signs that the place was inhabited. He followed her up the stairs, frowning in puzzlement when a key was produced and twisted in its lock. No knock. No calling for the neighbour.

"Tama? I'm home." Tempest called out, kicking the shoes away, smiling, walking in casually. The puzzling actions were met by a greeting, returned in a warm tone. It felt out of place if she was with the S-Class cyborg. "King's here too." Saitama appeared at the end of the corridor, a small, quick smile appearing for an instant. She tiptoed and kissed him, unabashed, unimpeded by the audience, vanishing into the apartment.

"What's in the bag?" Saitama asked, turning his attention to the guest.

"I brought a few games." King shook his head and tilted the backpack mentioned, walking in, finding two single-room apartments connected into a single house. The TV was on, the gaming system ready to go. It seemed bit outdated but he had also brought his own, just in case.

"Salty snacks are on the left shelf, sweet snacks on the top." Mayu called, readying the clothes to change into. The concert was tonight and she wanted to be there on time. "Tell Genos that I'll be with Suzuna after and I'll come back tomorrow. Also that thing." She stopped, thinking, organizing. "There is juice in the fridge and I got new teas in the box if you want to try them. Have fun."
Fury, grief, rage and pain… Those emotions had fuelled Genos’ search right from the start, had gotten him through the exchange of his broken, battered body for a stronger one. And he had understood how and why someone could go mad, berserk, in the process. It was as much science as it was a mental task, sharing the fusion process, influencing one another when harmonizing machine and spirit. He knew the risk of getting lost in the power that was being introduced, the extremely agonizing sensation of nerves being bound and connected counterbalancing the rush. And the taxing work afterwards to adapt and grow with the new body, the new functions, the lack of what had once been natural. But as soon as he had emerged from the change he threw himself wholeheartedly into learning and into the Goal.

Justice.

Revenge.

Frustration grew as nothing was found and the years mounted, melding into a string of events without time and distinguishable characteristics.

Roaming.

Searching.

Finding a threat.

Dealing with it.

Moving on to the next.

Those other accomplishments, good deeds, the attention and gratitude of those saved barely registered, going unnoticed, unremarked. Genos simply kept going.

Most of those bitter, volatile feelings were still there, in the back of him mind, his thoughts and memories, coming to life for a time, a driving force, a sudden snap, whip-like, driving, pressing, pushing.

Those emotions, raw and wounding, lead to mistakes, to rushing, charging headlong, getting harmed and disappointed.

Even as his powers grew and his abilities were honed Genos found no joy, just purpose. He had fought through it all, searching, hunting more of the same. No end. Just... a goal.

The few clues they had always lead to places long ruined, cold trails, whispers of a past threat. At least it now seemed like it. A call, a whisper, a threat, a promise and on arrival... nothing.

So the logical conclusion to be drawn was that they should to change their strategy.

More weighted in that decision and need, adding to the ever-growing list of lack of success, progress and task completion. The Association. The Organization. Sensei. Mayu. All things to consider and correlate. The first, third and fourth restrained his wandering. There were goals to achieve, lessons to remain close to and the need to provide guidance as well. All three offered means to grow in strength of body, mind and determination. The second however was a new angle that had arisen and it needed some proper investigation to see if it was at all related with his primary search for the mad
cyborg or if it was a parallel source of trouble. And something he should deal with as well.

Genos had poured those lines of reasoning as he rethought his actions and examined the events that kept befalling him. They had been curled in Mayu's big bed after the fright. She had tea and cookies on the nightstands and was running her fingers over Genos' hair, his head on her lap. Sensei had one arm around her waist, free hand sneaking treats, listening.

Purpose, life…

Mayu had suggested that he mapped, collated and revised all his endeavours into something that could be easily accessible and visual, like a single screen that allowed him to make the connections, selections and add as he needed, pointing towards one of her own messy boards behind the piled furniture, full of thoughts, full of pins that held notes and numbers that took the researcher somewhere else in the filing system. Or not. Hard to say.

Areas, timelines, what piece of information had drawn his attention to the spot, what he had fought, what he had found, did it relate to monsters, robots or other. She had suggested reaching out to varied experts as he sifted through years of data. To that he had said no. There was no need to alert others. What if they were involved? Other databases, other sources of information could be used instead but reaching out to their creator could alert the wrong sort.

Sensei had asked if a cyborg would that be hard to spot, pointing out that Genos' own incinerator blasts were flashy and destructive enough to be found with some ease.

That added another layer to the list of clues to add.

