The Spiral Downward

by I_Was_A_Reader_But_Now

Summary

A transfer student attempts to join the world's most prestigious heroic academy. It always begins with an utterance, a speck of intention that eats away at what it touches. An exploration of the difference between heroism and villainy unfolds in this darker take on the original events. Chapter 54: 27/10/2019.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes
Step aside, weave under and crush beneath

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

[Outside Replica City District – Eastern Hosu, Japan – 8:53 AM Tuesday – 3 Days post Yuuei's Entrance Exams]

Ridiculous.

He kicked the thought at the gravel and scowled as he looked over his shoulder. Here he was hesitating while his uncle's busted ride was probably halfway across the city by now. He turned back and looked up, clawing through his hair as he did. It was hard not to be intimidated at the sight of the massive city gate that hunched as if to crush him.

He let go and the wisps of blond settled back into perfectly ordered disarray as he groaned his frustration. "You're here now and that's that," he said under his breath. "Your plan worked so don't wuss out now like you always do, Riley." Speaking aloud made him sound crazy even to himself so he shut his mouth and looked up. The gate was still just as daunting as it had been a minute ago but he began to walk toward it until he made it close enough to it's black surface that the veneer shone bright against the sun.

A loud *ahem*, startled him and caused his head to turn abruptly toward the right. What had intruded on him was a strange sight; a small bear wearing a suit. He would have described it as elegant if it hadn't instantly transformed all his anxiety into equal amounts of nervousness. He tried to collect himself enough to stammer a hello, however all that came out was a cough as the word got stuck in his throat. It wasn't clear where the creature, a man he assumed, had come from but there was a single open door behind him that he could presume was the place.

"Aha, it appears I got your attention after all," the creature said in a high, energetic pitch. "It's quite alright if you're surprised by my appearance, you wouldn't be the first and you won't be the last, Torenagi Riley."

He managed to pull himself together and stood up straight before muttering a quick, "Sorry, Sir." It had really only happened out of surprise; he hadn't experienced an anthropomorphic quirk quite so prominent before. The bear-like man nodded, clearly undeterred by his rudeness.

"I see your uncle has decided not to join us today."

He shrugged. "He had business to attend to."

The Bear-man-thing nodded. "I see, no matter. I would have had to ask him to leave the examination ground shortly." Riley raised an eyebrow at that but said nothing. "Now, before we begin let me introduce myself. I am the administrator of this fine educational institute but you may call me Nedzu." He pointed to himself. "Or perhaps Principal Nedzu if you succeed today," he added with a chuckle. The light-heartedness of the principals tone somehow came across as severely intimidating. It held within it an expectation that he felt he did not want to risk disappointing.

"I-" he began.

"Sadly," Nedzu said, cutting him off, "we don't have time to mince words. Come along and I'll explain on the way." He beckoned Riley forward into the metallic wall and then into a cramped
corridor. It wasn't very well lit and had a dank smell to it like someone had left a tap running for the last year. It was also tight, but since he wore close fitting clothes he was in luck on that front, he would not get caught on any hazards in the dim light.

"Now, as you are well aware today we're having you take a practical examination and you might have wondered why exactly it is necessary." His voice echoed through the tunnel sounding neither completely close to him nor ever too far away. "Well, we wouldn't want you to be unable to handle the strain of our program and a vouch from your school simply isn't satisfactory."

"I see." He nodded, though he had worked out as much. The academic section had been difficult and had in turn absorbed a vast amount of his time. He had only been given a snippet of what the practical would be and digging hadn't help significantly. Apparently it changed vastly each year. If it was so elaborate then it made sense he had to come in person, inconvenient as it was.

"The delay in regards to clearing the details has been rather unfortunate." The man flicked a green switch belonging to a door, which swung open to reveal another corridor. "However it cannot be helped, as such you'll be taking the test on your own today. Think of it as an exception for coming all this way."

That at least explained why it had been only him outside the gate. He wasn't sure if taking the exam alone was a blessing or a curse, probably the latter. His quirk wasn't one that worked well alone because it needed time to really get going and then on top of that it required concentration.

"There's absolutely no need to worry!" Nedzu stopped while raising one finger toward him like he'd read his mind. "The exam will be exactly the same as described, just designed for one person. Take down the down the faux-villains in any way you see fit while avoiding the major zero point obstacle." The man switched the position of his finger to another light green button in front of him instead.

The metal door opened with a clang unveiling a sight that served to mesmerize him. It was a vast city that stretched with compact buildings each mixed and matched like someone had blown a Lego set to full scale. It was mind boggling that anyone, let alone a school, could afford to build such a large thing from scratch. The rumors, he knew now, were nothing short of true.

"…well almost the same." He caught the end of Nedzu's sentence behind his back.

"What was that?" He spun to the man, most of what he'd said just then had gone in one ear and out the other.

"Don't worry-" Nedzu said before placing his hand firmly on the same button. "- I'm sure you'll figure it out. Now then, good luck young man!" The gate crashed shut in an instant, leaving him alone.

Did he really just do that? His disbelief of it staggered him only to be cut off by a single high tone across the arena. Then, he heard the distinct sound of engines and the grating of machines and treads on cement. The city was whirring to life around him. Panic made his throat seize up, it wasn't like he could have expected it to start so unconventionally. He clenched his palms seize up, it wasn't like he could have expected it to start so unconventionally. He clenched his palms tight, pinching them as he tried to make his thought behave. Act rationally. You have no choice, so act rationally. I should head around the outside first. That seemed like the logical plan and it would minimize the chance of being caught out in the open by whatever was now roaming the damn streets.

He kept to his statement and immediately began to head east while hugging the shadows of the buildings as he passed them. If he hadn't known better he could have sworn it was a real city. There were lights on in the houses and someone had even gone to the trouble of placing trash cans outside
some of them. It felt like a fake sincerity, to lull him into a false sense of security. A distinct creak caused his step to stop as he came up to the third alleyway in a row of neat but drab white houses. As he leaned up to and peeked the corner he could both hear a more intense whirring of machinery and see the silvery gray skeleton of a single robot by itself. It had probably been placed there in hope that he would foolishly run past.

*It's now or never.* He stretched out his right hand, the first impression would probably decide everything. "Focus. Stay in control," he uttered with such low volume it was hard for even himself to hear. His breath came and left in measured intervals as a wrinkle of concentration spread across his brow.

Then, a single tremor jittered down his arm toward his finger tip. He held it steady and in response an ebbing of constriction began to manifest itself. The robot retaliated by jerking its body in his direction, having finally realized his presence. However he knew it was far too late for the one pointer to do anything about it.

"Compress!" he said and clamped his hand shut tight. The robot took a single grinding step but then halted with a rough screech. The machines chassis rattled before caving with a violent crunch that shot through the air. It crashed to the floor in a slump, now looking more like a compacted car rather than a robot.

His hand fell as he allowed himself to relax and without meaning to he even let out a small audible cheer over his success. It was followed by a quick bout of embarrassment, though that disappeared when he realized no one was around to hear him anyway. He shook his hand out, using his quirk for the first time each day tended to remind him of clipping a fingertip in a car door and often left a distinct tremor behind. Once the sting had subsided he began to walk again. His steps quickened into a jog as they gained the advantage of adrenaline.

He felled another two or three smaller robots hiding in a similar way before he reached an intersection. The street itself wasn't so interesting, however, resting at its center was a noticeably larger variant of the one point robot coated in yellow paint. The upper hand was still his, the volume of the robots own noises throughout the city probably made it hard for them to even recognize he was there. He held the hand he had been using to spew his quirk with his other hand. It was shaking and supping on his focus which he tried his best to ignore. The earlier tremor had only been enraged further by continued use. He knew it would grow heavier still before this was over.

Out of the corner of his eye he caught a glint of silver. He broke out of his trance just in time to avoid a large silver claw as it swiped over his head. "Shit," he said and slid back a few steps. It must have snuck up while he had observed the other one. Quick breaths flitted out of him as he regained composure; he would need his composure for this to work.

The yellow robot surged forward to help its companion. It covered twice the distance he did in half the time as he backed further away from the silver one-pointer still hot on his trail. He threw up his arms and a painfully distinct tremor answered his rashness followed by the eruption of a gaping hole in the silver robots chassis in front of him. The fake life in its single red eye faded as it collapsed in a heap only to be torn away as a yellow claw ripped through what remained of it and chucked it several dozen yards away. He fell backward and rolled with it, bracing his shaking right forearm with his left and tensing both. His muscles seized as he pointed precisely at the very same spark he had seen fade moments before. The red eye cracked and the yellow robot's head snapped sideways before distorting and severing off altogether. Its arm smashed down between his legs as it came to an unceremonious end.

"Too damn close," he said with the words bouncing between exasperated gasps. He'd gotten lucky
and he knew that, one misstep and he would have been a goner. There had to be a better way to go about this than to stumble blind as he had been. If he had more wits perhaps he could have figured it out then and there but he knew the test had a time limit, even if his estimate of how long that time limit was had just been forced from his mind by two robots trying to liberate his head from his shoulders. His arms scraped across the concrete as he forced himself to move.

[Replica City Control and Surveillance Room]

Nedzu leaned back comfortable as comfortable could be while surrounded by two men whom he had less-than-willingly conscripted into his extra-curricular obsession. He had little concern for how much they enjoyed being forced to be here but he guessed they secretly weren't very against it and even if they had been prior they would surely be reconsidering now as they watched the boy dart between the city blocks on the monitor in front of them.

"Quite a spectacle," he remarked in an attempt to break the silence. "What are your thoughts so far, gentleman?"

"It's destructive, like they told us," a robotic yet defiantly eloquent voice answered to Nedzu's immediate right. In the dark he could only make out half of the large puffy spacesuit the man always wore. It was his trademark as a hero, unmistakable for anyone else.

"But it's practicality is nothing short of laughable," the other man said in a tone that was so ragged and withered with lack of sleep that it could only come across as demeaning. "Something they seem to have left out."

"The only thing that I care about isn't whether it is practical, Eraserhead, but rather that it can be used to save lives. My own quirk," he said as he raised his finger to emphasize the point, "would also be impractical for a test like this."

"Ever the pertinent one, Thirteen, but I agree," Eraserhead answered and a stray bandage fell from around his neck onto the portfolio in his lap. He made not the slightest attempt to correct it but instead put the portfolio aside and closed his eyes.

"Still," Thirteen said as he began to tap one finger on the glass dome of his helmet. "There just seems to be something off in all this. They told us it's a force based quirk and I can verify easily that it is, however it seems." He strained like he couldn't find the right way to phrase his thought. "It seems almost..."

"It seems too simple," Nedzu chimed in.

"Something to that effect." Thirteen poised his hand on his chairs armrest and leaned on it. "It doesn't feel like he's holding back but with force based quirks like this you'd usually see some kind of auxiliary effect."

"Regardless," Eraserhead interrupted Thirteen's musing as something short of an annoyed migraine spread across his face. "We won't get much out of seeing him repeat basic combat maneuvers so let's hurry it up. I'm getting sick of these makeup examinations already."

Nedzu gleamed at the red button in front of him. That sounded like a wonderful idea right about now. "If he really is hiding something we'll see it right here and now." He removed the joystick from its case with almost maniacal eagerness and then switched the nodule on its side from OFF to ON.
His breathing had turned into a heavy pant as he eagerly moved from the crevice of each street to the next, leaving smoldering scraps of red, yellow and gray in his wake. He now knew the layout, which had made the process more efficient. Experience, as he had often come to know, trumped speculation each and every time and had helped him derive that the city was split into three square layers that were almost identical.

Aggression and speed were the defining variable that changed the further you went inward, as well as density. The robot's programming ultimately did not matter now that he knew their fatal flaw however it was the intense use of his quirk that worried him. Surely it was intentional, and that was why he was now stooped against a broken stone tremor, which had already begun to stick with him between uses of his quirk was now building up to uncomfortable levels. While his stamina was exactly terrible it also was far from limitless. He needed to pace himself and wait for some sort of sign that the practical would soon be over.

As if on cue a siren began to blare. "Attention; Attention; nine minutes remaining!" it cried. He found the coincidence almost shocking rather than re-invigorating but he gritted his teeth and moved a few steps away from the wall. If it was only nine minutes then he was sure even he could last.

He was not a step over three away from the shard of crippled mortar he had sheltered at before he was hit by a vibration that rattled through his legs and into his jaw. This was unlike his quirk. It was the whole world shaking around him like each and every piece of inanimate delicacy now held an intent to decimate him. He stumbled as the rumbling massacre came to a deafening crescendo.

**BOOM!**

The speed at which he whipped his head on his shoulders hurt his neck and volume of the sound made his ears sting as giant robotic arms tore through the sign on the front of a theater less than a football field's length away from him. Cement and timber and glass tore asunder and scattered as the visage of the zero pointer emerged in a cloud of debris and then rose far above the building it had so easily demolished from existence. It towered as the cities destructive god far above anything else present, like Godzilla had emerged. His mind, in the weirdest sort of transliteration of the situation corrected him. This was Mechagodzilla if anything.

Then terror collapsed in and washed the inane thought from his mind. He ducked like a frightened rabbit behind the wall he'd only moments ago used as a rest stop. There was a shaking throughout his body which he wasn't sure was being caused by the machines rumbling or his own fear. This must be the obstacle monster that had been mentioned to him only so casually.

"What the hell?!" he choked and bit his lip as he sank further down to hide. He tasted blood as his teeth rattled and pierced sensitive skin due to the ceaseless shaking that still went on and he heard the monster rolling into the street, now freed from its cage. No calming technique would help him in this situation, his body disobeyed all command and tried with every fiber of it's being to do only one thing; prevent this monster from finding his location.

*You don't need to fight it. Find cover. Safety. Move in the buildings to another part of the city.* His rationality was cracking through his need to obey instinct but that was still easier said than done, even if it was the rational conclusion. Yet, what choice did he have? It would find him. If that happened it would be the end. He closed his eyes and gripped his hands together tight. His tremor was still there but the sensation of it's presence allowed him to force his body into a crouch and move forward. Opportunity guided him as he felt the robot's presence lessen with every step, then he waited at the furthest edge of the crumbled wall until the fateful moment at which he heard the zero-pointer crash into a building. He jutted forward to seize his chance.
A single ear-rending scream of terror hit him in the side of the head like a hammer and turned his heel to stone mid-stride. He tilted his head to the side with lethargy that suggested that time was moving slower. A single morbid glance was allowed to him and he could not believe his eyes. There was a man running through the street with a girl in his arms that could not have been older than six and it looked like they had escaped from one of the buildings in a side street just as the zero-pointer had smashed it.

They couldn't have stumbled in here on accident, right? His thoughts told him he was an idiot to even consider that possibility. Yet, his ears rung. His hands shook. And his mind was plagued with poisonous doubt. It was almost upon the two now and the girls wailing as she looked over the man's shoulder was pure and intense. It had to be part of the simulation. There was no way in hell the school would allow two civilians to get crushed by accident. Even they couldn't be that extreme.

It was a combination of the debris as it barely missed the two and the downright mind-numbing screams that followed which allowed the seed of doubt already sowed to flourish and for urgency to win a battle over common sense. His hand trembled and he hit the ground hard with his fist while uttering a single defiant, "Fuck," before jumping to his feet and flinging both his hands out in front of him.

"Compress!" he shouted and his hands gripped tight like he would choke the robot's throat at this distance with only his mind. It wasn't so far removed from the truth. The zero-point robot's sweeping blow came to a stop less than five feet from the girl and her father as the monstrosities head compressed. Relief washed over him as the two narrowly made it through a gap that cut the robot behind them off. Now that they were out harm's way he could-

Rrtrzzzt.

The zero pointers head swaggered and swung its glare in one crooked motion from the street to him. It's lens and carapace were whole and unharmed. The eye burned redder than any other and the green gloss that covered it like a metallic skin shivered under the intensity of the engines running beneath it.

"Shit. Shit. Shit," he said in rapid succession before jumping from his hiding spot as the mechanical arm sliced through it like a crashing wave. He was hurtled yet somehow he landed on his feet and set off as fast as he could in any direction. The sound of his own feet smashing the ground did not reach his ears and the blood from his lips mixed with the dust in the air as the machine cascaded through everything to get to him.

He rounded the corner in an attempt to throw it off only to take the full brunt of a red mechanical limb to his side. Pain soaked through him as most of the power of the blow drained into his upper shoulder and arm, causing him to trip and stagger and graze close to the ground. Blood trickled between his fingers of his clasped arm as he barely caught himself long enough to grit his teeth. Adrenaline could help mask the pain but it could not deny that his arm had just broken in several places. He scrambled toward an alleyway that he knew would feed back into the main square. His heart was pounding in his chest and his breath was leaving him relentlessly. It felt like he would die. In an examination, how absurd was that?

He pushed his back into a wall as he rounded a corner into a narrow passage. "Attention! Attention! Three minutes remaining," the siren announced yet again, which didn't help him now. He wasn't sure how he was going to survive one minute let alone three. He needed a plan.

The wall shook behind him as he rushed to hurdle the smaller one in front with one hand, landing him in an intersection that lay parallel to the one he'd escaped from earlier. He looked behind him and took a few steps backwards as he realized he'd made a huge mistake. It wasn't just the zero-point
robot that was chasing him now, there were dozens that melded into a mob of virulent, deadly metallic colors. He'd meant to leave more of them in the dust rather than attract new ones.

Stop them from reaching you. He looked around, for what it was worth it did seem like the robots were only encroaching on him from a single direction, mindless as they were. He backed off into the street behind him toward the center of the city. The roads there would be more compact for what he had in mind, a funnel for his trap. He skidded to a halt as he reached the end of the street with his back facing a flat building as he didn't want any more nasty surprises. Then he flung up his remaining good arm and left the other dangling uselessly at his side.

"Attention! Attention! One minute remaining," the siren picked up again, although he couldn't hear it well as concentration settled in his mind and dampened the words.

Everything from sight to sound told him how fast of an advance the robots were making on his position however it all sat in stillness. Nothing felt as if it moved, not a hair on his head nor a breath in his lung, until his hand gave in with a violent involuntary shudder that he was only just able to control. Cracks withered through the floor like snakes on a fiendish hunt and dust sat swirling as it came together in a chant of collection.

"Compress," he didn't shout the word but spoke it in a vicious, decisive manner. He pulled his fist together and held it hard enough to whiten his knuckles.

As the zero-pointers foot met the concrete it gave away causing it to sink and then tilt. The weight spread the reverberation of the quirk further, far enough to engulf the crowded of robots huddled around its unstable feet. Each was swallowed in an inescapable tango of sharp limbs and plating as the sinkhole expanded and bit down hungrily.

It's not enough. He urged his compression even further with the tightening of his fist which was only a ritual by which to empower his use of the quirk. The harder he pushed the more the tremor worsened and more his concentration threatened to give. His body stood ragged and sweat dragged itself across every inch of it.

He could feel his body sway in a lapse as the pain and blood from his arm washed light headedness over him and caused him to fall to one knee. The point of his focus erupted with a crunch into a volcano of concrete mashed between robotic parts. "Not good, definitely not good." He attempted in futility to regain control over the quirk. Delirium overtook his vision before spreading into blotches of white.

He let his arm fall and the ground rippled. It spread as a silent web that had the speed of an earthquake before erupting into a thunderous THOOM that shattered the windows of each building into mere fragments. His ears rang and he was tossed backwards in a series of bounces before his momentum met an abrupt end on the concrete wall behind him. His head tapped the hard surface and the blaring of sirens guided him into unconsciousness.

Chapter End Notes

*I own nothing related to BNHA. OC material is my own.*
[South-eastern Hosu – Riley's Apartment – 9:36 AM Saturday]

Riley awoke to the sound of a firm knock and struggled to pull his semi-comatose body to it's feet. He stumbled toward the door, all the while disgruntled at the fact someone would wake him at such an ungodly hour on a Saturday. A Saturday! Some days were just, well, they just were not meant for waking someone up early.

He looked through the peephole and saw the fat figure of a man on the other side that he recognized. It was his uncle and he was undoubtedly here to check up on him again. "One minute," he yelled before rummaging through the half open suitcase still sitting next to the coffee table in the center of the living room. As he pulled a shirt on he couldn't help but eye his newly acquired scar. His mom wouldn't like that although he had no intention of telling her about what had happened. Besides, if he squinted hard enough then it become nigh invisible, albeit a bit ragged.

The door glided open as his uncle pulled on it the same moment he himself pushed. His lack of forethought rewarded Riley with an immediate sickness brought on by the profusely sweet smell that swept off his uncle like a noxious cloud. "Alo," he said while avoiding the urge to breathe through his nose at all costs. "Uncle Alo," he then corrected before adding a curt, "Hi." The man was tapping his foot while fiddling with a beige envelope in his left hand that was being held shut by rubber bands.

"Take it, I'm already late," Alo said as he held out the envelope and then hacked a series of harsh coughs that he dampened with the stained handkerchief in his other hand. Once the fit of coughing had passed he stuck the cloth back in his cheap white suit's lapel pocket. Riley reached for the envelope only for Alo to shove it in his hand while crashing past him into the apartment itself. Lights flickered to life as his uncle went and trampled into the kitchen to find the cheap water boiler housed there. "Make it count," he shouted from the other room as Riley closed the still gaping door. "It's got to last you for a bit as I'll be headin' out of town."

"Got it," he answered as he leaned on the frame of the archway separating the kitchen and living room. It wasn't a standard Japanese apartment in that regard, maybe Alo had picked it on purpose for that reason.

"I've got some plans going on so and I don't need the extra stress just cos I'm in charge of you."

"I won't be any trouble." He slipped the envelope into his pocket. He knew better than to ask where his uncle procured the money as he did but as long as it helped be the means to his ends he was grateful to have it.

"I'd bet not," Alo said, swinging the boiler kettle from it's holster despite it's work only being half finished before filling a cup containing a vile brand of instant coffee to the brim. "Want some?" he asked as he held it toward him.

"I'm good," he said. He didn't hate coffee but the caffeine made his tremors that much worse and the bitter shit his uncle bought was borderline inhumane to give to anyone, really.

"Suit yourself." He chugged the contents of the cup in one go before smacking it down near the rest
of the dishes. There was a pile now, collected over the past week. "This place is starting to look like a trash heap. Sis said you could take care of yourself and I got a good deal going with that lady downstairs, so don't mess this place up too bad you hear?"

"Sorry, I've just been a bit stressed out. I'll do it." He'd grown lax in his impatience.

Alo looked down at his dulling bronze watch. "I'll be back in like." His foot tapped again as he thought. "A week, maybe two tops." In a bit of an abrupt start he made for the door as if coffee and intimidation were really the only reasons he had gone to Southeast Hosu to begin with. Alo did pause, if only for a brief moment to look at him and then thought better of it and opened the door. He was outside in half a blink.

"Bye, uncle," Riley said after him as he waddled away more athletically than his stout frame should have allowed. Alo did not turn back again but simply threw up one of his ring encumbered sausage fingers in a wily method of recognition and goodbye. It was a more heartwarming and rather untypical exit for the man, usually he didn't give that wave.

He let the door shut under it's own weight as he fingered the envelope in his pocket before taking it back out and shoving it in the back of one of the kitchens many ceramic plated cabinets. Being alone again made him glad, so he began to gather dirty cups, dishes and clothes. A task might do him good as four days had already gone by since the exam and he hadn't heard a single peep from the school. Truthfully it wasn't their lack of response that had made him impatient, but rather that because the exam was now over he'd lost his primary focus of coming here. He was basically just a sitting duck as he awaited their decision and that had made way for pangs of homesickness. He'd tried to distract himself by getting to know Hosu at least a little but the experience had been more jarring than relaxing. He had to judge that this was because of the heraldry and privilege of heroism that he had encountered here. He was used to it being far more like a duty than a right.

The day had rolled into noon before he had finished his task almost in it's entirety. If anyone else had been around then he probably would have held some pride as it was far cleaner now than when he'd moved in. Two trash bags that went up to his knees in height were stuffed to the brim and now leaned on the wall. A third bag, this one made of linen, needed to find a laundromat rather than a garbage can.

The newfound cleanliness had vacated some space to unburden his suitcase of his remaining stuff. Two baseballs sat on a table accompanied nearby a coat rack that held a leather cap and an embroidered jacket with the letters LHPI on the back, as well as another that was a plain green. A few small souvenirs he'd bought on the first day here now adorned a dresser including a cheap metal baseball bat he'd found in a second hand store and a small carved statuette of a shrine priestess. They were things he could easily take back home if matters didn't pan out.

He picked up the two bags with one hand and hauled them over to the door. As he reached to open it the envelope slot clinked and pulled his view down to it. Sure enough, a letter had fallen through although unlike the one his uncle had given him this one was thick and bumpy. He reached down to pick it up and noticed it was a hair heavier than he'd anticipated at first sight. He flipped it over nonetheless and on the back was written 'Greetings – Principal Nedzu' in lavish handwriting.

His eyes went wide and he dropped the bags before throwing the door open again. The gray hallway of the second story apartment was as empty as ever and whoever had dropped off the letter must have been some kind of magician. It didn't matter so he let the door shut a third time before tossing both himself and the envelope onto the table and ground respectively. He had a sofa but one thing that his apartment did have that was Japanese was a literal mountain of cushions to sit on. His fingers danced beside the letter as contemplated it. A little thing like this could dictate if he had utterly
wasted his and many others time, or not. It gave him apprehension of the kind that was hard to fully
comprehend.

He grabbed the letter as he knew that waiting any longer wouldn't make the feeling of a rejection
sting any less. He slid his finger under the paper skirt and tore the red seal apart before tipping the
entire thing on its side which allowed the contents to spill carelessly onto the coffee table. A pair of
thin white gloves with rings on their cuffs landed in a bundle crowned by a folded piece of paper.
They were followed by a silver cork sized disk that rolled leisurely before coming to a halt near the
edge.

He reached for the disk but it erupted before he could grasp it. The lack of lighting his room
possessed came to an unexpected advantage as a luminescent projection of Nedzu's face appeared
along with the same unhinged smile that fit just perfectly enough on the principal's face to completely
unnerve him. It was something so natural it became oppositely devoid of the very concept, like one
of those cheap costumes you could find in older movies. House of Wax came to mind. He shook his
head to eradicate the feeling as the image of Nedzu opened its mouth.

"Ah, we meet again, Torenagi Riley!" Nedzu said, however he didn't answer; it was obvious enough
that it was just a recording. "It seems you got my letter just fine so excuse my informality and let's get
down to business." His face became hard set but the smile did not fade.

"Let's start by putting your examination results into perspective." He coughed as a small board lit up
behind him, displaying an array of numbered categories. "You incapacitated a total of twenty-seven
of our maniacal little combat machines, totaling fifty-six points." He wasn't sure if that was good or
bad, he had no context. All he was left to do was to listen, not having to respond helped his nerves.

"This exam was also designed to assess your ability to think under pressure in addition to your
combat abilities, in the form of the little surprise we snuck in." As he finished the sentence Nedzu
gave a cheeky wink. He understood what the principal meant and felt a bit bitter about being tricked
before letting it go. It was pointless to regret, better safe than sorry and it wasn't like the robots were
harmless. His shoulder was proof of that.

"The two fake civilians escaped safely, which netted you an additional twenty rescue points. This
brought you to a grand total of seventy-six," He clicked the remote in his hand. "This score would
normally be sufficient for consideration, however." The monitor switched its view to a camera above
the battlefield.

"It was clear that there was a lack of control over your quirk. This resulted in a high amount of
damage to the entire area," Nedzu said as the video played. It showed the decimation of his
immediate surroundings and his subsequent unconsciousness. He hadn't remembered much of what
had happened near the end but the light tremor that he could still feel shaking his arm had indicated
enough of the careless overuse of his quirk. All the video had done was confirm it and cause his head
to sink.

"Torenagi, I have zero doubt you must be aware of your quirks shortcoming and its inherent
danger," Nedzu said as he looked down on him. "It could easily fall out of control without proper
care." Riley gripped his knee hard in response. He had been hearing that statement a whole lot lately,
but that was inherently the point. He wasn't putting himself through this spiel out of fun and surely
someone had to understand that.

"...Despite that we put your case under special consideration," the principal continued, causing him
to look up. "If we weren't going to give dangerous quirks a chance we wouldn't be able to call
ourselves the best school for heroics, now could we?" Nedzu said with a rhetorical chuckle, he was
clearly quite pleased with himself.
"Consider this a formal invitation of attendance and in case you do not change your mind, welcome to Yuuei." Nedzu said as he clapped his hands together before another man came up to him and whispered something in his ear. "Ah it appears I'm running short on time, you'll find further instructions inside the envelope!" The screen flickered in static before the light collapsed back into the capsule disk.

As he sat there in the slight darkness unexpected happiness swept over him. His shoulders slumped and he fell back as the giddy feeling spread throughout his body and wiped out any lingering fatigue. He rolled his head sideways toward the plain picture frame he'd placed on a shelf by itself. It kept a picture of parents that looked happier than he could remember. A small girl lay in the woman's arms, wrapped in a white cloth and a young boy with wispy hair clung at the gray pant leg of a man with shoulder length hair.

"I'll make everything right again. Just watch me."

Chapter End Notes

*I own nothing related to BNHA. OC material is my own.*
Acclimation

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

[Yuuei's Campus – School grounds – 7:09 AM Monday]

Riley tugged uncomfortably at the tight collar of his uniform with one gloved finger as he walked toward the monumental class building. He had never been a fan of blazers but the addition of a tie somehow made it significantly worse. He pulled the letter from his pocket and re-read it. 'Southern Quadrant. Main Exercise Building on the third floor - Classroom 1-A' it said in red grated letters at the bottom. This was the right place, maybe. He could be at least like seventy-four-ish percent sure.

He had underestimated the vastness of the campus. It dwarfed his old boarding school by a number of magnitudes making it seem like a playground by comparison. Heck, he'd needed an ID to even enter the damn thing. The letter disappeared back into his pocket as he ignored some of the obvious stares he was starting to get from the swaths of first to third year students swarming past him. He felt out of place, and the fact that it seemed like everyone except him knew exactly where they were going didn't help.

He shoved himself through the crowd, they were meant to be there at seven-thirty sharp and he didn't exactly want to be late on his first day. The inside of the class building was no less confusing than the rest of the school but after ten minutes of turning corners and ascending stairs he finally found the large door bearing the number one and the letter A. He let out of a hollow breath before he slid the door back with a click and stepped inside only to be met with an immediate commotion.

"You have some nerve!" Riley froze before realizing it wasn't directed at him. It belonged to a tall blue haired boy, who was standing close to a sitting spiky haired blond student with his feet perched on his desk.

"Don't you think it's disrespectful to rest your dirty shoes on the desks that once belonged to our upperclassmen?!!" His anger was now accompanied by a series of erratic hand motions that made him seem too rigid for his own good.

"Why should I give a damn?" the blond student barked back with a shit-eating grin on his face which turned the blue haired boy's face a strange shade of purple.

Riley saw his opportunity and skulked down the side of the class to the back. It was easy enough to figure out which seat belonged to him, the letter had a seating plan already included, which stuck him right into the back corner. As he slid into his seat he allowed himself to relax. He'd made it on time and escaped attention perfectly. Although… perhaps not perfectly enough, he realized, as the neatly cut hair of the blue haired student swung around at him. Dread pitted in his stomach as he started charging between the rows of desks toward him.

"Hello, fellow Yuuei student!" the boy said before even reaching him. In one swift motion he swept up Riley's hand. "Allow me to introduce myself, I am Iida Tenya and it is a pleasure to meet you."

He blinked twice before making a mental note that Iida was actually the boy's last name, and Tenya his first. There had been a couple of times where he had been glad to be at least somewhat adept in his mom's native language and this was one of those times. He wasn't as fluent in the customs, not by a long shot, but now that he was living here for the foreseeable future he would have to make do he
supposed. Iida stopped the handshake that was practically all him up to that point and tilted his hand on its side while looking upon it with an intent gaze. He pulled his hand back in response; it was becoming far too awkward for him to put up with.

The boy's eyes narrowed behind his glasses as he straightened them. "What is with those gloves you're wearing? They are not part of the uniform. If they are simply for style I must insist you remove them."

"Trust me, if I could take them off I would," he answered. He had definitely had zero desire to be an eccentric and if anything they only served to make his hands strangely cold. "All I was told is I can't be here if I don't have them on. As far as what they do, your guess is as good as mine."

"Oh." Iida hesitated and the stern look on his face collapsed, ahem, he coughed. "Please, accept my sincerest apologies." He gave a slight bow. "I should have assumed you were only wearing them upon the school's discretion based on their intricate design. It must be for a good reason."

"Don't apologize." He stretched the material of the glove out one uncomfortable finger at a time. He had to admit Iida was right. The cuff of the gloves was far from ordinary; little silver wires laced themselves in a weave of directions that was no doubt deliberate. There was definitely some kind of purpose to it, even if he didn't know what.

The boy muttered a quiet hmm causing Riley to look up, he wasn't sure what the student wanted now. Iida took his hand from his chin and smacked it swiftly into his other hand like he'd solved some kind of murder case. "You must be the transfer student."

He wasn't sure how the boy had figured it out, and worse still he was now keenly aware of the number of people who were shifting their attention toward them as a consequence. It didn't take much to realize what had given him away as the blackboard at the front of the class listed a detailed seating plan by student number, along with enrollment condition. The only thing missing was their names. If he had to guess his crude speech probably hadn't helped, either.

"I guess I am," he answered after a second. A girl with long cords attached to her ears and her bird beaked companion were staring over their shoulders at him. If there was one thing he hated it was being the center of attention and the guy had excelled in providing exactly that.

Iida on the other hand appeared thrilled at the confirmation."It is an honor to meet someone from another country. I myself have never left Japan, so please enlighten me to the ways of your culture." There was a sparkle in his eye as he turned away and gave a placated sigh. "Ah, the variety unique experiences Yuuei presents us with. It truly is the apex of heroic education." Then he paused and turned back. "If I may ask, what is your name?"

He was hesitant for a moment. Any conversations that had still been going on had been expertly dismantled by Iida's display of grandeur and it now that meant the only way he could douse the attention was by revealing something about himself. Begrudgingly he stood, and left the comfort the desk had provided.

A variety of faces looked back at him and many much stranger than even Nedzu's had been. There was a girl with pink hair but not only that, her skin was pink too and her eyes black as pitch. To his left he'd caught the attention of a boy with white and red hair and a hideous scar that split his face in much the same way. That particular eye contact was short-lived, the student had already retreated his glance to the window. There was, as luck would have it, a few students who did not have quite so blatant quirks, like the student who had been fighting earlier with Iida and a guy with a tail who was in all other ways plain. He chose him to speak toward.
"Hi," he stammered and cleared his throat. "My name is Torenagi Riley. I'm a transfer student from Leineif Heroic Preparation Institute in America." He could feel his cheeks growing red hot as he said it. "I hope to make the most the educational opportunity Yuuei has presented me with and I look forward to working with you. Everything is a bit foreign to me here, so please forgive me." He collapsed back in his seat as he finished and his embarrassment subsided, he just hoped he hadn't been too formal. Not a moment later it was obvious that his attempt hadn't quelled the interest in him as he'd hoped, but instead kindled it.

"Please tell me more about Leineif, it sounds like an intriguing place," Iida said, much to his dismay the guy had no off button and he himself didn't exactly feel like sharing. Nosy people were the most annoying. Before he was forced to answer Iida gave a stumped oof as a red headed student that he must have missed in the commotion barged in beside him. It was enough to temporarily end the assault on his nerves.

"Kirishima-" He pounded his palm down on the desk. "-Coming out and saying all that, that kind of confidence is pretty manly in my book." His face beamed, revealing a set of sharp teeth that looked like they belonged to a shark rather than a human. "So what's your quirk? Mine's hardening." He raised his hand and his fingers turned rigid and sharp like an edged stone.

"Compression," Riley answered and despite Kirishima's claim he didn't feel all that confident. However, at least this was a topic he could take interest in, much better than talking about his old school. "I can't really demonstrate it here but it's a force based quirk I exert with my hands. Maybe I can show you later." The bloke gave an eager nod in response.

Iida opened his mouth to say something but was once again manhandled. This time it was the cord eared girl from earlier. "So you're from America? That's pretty cool. Still, why someone would want to come to a death trap like Hosu sure beats me." The expression on her face was rather flat and now that he was closer he could see that calling them cords wasn't doing them justice. They were more like jacks you'd find on a pair of headphones.

She scowled as she noted his silence. "It's Jirou Kyouka. You into music?" she said and then paused. "It's fine if you don't want to answer I just don't get to meet many foreigners." She shrugged but it seemed to Riley like a feint, or that she was more interested than she let on.

"It's alright," he answered, not wanting to seem rude. "Uh… alt rock, electronic… and metal? I guess. I'm not that picky." He'd found music to be a good distraction while waiting for the first day of class, although the selection on his phone had been rather limited.

Jirou pushed her neat purple bang to the side. "Cool." His answer hadn't been great but if she cared then it didn't show. "Well if you want we can swap bands or something some time. Well, I guess we're not too strung out from the hero course."

"I wonder how much longer we've gotta wait," Kirishima said. "It's been killing me all morning! Even just being in this classroom feels crazy, doesn't it man?"

"Kinda," Riley said. "They didn't give us a schedu-" He was cut off by the penetrating sweep that was Iida's voice from across the room followed by a screech as a desk moved two inches across the floorboards.

Jirou threw a scornful look over her shoulder. "Noisy idiots."

"I must insist, take a proper seat and straighten up your uniform while you're at it and where is your tie? It's a requirement that a Yuuei student be properly dressed," Iida said. He'd made his way back to the spiky haired student. "If not for the sake of your upperclassmen then surely you can manage
out of respect for your new classmates."

"Why the fuck would I respect people who I'm just gonna walk all over," the blond answered. "What school are you from anyway, you two bit extra?"

"Two bit extra?! What nerve, someone like you wants to be a hero?!" Iida said in surprise before collecting himself. "I'm from Soumei Junior High School." He followed it with a frustrated huff.

"Soumei, huh?" The blond put his foot down and stood up inches from Iida's face. "I guess now I really have a reason to end you."