Random destruction in every area, however, could be the result of a mad cyborg, a rampaging monster or even the weather. Still lashing out or losing control over a part or weapon was not unheard of… and it was the first sign they had searched for but only when it came close to inhabited areas or endangering humans. Such a narrow criteria had had results but broadening the search would increase the hits and thusly what to compare them and deal with a threat.

Taking that idea back to Dr Kuseno made it happen.

The scientist entertained the notion and polished it with the same method he would apply to tech development.

Why he hadn't started before would be anyone's guess. The focus of genius tended to zoom solely on what was driving their interest at the moment and sometimes it lead to tunnel-vision.

It took a few days but the search room had been created.

A seamless screen wrapped around three of its walls and was linked to all the aspects and angles they could think of. The interface was a table that mirrored what he needed to see in 3D. Sidebars could be used to add whatever else he felt necessary.

Colour coded.

Briefings.

Outcomes.

Finished missions.

Completed tasks.
Analysis both finished and occurring, linked to their origins and progression of events.

Details on every instance, able to be manipulated, augmented and distilled.

The main file of the target.

Places of interest both investigated and new.

Recent activities recorded.

Distress signals.

Disaster Alerts.

Flares.

Association tasks.

Suspected Organization movements.

Isolated incidents.

Location of the probes.

Weaponry of all the parties involved.

Prototypes were unavailable in that room though.

The possibility to customize his search and create a plan with as much detail, nuance and probabilities of success… It made it easier to sort and prioritize.

It was about method, discipline, forethought. And it was something his drive and impatience had been foregoing. There was more to investigate in that map than the markers that tracked the possibility of his revenge. His interests, focus and duties had expanded. Every single one of them could be added and linked to his phone for remote access.

Currently he was trying to select what lead to follow. There were more closed and finished tasks than what he had once thought possible. But the new ones were not stopping either. The system also sorted them by the urgency, calculated automatically and factoring everything the computer held.

Somewhere in the lab a chime rang. Outside calls were few and in-between. Usually it was him checking in, adding hints, asking for a new direction or requesting a pick-up. The hiss of the machines stopped abruptly as the doctor abandoned whatever he was working on to take the call.

"Dr Aida?" Dr Kuseno's voice was full of surprise. Genos stiffened and stopped at the entrance of the information room, concerned. Had something happened? Was she in danger? But something wasn't exactly right in that scenario. The familiarity of the response...

"Good morning, bot-man." Aida Masami called out from her screen, sounding amused. The cyborg waited, listening in. "I heard your creation is playing with my creation." She chuckled at her own quip. "Sent you a few things through BEE [Brings Everything Everywhere]. Make sure you equip your boy properly. He seemed too lightly armoured through the video-chat. And seeing this is now my business I think you should contact the Forbidden Area."

"Do you think Exile is involved?" The scientist did not deny it or turn away her help. That said a lot about Aida Masami’s alignment and skill. His quest was known in the robotic circles but to that day
every offer of help had been refused.

"Maybe not but he knows the underworld. And now with this... he may be more inclined to help."

"Or attack us for that on sight." Kuseno sighed.

"Maybe. But if your boy is as well built as he looks he may pull through."
"Hey! Stop taking all the booster items!" Saitama grumbled in frustration, unable to keep up, tilting the controller without getting the quick response he needed to go through the enemies and gather loot, teeth gritted, eyes narrowed.

King looked a little stung behind his game-face but didn't ease up. It had been a while since he had a Player 2. Both kept their focus on the screen as the ships blasted through monsters and obstacles, the split screen showing their progress, power and level completion.

"Though luck. I'm faster." In the end King didn't resist a little taunt as he maneuverer smoothly to take yet another booster and manage a combo move that blasted him across a blockade. In turn that opened up a bonus round filled with easily grabble items, letting him play until he reached the storage cap and then converting them into a brand new upgrade before releasing him back into the main path, golden, glowing and magnetised.

"We're on the same side and you just did it again!" Hunching closer to the screen as if that could make the controller's connection and his skills sharper the hero-for-fun complained. And even with the new enhancement the guy was still merciless hoarding abilities. "If I stay weak we won't beat the boss." Grumbling as his little robot-ship-thing took a hit and wobbled wildly on the screen, locking, unresponsive, a timer appearing, blinking keeping him from manoeuvring.

"I'll win alone." Sure of his skills King shrugged, chuckling. He stopped whatever he was going to say when something rang, looking over his shoulder, pausing the game. Saitama fidgeted and clicked every button in frustration. They didn't un-pause it. It would be rude when someone was taking a call.