Iida gasped. "A reason to end me?" He wasn't sure why the blond was trying to pick a fight but seeing as the teacher wasn't here yet he could sympathize. Having someone all over your case was a pain even if Iida seemed nice enough for it to be out of concern rather than contempt.

"De-ku," the blond delinquent's attention split away from Iida as he spat the word. His focus had shifted wholly to the door behind the tall boy. Another student had just come through it, although he had solidified with fear at the sight of the class. It went no further than that as Iida was the first to turn.

"Hi, I'm Iida Tenya, Soumei Junior High School. You're Midoriya, correct?" Iida asked as he adjusted his glasses once more and pulled the boy into a firm handshake like he had Riley.

"Oh yeah, haha. I'm Midoriya, nice to meet you Iida... again," he answered while shaking his head, causing the frizzy green tint of his wild hair to sway.

"I must apologize for my demeanor in the exam. It is obvious now that you must have grasped the true nature of it before I could. I completely misread you." Iida had a strange stance, like someone making a public announcement might have.

Midoriya scratched his cheek. "Oh, uh, I don't know about that, I think I just go lucky."

"Nonsense. There's no such thing as luck, you are clearly quite skilled," he said in retort, much to the boy's embarrassment.

"Ah, it's you, that curly haired kid." Midoriya jumped an inch off the ground at the sound of the female voice behind him before turning to face it. It belonged to a short girl with brown hair that bounced just above shoulder length.

"I can't forget how you laid out that robot in one punch!" She swung her arm in a massive arc to mimic the action. "Thanks for the help! It's Uraraka Ochako by the way." Her cheerful enthusiasm served only to turn Midoriya's face bright red. Riley wasn't sure what to make of the spectacle, so far his class was nothing but a succession of personality clashes. It beat his old class a bit but, perhapos only because his old class meant his old school. He dismissed the thought.

"This is the department of heroics. You're not here to make friends so if that's what you've decided to do then you can get lost." Confusion struck him until he realized it was a sleeping bag that had said the words. It was splayed wide along the class door at an angle that made it awkward for him to see until it hopped upright. "You lot took eight whole seconds to shut your traps," it said as everyone watched in a perplexed silence. "Life is short kids and you're all lacking a bit of common sense, so let's get a move on. I'm your homeroom teacher." The sleeping bag began to unzip. "Aizawa Shouta pleased to meet you." He had in his hand a tracksuit of some kind, which he recognized as one that had been sent to him along with the uniform a mere day after he had accepted. "Put these on and shove off to the P.E grounds."
An estranged heat sutured the field. It was one intended for sport so he could assume a thing or two about what was about to happen but it still left him rubbing his head as the remaining students came together. The gloves made the action less comfortable as the tiny metallic spines on their cuffs dug into his skin. Even if he had no idea what they did he was sure they could be a good deterrent for bad habits, like biting nails or picking at skin, though he had neither.

"Isn't there meant to be orientation?" Iida asked as they gradually stopped walking. His heels had become caked in dirt, something he was trying to scrape off but with little success.

Aizawa gave Iida a smug look. "You're all probably wondering why you're out here, well." He pulled the loose collection of bandages around his neck tighter, hiding the scruff of his half shaved beard. "We're going to do a quirk apprehension test."

"A quirk apprehension test?" Iida parroted. Riley couldn't say he'd heard of such a thing either.

"Yes, a quirk apprehension test, don't make me repeat myself." Aizawa groaned. "There's no time for those silly ceremonies, if you want to be heroes then it's better to skip all those frilly niceties." He found himself able to relate to the logic, he had come here for a reason after all. Anything other than that pursuit was probably a waste of time. The teacher pulled out a small baseball from behind the back of his loose black clothing. "Bakugou, what was your best pitch in middle school?" The ball went sailing at the angry blond student from earlier.

"Sixty-seven meters," Bakugou answered as he caught it.

"Alright, try using your quirk to throw that ball, anything goes as long as you stay in the circle." Aizawa had begun to rummage around behind his back again before pulling a tablet-like device. "And don't hold back," he added.

The boy scoffed. "You got it." He walked to the plate and stretched his right arm out against his left, a sign of practice. He pulled his arm back behind him into an over arm pitch before flinging it with the entire weight of his body behind it. "DIE!" He shouted, and the ball exploded from his hands with a deafening boom. He watched the it punch through the air like a howitzer had launched it and then land a great distance away.

Die? He wondered if he had heard right. Yeah he definitely said die, he could instantly nail him as the type to get pissed off at anything. Better not to cross, he noted.

The machine beeped in Aizawa's hands before reading **705.2 meters**. "Normally society wouldn't let you use your quirks to keep things fair but here at Yuuei we don't need to follow those archaic rules set forth by the ministry of education," he said, and tilted his head sideways as if he'd built up a nasty cramp.

"So we're going to be doing fitness tests with quirks? Awesome!" A black haired boy said. He had tape dispensers on his arms, which had been hidden by the uniform up until now.

"I can't believe we really get to use our quirks so casually already," another student with a black streak in his blond hair remarked. "That's the department of heroics for you I guess." The comment prompted a number of agreements and a sense of excitement among them.

"So this looks like fun to you, does it?" Aizawa interrupted them. The look on his face had changed to something unpleasant. "You were planning to spend your days here having a good ol' time..." There was a feeling of dread building with every word. "All right then, if it seems so fun then let's up
the stakes. The student who scores lowest on today's tests will be judged as 'hopeless' and be immediately expelled." The chuckle that now accompanied his grin was one of sadism up-most refined.

Thick smog had drowned their crowd in dilapidated silence and choking worry. Now no one was having a good time, with the exception of Kirishima and Bakugou, and Riley was far from exempt. His thoughts began to race at a dangerous speed. He didn't want to be kicked out on his first day and this man did not look like the joking type.

"There will be eight tests. All the standard fitness trials that you might be used to, use your quirks in any way you see fit," the teacher said as he turned away.

Think. Fitness tests and compression. It wasn't the most undesirable combination if he didn't handle it like an idiot. And, by his logic, if he couldn't handle something like this they would have seen that and not let him through in the first place. Grip strength should be simple enough and pitching might work if he was willing to try that again. He removed the gloves and stuffed them into his pocket before he began following the rest of the class behind Aizawa. The dash was first, every competition began with a dash.

Fifteen minutes later and he wasn't sure what he was expecting as he looked at the time on the clock. Six and a half seconds, give or take. His only real training that involved running had been for endurance. That was why he had lasted as long as he had in the entrance exam compared to how long he used to last with his quirk on full blast. Even that had taken time to drill into his head and to bore into his bones.

Riley pushed the thought from his mind as he knew already with just a glance he was not the most physically able student here, far from it. A hair shy of five foot six and light muscle did not an athlete make. The ranged type. That is what he was and that should be the strength he could play to in the upcoming tests. At the very least he might have time to use his quirk in some of them.

"Next is," Aizawa said as he scrolled through the electronic clipboard in his hand. "…Grip strength. Transfer student, Torenagi was it?"

"Yes, Sir," he answered. The man seemed to take joy in his torment as he held out a finicky looking device toward him.

"It's your turn, like it or not."

Riley scowled and took the device almost too quick. This teacher hated hesitation from what he had garnered in the past hour and he was only happy to oblige if it meant he wouldn't get kicked out. Fake it till you make it, or some such idiom. He wiggled his fingers on the metal handle as he held up the machine. It didn't look special but it was sturdy and weighted. Strong enough to withstand his quirk, he wagered as he dropped it to his side and spread his stance.

"Compress," he said. Snap. The lever careened into the handle and tore at a rough sideways angle into his palm. He let the quirk's effect disperse as fast as he had gathered it before the lever could wedge and snap his fingers in two. He opened his eyes and lifted the device upward. It now had a
crack running down the glass. "Brittle," he remarked.

"Three-hundred and seventy-two kilos," Aizawa said as he entered the result into his clipboard. He had the device handle first to the man who paused as he took it, like he was looking for something on it. "Thirteen'll be glad to know his endorsement hasn't gone to waste, yet," he said in a low tone. Riley blinked back at him but before he could say anything the man pointed with his head. "Back in line. Sero, you're next."

Sero pushed past Riley, whom was left with an expression like he had just tasted a lemon and was surprised to find it tasted sour. The lack of context for what Aizawa had meant by his comment bothered him. It made sense that someone on the teaching staff had to approve for him to even have a shot but that didn't mean he had to like the idea.

"Nice job dude." Kirishima hit him on the back as he rejoined the crowd. "I knew you had it in ya my man."

The boy's praise shifted his thought back to the matter at hand. "Thanks," he answered, a tinge of pride sat in his chest. It had taken many wrist braces to get his quirk to the point of less maim and more crush.

Iida held a finger to his chin. "So that's the level of international students, very illuminating." Unlike Kirishima, Iida's comment served only to turn his ears red. If the student wished to use him as a barometer for that then it was the equivalent of digging for gold in a sandpit.

Despite what he had figured was a decent score he hadn't walked away the winner in grip strength. That spot had been taken by a guy with six limbs, Shouji Mezou, who had scored well over five hundred kilos and then again by a girl who seemed to be able to create anything, Yaoyorozu Momo.

As long as he wasn't the bottom of the pile it did not matter but that was becoming a worry now as the last three tests hadn't proved very successful for him either. Toe-touches and endurance running were all too ordinary, and he lacked the strength to manage much significance with pull-ups. It was a reprieve that he was not the only one with a similar issue. One or two tests had stood out for each of them, with the exception of that Momo girl. They were back outside now, with a more promising test ahead. Pitching.

Riley snapped back to attention as Aizawa grappled Midoriya to him using the bandages coiled around his body. They were snakes, sliding and tangling and moving whatever which way they wished to weave. The skill with which Aizawa wielded them had him wondering if that was his quirk, as they floated with a vigor verging on paranormal. It made sense and was kind of awesome to boot.

"Yo-You erased it?" Midoriya squawked like a bird caught in a trap. Then, his face lit up even as it was being choked out. "Wait a minute. You're the eraser hero, Eraserhead!"

"Eraserhead? I feel like I've heard that name before," the boy with the streak in his hair said. Kaminari Denki, if he remembered correctly.

"Wasn't he some kind of underground hero?" Sero answered to the agreement of several confused murmurs. Riley could say with utmost confidence that he had zero idea who or what an Eraserhead was but aptitude with Japanese pro heroes had not been part of his written examination requirement. It did revoke his earlier guess of the teacher's quirk but filled him with some confidence in assuming that it was actually centered around Erasure. A mind-blowing jump, really.
"Kinda freaky isn't it? I wonder what he's saying to him," the air next to Riley said. More accurately, it was a floating set of clothes baring an invisible girl. An invisible girl, he noted, who had out performed nigh on half of them in physical feats.

Iida nodded at her. "Probably words of encouragement, Hagakure."

Bakugou ground his teeth then said, "More like telling him that he's a goner."

"Or Mister Aizawa is telling him to get serious," the bird beaked student, whom Jirou had introduced to him as Fumikage Tokoyami, said. "He has by far the lowest score. At this rate, well." He dropped the sentence off, but it came across well enough.

"Where is that explosive power from before? I bet he could toss that thing out of the park!" Uraraka said, giving a fist pump as if to encourage Midoriya. That did little good considering Aizawa still had him entangled.

"Explosive power? Deku's a quirkless guppy!" Bakugou snorted.

"Quirkless? Don't be ridiculous, didn't you see what he did during the entrance exam?!" Iida said.

"Tch, yeah whaddayou know, he's always been a quirkless loser and he'll always stay a quirkless loser." Bakugou went back to watching Midoriya with nothing short of a glare. Riley wasn't sure what to think of it but it all sounded kind of silly. If Midoriya had no quirk why would Aizawa need to erase it? That was ignoring the even more obvious fact that Midoriya was here right now, it wasn't like robots would destroy themselves out of pity.

Midoriya grabbed his right arm as Aizawa let him go. He stumbled to the pitch then rolled the ball from his left hand into his right while almost dropping it. Riley had missed the first throw because it had been uneventful but now Midoriya had taken upon himself a different look. It was one of gritted teeth, desperate eyes and akin to an animal in a corner. He gripped the ball tight and something had indeed changed, like there was some invisible heat that none of them could see in the wind-up. Midoriya leaned back then curled forward, releasing the ball. It hung at the tip of his finger for far longer than it should have before exploding with an ear rending crack as the soft material whipped into the air. It cut with far more the power than a supposedly quirkless kid could deliver and flew beyond the boundaries of the stadium before disappearing. Aizawa held up the machine which now read 705.3 meters.

"Teacher, I-I can still move!" Midoriya clenched his fist while facing Aizawa. A strange look had replaced a mocking pity. The man was impressed but his face fought him on showing the emotion like it was just a tad to dirty for him to comprehend.

"That's more like it Midoriya!" Uraraka said before she was shoved out of the way. Bakugou charged forward like something bestial had captured his body and was now raging.

"Explain right now you little shitrag!" Bakugou yelled as he grasped toward Midoriya. A few steps into his rage a bandage caught his arms and he flailed as Aizawa's bandages encased him. "What the hell? Aren't these made of cloth or some shit?!" No matter which way he twisted or bit or clawed the material offered no respite.

"These are my special capturing weapon, steel wire alloy woven with carbon nanofibres," Aizawa said. His eyes were red like that of a predator. "Stop making me use my quirk so much you damn brats. I've got serious dry eye." He pulled on the bandage and released Bakugou while simultaneously causing him to fall on his ass. That made Riley chuckle though he wiped it away just as quick. Aizawa dug into his pocket and fished out a small black bottle which he then unscrewed.
and tipped into his eyes, dousing them and their redness. "Another outburst like that and you can be
the first to go home. Now get back with the others before you regret it," he said in the most
nonchalant yet completely threatening way possible. "Uraraka you're up next." It didn't seem to
bother him in the slightest that one of his students had almost tried to kill the other.

"Don't expect too much from me, okay?" Uraraka said back toward the rest of them before tiptoeing
up the plate with ball in hand. He could admit he knew a few people like her, too nice for their own
good.

"Here I go…!" The ball left her hand in a weak underhand throw that flew at a forty five degree
angle. The ball trailed fifty feet, then a hundred, further and further until it was more than a mile and
then finally further beyond that before it went out of sight completely. The machine beeped after ten
minutes and didn't display a number, instead holding a stark figure eight on it's side.

"Damn, now that's a quirk I wish I could have," Sero said as Uraraka walked back to them. She'd
scored infinity and Riley had to check twice to make sure he wasn't going insane but the machine
didn't lie. It had him careening thought in before realizing that Aizawa was pointing at him to go
next.

"Well, um… good luck?" Kirishima gave a perturbed laugh, like he couldn't believe it either as he
pushed him forward. There had already been immense pressure before but that had almost thrown
him. Misjudging her had been a mistake.

"If you think I'm beating that then you're going to be disappointed," he said before taking a ball from
a basket and making his way to the center of the pitch which was now a littered mess of burn marks
and pot holes. He raised the ball, throwing it in the air once to gauge the weight and consider the
plan he'd made. At least he had one, he supposed. A crook of his neck came first and then he folded
his fingers together to make a makeshift funnel with the ball resting at the field facing open end.
Compressions were easy enough but controlling what happened as a result in a meaningful way was
difficult. The entrance exam was a perfect example of that.

"He isn't going to throw it?" Kirishima asked aloud. Riley his a smirk, the student wasn't shy, he
could give him that much.

A familiar tug like a handshake from his quirk began to form at the base of the funnel and he re-
tightened the particular way he had folded his fingers in response. If he hadn't been facing away
some might have seen the sphere as his quirk formed. It was absolutely minuscule and it wasn't truly
a sphere at all, more like an area where his focus rested. It was a focal point, so to speak. The size
neither increased nor decreased, which was how he knew it was working correctly.

As the sphere continues to draw in atoms from the surrounding air the total density of the sphere becomes much
greater. That was the analysis a quirk-specialist had given his mom and him back in elementary
school. It wasn't correct but it had given him the idea for this technique years later.

He knew he was beginning to reach his limit as he felt the focal point waver. He allowed it to waver
further but in a particular direction, outward and toward the ball. The sphere obeyed, then disobeyed
in equal measure, popping with a harsh crack and pushing out the funnel like a spear. The ball went
hurtling out of his hand like the cork of a champagne bottle and less cleanly than he'd hoped. He
shook his hands to dismiss the pain of letting the miniature gun-like effect go off and watched as the
ball flew at a slight right angle. It landed just before the fence and disappeared in the grass which
caused the machine in Aizawa's hand to beep. It read 549.7 meters. Satisfied he turned back to the
group and wiped the blunt force away on the blue cloth of the gym outfit while making his way
back.

Hagakure winced in his direction as he approached. "That looked like it hurt."
"Not as much as that I bet," he answered, pointing at Midoriya's finger. It was a pulsing red and the skin looked like it had been flayed off whilst also burnt.

"Shit man, I didn't even notice that." Kirishima grabbed Midoriya's hand like he wanted to make sure that if the finger was going to fall off he would be in a great position to catch it.

"Oh that? Ah, it's um. It's fine. There's no need to worry about me." Midoriya pulled his hand back. "It doesn't hurt, really!" The sliver of pain on his face told a different tale.

Kirishima laughed. "You're a pretty tough dude."

"Fucking yourself up that bad for a baseball pitch?" Jirou had one eyebrow raised in disbelief.

"Can you blame him? Considering what's at stake." Tokoyami waved a shadow hand that wasn't his own. His mortifying quirk was still hugging his P.E uniform. It looked like some kind of demonic vulture.

"Enough with the chatter," Aizawa interrupted. "There are still two tests left, plenty of chance for most of you to end up at the bottom."

Riley froze at the scoreboard before sighing in relief. He was ranked fourteenth and not twenty-first, he was safe for now. The one stuck at the bottom was Midoriya despite his performance in the pitch. Distressed would not be adequate to describe the grovelling boy's state at that very moment. It was something more akin to a scientist in a movie realizing he had just thrown the cure to cancer into a trash compactor that was to be buried at the bottom of the ocean.

"I… can't believe it." Midoriya clutched his finger out of hysteria rather than pain. The scoreboard flickered like a candle and then disappeared, revealing Aizawa behind it.

"That whole expulsion thing." Aizawa scratched the meek strands on his chin then grinned. "That was merely a logical ruse, you know, to draw out your best performances."

"Wait, what?" Iida, Uraraka and Midoriya exclaimed simultaneously.

"Yes, none of you are going home." He paused. "For today anyway." The teacher reached into his jacket and pulled out a piece of paper which he began to scribble on.

I guess I overestimated his cruelty. Even though he hadn't been the one faced with expulsion Riley was glad that none of his new classmates would be leaving. He pulled the gloves from his pocket and put them on one finger at a time, it was a chore with the tremor. He looked at his hands as they turned cold again. However it wasn't the cold that had his attention, it was the disappearance of the jitter altogether. Maybe he hadn't used his quirk as intensely as he thought he had. He rubbed the back of his neck and noticed the odd look Aizawa was giving him, however the man turned away just as fast.