Tempest crossed the other room where she had been since pointing out the treats, wearing different clothes and spikier accessories, pushing papers away from the laptop, leaning down, frowning, taking the call.

"Director Sitch?" Her voice was slightly puzzled as soon as she caller appeared on the screen, worry crossing her features.

"Tempest. Good. Glad I was able to reach you." The man's voice was filled with relief, regaining the formality soon enough. Tempest tensed, stilling. "The Earth-Is-In-Danger-Prophecy Emergency Measure's Team requires your assistance." Relief also flooded her expression after that long-winded statement.

Saitama, whose hands had gone motionless on the controller, moved once more.

They had suspected it would be something bad, or heartrending about Genos. Given public knowledge of their relationship, at least when it came to Genos, it would not be too farfetched to believe the Association would reach out to inform Tempest, King reasoned, reassured as well.

Mayu had moved on, focusing on the ridiculousness of the naming sense. In all seriousness he was able to state the name. No stammer. No hesitation. No reflection. Even if the purpose was as serious as it could be the thing just seemed very unwieldy to pronounce. And EIIDPEMT was not easier to say either. But the subject was safer than a heavily damaged cyborg.

"When?" The heroine sighed and sat down, staring at the screen, nibbling her lower lip. The tension was different, closer to anticipation. Could be something.
"Today. Please report to Headquarters as soon as you are able." As if it was settled he gave her the time and order. Tempest shook her head, interest gone. It just seemed not worth of moving her schedule around. "This is a meeting of the utmost importance…"

"I already have plans Director." She clipped his speech, showing little care for the bossy and demanding attitude, placing a bracelet on one wrist and reaching for a choker. The black and silver spikes contrasted harshly with the pale pastels and soft frills of the shirt and skirt combo.

"But…” The man seemed too stunned to make his case.

"I'm sorry but this was previously agreed upon." She placed a pink headband on her head and twisted her hair so it created little pink horns peeking through the fluffy waves, using bobby pins to keep them in place and shaped. "So if you'll excuse me…” Tempest finished the conversation, sighing, pushing the top down, hunting for the hairspray, using it until they stopped wobbling, coughing and waving hands afterwards in the cloud of gas. Fortunately there was no explosion in the interaction.

"What if it was interesting?" Saitama asked as they returned to the action, still clicking even as the timer continue its countdown and the ship spun.

King nodded a bit absently. That wouldn't be his first concern but it was fitting of them. Powerful people were weird in their world view. That was something S-class made very plainly obvious.

"You heard the man Tama." She teased, walking towards them, leaning down, clicking on the toggle and mimicking the motion on Saitama's bald head. He groaned in complaint but played along. "Probably a boring committee meeting where they are getting heroes that can be swayed by big promises to do their small odd jobs that the S-Class bunch doesn't want to do. Like this one here." She stopped, smiling. King cracked a little grin as well, unable to correct that assumption. Thinking for a bit, staring silently at the screen Mayu shook her head, amused, leaning further down, whispering in conspiracy. "Want to go in my place with a little note pinned on your shirt saying why?"

"No. I'm busy." Saitama answered to her amusement with his own chuckle, finally able to blast through, picking the pity items the game tossed after a block.

"So am I." Tempest smiled, kissed his cheek and turned away, picking up round-toe boots, walking towards the veranda. "Have fun." Chortling, catching the slight twitch of worry in King’s expression she hopped off, thunder and lightning roaring and fading.

"Saitama?" King tried, returning to screen himself, still going strong. "Is it strange that…”

"What is?" The hero was biting his lip, catching up.

"Nevermind." Shaking his head King let the thought go.
Chapter 61

The infestation had had its start deep within the factory labs, in the cold artificial lights beneath the earth, although the circumstances that lead to the catastrophe were not yet clear. An accident? Sabotage? Or... something made by some mad one that had gone exactly as planned... So far only guesswork and panic.

The surveillance feeds that dotted every corner, room corridor and cranny were very graphic in its silent depiction of the event. In the aftermath those could be the tools that cracked the case.

Hundreds of dog-sized bug-like things were skittering fast within the building. Reports and static-filled glances of a bigger one, like a nest mother, gorging and lounging on its huge bum down below, terrified those that had escaped or were about to do so. They were big, ugly and hungry for human hair.

The area was quickly quarantined according to security protocol but the critters spread, taking over every level they could get into, going through the wigs, the worker's hair, the scraps sent from hairdressers everywhere... and the areas off-limits grew, expanded and entered lockdown one after the other too quickly sealed for a proper evacuation. Even as the warnings blared it was every man for himself.

The few that had escaped the building were horrified and bald.

The ones left within could only be seen in the images, running, barricaded, hiding, out of reach. Or swarmed, munched on and left curled in a weeping heap.

First public services had been called. Police. Fire Department. They did their job, closing off access, issuing warnings, questioning the escapees, using their tech-men to tap into the videos. The debate began. How to save people and how to get rid of the things. Then more ideas had been shared and voted on and reinforcements had been summoned. The owners had also tried the more down-to-earth and less panicked approach. Pest exterminators. Who in turn could do nothing because the things were too big to be downed by the kind of poison that was safe to use when people were still in the building. Lawyers were brought in next in an attempt to find some convenient loophole.

But it was clear their collective efforts would not be enough.

They could help the workers and prepare for the demand of reparations but what waited within the building was beyond their means. Guns and hoses had been able to keep some of the scouting critters at bay but the sheer number of bullets needed to bring a single one down was prohibitive. Pushing them back into the building with jets of water had proven the best method of defence so far. But it was a stalemate and the longer it dragged on the more dangerous it became.

The threat level was steadily rising.

The Association was contacted after much debate and at the lawyers' behest. They even began drafting some beneficial agreements such as monetary donations proportional to the resolution time.

As for the Hero-handling services they had already been aware. Their advanced surveillance had already caught the incident, taken the data provided by the network of security within and assigned a team to its investigation and research for a resolution, testing, prep ping statistics, probability and courses of action. They had only been waiting for the call so they could not be accused of out-staging and outshining the police. They were still a bit on thin ice in that relation after the Z-City
incident.

Media was called in for maximum coverage. Not that the news hounds weren't already sniffing about but most were incontrollable.

With the reputation at stake and a seemingly simple mission before them the Association advanced prideful and sure of their advantage, dispatching a team that matched the projected level.

The B-Class heroes deployed had been sheared, defeated and scattered, returned to the starting point, curled in the emergency vehicles, testing ointments and wigs on their depleted scalps looking very much dismayed and slightly freaked out. Hero suits torn, weapons lost, dignity tarnished and all that.

While it looked bad it also validated why the «normal» means had failed, fact that was quickly picked up and pointed out by a loyalist report whose bank account grew with each word of propaganda and praise he broadcasted to the disaster channel.

New measures were called in.

More members were added to the science team.

A new path had to be chosen.

Something that made them look good, effective and endearing to the public...

A bubblegum popped in the silence near the closed and cordoned off gates. The snappy sound attracted unimpressed glares from those close by while they busied themselves around the preparations for the incursion. Saitama chewed slowly, staring at the place surrounded by bright ribbon proclaiming danger, carrying the bomb filled with the disinfectant that kid they met at the lab had developed for that pinch.

Mayu twitched and fed more energy into the wisps that surrounded her, balling and chaining them into long ribbons, keeping them like supercharged bug-zappers all around, grimacing now that her back was to the swarming cameras that kept snapping, hair bound in a tight bun to prevent any mishap as she advanced towards the four-story place they had asked her to clear. Her powers and low upper body strength prevented her from doing the carrying despite being the image chosen for strike.

"Why did we come?" She whispered softly, reaching out opening the gates, blasting an arch of electricity, clearing the way when a first wave swarmed, grimacing and keeping her flats from turning and getting away from the bugs.

"We were bored." The frantic phone-call had caught them plotting a 6 city wide raid on several sales with overlapping times but massive discounts.

Mayu nodded slowly and turned, making sure nothing was ready to jump them from behind as soon as they were in the shadow of the building.

"Why did you come?" She teased softly, turning back, reaching the door, electrifying it, listening to the sounds of bugs being fried on the other side.

Saitama smiled slightly, blushing lightly.

"I found a coupon for one of those places you like sort of nearby." He admitted.
"So hero job and date night?" She smiled and opened the door, facing the creatures, blasting her way through, mindful of the device but making lighting fly wide and hard. That explained why he had chosen not to wear the yellow jumpsuit.

According to the instructions they had to activate the thing on the top floor for a full cleanse.
Chapter 62

"So you got snubbed by hair-eating beasts..." Mayu attempted to soothe Saitama's pride after the long silent trek back home, managing to say it without laughing or choking on a snort, successfully keeping her amusement inside. Tama groaned and pouted, following her lead up the stairs, unwillingly making little squeaky squishy sounds as he walked.