"Go back to class and take your curriculum sheets, look them over by tomorrow," Aizawa said as he looked to Midoriya. "Take this and go get fixed up by Recovery Girl, no doubt you'll need to be in top condition for tomorrow's absurd ordeal." He handed the boy the scrap of paper he'd been writing on. The man turned and began lurching out of the field, leaving them to sort themselves out.

[Yuuei's Campus – Classroom 1-A – 1:43 PM]

"…That should cover everything you'll need to know for today," the blocky man said. He'd
introduced himself as Cementoss after having met them on their way back to class to pick up their curriculum sheets. Their delayed orientation had been rather normal, and with that also extremely boring considering what they'd already done that morning. "Your classes will begin in earnest tomorrow. Be prepared." He finished writing and left the room, effectively dismissing them.

He slung his bag over his shoulder and grabbed the curriculum sheet. It had a list of ordinary subjects on it that would comprise the morning and a lengthy block named 'foundational heroic studies' that would absorb most of the afternoon. He stood to make his way toward the exit. Normally he wouldn't be so eager to get back to his lonesome apartment but he felt unusually tired. It must have been stress from wrestling with possible expulsion. Before he could reach for the door he felt a tug on his shoulder that held him back.

"Yo man, gimme your number before you go," Kirishima said.

"Sure." He nodded and slipped his phone from his pocket. He saw no reason to refuse, Jirou had already asked the same of him on the way back to class and Kirishima seemed like one of the friendlier people. An exchange later he said a goodbye and gave a small wave before leaving in earnest. Instead of turning toward the stairs he instead followed along the corridor toward one more pit stop he had to make before he could go home for the day.

He ended up trudging back through the ID gate with a bag considerably heavier than it had been. It was filled with material he would need, borrowed directly from the school library for an indefinite period of time. He'd also picked out two slim books for purposes other than study; it couldn't hurt to have something to read in his spare time. If he found any, that was. One of the two was a fiction novel he'd chosen almost at random from the sci-fi section and the other a historical literature book titled 'Dominative dynasties of Japan; the rise and fall of villainy'. He wasn't sure if that second one would actually help him, but it had piqued his curiosity.

Now all that was left for him was to get home. Since his Uncle was out of town there was zero chance of him getting a ride, not that he really wanted to bother the man. The sizable amount of money his uncle had also given him still wasn't really enough to waste on bus rides, so the only option that remained left to him was to walk. He clicked open his phone to find a map since he wasn't familiar enough to know the route by heart having only been twice. As the phone lit up he noticed he had two new messages.

1 – Kirishima – NEW

He already had a fair idea of Kirishima was texting about, for someone who he'd just met the guy was enthusiastic to hang out with him. He could reply later when he got home.

2 – Unknown Number – NEW

That, he had to admit, was odd. He'd always made a habit of assigning names to numbers as soon as he'd acquired them. His finger hovered over the delete key before he bit his lip and opened the message anyway.

*Has it ever crossed your mind.*

*This world's imperF-ection?*

*We wait. We listen.*

- J
Trepidation racked his spine as he read it, yet he had no idea why. It made no sense, surely it must have been a joke. Maybe it was sent to him by mistake. The thought was comforting, he had just arrived here and mis-dials could happen anywhere. It was a brand new SIM card and everything. Judging by how creepy it was it was probably better it's intended recipient hadn't received it. He looked up from his phone at his surroundings but found nothing unusual.

**Message deleted.**

That's what he got for not following his gut and opening it. A text was a text and nothing to get paranoid over. He pushed his bag behind him a bit further to make it more comfortable, glanced back at the school then picked up the pace and hurried toward home.

Chapter End Notes

*I own nothing related to BNHA. OC material is my own.*
Augury

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

[Yuuei's Campus – Classroom 1-A – 7:24 AM Tuesday]

Riley tilted back and forth on the legs of his chair, watching the ceiling as he did so. Around him he could hear other students funneling into class but he paid it all little mind, he was trying to forget the weird message he had received the previous day with little success. A hand shook him violently out of his stupor, making him jolt upright as the metal legs hit the floor and he came face to face with Kirishima.

"Heeeey, Torenagi. You awake man?" Kirishima asked.

"Uh yeah, hey. Just Riley is fine, if you don't mind," he answered.

"No problem, Riley. Uh, so you," he put a hand to the back of his head. "You didn't reply to my message last night. I didn't do anything to piss you off, did I?"

"You didn't." Riley glanced away. "Sorry. I just had a lot going on. I must've completely spaced after looking at it." The words from the message were still burnt into his mind, however he did manage to push them out for the time it took to pull his phone from the pocket of his blazer. He looked back at Kirishima's message and, lucky enough, it wasn't accompanied by another. "Yeah, sounds good. I'm free today, and most days after class," he said, reading it. Kirishima wanted to go to some hole-in-the-wall place nearby from the looks of it. It did sound like fun and it might help him get to know the city a bit better anyway.

"Great, I know just the place, I'm sure you'll love it. I'm getting someone else along too." He then turned to the front. "I wonder what Aizawa has in store for us today."

"Probably another expulsion threat," he said as he went back to tipping on his chair, though he then hesitated as he noticed Kirishima's unease. "I'm sure it'll be no problem for you, since you got eighth yesterday."

"You're right," Kirishima nodded. "Whatever it is, I'll smash through it no problem." Riley had to admit he was a bit of envious of his confidence.

"In your seats," Aizawa said as he entered the room, causing Kirishima to rush back to his place. "We only have three short years to bring you up to a state more than absolutely pitiful, and it isn't looking very good from my perspective."

He couldn't find any other way to describe his morning classes other than mind-numbing. He had suffered through English and Mathematics, whereas sciences had grabbed his interest only in passing. It wasn't even because he liked physics or chemistry, rather the heavy emphasis of his quirk on the former made it of importance. He found out fast enough that such intricacies weren't going to be explored on a blackboard. His unenthusiastic approach to the sheer normality of the regular classes stood shared by everyone except Midoriya and Iida, who were dedicated to every word. It had felt like an eternity before lunch had rolled around but at least he had something to look forward to next. This time he was the last to enter the class; most people had gotten here early. It wasn't a surprise considering this would be their first 'foundational heroic studies' class, whatever that
He held his hand firm to his left side while heading toward his seat. The tremor had not yet left him but it would be gone in less than twenty minutes, still he really have just put on the gloves now that he thought about it. The door to the classroom crashed open behind him, causing his last few steps to the seat to turn into a jump. If any more force had been used there would be a bulbous man shaped hole now where the frame was, instead it was a gigantic figure crowned at height by two crazy yellow spikes of hair. He took two large strides to get the podium and dwarfed it, making him look more like a caricature than a real person, let alone a hero, yet he looked every bit the part from large waving cape to the very weave of his blue, red and yellow latex.

"It's me!" the man said with such bravado that entailed that everyone should already know exactly who he was. He had a huge unnatural smile spread across his face and he oozed with confidence from every pore. The class shook with mumbles of excitement and rightly so, even Riley himself had a hard time not being star struck by Japan's number one hero, All Might. Even in America his face was plastered everywhere and it wasn't a surprise considering half his special moves had their names filched from it. To say he was popular would be akin to calling Kill Bill a low key action flick.

"I can't believe All Might's really gonna be teaching us," Kirishima said. He was wearing his excitement like a cloak on his back.

"Is that his Silver Age costume? So cool!" Ashido Mino, the pink haired girl, said. He'd made sure to grab the last few names he didn't know from the scoreboard yesterday as he didn't want to have an awkward moment of forgetting or not knowing one of his classmate's names. It was lucky that remembering such details was natural when your quirk revolved around focus.

"A bit cliché," a blond haired student, Aoyama Yuuga, murmured under his breath. "And the colors clash completely." He was perched forward on his hands, drooling over the thing he was so quick to denounce.

"Welcome to foundational heroic studies," All Might said and was met with obedient silence. "Today we're going to start with a trial of battle." Every syllable of each word and letter between was raised in an excitement matched by his magnificent glinting teeth. "I expect you to show me what you're made of, young heroes," he said and raised a card with the bright red letters 'BATTLE' in front of him. "Now I assume you all remember when you registered your quirks you were required to put in a request form." He pressed a remote he had very much pulled out of nowhere and the walls at the side of the room began to separate into various caches. "Here they are, the fruits of your labor; your very own battle gear! Get changed and head down to battle ground beta." He flourished his cape before heading out the door in as a grandiose a way as he'd come in.
if they had a spiral pattern etched into them and wasn't part of his original design however he appreciated the embellishment. In addition to the shirt, which had come with an undershirt, he found two metallic cartridges that looked like vambraces fused directly into each wrist. They had protrusions like the barrel of a gun and meant that he could pull off that trick from the test without blowing up his hands.

The final parts of the getup came in the form of a rigid pair of shoes with spikes at the bottom; it was similar to what you would find on a pair of cleats with less height. Accompanying them was a sleek black visor with range markers on the left and a small button marked 'Scope' in neat white letters. Most pleasing of all was the simplicity of the overall design, there was no excess buckles or a cape or anything that might get in the way of his quirk. It was in that aspect like how he would dress in public, with the exception of the aesthetic.

An eagerness picked at him like a vulture once he had dressed and he tucked the book away. The rest he could read later. A sci-fi cop looked back at him as he closed the door to the locker and a now hidden smile crept across his face. It was something straight out of a movie. He turned on one foot, a delicate exercise with the cleats, and left the locker room. There was only one student who had been slower than him, Midoriya. A hesitation spread across the green-haired boy's face as he watched Riley leave, as the very locker he had been using now had the indistinct tone of a vibrating phone emit twice from it. Then he found it to be none of his business and also left.

Riley joined the crowd already assembled at the training ground. He was unsure if he could call it that considering it was more of a collection of concrete buildings set up in tidy rows. Questioning it would bring him nowhere, he decided, so his attention drew toward the other students whom he had not been able to get a good look at in the locker room.

Now that they wore their costumes he could only guess who was beneath, with some exception. Bakugou was obvious enough. He only had a black-and-orange mask to hide his eyes and the rest of the costume was designed like someone's nightmare fuelled visualization of what a living hand-grenade might look like. Kirishima didn't look very different either. He had a few taut red bands stretched across his muscled chest that made Riley realize just how much his new acquaintance must be training on the daily.

The black visor hid what he was looking at well enough but he still didn't wish to stare, so he looked elsewhere. Not far from himself stood the boy with the scar. Todoroki Shouto, if he recalled. Half his apathetic expressions was now hidden by ice with only a crimson eye shining through. The very air around him was making Riley begin to shiver and Iida too, who had chosen an equally bad place to stand. Iida incidentally had the coolest costume. It looked like a Gundam with massive engine exhausts sprouting from the calves, which he now knew were part of his quirk as he had demonstrated it the day prior.

Further fawning Riley was planning to do was stalled as he noticed the last student had finally joined them. Uraraka stepped in the way to intercept Midoriya, which made him skid to a halt. His costume was rather intimidating as the rabbit-like ears and stark green contrast reminded Riley of the character Frank from Donnie Darko, although he doubted that was intentional considering how whimsical Midoriya had acted.

"Ah, cool costume Deku!" Uraraka said. "It looks so much more practical than mine." She glanced downward and blushed before looking up again. A skin sight suit could do that.

"Thanks yours is co-" Midoriya said but interrupted himself by protracting his speech in an extended, "-whooaaa," His eyes had become borderline lecherous as he looked Uraraka up and down. Skin
tight suits could do that and, Riley wagered, that was probably why costume regulations were so tight back home.

"Heroics is the greatest," a miniscule boy named Mineta Minoru said as he gave a thumbs-up to Midoriya which caused Uraraka's crimson shade to return twice-fold.

"I'm liking everyone's styles! Very cool young ladies and gentlemen!" All Might shouted before using his clipboard to cover an outlandish grin. He was deliberately avoiding eye contact with what Riley surmised was Midoriya. A glance over his shoulder at the boy and then at the man had him concluding one thing; Midoriya was an adoring fan if ever there was one. "As I said, we're rather limited on time," the teacher said as he gathered himself and pointed to his side at a set of boxes. "The trial of battle we'll be conducting today is an indoor challenge to prepare you for all sorts of characters. Most villainy does lurk in the shadows, as cliche as that may seem."

He reached inside the box and took out a black ball with the letter A. "The name of our little game is two-on-two team battles as such a dark ball will mean villain and a bright one hero, with letters determining your groupings." He began to hand out the balls one by one. "Inside each building there will be a bomb on the top floor and the objective is simple; the villains need to defend the bomb until the time limit runs out, while the heroes only need to touch it to win." As he got to the back and handed the last ball to Midoriya he paused and gave Riley an awkward look, realizing what had occurred. It wouldn't have mattered even if he did have one extra as the class size was uneven.

"Ah, he can join our group if there aren't enough people, or I can go twice," Kirishima said.

"No, no, it's quite alright young-" All Might paused to check a clipboard of faces. "Young Kirishima. Your homeroom teacher Mr. Aizawa had the forethought to prepare for this exact scenario." He looked back at Riley and gave a smile that set him on edge. "I'll explain once the other students have had their turn, fear not."

Riley reached his hand up to his neck and a spike of chill hit him between the edge of the collar and the edge of the helmet. It was the gloves that had done it so he dropped his hand just as fast. He was keeping them on as a habit now, whatever they did to stop his tremor was becoming rather pleasant. He frowned and a doubt crept into him. Maybe Aizawa did need to get rid of someone and this was his way of doing it. He wasn't as easy to read as his previous teachers had been.

"How are we deciding which group is going against one another?" Iida asked.

"Fret not!" All Might nodded. "We'll be drawing lots," he said and then walked over to a separate box he had prepared next to the one he had retrieved the actual balls from. He gave it a vigorous shake before reaching inside and retrieving one ball marked A and another marked D. He looked around. "First up, the villain team of Bakugou and Iida against the hero team of Uraraka and Midoriya!" Bakugou clenched his teeth and glanced at Midoriya. Anger could not have adequately explained the palpable surge of fury radiating from the former to the latter but whatever that grudge was that he had expressed during the pitch yesterday had stuck around. After all ten sets of balls had been drawn the mood of the group had changed and Riley himself was left watching in silence with a precarious set of thoughts hovering on what had been set aside for him. It was just luck of the draw. The statement did little to help.

"Now students, try to get inside the heads of your respective roles. You can feel free to give it all you got; I will stop the exercise if things get out of hand. Bakugou and Iida please head inside the building marked beta fourteen." All Might pointed in the direction one of the generic apartment complexes and the two of them began to proceed toward it. "Midoriya and Uraraka, you two have will have five minutes to prepare before going to neutralize the bomb, await my signal to start," he explained. "As for the rest of you, follow me to our observation room."
Several dozen video screens lined the walls of the surveillance room. It was exactly what one might expect and easily covered every inch of the β-14 building. Iida and Bakugou had set up shop near what Riley assumed was the villainous device, a kind of bulbous rocket. The way Iida was psyching himself up drew quite a few chuckles, although to he himself it was rather admirable. The sensible student was nothing if not dedicated, which he could appreciate.

"The trial of battle." All Might snatched up the microphone and shouted, "Begins now!" In his enthusiasm he had twisted the device and let go of it with a wince before picking up his clipboard again.

Bakugou was first to act by storming out of the top room and leaving a perplexed Iida behind with the weapon. It wasn't long before he had cascaded down two of the five floors of the exercise building despite it being more maze-like than one would expect. Midoriya and Uraraka had taken a smarter approach by having completely skipped an entire floor through the use of that anti-gravity quirk the girl possessed, although it did leave her looking nauseous. The pair of make-do heroes shuffled around each corner, taking each turn in full before making it. It cost them time but it was easy to see the benefit of the strategy. There was no audio but Bakugou might as well have been screaming through the monitor with the anger present on his face. Then, in spite of obvious rage, Bakugou paused. Footsteps, Riley guessed. He was listening for footsteps. Something clicked on Bakugou's face and his head turned left. Like a shark that had smelt blood in the water, he swept down the corridor.

"He seems like a real live wire. All Might didn't make a mistake putting him on the villain team," Kaminari said. "Does a guy like that really want to be a hero?"

"Can't blame him if he's into it. It is the first real exercise," Sero said as Bakugou approached a hall that put him a mere wall apart from Midoriya and Uraraka. A glint of red dazzled the camera feed and the wall exploded as Bakugou's fist collided with it. Midoriya flew across the room and came to a stop in a heap. The blow had scorched him and taken half his mask with it.

"An ambush?!" Kirishima said. "That's as unmanly as it gets!"

"Ambushes are all part of strategy," All Might answered. "Heroes may have a superior morality but you need to use any trick to win in the heat of battle." Riley could agree with that. It was a dumb idea not to use what made his quirk even viable in the first place, manliness be damned.

"Makes sense with how different their skill levels seem to be," Ashido said as Bakugou launched his right fist in a wide arc and took another wall with him. Midoriya came up underneath and grabbed Bakugou's arm before pivoting and yanking him downward. Bakugou went flying overhead and came down in a brutal smack on the concrete. "Or maybe not," she added.

"Midoriya's got some sweet moves even if he isn't the best at using his quirk," Sero said. "I don't think that guy knew what hit him." Bakugou rose as if to answer Sero and wiped his hand across his dust caked cheek, before grinning wide and leaving no show of pain, only a lust for destruction. Riley gulped. That would have laid me out cold, yet he shrugged it off just like that. Iida's comment felt more misplaced than it had even yesterday if this was how a typical student here was capable of fighting.

"So," Jirou said, startling him. "Got any idea was All Might has planned for you?" She had somehow snuck up right behind him.
He bit his lip as he answered, "No idea." They hadn't talked or texted at all since the first day. "Makes me kinda nervous, not gonna lie."

"I can tell," she said. "I bet it's just going to be ten seconds of All Might beating the shit out of you." He turned to her, not sure if he had heard right. "Kidding." She shrugged off her smirk. "But judging by yesterday I doubt it's gonna be pleasant."

"Yeah. I'm kind of glad though. If I messed up using my quirk on another student, then." He fumbled the word and left it hanging. This was not a direction he wanted the conversation to head.

"I like your costume by the way, very slick."

"Uh, thanks," he answered. It was fortunate the visor hid most of his blushing. "Yours is cool too, it has some kind of trick to it right?"

"Speakers in the shoes and wrists, you'll see soon enough."

"Students," All Might said as he noticed the chatter. "Stay focused on the match, it'll help you do better in y-." The rest of his sentence was cut off by an explosion that drew all his attention to the screen. The match had proceeded far faster than Riley had anticipated. Bakugou had blown several yard more wide holes in the walls of the second floor while chasing Midoriya.

"Bakugou is really gonna kill him," Kirishima said.

"Even if he doesn't kill him he's kinda tossed all that strategy out the window," Sero said.

"Some grudge," Tokoyami murmured.

"It won't just be Midoriya he'll kill at this rate," Riley said and pointed at the swaying pillar near the outer edges of one of the screens. "If the building falls they could all die." It mirrored in it's entirety a memory he did not often remember, and one he wished away just as quick in a haze of displeasure.

"Yes. This is getting out of hand Mr. All Might," Momo said. Her polite voice did little to hide her glare.