A quick briefing before entering the affected area assured the heroes that the big beastie was deep down where the mess had started. Just fry the small ones and get to where the bomb cleaning could start. That was the information given.

Mayu had blasted and broke through the skittering swarm of bugs, from giant to tiny critters in every variety of disgustingly multi-legged and aggressive while running up the stairs. Lashing lightning while carrying a bomb of unknown side-effects to all non-bug and having strict instructions on what not to damage did no one any favours. Listening to it beep warnings every time a wisp or a lingering electricity got too close was also not ideal.

The top of the building had been reached, an empty, silent area. A big office divided into two parts. Three if they counted the tiny hidden chamber where the stairs stopped. A corridor of desks that lead straight to a set of double doors and the president's private office. That area had been swiftly evacuated even before the alarm had beeped. Most of those surfaces were pristine. Tempting to think the defences had worked there but not very a plausible thought when the briefing said the incident had started in the "highly secure area". And without power it would be ludicrous to believe it. The things could be acting cautiously after the mad dash extermination but the bugs had barely given them room to go up despite the permanent zapping effect. So why put some distance now?

It had been a gigantic and unpleasant surprise when the doors across them had broken apart and a massive thing lurched forward, shrieking. Its big fat bottom had gotten stuck on the doorway. Cracks spread as the material reached its structural limit.

Mayu could have done it with a strike but charging up and releasing lightning wildly would damage everything around them. The burn marks she had left on the way were already on a debatable area of what could be called "property damage" and "deliberate". And the spook had made her zap herself clear across the room, defences up and crackling.

Saitama could also deal with it with his overwhelming strength. But it could result in not only guts everywhere but also blown walls. He had just blinked at the bug before turning back to the spot where he had placed the beeping bomb, starting to fiddle with the buttons.

Before they could activate the thing the big bug broke free, slamming against the lightning, setting off the field. Thunder and electricity spiralled against the body of the beastie. Mayu huffed, trying to rein it in.

Cracking, hissing, debris and legs. Fried but not dead. It was angry and injured. The flurry of motion, plucked Tama from the ground.

A big, open drooling maw approached Tama's smooth head.
A sniff broke the growl.

A very disgusted beast shrieked something that sounded like a very drawn out EWWWWWWW and a look of disgust crossing its bug-face, a sneer that a child would reserve for vegetables.

Saitama’s confusion turned to a frown and a fist clenching.

"And there is very little I can say to make it better..." She unlocked their door and slipped inside. To keep the gloppy mess of bug innards away from the door the floor and the path to the bathroom Mayu paved it with expired promotional flyers hastily retrieved from the recycling bag. Fortunately Genos had not returned as a tornado of chores and disposed of it. Otherwise there would be much mopping to be done. She had been spared the splatter by a desk. Date plans had been suspended in favour of bathing. And praying for the water to be back. "But this time they credited you as they should." Despite being a crowd of reporters equally repulsed by the bug guts and eager to get a quick interview and a winning shot.

"I guess." Tama groaned in a clipped tone, the shoes he took off following his swamp-sounding steps through a thread of slime. It seemed to be congealing. A zap split the thread. Burning made the smell worse but freed the footwear from his socks and pants. The paper didn't stick.

A quick dash allowed Mayu to reach the faucet before him, turning the knob.

Water came out sputtering at first and then steadily gaining pressure. And warmth.

Sighing in relief Mayu glanced at Saitama who was peeling the clothes off his body. Part of the shirt shattered, covered in hardened muck. Unsalvageable clothes even through a Genos miracle. Sparks hissed slightly as she shifted, scanning the room, stepping away from the tub.

Nothing else was at risk of sliming.

Tama walked towards it, tension leaving his shoulders. Time to see if that would do the trick. Under the spray the stuff softened and melted, splashing down the drain. If the water had not been there they would have had to wait for it to dry and then peel. Or burn it off. And given they had been without for a couple of days due to a massive crater made by a drill chase… Genos had blasted the beast and proceeded to file the complaints to have the area and pipes fixed.

"Need help?" Mayu asked, reaching for her falling bun, tucking the messy strands behind her ear. At the time all she could offer as compensation was cuddles and comprehension.

Tama threw her a sly grin over his shoulder, shaking the water from his hand. Stretching was followed by greedy eyes. Torn between putting on a show, getting the sticky crust of bug off him, accepting her proposal or following through on his challenge he dropped the pants. Like rolling the dice, leaving the result to luck and Mayu.