All Might's grip on the microphone tightened but he didn't say a word as Bakugou ran down the crumbling corridor near the center of the room. He swung his fist at Midoriya who did the same. At the very last second Midoriya swayed, tilting his arm upward instead of ahead. Air and heat destroyed three cameras as two blasts shook the surveillance room, fire and brimstone obscured the rest before dispersing like a tornado was gathering up every piece of debris and flinging it upward. The storm crashed through all the floors before throwing Iida back from the center of the top room. He cowered in the whirlwind as Uraraka backhanded more debris his way with the help of a pillar twice her size. She threw the pillar after the debris and launched herself over Iida's head at the device, grasping and collapsing onto it.

All Might regained his temperament and swung the microphone toward his mouth. "Hero team wiiiiiiiiins!" He was drowned out as multiple sirens signaled the end of the match.

"Holy crap!" Kaminari stuttered. "That was insane!"

"And it kind of feels like the stakes just rose," Sero said.

"Yeah. This sure is intense for just training," a frog-like girl answered, followed by a croak. Asui Tsuyu.
Tokoyami crossed his arms and looked away. "The winning team is on the floor but the losers are still standing completely unharmed. They lost the battle but won the war as they say."

"Right. I'll be back in a moment to pick up the next students and we can talk about what went well and what didn't," All Might said then left the room. Riley wasn't sure what to think as the remaining stone fell to the floor and the contestants stammered to a halt in a deserted enthusiasm. It was all a bit too much for his taste but did that make it wrong? He wasn't sure.

Three more matches passed in the same span as it took for the first to end and with far less bodily harm. Riley wagered it was probably a good sign as the time for his own match was not far from approach. The first of the matches had been Kirishima's and it had ended with him piling a fist so hard into Ashido's stomach it could well have gone through it had she not been encased in Sero's Cellotape quick. Her partner, the boy named Aoyama Yuga, did not put up a fight after she had gone down. Following that match Tokoyami had made short work of Momo and Mineta despite what appeared to be the most solid defense yet. A hallway filled with mines, sticky balls and all manners of traps did little to prevent Tokoyami from splicing the floor apart and having Tsuyu grab the device, which had ended any resistance before it had even begun.

The third match, which had only ended mere seconds ago, had involved Jirou. In his opinion she had done an even better job than Kirishima. The jacks on her ears had allowed her to locate her opponents through the noises they were making a floor above them near the device. She had gone ahead of Kaminari, who was her partner, and had even made good on her word earlier by using her shoes to vibrate a bald, pointy headed student named Kouda Koji into unconsciousness. The tall student black haired student with the square shaped eyes, Rikidou Satou, was subdued a moment later by an undirected surge of electricity that Kaminari had released up through the wall and into the floor beneath him.

"The final match up will be," All Might said as Jirou, Rikidou and Kaminari rejoined them. "Between young Shouji and young Todoroki as heroes versus Ojiro and Hagakure as villains." The named students left promptly with All Might. Riley did not see much reason for the man to accompany them but perhaps he wished to service upon them some divine nugget of wisdom.

"Got a clever opinion for me?" Jirou remarked as she walked up to him.

Riley paused, then smirked. "Provide ear plugs next time." His ears were still buzzing.

"Hmm," she said, parting a mischievous smile. "Yes, I may well do that. It wouldn't be good for T.V. if I made everyone deaf."

"Thank you for the match," a deeper voice said behind them and they turned to find it Rikidou. "Or, uh, I guess for kicking our asses."

"You're very welcome." She shrugged. "...I guess."

Rikidou cleared his throat then sort of did a step away. "I'll do better next time," he said and mingled back into the crowd.

She gave Riley a look. "What was that about?"

"I think he was trying to say there are no hard feelings," he answered. "I guess," he added then cocked an eyebrow. "Wouldn't you? Guess, that is."

She gave him a punch in the arm. "Guess that," she snapped and scowled at him. Riley shrugged at Jirou and wiped away his bemused expression as he looked back at the monitors. The students who
had gone to set up were already in position although he could not see Hagakure anywhere except by the awkward stares Ojiro was giving the air just to the right of him.

"I'm back!" All Might shouted as he came back in the room. It had been his third time to say those exact words and they were beginning to spread the allure of the man's reputation quite thin. The camera right in front of the microphone hummed in displeasure as All Might changed its view onto the cement field in front of the building. Todoroki and Shouji were awaiting a signal there and so All Might grabbed the microphone and raised it close to his mouth. "You may begin the trial of battle!"

In an instant and undeniably disgusting display six additional arms twisted from Shouji's body and emerged as a collection of what could only be described as human ears. He approached the building and put his ears against the ceiling of the corridor and then moments later twisted his appendages into the form of mouths. His companion nodded and then Shouji took a step back at whatever reply Todoroki gave, before leaving the building.

"What gives?" Kaminari asked. "Is that guy just confident or stupid?"

"Confident would be my deduction," Momo said in a weak voice. There was an incredible exhaustion to her figure like the earlier demonstration had taken it all out of her.

"Two on one is pretty manly, maybe he wants to show off," Kirishima said.

Todoroki turned to the face one of the camera's directly which silenced any remaining murmurs. His red eye hazed up the screen as the student placed a single hand on the wall next to him. A shimmer glazed over his arm and the air around him crystallized before latching onto the wall itself. An unfathomable amount of ice sheeted the wall, corridor, floor and building in a single breath making concrete into crystalline palace. It took the student two minutes to saunter the rest of the way to the top and take the device from the two students who couldn't even move.

"Woahhh," Uraraka said.

"That was... one sided," Jirou said, wide-eyed.

"Calling it one sided sure is kind of you," Riley answered. His own breath was coming out a mist and his neck felt hard to move in the cold overtaking it. "Devastating is more like it." Envy hit him hard in the chest, if only his quirk was so elegant.

"You can say that again, man."

"Now, now, don't get too intimidated. It isn't the quirk, it is how you use it!" All Might said. A short time after the four students had rejoined them and they went over the battle details again, or rather Momo did. Every rundown she did was perfect to the point where Riley did not wish to even offer his own contribution, in fear she might correct him. Once they were done All Might crooked his neck and then went wide-eyed as he peered over his shoulder. "Young Torenagi," the teacher said as he turned to him. "Here I almost forgot you existed!"

"Uh," he answered but the man waved a hand to silence him before switching the cameras to another building they had not yet seen marked $\beta$-35-P.

"It wouldn't do for you to miss out on a chance to participate. Follow me, young Torenagi and the rest of you can stay here," All Might said before gripping him the shoulder and guiding him toward the door. It all caught Riley off guard until they were well over half way to the concrete field.

"I'm sure you are aware that your admission to Yuuei was made under special circumstances," All Might said as he paused halfway down a metal staircase near the exit to the courtyard.
Riley nodded and looked up at the man. "I was told classes are usually limited to twenty students."

"Exactly right, m'boy. It was all rather short notice and as such we had to prepare a separate hostage rescue exercise for this occasion. It's a shame you won't get experience fighting fellow students that are more on your level but desperate times call for desperate measures."

"Desperate measures?"

"I'm sure there'll be more chances in the future so try to make the best of this." All Might coughed as if to hide his next words, "...Even if it does come across as a little unfair." He continued down the steps and opened the metal door, allowing a frigid wake of air to enter the tower. It must have been left over from Todoroki's display.

"Sir," he said, following the man outside. All Might did not appear to hear him and only turned back once they had reached a spot just outside an previously unused building.

"Your opponent will be a teacher who will act as a faux-villain."

"What?" Riley's jaw became tight as a thrice bound knot. "You can't be serious. You aren't serious, right?"

"I am. But fear not!" All Might shouted. "You won't be facing me. Another teacher has insisted on help us out with this exercise." Somehow that didn't calm Riley's nerves; he was still kind of hoping it was a joke. His shoulders drooped, maybe Jirou had been right. "The villain's objective will be to restrain you and make you run out of time before you can rescue the hostage and bring it to this spot." He pointed down at the large red 'X' beneath their feet. "Naturally the faux-villain will be disallowed from using excessive force but make sure to treat this as a real hostage situation. Exercise control and separate the hostage from it's captor."

"But-" Riley said, however before he could continue his panic All Might clapped him on the shoulder hard enough to send a jolt of pain down it, causing him to wince, before leaning down to speak in his ear.

"If I may offer you some advice," he said in a hushed tone like he didn't want anyone else to hear. "A surprise attack might be your best bet, something super-duper flashy, you got it? Your opponent is a fiendishly cunning man. Now, good luck!" There was a clap like lightning rushing away and All Might was gone, not that he could have protested any further with his head spinning like it was.

"This is some bull," he said and clenched, causing his fingernails to gouge into his skin. It was the only way to stop himself thinking too much. This wasn't a joke, no matter how hard he hoped. It should have been one, it all seemed so deliberate. A teacher fighting a student would be unfathomable even at Leineif and those teacher's would have loved to have had a student take a swing at them.

"Formulate a plan Torenagi! The exercise will begin in three minutes," All Might's voice spilled across the courtyard.

Easier said and far easier done. His quirk wasn't what you could call subtle unless the baseline for subtlety was the laser of the city destroyer from Independence Day. Still, big and flashy, that was what All Might had told him to do and he could surely manage that. He removed the gloves, tossed them aside and sat down on the 'X' All Might had indicated before taking a closer look at the building ahead of him. It didn't look different than the others, but there must have been a reason for the 'P' attached to the end of its name. One thing he knew was that these buildings were cheap from the plan All Might had shown them so he doubted the foundations were even properly laid since no
one actually lived there. If opponent was supposedly a "cunning man" then that had to mean that there would be a trap at the entrance. Going through the front would not been an option.

He stretched out his fingers. This would come with some risk but there was little chance he would succeed without risk being involved. If it failed he wouldn't be dragging anyone else down at the very least and it was, he had to admit, kind of convenient with what he had told Jirou. A teacher wouldn't get hurt by his quirk where a student might be. He raised a hand and then remembered the scope. Now was probably the perfect opportunity to use it as he would need all the focus he could muster.

"Begin!" All Might's voice commanded him.

"Unilateral Subduction," he said and his body clenched like it was caught in a vice.

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[Yuuei's Campus – Training Ground β Surveillance Room – 3:02 PM]

"Poor guy, no way he's going to beat a pro hero like Eraserhead," Sero remarked. "Even if he wasn't going to use his quirk."

"Yeah, it's been a minute and he hasn't even moved an inch." Kaminari pointed at the screen, then laughed. "Maybe he's scared,"

"Why would he have his hands out like that if he was scared you knucklehead. Not to mention you already saw his quirk yesterday," Jirou said.

"Pssh," he retorted in outrage. "Well it didn't take nearly as long yesterday did it? Looks to me like it ain't working for him now."

"If you aren't going to say anything meaningful then keep it to yourself. Learning to pay attention might do you some good," Todoroki said. His tone was impartial at best and demeaning at worst.

Kaminari turned to the student. "What do you mean by that?!"

"The building is sinking," Momo said.

The building was sliding like someone had put it on an elevator with the descent becoming rapid as it overtook the second floor and ate it's windows. It took a minute to finish it's uneven descent and then only a smidgen of the original height remained. Around it's edge was wedged a brown line of dirt that had come up through cracked concrete in an attempt to escape being crushed.

His fingers grasped for the scope but the tremor made it hard to push. As he pushed himself to his feet he took two woozy steps and his shoulders zapped a dull ache through his forearms, hands and fingers every few seconds like he'd slammed them in a door. It had worked, for better or worse. It should not have been so easy but even his own estimations had been wrong as the cement the building was made out of was mind-bogglingly heavy. That was the only reason the dirt had made way for it as he had compressed everything beneath it into as fine a paste as he could manage.

Lethargy plagued him as his steps turned into a jog. His breath shuddered and clipped the inside of his visor, wreathing his head in warmth that did not match the ice thickened air. He reached the fifth floor window and raised his hand toward it, intending to smash it. Then he reconsidered and turned the back of his hand toward it. No reason to be quiet, whoever was in this building would be fighting through whatever destruction his quirk had caused downstairs. One quick tap and the glass fell to the floor in shards, then he undid the latch and opened the window before hopping through.
His suspicion spiked as he took in the room. The hostage, as it were, was in the center equidistant from every wall and tied to a person sized pillar with white restraining tape. There was no sign of the guard so in lieu of a better option he curved his approach around the pillar at the right side of the room and then inward. He undid the restraining tape with ease, as it just seemed to crumble in his hand as he ripped at it, then flung the hostage over his left shoulder in one motion. At the second he did so there was a click beneath the hostage pillar and then a sudden whine behind him. A trap that he should have seen. His back ached as the bandages tightened on his chest and right arm. His left arm had been saved by it's handle on the hostage but helped little as he tried to kick away from the pillar.

He tried to free his right arm so he could wedge the rest of his body free but all it did was tighten the bandages grip and threaten to choke him out. He glanced over his shoulder and saw something coming up out of the corner of the back of the room. "Checking for traps is a basic principle in a rescue situation," a familiar voice said. It was Aizawa, no mistake. Riley cursed under his breath, him of all people, the one who could make his quirk useless. He would have much preferred the teacher with the microphone quirk, he didn't seem to take anything seriously but Aizawa wore a deathly grin even now. The teacher reached the edge of the back of the pillar where the trap he had set could be wound back up and took a hold of the bandages there. He would need to tie him up to win, Riley realized, just doing this wasn't enough. He looked away from Aizawa and threw the hostage toward the window with as much might as he could muster. It hit the ground with a thud and rolled several more feet, coming to rest about half a yard from the window.

"Getting the hostage out of my reach won't win you any points," Aizawa said.

He grit his teeth and raged against the bandages and this time managed to move his foot into a spot where he could place it at the edge of the hostage pedestal and push himself out. It gained him about three feet on his assailant and the ability to turn his body despite mummification wrenching on it. His mind flit toward his left hand and the cartridge, toward the pitch and his focus.

"Better think fast hero," his tone became one of mockery. "You won't be able to save a single soul with that impractical quirk." Riley felt the tremor intensify as it swept through his arm and he became adamant in his proposal, if this was the man wanted then he would get it. Just a little longer.

Aizawa placed a hand on the pillar and rounded it while pulling another yard of the fabric in. "Next time I would suggest avoiding an opponent who outclasses you entirely, or at least even attempt to dodge the attacks launched against you."

Riley gave in to the pull of the bandage and swung his leg around in one swift motion, which let him prop himself up against the pedestal and to aim his left hand up like a blaster toward the teacher. "Dodge this," he yelled.

"That won't work," Aizawa said and his eyes began to glow.

Boom.

Aizawa was forced to throw up his hands against the dust explosion that powered out of his gauntlet's cartridge. The bandages fell loose and Riley stumbled backwards, tripping and turning before catching himself on his right arm and tossing himself up into a sprint. He hooked the hostage bag into his fingers as he passed it and hopped the window, landing on the concrete in a stunted cascade of steps unused to the intricate footwork the action required. The 'X'. It was only a few yards away from him now. He made it half a hair before his breath heaved and his body failed him again. His right arm pushed him back up again but no further than that, as now his left arm was being yanked backward by a quartet of nanofibre strands.
"A clever trick won't be enough," Aizawa said behind him before pulling. Riley's shoes skidded against the concrete in resistance but it did little more than keep him upright.

"Bastard," he answered under his breath and twisted against it. That did little, it was reeling him in inch by excruciating inch. "Fucking damn it," he yelled, his body tipping on the edge of succumbing. *Come on, come on. It can't end like this.* He let his quirk flow out of desperation, perhaps if he was lucky he could crush the man's hand and free himself from the grasp. His vision became strained as his earlier lethargy caught up to him and his arm felt as if it would pop from it's socket. Any second now he knew he would give out and-

**Snap.**

Riley tumbled forward instead of falling back and landed on the red crossed marker in a rough heap. Confusion reigned and strain fell out of him in deep breaths. He tipped his head sideways in Aizawa's direction, tattered bandages hung from his shoulders as he rummaged through shredded pieces lying on the ground between them. The cartridge had not put a scratch upon the pro, not that he had expected it to do so. He raised his hand to look upon the device, only to find it still wrapped in a crude chaos of torn fabric. Beneath it his body was more than bruised, his joints ached and his body shook all across. He dropped it again as exhaustion laid waste to any idea of thought or reason.

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**Yuuei's Campus – Training Ground β Surveillance Room – 3:09 PM**

"Hero Team… wins?" All Might said, even he appeared confused at the outcome.

"Damn," Kirishima said.

"Didn't think he had it in'im," Sero said.

Kaminari looked at Sero with an unsure expression. "And here I thought I had only underestimated mister ice man mc freeze dude."

"I thought Mr. Aizawa could cancel out quirks, what gives?" Hagakure said.

"It's rather obvious if you think about it," Momo said. "As I'm sure everyone's worked out by now, Torenagi's quirk compresses everything around it into a small area."

"Yeah, sure, I mean you'd been an idiot if you didn't know," Sero said with half-lidded eyes.

"However." Momo glared at him then inverted her palm and placed her elbow against her hip. "When Mr. Aizawa canceled Torenagi's quirk he released his ability to control the compression in that gauntlet. Since the air had nowhere to go it exploded outward in that burst of force." She dropped her hand, satisfied with her own rationalization.

"He essentially used Eraserhead's quirk against him. I doubt it'd work twice," Tokoyami said.

"I get that," Hagakure said with a shrug. "But what was that at the end? Those bandages practically got shredded."

"Perhaps it was a mechanical failure on Aizawa's part, or Torenagi broke the bandages by using his quirk on them." Momo gave her a dismissive gesture. "You'll just have to ask him yourself."

"Nuh-uh, Mr. Aizawa's scary," Hagakure said, her voice quivering.

"I meant Torenagi." Momo said.
"Maybe Bakugou just isn't as strong as he looks, he couldn't even break one of those," Kaminari said.

"There's no need to rub salt in the wound dude." Kirishima gave Kaminari a slight shove. "Not after what happened earlier." Bakugou hadn't moved an inch since he had gotten back in the surveillance room.

Momo shook her head. "All in all though everything he did was rather reckless, but considering his opponent I suppose there wasn't much choice."

"Quite correct. The hostage was placed in danger but it resulted in a successful retrieval, a situation where you know you're at a disadvantage is a common occurrence for heroes," All Might explained as he switched off the surveillance equipment fully. "Steps must be taken to minimise risk, but that isn't always possible. He was lucky to escape that trap. Now then, I shall retrieve him and the rest of you can meet us down by the exit tunnel," he said before rushing out the door which was now thoroughly cracked by the teacher's repeated use.

"Good work everyone! Apart from young Midoriya there were few injuries, you can go see Recovery Girl in your own time to fix up your scrapes and bruises," All Might said as soon as Riley and the pro had rejoined the group. "However I think that's quite enough for today, I'm going to go share today's battle deductions with young Midoriya since he didn't get the chance to do so in person." The man clapped his massive hands together, then turned and in that same thunderous click sped away beyond what a normal eye could see.

Riley followed the others into the changing room. It must have only been a spell past three thirty but he felt battered and he knew it'd come back to haunt him in the morning. That didn't bother him though, as the question that spurred his mind now was how the hell he had escaped Aizawa. He mulled the thought as he took out the case and removed his helmet before stripping down entirely. Then he put on his uniform trousers but didn't put the dress shirt on immediately, instead he reached for the gloves and watched his fingers as he slipped them onto his trembling hands. It subsided once more but the gloves themselves bespoke nothing of what gave them that gift. It was so… odd. He shook his head at it then reached for the dress shirt.

"Daaamn dude, Mr. Aizawa was rougher on you than I thought," Kaminari said, grabbing for his hand and pulling his entire arm upward. The purple bruise on his left arm retaliated with a tender pain.

"Yeah, maybe I should get it checked out," he answered and pulled his hand out of Kaminari's grasp. It didn't hurt too much but if this Recovery Girl's skill was as good as the school claimed then there was no real downside that he could see. It was probably her who had fixed him up after the entrance exam.

"You're still good to go after class today?" Kirishima asked, pushing up beside Kaminari.

"I am," he said whilst buttoning on the shirt and then slipping on the blazer. The school shoes were pretty comfortable compared to his cleats, so he put those on too despite the exception that had been made for costume shoes. The last things he took out of the costume box before sealing it were his wallet and his keys, as well as his phone. He clicked it to check for messages, as his uncle hadn't said a peep for almost a week and a half now. Booze was not his own indulgence but disappearing acts too, it seemed. The phone made a *chk* sound as it unlocked.

1 – Unknown number – NEW

*Not again.* He shuddered. A vain hope had convinced him that it was random but a second message
pushed the likelihood into absurdity.

*There is no point in hiding our discontent, our dissipation.*

*We are watching.*

*Always.*

- J

"Who the hell is doing this," he said under his breath. His hand shook the more he read it and the more he repeated the lines in his head. Maybe Jirou… no. That wasn't possible unless she'd used a second phone and besides what motive would she have? Not to mention he doubted she would be dumb enough to sign with her initial or write something so downright crazy.

"You okay, man?" Kirishima said and Riley cursed, there were still a lot of people around and he was getting stares. He shouldn't have opened it in here.

He flustered and mashed the lock button. "Yeah, I'm completely fine. Absolutely fine," he answered and tried to fake a smile.

Kirishima swiped the phone from his hand. "Watcha lookin' at?" he asked as he pulled up the phone to his nose. "Huh, I think you forgot to disable facial recognition."

Riley jumped and grabbed for it. "Give it," he said, only to have an elbow shoved in his face.

"Yeah, yeah just a second man-" Kirishima said before his eyes narrowed. "Uhh, is something wrong with your phone or something? Why would someone send you that?" he turned the phone's face toward him, the message that had been on it was now further garbled but still contained some key words. *We are watching. Always.*

"I don't know I think it's just a glitch or whatever," he said and snapped the device from Kirishima's grip. "Or someone's just messing with me, I don't know, forget about it." He turned away from the boy and slammed the case shut before turning to leave the changing room.

"Hey wait up," Kirishima said after him but Riley ignored it.

An annoyance hung on his mind as he walked back to class. He hadn't thought someone like that would invade his privacy so completely. If Kirishima shared what he could read it would just cause trouble and stress that he didn't need and considering he'd just done what he'd done it wasn't a stretch to think he might be inclined to do so. Riley grumbled to himself and a debate waged in his mind of whether to skip the last thirty minutes of the day or not. It would be an express ticket to getting kicked out considering this was a Japanese school, or so his mom would have led him to believe. He decided against it, Aizawa would have his head on a platter if not his ass out the door, not to mention he had already agreed to go with Kirishima after class. A no show would only further his suspicion and maybe by playing it coy he could dispel it instead.

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"The way you shot him in the face was bad-ass dude!" Kirishima said as they entered a cosy alleyway. It was rather charming, fronds of yellow leaves hung above small lanterns that marked the entrance of shops that were cramped side by side together.

"If you say so." Riley shook his head a little as he didn't really share the opinion. If the costume
hadn't held it would have been different.

"I can't really help feeling like my quirks a bit outclassed. We got that crazy guy with the ice powers, Bakugou with those explosions and even this chump over here shooting electricity from his fingers." He pointed his thumb at Kaminari.

"I donno, taking out that pink girl with one swing was impressive, not to mention better than demolishing half the building like Bakugou. It didn't even end up helping him win." Saying it aloud himself seemed kind of ironic considering what he'd done.

"Heh." Kirishima grinned before gripping his right arm with his left like a body builder. "If there's one thing I got its power." He took a few more steps before peering to the left. "Oh, looks like this is the place," he said as he read the sign that hung from a wooden pole. It was a hidden diner they had stopped in front of, tucked underneath a shoddy building that overhung it. The aroma that wafted under the orange curtains stung his nose as he walked up to it.

"We walked all this way just for a meal ticket?" Kaminari looked up from his phone with a frown after his minutes of silence.

"This is the best place around here I'm telling you. I used to come here all the time." He pulled the curtain aside and took one of the five stools lined up against a narrow counter. "Doesn't look like it's changed a bit."

He took the seat to Kirishima's left, against the wall. He'd been to a place like this before with his uncle, and sure enough this one was quite similar. If you leaned over you could see a small heated tablet the chef used to cook, accompanied by a few wooden cutting boards. It was far from a clean establishment, the few pans the chef did seem use were grease-laden and worn down. However he didn't really mind, it was a step above the places you would find near his apartment, finding a good place to eat there had soon led to him cooking almost every meal himself instead despite being terrible at it.

"Whatcha in the mood for?" Kirishima asked, looking at Kaminari and then him.

"You can pick for me, as long as it isn't seafood." Riley could still remember the queasy feeling provided by out-of-date salmon that the owner of a diner had insisted was fine to eat. He hoped that place was out of business now. Either way he didn't want to risk being poisoned again.

"Ditto," Kaminari said. He had once more become too absorbed in whomever he was texting to care.

Kirishima gave a nod and called the chef over, a petite man well into his thirties with a thick pair of plastic gloves on his hands and a nasty scar on his chin that looked like it had been caused by a fishing hook. He slid out his own phone as Kirishima took care of ordering. There was no new message, which was a mixed blessing. His uncle was still missing in action, but at least there hadn't been a follow up to the message a few hours ago.

Stop worrying. If it became more urgent he always had the option of contacting the police. Maybe he could even tell Aizawa, if he was feeling brave, although he doubted the man would take him seriously.

"So," Kaminari said as he looked over Kirishima's back at him. "You gotta tell me how you did that shit with the bandages, we all thought you were a goner when Aizawa got you that second time."

He thought for a moment before he realized what Kaminari meant. "No idea, I just got lucky I guess." As he said it he rubbed his forearm however the bruise was gone now as Kirishima had
dragged him to Recovery Girl before they'd left the school. Now he wished Leineif had someone like her around. In regards to Aizawa, he was sure it hadn't been his quirk, it didn't work like that. If it had done something he had no doubt his hands would have been trembling more than ever after the exercise, but except for the few jitters the gloves had dispersed there hadn't been much.

Kaminari shrugged. "Guess it really was just Aizawa messing up."

"Probably." Though, he found it hard to believe a man like that could mess up.

"That'll be… twenty-seven-hundred Yen," the chef said as he put down the blue encrusted bowls in front of them. Inside was a strange coalition of two types of meat, some kind of beef and mutton, layered on top of onions that covered a gravy-like noodle mixture. It was the smell that hit Riley hardest and made his mouth water.

"I'll take care of it," Kirishima said before grabbing a slim brown wallet out of his back pocket.

"Thanks dude," Kaminari said between mouthfuls.

"Ah- you don't need to. I can pay for myself." His budget might have been limited but he didn't exactly want handouts.

Kirishima turned on him with a serious face. "Consider it an apology for what I did earlier, I shouldn't have grabbed your phone like that. You just looked a bit rattled, sorry."

"You don't need to apologize. It was just a wrong message and I overreacted a bit." His anger had mostly stemmed from not wanting to get other people involved. He was over it now, especially since Kirishima evidently hadn't told anyone what he'd read. It was hard to stay mad at the guy. "I did turn off facial recognition now, though. I didn't even remember turning it on." He grinned.

"Hah, glad I helped a little in the end. Let's forget about it then, go ahead and eat." Kirishima nodded. "And then tell this ain't the manliest meal you've ever tasted in your life."

Riley prodded at the bowl before then swallowing a large chunk of it in one gulp. He couldn't think for some time as the salt and beef flavor hit him. It was followed by a sweet tang infused spice that left his mouth buzzing even after he swallowed. It wasn't something he'd had before and it brought on such a strong urge to wolf the thing down that he did not hesitate to do just that.

"See? What did I tell you, it's good right?" Kirishima said after wiping his own mouth with a napkin. He was already well finished.

"It's frickin' sweet dude, even my mom can't cook like this." Kaminari patted Kirishima hard on the back.

A quick, "Mhmm," was all he was able to get out as he chewed, much to Kirishima's amusement. He needed to remember where this place was, it had somehow just become very vital to his existence.

Kirishima leaned back. "Nothing beats a good meal after a long day."

"We gotta do this more often," Kaminari said as he dropped the plastic spoon on the bench. "I bet some of the girls would appreciate this," he added before drinking what remained in the bowl.

"So America, huh?" Kirishima gave him a curious look. "Must be pretty different from here, I bet. Any particular reason?"

He put down the plastic spoon and looked into the murky bowl. "A promise," he said. Amistake, his
mind corrected him and he shook his head. "It wasn't Yuuei in particular that drew me here, it just
happened to turn out that way. It fell into place so fast that it's still a bit surreal to me."

"I guess if you're going to be a hero you might as well aim high. Still, to come all the way from
America just to be here." Kirishima smirked. "That's pretty manly too."

"How about you? Why Yuuei?" he asked as he emptied the last of the bowl and pushed it away. He
didn't want to be the only one being probed.

"Well, it's not as mysterious as your reason but there was this one hero I always really looked up to."
Kirishima looked stern for a moment. "Ever heard of Crimson Riot?"

"No," he answered, not even in passing.

"Haha, I didn't think so." He began to play with a spare chopstick in front of him and his serious
look replaced itself with a pleased smile. "He's a bit of retro hero, but he's noble and manly as they
get. If I can even become one tenth of the hero that Crimson Riot is, then that's good enough for me.
Yuuei is gonna help me get there." He dropped the chopstick as he finished the sentence.

"That's pretty damn cool, I'm sure you can do it." He was glad to see Kirishima had a more driven
side. Then, as if to break the moment, the chef clanked their bowls together in his attempt to gather
them. He tapped the table as a thought intruded, one that had since that morning. "Why did you
invite me out here anyway?" He had been curious, it was obviously unusual yet he couldn't think of
a reason. Payback, as it were, hadn't been earned until Kirishima had pried into his phone so it
couldn't have been that.

"You seemed a bit lonely," Kirishima said before drinking from a slim cup and slamming it back
down.

"I did?" He blinked and he wasn't sure what to say to that on the account of it not being the case, or
at least not enough to warrant the pity.

"Yep, I gotta agree," Kaminari said with a small tut-tut. "It's written all over your face."

"Ah." He frowned and looked down at the table. "Thanks I guess," he muttered, not wanting to
seem rude.

"Don't sweat it man," Kirishima said without looking in his direction.

Before the awkwardness could extend the chef looked over his shoulder. "Oh you must be Yuuei
students, I should have guessed by the uniforms," he said before he dropped the bowls into a square
sink in the corner.

"Yep, we sure are," Kirishima answered before leaning onto the now empty counter and grinning.
"Still feels good to say that."

"Well make sure you bring all your little classmates here, this place could really use the business." The
chef then let the water rinse the dishes. "Maybe I'll even throw in a discount," he added with a
hearty laugh.

"Wait, this place isn't doing well?" Kaminari asked in apparent disbelief.

"The same old problems Hosu has always had, we might have more heroes these days but there isn't
enough to protect every shop. Villains bring business down like crazy," the chef said. Now it made
sense that the area seemed so empty even before their arrival here.
"Well now that All Might's around I'm sure the crime around here will be gone in no time," Kaminari said before going back to fiddling around with his phone.

The chef's face seemed to light up as he turned at the mere mention of the name, leaving the dishes behind to address it. "All Might's in Hosu?" He held his palm against his chin as he thought. "I guess I can rest a bit easier knowing that."

Soon, the day grew short and he parted ways with Kirishima and Kaminari. His homesickness felt a bit more distant as he trudged the long way home, and the city more welcoming in turn, maybe he could get used to this.

Chapter End Notes

*I don't own BNHA. OC material is my own.
Odds and ends

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

[Eastern Hosu – Side road – 7:09 AM Wednesday]

As Riley turned another left he looked down at his phone again, he was almost there and the sooner he was the better. He wasn't sure if it was due to overusing his quirk or because of Recovery Girl's treatment but he'd had a ragged feeling tugging on his body all morning. Regardless of what it was it made it hard to pay attention to where he was going and the rife distractions of the Hosu streets certainly didn't help. It made him glad he didn't take the train to school as he doubted he would have remembered where to get on and off.

The buildings were growing further spread out as he passed through each subsequent street, which meant he was on the right track. Yuuei was one of those places that held precedence over everything in its vicinity, even heroic agencies and commercial offices. It was far nicer than where he lived, if a bit chaotic, his uncle might have gotten a good deal on short-notice but south-eastern Hosu was still only one step above a slum despite. Still, free was free after all he had no room to argue. He stopped as he hit the corner and, without realizing it, he had become surrounded by other students.

"Ugh, there they are again," a petite boy said as he and his friend passed Riley.

"I can't blame them. Did anyone expect All Might of all people to come and teach here? I sure as heck didn't," the boy's large friend answered. Riley knew exactly who they meant and he could even see them from where he stood, it was a gaggle of goose-necked reporters with camera crews and everything right outside the main gate. They were positively, unrenouncably in his way but maybe, just maybe, by doing his best to ignore them they would pass him over all together, so he pulled up his phone to his nose and crossed the street. His step was deliberate and deadly, not only to avoid hitting straight into something but also because he only had about fifteen minutes and he would be damned if an ever thicker cloud of privacy invading junkies would get him in trouble. It all went well, just until the touch of a hand grazed his shoulder.

"Young sir." A young male reporter with a deep voice bounced in front of him. "You're a student here, correct?" A brown comb over made him look elegant and he was dressed with extravagance beyond that which his pay grade should have allowed. "Do you mind giving me some information about All Might? You could be in the news if you give me a good scoop." His demeanor was posh and mature but he was probably no older than twenty five. There was a pair of black frameless glasses clipped to his breast and at the tips of his fingers there was a weird intrusion; it was like someone had bored holes in them.

Riley paused, though only because the elegance of the man and his brown combover caught him off guard. It as far beyond what his pay grade should have allowed. "I'm sorry, I don't feel like talking to you," he answered.

"That's a bit disingenuous, wouldn't you agree? If you have a good scoop about All Might you could be in the news."

Opening his mouth had been a mistake. "I don't know what you're talking about. Bother someone else," he said and tried to brush past, only for the reporter to grab him by the shoulder.

"That's a shame," the reporter said, pressing into him and reaching for a pair of frameless black
glasses clipped to his jacket. His fingers had weird intrusions, as if he had been boring holes into them. "And here I was excited to meet someone like you in person." A strange smile slid onto his face like something practiced in a mirror a hundred times.

"Get off me." Riley shook out of the man's grasp and scowled at his sheer audacity, who in their right mind would resort to force to get some dumb story? Before the man had a chance to stop him again he gapped it toward the entrance of the school. The gate beeped as he stepped through it, before a small button lit up green. He had his I.D. card to thank for that and also for the subsequent slam as the gate shut behind him, which locked the media and that strange man, out of sight. In his mind, the words remained.

[ Yuuei's Campus – Classroom 1-A – 7:34 AM ]

"I hope you're all well rested after yesterday's trial," Aizawa said as he entered the room and dropped a disorganized folder onto his desk. "I took the liberty of reviewing your battle footage." There was just a hint of a glance in Riley's direction as the man took his seat, or perhaps it was just his imagination, and then he closed his eyes like the light of the room was hurting him before he reopened them upon another student. "Bakugou," he said. "Pull yourself together and stop acting like a kid. You have talent, don't waste it."

"I know," Bakugou said in a low tone. Anger at being called out or at himself? It was an impossible thing to be sure of.

"And as for you Midoriya." Aizawa turned up his nose at the boy. "Is it your plan to break yourself in every battle exercise from now on? Hurry up and learn to control your quirk so you can be an asset, rather than a liability."

"Y-yes, Sir!" Midoriya said. The burn wounds on his arms were gone, but he still had that sling that he'd come back to class with yesterday after the exercise. That had damaged his enthusiasm little, by what it seemed.

"As for the rest of you, remember to keep your heads on straight. It might only be a practice session but in a real scenario you would only get one chance, treat it as such," Aizawa said before flipping open the folder, it had a number of thin forms inside. "Now, I'm sorry I have to spring this news on all of you so soon," the air grew instantly heavier, "but the school has regretfully informed me that we need to pick a class president." Riley exhaled and rolled back in his chair, crisis avoided, he had to admit the man knew his talents.

"Something normal." Kaminari gave a scattered laugh, followed by a huff of air. "I'm so glad it's something normal, you know?"

"Yeah, two more like that and it might just do me in," Hagakure said.

Kirishima jumped up from behind his desk. "Class president's a job for a real man, pick me!"

"I wanna do it too," Jirou said before anyone else had the chance.

"I think I would be most suitable for this position," Iida said before he thrust his hand out between the two desks next to his own like he was trying to wave down a plane.

Aoyama whacked Iida's hand out of the way without even looking at it. "I believe this magnificent position was made for me."

Everyone began to throw up their hands. It made sense, this was a heroics class, though there were a
few exceptions like, he noticed, Todoroki. That guy was an enigma but one Riley had no desire to unravel. He put up his own hand, as throwing in his candidacy couldn't hurt and there was a difference between being the center of attention and being perceived as someone willing to lead. The very second he did, his phone vibrated in his pocket. He kept his hand up, slid the phone from his pocket and glanced at it, since the class was in practical chaos it was safe enough to do so.

1 – Unknown Number – NEW

His grip became all too hard on the phone as he read it but that did not make him delete it like he should have. He put his hand down instead and pushed his seat back a foot to hide the phone better. Letters cascaded down the screen once more.

\[ Y^\prime Q^\prime_h \]

Waste. Your.

Potential.

\[ H^\prime \]

- J

This was a stalker. That conclusion was the first thing that crossed his mind as he read the spooling text. Three times in three days, whoever "J" is must have realised their mistake by now, which meant it wasn't one. The real question that bothered him was why. There was no reason that he could see for someone to message him this, he hadn't wronged anyone had he? He tried to think back but it was in vain as he hadn't been here long enough for that to be the case. Worse still this message was different than the previous two. Those had been downright cryptic but this one was a threat so thinly veiled that he wouldn't have been wrong to check if somewhere out the window a sniper rifle was being aimed at his forehead. His eyes darted around the class but no one was paying attention to him, no one at all, so why couldn't he shake the feeling?

"Quiet!" Iida's roused him out of his entranced state. "It is quite clear we won't come to a fair decision by shouting so I propose something democratic. Is that alright, Sir?" He looked over at their teacher.

"Yes, yes whatever. I don't care how you decide as long as you do it quickly," Aizawa answered before pulling the sleeping bag hidden behind his desk over his head.