Lightning snapped and sparked as the door slammed shut. The mirror's backing was stained by the sparks. Some of the walls were also scarred. Wisps buzzed around, brightening the room, gathering. The rug hissed and fumed, singed. The electricity played along, trailing her gestures as she approached, lingering on the fabric of the dress as it was tossed.

Tama's foul mood seemed to be all but gone now.
Answers about the underpants and their absence were likely to be found on the hamper or drying line.

Mayu stepped into the water that pooled around their ankles using his back as an anchor, steadying her movement. The electricity snapped through their skins and spread through the water.

Saitama groaned and shuddered, glancing over his shoulder, hands stopping their scrubbing.

The rumble of thunder, usually insignificant when she sparked under the control of the earring and ongoing training, was starting to make itself apparent and causing loose bits and baubles to rattle. Her palms flattened against the wet surface before her, feeling the muscles undulate under the shivering lightning and crackling static.

The grope over his bottom along with a sharp snap of static made Tama hiss into the water. She chortled softly, stepping closer, palms moving in a gentle caress. That caress turned into a hug, fingers playing along the hard lines of his chiselled physique until they were flat against his stomach.

Slyly she snuggled, placing her cheek against Tama's spine, sighing. He shuddered, covering her hands, taking a deep breath, arching against her. The active electricity between them did little more than create a ripple. Unaffected, as if she was not discharging like a deadly storm strike. The bathroom however was staring to show the effects of that energy. Lamps had shattered. Tiles had cracked. The wisps were gathering near the ceiling. There was something starting to burn. And the slight smell of ozone.

Warm water sprayed her arms, sizzling. Tama's solid body was keeping the shower from soaking her. His slick fingers were caressing her wrist and arms. Tenderly Mayu kissed his spine, trailing a playful pattern down his back, leaving little shocks in her lips' wake.

Saitama reacted with a shudder and a groan, trying to reach her now wandering hands. His grip missed as they sneaked lower. Kisses were again pressed on his spine, as charged as her touch, wisps blooming and discharging, taunting as they struck Tama's nervous ends, causing spasms, pleasure, and a desperate attempt to stop it or retaliate.

Managing to stop the onslaught Tama spun her around locking Mayu's arms, turning the tables on the caging hug. The water caught her in a splash, soaking her, steaming before winning against the electricity playing along her lightning flowers. She shrieked and squirmed, laughing, the raspy snorted sound drowned by a kiss. Tama took the electricity without a flinch.

Tama pinched her bottom back, arms ready to hoist his girl up as she squeaked in surprise, hopping.

Squinting through the water and her wet locks she looked down and back, concerned. The arms around his shoulders tightened.

"Was it you?" Mayu whispered, concerned.

"Yes." Saitama answered, laughing, his expression softening, kissing her forehead.

"I thought it was a bug." Relaxing she snuggled back. They were soaking wet and all traces of the gut explosion seemed to have vanished. Thunder quieted. Mayu sighed and curled against his chest, adjusting his legs around Tama's waist. It was warm and the water added a calming sensation. His arms surrounded her gently too, rocking them under the steam, shivering through the electric pulses.

"Should I stop?" The whisper was soft, comfortable, accompanied by the playful tap of her fingertips over his smooth head. He was resting against the curve where her neck met her shoulders, tendrils of wet pink hair sticking to some spots.
"Do you want to?" Saitama murmured, head coming up. The hair remained stuck to him, causing Mayu to smile back in that pause, shaking her head. He pressed his forehead against hers, laughing. It was so rare of him to laugh like that. Happy, free, unrestrained, unclouded. It was a warm rich sound she cherished. Even as it shivered as lightning coursed through him.

Their lips met again, hotly, eagerly. Desire and amusement tangled in the heady feeling. Static snapped and the electricity started to gather again, fiercely answering to their exchange.

Smiling Mayu shifted, letting herself sink into Saitama, taking him slowly, nuzzling his neck. Tama shuddered, groaning, palms flattening against her hips, sliding to her back. Mayu scrapped his scalp, nipping his neck, sighing.

Tama's lazy motions combined with their slick skin and shudders made the breathless, shared moans grow into tangled sounds.

Water sizzled and boiled, turning into steam on contact, the mist filling the room. Dazed she nipped and caressed. Pleasure bloomed and grew, shared as they moved.

Spent and languid they sighed, parting. Mayu patted his arms sliding down, stepping back coming under the shower head. It took a bit for her lightning to stop.

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