"Very well, a fair democratic election it shall be!" Iida said.

'This number has been blocked,' his phone told him. This had to end, Riley thought before shuddering. Then he glanced upward toward the front of the class. Iida was stooped over the results on the board like a hook had been used to wrench out his guts. Most people had voted for themselves, and even Riley had if only to get Iida to piss off for a second. It had to end, these dumb messages, he had to find a way to stop them or better yet just show someone. However that feeling, the trained discomfort upon him, had not left.

"Well then," Aizawa said as he stood and unzipped the sleeping bag. "With that settled, Midoriya will be your new class president and Yaoyorozu your vice-president." He pointed a finger toward the two who were standing at the front.

"F-for real?!" Midoriya stuttered as he looked at the class then at Momo next to him and back again.
"You gotta be shitting me, who voted for Deku?!" Bakugou shouted. His mouth was twisted like some vicious maw.

"Don't beat yourself up Iida, there's always a next time. Um, well there's always a next year, anyway," Uraraka said as she patted Iida on the back and scurried away from Bakugou.

"I cannot argue, I insisted on the sacredness of the position after all…!" It would have been more convincing if he hadn't resolved to slouching on his desk like a thousand years of shame sat upon him.

Kaminari chuckled. "Man, how did you walk away with no votes? You proposed the idea and didn't even vote for yourself?"

"You wanted the position that bad but didn't want to break your own rules," Rikidou said as he rubbed his chin. It was some kind of mix between pity and respect.

"Enough of your squawking. I have one more important thing you all need to take register of," Aizawa said, holding up some of the sheets from the folder. "Midoriya, Yaoyorozu, take one of these and hand the rest around." Riley looked at the sheet of paper as Momo gave it to him, it did in no uncertain terms look like a permission. "Get these signed off by your parents or guardians or whomever and bring them back. It's to allow you to participate in future trips." Aizawa then put the empty folder in his desk. "Speaking of which, there'll be one next week."

"Next week? Where?" Kirishima said, stuffing the sheet in his bag without even reading it.

"Don't get your hopes up too high. It's a place within our general campus, which some of you may have heard referred to as the U.S.J. I'll talk about it more next week so drop it for now." He gave a dismissive wave of his wrist which dropped several faces. Riley wedged the sheet into a notebook before sliding the book into his bag, at some point he knew he'd need to get that signed either by his uncle or mom, preferably the former. It was hard to be excited about it, as a worm tunneling through his mind.

[South-eastern Hosu – Near Riley's Apartment – 4:47 PM]

Riley trudged his way home through the deserted streets with an umbrella in hand. It was courtesy of their new vice class president, Momo, whom had taken pity on them in lieu of the awful weather. He didn't exactly mind the rain, not because he fancied getting wet but because it dispersed the smell of the fishing dock not too far from his apartment. The only parts he saw of it now were the looming cranes peeking over the clumped apartments that ran downward toward a rust sown field of corrugated huts. Beyond them was a slim river that cut south-eastern Hosu into two sections, and to his misfortune his own side was the one that suffered the pains of the industrialisation rather than reaping the benefits.

He came upon a familiar sight as the last of the cranes fell out of view. It was a red house that was growing in significance with each passing day, as every time he saw it he could make out the minute changes of hands hard at work. Despite that the door still had a sign nailed to it that told it was closed for the foreseeable future. It told of no renovation, no date of opening but the idea comforted him. He tried to peer inside however the rain made the windows opaque and the usual light was extinguished, all he could see were the outlines of boxes stacked high to the ceiling. Many of the stores here had met the same fate and only few, he guessed, had even the slightest chance of re-opening. It was like the chef had said and something told him poverty only compounded the effect of villainy on things like this, especially in a city more than thrice as large as Leineif had been. Even that importance the chef had put on All Might seemed misplaced, the hero was larger than life but he was still just a man.
He stepped away from the door of the red building. It was a shame, truly, as almost all the buildings in south-eastern Hosu bordered on antique and in that sense it was the last bastion of the authentic style that was so prominent in Kyoto where some of his other relatives lived.

As he turned the corner his own apartment looked him in the eye, far down the remainder of a one way street. It was the kind of place that from the outside you might guess was completely uninhabited except by lowlifes and tweakers, however that notion was unraveled by the constant drone of a static-y T.V. and the occasional bark of a dog. It hadn't been so obvious when he'd moved in here but in the same way as the other buildings it was charming. Sparse trees that had escaped trimming lined the bottom of the complex, growing from the base level up to the second on which he lived. The wooden pillars the trees kept hidden looked like they'd been reconstructed more than once, rather out of necessity than aesthetic but it gave them a layered black and white grout.

He labored to pull himself up the metallic stairs one step at a time because he didn't want to lay himself low like uncle Alo had the first time he'd shown him where he'd be staying. The railing was rusted and the paint was flaking off and as he reached the top he was met with a grayed hallway that connected the disparate rooms of numerous residents with only a few wavering lights. The door of his apartment clicked as he slid the key into the lock and gave it a hard shove, which let him inside. He slammed it shut behind him and the room lit up as he flicked the switch next to the door before dropping his bag near the coat rack. Home, sweet sort-of home, he mused. At least if he walked this far for three years he'd have some mean quads to show for it.

He folded his umbrella then put it aside as well, before lethargy came upon him all at once. His fatigue from that morning hadn't left him and their heroics class, while less glamorous, had still been exhausting. He needed to relax, he decided, as he took one of several hangers off the door that connected to his bedroom. His closet didn't have enough space for hangers, though that didn't mean the apartment was small, it was just big enough for his uncle and him to both live in. And well, since his uncle refused to actually live in the place he paid for that meant Riley could spread himself out as he pleased. Momo making those umbrellas had been a godsend, he saw his blazer was almost untouched by the rain as he took it off and the few droplets that had fallen on it would dry by the next day. He wiped his hand across the front of it, smoothing it out with a deliberate firmness. It was a thing his mom had insisted he do though he didn't much care for the neatness of a goddamn uniform he was requir-

He let out a yelp, pulling his hand away and letting the blazer drop to the floor. It felt like a bee had stung him. There was a small red splotch on his finger and a single bubble of blood that he wiped away before looking down at the piece of clothing again. There was nothing odd about it at first sight as he grabbed it by the collar and dragged it onto the wooden table once more. He peeled the lapel back before dragging one finger over it at a torturous speed. He got about halfway before he felt the slightest prick and pulled away. Something sharp was stuck in there, just underneath the surface of the fabric. He pushed the fabric down on either side with two fingers and surely enough it revealed a small spine, like something you would find on a cactus but longer, needle-like. He gripped it with his thumb and forefinger and pulled it sideways the same direction it had been rammed in, he didn't want to break it. It looked synthetic, like plastic, and when he held it against the light it was wholly invisible to the naked eye. It was sharp enough that he was curious how he had gone until now without noticing it, let alone how it had even gotten there. Had someone placed it there without him knowing? The thought was simultaneously terrifying and utterly silly. Now he knew he was being paranoid. He dropped the spine onto the table, picked up the blazer and returned it to its rightful hanger before proceeding to deal with the rest of his uniform so that he could change into something more comfortable. After a few minutes he was done, and collapsed into the slim, fetid couch with a yawn.

Normally he would practice his quirk now but for once he had no desire or energy to do so. The
tremors had been getting worse, which meant he was overdoing it. No doubt stress over the whole situation he found himself in was exacerbating it. He would resume tomorrow, during lunch. He reached down beside his leg in search of a cable that he knew he'd left there. Surely enough he found it and he plugged it's flat and white end into the underside of the phone causing it to beep to let him know it was charging.

He scrolled through movies screens at a time, the site he was on was rather user unfriendly but in lieu of a T.V. it would need to do, he was fortunate this place had free wifi despite how run down it was. Perhaps it was to sweeten the deal. As he made a choice the screen increased in width to accommodate. Half a second later he couldn't even remember the title of the movie through his tired mind however he knew why he had picked it. He had a thing for movies with war scenes, not because he cared about the political nor even the conflict but rather because of the build-up. There was something about that moment in a film where two opposing armies stand ready to fight, about that stillness; the anticipation of the battle to come. It gripped him, so to speak, by transforming something he couldn't really hope understand into something more visceral. As the film began he could already feel himself dozing off, settling into an earlier schedule didn't seem like it would be a big deal at this rate.

BOOM.

Riley jumped up and the phone hit the floor with a whack. As the brief disorientation passed he realized what had happened and reached for his phone. It hadn't broken on the hard wooden floor but he'd have to be more careful in the future. He swung his legs and stood, a chill washed up from the floorboards making his toes curl, not two hours had gone by since he'd passed out but the remaining sun had already sunk away leaving only the rain and cold behind. For a moment he considered just going to sleep for real but he was wide awake now, which meant he should try to be at least a little productive.

He didn't consider himself a slacker and there was already homework he had to do despite it barely being the third day of the semester. It was unsurprising. The foundational heroic course used up most of their day which meant it was only logical that the more ordinary classes would become a time crunch, at least compared to his old curriculum. He would do what he needed to do, if he flunked out it wouldn't be due to his grades. He lurched to his bag that he'd dropped earlier and rifled through it until he found two books in which he'd recorded the majority of his notes. In addition, he grabbed a heavier text off a shelf among the other books he'd borrowed as well as some he'd bought for cheap. He dropped the bag next to the wooden table and the books on top, along with a fine wooden pencil, before he turned to the latest page. He was greeted with both the fundamental organic chemistry drawings and equations they'd done, as well as a doodle he'd scrawled in the corner out of boredom. They were still in the stages in class where Cementoss was making sure everyone was up to speed. So far they'd only been introduced to two other teachers, namely Midnight, a... voluptuous heroine who taught mathematics and Present Mic whose attempts to teach them English mostly resulted in rending their ear drums with his voice amplification quirk.

It took him about an hour to finish what he absolutely had to do however that wasn't because it was difficult, much of what they were doing he'd already covered at his old school, rather it was that his attention kept drawing itself to the sliver of plastic spine still resting next to him. He wasn't quite sure if to throw it out or keep it, the mere sight of it bothered him and logically there was no harm in chucking it but that was kind of like admitting that whoever was sending him those messages was getting to him. It wasn't like they weren't, but he liked to think himself less unnerved than that. He reached for the small piece but stopped at the sound of a low multi-faceted Brrrt that sprung from his phone that let him know someone was calling him. Maybe it was his uncle, that'd be a huge relief right about now. He almost instinctively hit answer as he grabbed his phone but stopped himself.
There wasn't a name on the call but rather a deep emboldened **Unknown Number** gracing the dark screen.

He'd blocked the number, he knew he had. Perhaps he'd pissed whoever "J" was off enough for him to call directly now, and not to mention with a different phone. It didn't matter really as the real issue was if he should answer or not. He decided against it, he knew it'd be stupid to do so and that it would be better just to let it ring out. If this was the length the person was willing to go to though, what was going to happen next? There was no question, this person was either a stalker or sick in the head, probably both. Maybe he should just answer and tell the person to fuck off.

Then, the phone ceased as the call died, an anxious breath left him in a rush and he found himself more shaken than he'd ever been, even after each of the messages. He needed to call the police, or tell Aizawa or something. Whatever was going on was beyond- *Thump, thump, thump*, the door rattled as a fist hit it three times. He stood and retreated from his seat toward the other end of the room. A million variations of the same thought and panic hit him at once, each a slight prick more nerve inducing than the last. *Calm down, you're meant to be a hero right? Heroes don't panic.* The thought slowed him albeit only a bit. *Whoever it is, they won't risk breaking in here. You saw cameras around, didn't you?*

Still entranced, he forced himself to inch toward the door and along the way he grabbed the metal bat from the shelf, letting it swing behind him out of sight. The door had one of those chains on it, to prevent forceful entrances, but he doubted that would stop a determined intruder. He could hear his own withered breathing become louder the closer he got. The door *thumped* again one more time before he looked through the hole, he couldn't see anything at first; maybe the person had hidden themselves to the side so that he wouldn't be able to spot them. Then a glare of white came into view, crowned by the face of his uncle with his sleazy handkerchief rolled against his nose. He looked annoyed, or perhaps irritated at being made to wait.

"Hey, kid!" Uncle Alo called in a voice only one degree below a full blown shout. "Open up will ya? I'm losin' fingers by the minute out here." He tapped the door again, to which he responded by dropping the bat to the side and undoing the latch in one fell swoop, he'd never been so happy to see that rounded face before.

"Alo," he said as the door opened and the dirty white suit garnished the frame.

"Took your sweet time." He rubbed his hands together and wiped his black, somewhat greying, hair back. "You didn't pick up," he said while allowing himself inside.

"Sorry I didn't know it was you. I wasn't sure when you were coming back." His heart was still pounding. He'd been given basic training in stopping that back at Leineif, but he found it impractical to execute. And by that, he meant he'd completely forgotten it.

"It's fine, it's fine," the man said he pushed past him. "Broke my phone up in Ibaraki, they don't make em' like they used to." He stumbled around a bit before taking the seat he himself had been using only a few minutes prior.

"Are you going to stay the night?" He let the door fall shut which sealed away the freezing air outside as well as whatever the hell else was out there. For all he knew it could be an invisible man, like in the movie, considering what was happening the idea was becoming ever so plausible.

"Nah, nah. I just wanted to come in for a pit stop, letcha know I'm still breathin'. I know you don't want an old geezer like me hanging around," the man said with a smile and a cough.

He shook his head. "That's not true." Especially not right now. It was a gigantic relief that Alo was
still alright, although the man did look like he'd frozen half to death out there. "There's actually something I wanted to ask you."

The man gave him a look, like he wasn't sure if he was serious. "You aren't getting in trouble are you?"

"No, that's not it," he replied before bobbing down and proceeding to fumble through the remaining books still in his bag.

"I used to fight a lot back in my high school days but I doubt they're as forgiving in those expensive quirk schools of yours," Alo said as he watched him. "If you throw a punch, make sure you can finish it. I don't have the means to bail you out."

He found the sheet he was looking for, still stuck between the pages of his English notebook. Fortune had been on his side, he had to admit. "Could you sign this for me?" he asked as he waved the paper in his uncle's face and pretended to not have heard the man. He didn't think Alo could actually fight, even if he acted tough, but it was probably wise not to question the man or the advice.

"Eh?" He yanked the piece of paper from his hands.

Riley made an innocent shrug. "It's so I can go on trips."

"As long as it ain't costing me. Make some coffee will you?" The man patted his suit jacket a bit before reaching inside for the pen he'd found.

He got up and walked to the kitchen. He found the bag of instant coffee behind the kettle, which he pushed on while grabbing for it. There were a few sachets of tea beside it, he'd used a handful of them but the distinct Bergamot flavor of Earl Grey wasn't something he particularly enjoyed. He heaped two three quarter teaspoonfuls into an empty cup as the kettle clicked. He tipped it into the cup and tried not to burn himself on the steam that erupted from it. He walked back to his uncle with the drink in hand, which his uncle took and swapped for the sheet. His uncle had scrawled Torenagi Aloysius, with generous breadth, along the bottom.

"Thanks," Riley said as he put it back where he had gotten it from. That was one problem he wouldn't have to worry about at least.

"Surprised you didn't just get Kumai to sign it," the man said before settling back into his surrogate seat again. He knew the man hated his full name, hence why he shortened it and avoided using it when possible. Not something he could do for this.

He sat down beside his uncle. "I didn't want to get mom involved in something so trivial."

"I see." There was a weird displeased scowl on his face. "I'm sure she wouldn't mind, even with that ergo-maniac around."

"It's not that simple." It wasn't a topic he wanted to broach.

"Riley," Alo said as he turned on him. "Don't be so hard on yourself, yeah? Ain't your fault." The words left his mouth with some force, like he wanted to believe them but couldn't quite.

He shifted in his seat. "Yeah. I know." There was a bid of understanding on his uncles face, one he hadn't been treated to in a long time and not ever directed straight at him before. It left him stirring and dizzy.

"Ah, before I forget," Alo said as he pulled back the front of his jacket and removed another elastic
bound envelope. "Your allowance for now. I already took care of everything else so don't worry about it."

He hesitated to say something and felt beaten over the head by the fact he'd let the messages get the better of him. Had it not been Alo and instead the stalker he could have been in serious trouble, maybe even dead. "There is something else I need to show you." He snagged his phone from the table before the man could so much as ask.

"Yeah? Make it quick then," he said before he chugged the coffee down. The man had to have had a throat made of iron considering how hot the beverage must have still been. A few deft pushes unlocked the phone. As hypocritical as it made him feel, getting his uncle involved was different, far different than say Kirishima. The man deserved to know what was going on, it involved him too and was wiser than going to the police. He found the message from that morning, the only one he hadn't deleted so far, and pressed to open it. It loaded for a second before a small box popped up; Error, unable to retrieve message data. Please try again later, he tried a few more times to no avail.

"Well? It's not girl trouble is it?" Alo said and Riley returned him a reddened look of disbelief which caused the man to chuckle. "Hey now don't give me that." He laughed. "I was quite the lady killer when I was your age."

"I don't doubt it," he answered, his uncle looked like he'd been born well into his forties. He turned his attention back to the phone. He'd never had trouble opening his messages before. Perhaps he hadn't given the stalker enough credit, if the messages became invalid after a while it would certainly help cover his tracks. Vrrm, the phone vibrated in his hand, he almost dropped it out of fright.

1 – Unknown Number – NEW

Try. Again and so on. He will be first.

-JJ

His mouth was filled with ash as it confirmed his fear; blocking the number really had done nothing. No, worse still, "J" was very well aware of what he'd tried to do and now had retaliated.

"Well, whatever it is it'll have to wait till next time," Alo said as he got up and walked to the door. Dizzy tilt washed Riley's vision as he realized there was nothing he could do. He couldn't tell his uncle anything. "Chin up lad, you look like someone died. Focus on school and I'll be back before you know it." The man reached for the metal handle.

"Uncle." He forced himself to get up and follow, the cement in his joints made them so rigid it was painful to do so. The paralysis was aided by a hindering stream of emotions, and a heavier conclusion his mind had reached in a matter of seconds.

"I'll even give ya a ring to let you know I'm okay, so no leaving me hanging next time," Alo said while hoisting the door left, into the frame, so he could open it. Then the door shut and his uncle was gone. There was nothing he could do but stand there, powerless as he was. Self-revulsion filled his stomach. He'd made things so much worse. His fist slammed into the side of the shelf by the door, and the shrine maiden sitting there toppled to her knees. There was no pain in it; the only thing that lingered was the hole in his stomach and the cold in his bones.
*I don't own BNHA. OC material is my own.
Stakes

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

[South-eastern Hosu – Riley's Apartment – 4:42 AM Thursday]

He dropped out of his bed with a smack as he landed on his face, waking him instantly. "Goddammit," he said as he rubbed his forehead in pain and realized how gross he felt. An uncomfortable cold sweat had clung itself to his entire body.

In the little sleep he'd managed to grab most of it had been riddled with nightmares. His sister had been there, that wasn't unusual. Alo had been there too, which made sense, considering. However an unexpected third had joined them, the young reporter with the brown comb over. For a time he just sat there, allowing the ringing sensation that it always left him with to fade away. Then, when he felt like himself again, he checked his phone; he needed to know what time it was.

The screen lit up and a sigh of relief left him as there was no new message. Did that mean "J" felt so satisfied in his victory that he had no need? He'd searched the apartment before he'd slept, but there was nothing he could find to hint at a listening device or camera. He shook himself and got up. He wasn't going to solve this by giving into ceaseless, meaningless introspection. If there was one thing he could at least try and do it was to catch "J" in the act, red handed, before he struck. No one was perfect and he had an idea.

He knew he wouldn't get any more sleep that night and, although tempting, it was already close enough to the actual time he should be waking up. So instead he threw the phone back on the bed and stumbled into the bathroom to begin getting ready.

[Yuuei's Campus – Class Building Third Floor Hallway – 7:13 AM]

His peace and quiet had only lasted a few hours because another message had arrived as he'd left the apartment and he'd looked at it several times since then probing its implication.

_Do you really think you can run_?

_Ev ry second we come elscer._

_Jjj jjJ_

There was no doubt he was running out of time, yet the message did little to enlighten and much more to scare him. It was probably all an attempt to keep him riled up as to stop him from thinking straight. He took a deep breath. They were still just text messages; words on a screen, but now that the stakes were so much higher they held him so far more. A petty notion crossed his mind and he hit the forward button, it blinked in response as a loading bar popped up. After a moment it froze before being replaced by a thick malformed box.

_Sorry, your message could not be sent at this time. Please try again._

It was worth a try, but he'd need to be far more clever. He put away the phone and looked ahead,
before knocking back one of the three doors that still separated him from his classroom. It was annoying and inconvenient that he always entered the building from the worst possible side but he had no choice because it was closest from the gate he took to get here. It lengthened the trip by a few minutes. He felled another door the way he had the first, two to go, however this time he tripped as he tried to stop himself mid stride as he hadn't expected Jirou, of all people, to be in his way. She wasn't barring it, or ambushing him, or anything of the sort and she didn't give him any attention, so he assumed she wasn't even aware of his presence. Odd for a girl whose quirk was based around sound.

"Hey," he managed to say after getting over a sense of awkward indecision. He wasn't entirely sure if to bother her because she was busy looking at a selection of colorful fliers pinned to a cork board. She looked at him, then back at him again. "Yo, you're early today," she said.

"I had some stuff to take care of." He pulled on the strap of his bag. What he had gone and done was something which was minor at best, however it was better than nothing.

"Hmm, same." She shrugged. "Semesters only just started and there's already so much going on."

He was caught off guard by the mundane but then he remembered no one knew what was going on. In a bid to play along he kept his face as straight as possible, he'd already messed up once. He glanced at the notices, she was right. There were at least a dozen activities pinned up including stuff like basketball, book and even shape shifting quirk clubs.

"No kidding." He eyed a simple form regarding a baseball club. It was run by some third year named Mirio, he read before dismissing it. He could hardly allow himself to be distracted like that.

"I'm a bit bummed about losing that election," Jirou said.

He looked at her, partly out of curiosity. "Almost everyone voted for themselves, except Iida I guess. What were you expecting?"

She carried a pout on her lips as if unsatisfied. "Tokoyami and me both ended up voting for each other, which resulted in well… nothing."

There was no way to hold back a chuckle at that. "I didn't peg you as the kind to care about some silly election. At my old school it was usually a battle to have less responsibility, not more."

"Don't get me wrong. I'm not into the whole thing but… we're at Yuuei right?" Her shoulders sagged.

"Is everything alright with you?" The irony of the question didn't pass him by, but he wasn't going to pretend not to notice her blatant frustration.

"Yeah, it's nothing," Jirou said as she cocked her head at him. "There's no need to pretend to be interested."

"Sorry." He almost stuttered but played it cool. "It's fine if you don't want to say anything." He regretted it now, it hadn't been his intention to come off that way.

She folded her arms and gave a chuckle of her own. "Relax, I'm just messing with you."

"Oh," it was all he could manage to say in retort. Stupid, stupid, he could kick himself.

"Besides I should be asking you that question," she said then reached for one of the fliers. Before
one of the tags ripped she stopped and pulled her hand back, having changed her mind about the A.V. club. Perhaps she found it too lame.

"What?"

Jirou dropped her hand. "I guess now I'm the one being rude," she said as she looked at him. "Sorry." He shook his head and didn't answer. His acting wasn't half as good as he he'd hoped. "By the way, if your tie bothers you so much just loosen it. I doubt anyone will call you out, not with Bakugou running around with his pants sagging halfway down his ass." She smirked at him, then put her attention back to the board.

He dropped his hand to his side too fast, he hadn't even realized he was pulling on his collar again. "It's not that it's too tight, I'm just not used to it."

"Didn't you go to some private prep institute?" Skepticism had invaded her voice.

He cocked his head. "We had a dress code, but definitely not something like this. The only clothing that even resembled that was the emblazoned jacket he kept and even that had been a gift. "Leineif isn't exactly what you'd call prestigious. It isn't even really a prep school, the word just sounds prettier."

"I see. Must be nice being so far from home all the time." Jirou finally pulled a sheet from the board, after writhing decision. It was the A.V. one again, though why she had taken the whole thing rather than a single number he wasn't sure. "I can't even imagine that kind of freedom, not having your parents breathing down your neck."

"It's not that great." He turned his gaze down and away, maybe if they were then "J" would never have even have tried in the first place. He dismissed the thought almost as soon as it crossed his mind, it made him feel ungrateful.

"If you say so." She looked at her phone. "…Shit. We're gonna be late, come on," she said and turned on her heel, down the hall toward the class.

He tugged at his neck again and then did indeed loosen his tie just a little. He knew he needed to get a grip.

[**Yuuei's Campus – Training Hall δ – 1:37 PM**]

"Put your backs into it ladies and gentlemen!" All Might shouted as he walked along the sideline, next to the bench he himself was sitting on. He didn't remember how long it'd been since he'd last played dodge ball of all things, athletics had certainly been required at his old school but it had never involved playing a simple game like this, drills had been more their style.

"Kirishima you're out," the man said with a point of his thumb after the ball clipped the student across the shoulder, it still held traces of smoke it had gained from the throw.

"At this rate Bakugou is going to put half of us in the hospital before the semester is over," Kaminari said as he took the seat beside him.

"With that temper? Yeah I could see it. He's like a time bomb," he said.

"Tough break dude," Kaminari said as Kirishima fell beside him with a pant. He gave the guy a look of pity. "I'm glad as hell I didn't have to go against that monster."
"He's just a little… competitive. That's all," Kirishima said as he watched the remaining competitors struggle, after his elimination only Tokoyami, Momo and, surprisingly, Mineta remained.

"A little?" Kaminari said in a higher pitch, like he hadn't heard right.

"I can't really judge him, I'm the same way." Kirishima shrugged before rolling out his shoulder.

"It's no way for any student to behave, let alone a Yuuei student. As the class president you should have a word with him Midoriya," Iida said. "I'm sure with some reasoning he'll see the error of his ways."

"M-me?!" Midoriya answered. He hadn't even registered the green haired boy sitting behind Iida as he was hidden from sight. The sling he'd been wearing from the Tuesday was absent now. "I don't think that'll work… Kacchan has kind of always been this way."

"Disturbing." Iida folded his arms. "Still…"

"He's probably more likely to bite your head off then listen. I've seen his type before," Rikidou said. He had the right of it, even with only two people left on the opposing team Bakugou's style could be described as animalistic. There was no mercy in it, or sportsmanship, only the need to reach a goal. Whatever had irked him on Tuesday after his loss was far gone now.

Kirishima grinned. "Well, you can't say he hasn't got a real manly spirit."

"I'm not sure why you're so impressed, our vice class president is really the one doing all the work," Jirou said with a tone of inexplicable boredom.

As if to confirm it Momo flung the ball she'd been holding, setting it sailing straight at Mineta's face, unlike the previous times it didn't stick to the gooey clots that Mineta had on his head but rather slid right past it.

"Mineta you're out. Nice work young Yaoyorozu." All Might gave Momo a thumbs-up.

"Thank you Mr. All Might," Momo replied with the slightest nod of acknowledgment.

The ball rolled up to his feet, he regretted grabbing the thing as it did. "I think you're right," he said to Jirou as he wiped the Vaseline like solution from his fingers. "She might be more dangerous than an entire team combined." The vice had gotten other competitors much the same way, first Hagakure with some chalk and then Ashido with a net like contraption. There was little doubt she would have gotten Kirishima too if Bakugou hadn't beat her to it.

"You'd think teach would set up two games at a time so half of us wouldn't be bored out of our minds." Kaminari groaned.

"He probably thinks it's too dangerous, considering what happened last time." Tsuyu said and she was probably correct, All Might was being more cautious than last time.

"Tokoyami you're out!" All Might shouted. "Congratulations red team," he added with a clap. "Now shall we move onto the second group?" He turned to the bench.

"Good luck man," Kirishima said, hitting him on the shoulder just a bit too hard for him not to feel the sting. He pulled his hand up through his hair and down the back of his neck and then stood, maybe something ordinary was exactly what he needed. Another message had arrived less than an hour ago and he was finding it hard to deny their increasing frequency.
He pushed the curtain back and took a look outside. The parking lot behind the apartment was empty as it always was with the exception of a single man attempting in vain to remove the caked up frost from his windshield.

He let go and the curtain fell back into place before he went and grabbed his bag, swinging it over his shoulder, then along with it he took the small USB that had sat on the table throughout the night. The button on its side beeped as he touched it which signaled the end of its recording, it was like any a student might have had, if a bit archaic. That served his purpose since he could hide it anywhere in sight, though he'd have to listen to it to and from school if he wanted to avoid weird looks.

He whacked at his door before he opened it to loosen it from its frame, the lock clicked. Then he unbarred the chain, a precaution and pulled it inward allowing the cold air to hit him. It was a positively chilling morning that he could only bare through due to the thick woolen undershirt he snuck under his uniform, nothing anyone could see just by looking at him. It was with careful step that he went down the stairs and along the footpath, if there was one thing more dangerous than a wet night it was the frigid slip that it left the morning after. He held the USB to his ear as he walked, as he expected no one bothered him with so much as a greeting as he went on with his business, he doubted anyone around here had a reason to act so cheerful.

As he passed the red store again he gave it another glance. He couldn't be quite sure but something had changed about it, perhaps the boxes inside had moved or someone had given it a new lick of paint. It was neither of those things, rather what it was hit him as he stopped at the corner to cross, as he looked back over his shoulder within it the light was on. A single light bulb suspended from a frill cord on the ceiling, it lacked a shade which made it look rather eerie.

He didn't have time to idle on it. If the place was indeed being fixed up then his assumptions a few days prior may have been unfounded. He would be glad if they were, things wouldn't seem so bleak then. He knew he would get another message soon and when he did he would call his uncle. Not to let him know of it, but rather to check that nothing had changed, he would rather his uncle think him needy than allow anything to happen to him. For once he turned right at the intersection that would inevitably have taken him to a bridge. Where he crossed made little difference to his actual destination, however the different route would lend him some privacy to listen to the recording, albeit at the expense of speed. It was a long thing to listen to but he had plenty of time. It was maybe ten minutes of walking before his recording stumbled upon something in its sped up state.

"What in the hell?" He stopped dead in his tracks as he mouthed the words. It was in all manner of ways something tiny and piercing. It sounded like a creaking noise so to put it, like a metal cog running against another, and it ran for maybe three seconds before it went silent, once again leaving only his unconscious breathing behind.

He rewound the recording. It was rather lucky it even had that function with how much it cost him but he doubted the things were in high demand. He'd gone out of his way to pick it up, making sure that he was alone when he did so, or at least as far as he could tell. The sound came again, confirming it wasn't merely a glitch in the recording. Still, strange as it was it gave him little to work with. It could have been a truck or something passing by his apartment, or perhaps a washing machine on the fritz downstairs.

It was doubtful it was either of those things but perhaps it was only his mind playing tricks on him, making him want to believe he'd found something. He shook his head and put the device in his pocket, the rest could wait until later, if he didn't hurry he was going to be late no matter how fast he walked.
He found himself on the roof, as he had many a lunch period over the first week. It was the only place he could find to prevent himself being constantly interrupted or stopped. Practice would distract him a bit, and he'd been putting that off. He couldn't let himself get rusty despite what was happening. It was far more effective than studying at this point.

"Compress." A pang hit the air as the can he aimed his hand at was crushed. It became one of several now decorating the floor. "Compress." Another pang. This time it came from a hollowed out softball. He'd had no further success in listening to the recording. The creak that had initially promised something had taken over the entire thing an hour later, in fact it had become so non-stop that he had little hope the thing wasn't actually just busted. He should have figured that would happen.

"Compress." A crack erupted as a plastic container suffered the collapsing effect. Each consecutive use of his quirk was followed by a deep breath in and a deep breath out. It formed a rhythmic motion much akin to meditation. It did clear his thoughts, although only enough to let others in. Maybe it was his stalkers doing, he reasoned. He could mess with his phone which wouldn't put a recording device out of question. If that was true then his paranoia would have been right all along. He shook his head, he didn't want to think about the implication of that, he didn't want to lose his nerve.

Pang, the sound came back. This time he didn't say the word to accompany it. He didn't know what Yuuei's staff would think of him practicing up here, but somehow he doubted any of them would find out with how noisy the school was. The thought of Nedzu sitting in his office wondering about a constant dinging noise coming from his ceiling brought a grin to his face. He unclenched his hand as the final object fell to bits and crumpled to the floor. Then his concentration faltered, at least the minimal amount he'd been able to maintain. The tremors in his hand returned, zipping through his fingers. The messages hadn't been the only thing getting worse. It wasn't like they were a new thing but the tremors had usually disheveled themselves in the past, now they stuck.

"Ever since Tuesday," he remarked to no one in particular. It was probably just stress; his body hadn't had a lack of physical exhaustion all week after all.

He slipped the gloves back on, causing the immediate suspension of the symptom. He held his hand up to the sun and looked at the gloves. At this point he wondered if maybe it was just placebo, but it was too quick for that. Nedzu had said his quirk was dangerous and in fact he'd deliberately used it as a reason. Still that wasn't something some magical gloves would fix, quirks differed from person to person but the one true common factor is that they were all physical functions; part of his body's physiology. That's why he couldn't just think his compressions into being, why his hands were part of the equation.

A loud clang bounced against the ducts of the roof, not of his own making. He ducked behind one of the vents, barely big enough to hold him behind it. Someone had opened the rooftop door. All he heard was the footsteps. If it was a teacher he was done for, now he regretted being so cocky earlier. He held his breath as the steps came close then stopped.

"Bah!"

He jumped as someone grabbed his shoulders. He would probably have fallen several feet back had he not felt silly in doing so. He turned to look, expecting to see Midnight or some other teacher who had taken pleasure in his torment, but was met only with Jirou's face.

"Did I getcha?" She wore a smug grin that had lingering sentiments from her attack on him just a second ago.
"Yeah, yeah… very funny," he answered before rushing to pick up the trash he'd left behind in his wake.

"What are you doing up here?" she asked as she watched him and shifted her weight from one foot to the other.

"Uhh, nothing… yep, nothing at all." He could have cuffed himself for how lame he sounded.

"There's no point lying. I've been hearing noise from up here all week already," Jirou said causing him to freeze with his guilt.

Right, she must have heard the dings. He looked at the girl, her long ear cords were almost touching the floor as if to taunt him. He dropped one of the pieces he'd just picked up, "…Fine you caught me," he admitted before throwing the bits and pieces into his bag to dispose of later. "I was practicing my quirk. Sorry, it's just a bit… um." He wasn't sure how to finish the sentence and instead threw his bag against one of the outer fences and lowered himself to sit against it. The jig was up as far as he saw it, so there was no point to leaving now. "Just try and keep it a secret, yeah?"

"It's cool. I won't tell anyone," she said. "It's a much better reason than that goofball Kaminari and that pervy little grape Mineta had for sneaking off alone."

He could guess what she'd found them doing; he had already overheard complaint enough about their more lecherous activities in class.

"…Besides, it's not like you're up here smoking or some shit," she said lowered herself beside him.

"Is that really what you thought I was doing?" He gave her a skeptical look.

"Not really, but I'm not the only one who's seen you go up here." Her tone was enough to let him know that the observation wasn't a good thing, "Would suck if you were kicked out for something so stupid."

"I'll try somewhere else." he leaned his right arm on his knee, the practice had made it sore.

"You should probably just start asking for permission to use one of the gyms during lunch, I know that's what Kirishima does."

"Yeah, you're right." He saw her point but there was doubt it'd go that far, Yuuei's teachers hardly seemed that compulsive… there was the matter of a 'no entry' sign on the door that he'd ignored. It was probably better safe than sorry.

"Hey." She nudged his side. "Atleast now I can ask how you got out of Aizawa's bandages, I've been itching to all week. Kaminari said you wouldn't spill."

"There is nothing to spill. I thought about it and any answer you can give would be as good as mine." If he was being honest he had actually almost forgotten on account of the messages.

"Well if you don't know I guess that's that." She tapped her fingers on the concrete. "You know, I didn't mean to snap at you the other day. It was just my dad being a dick, I shouldn't have taken it out on you."

He looked at Jirou. He didn't realise it had been bothering her. "It's whatever, I know the feeling, my dad's a dick too," he said while trying not to sound too serious.

"Oh? Is that why you came all the way over here?"
"That's... pretty personal, sorry." He regretted what he'd said. It was a stupid thing to do in front of someone he barely knew.

"How about this; I'll tell you why I came to Yuuei first, then you tell me your reason, then we can both be equally miserable," she said with a stifled laugh. He hesitated, however her offer ignited his curiosity, so he nodded as to humor her request. It wasn't like he'd have to tell her anything major.

"Well, believe it or not my family is pretty famous around here, at least in the underground scene," her voice had gone back to that unrequited monotone she usually held. "I'm sure you realised music and that kinda stuff runs in my family." She gave him a sincere look and held up her cords before continuing. "My mom, she's kind of a rock idol, but I didn't want to live in here shadow, ya know?" He nodded again to show he was still paying attention.

"So yeah I decided to do this hero thing as my way out... and if I change my mind I can always go back. What I didn't expect is for them to be thrilled with the idea too." She gave a slight sigh. "There really isn't any winning with parents I guess."

"So-" He couldn't hold back a grin. ".-You got mad with your dad because he wanted you to do what you wanted?"

"Yeah?" Jirou raised an eyebrow and then her face sharpened. "...So what?" She seemed to realize the ridiculousness of it as she thought about it. His grin turned into a laugh that he did his best to try and muffle with the back of his hand. "Hey... shut up." To reinforce that she took a fist to his arm, it did the job well enough.

"Damn." He rubbed it with dramatics bordering on hyperbole. It hadn't hurt that much, but it seemed to match the situation.

"Right, if I'm gonna be exposed then it's your turn mister transfer student. Regale me with your chivalric story of wanting to become a hero." Light-heartedness had replaced her annoyance.

The smile faded from his face, a deal was a deal. He had told Kirishima a pinch, but he doubted he could get away with that much this time. He waited a good long while before he finally decided to answer. "What if I told you that both my parents are quirkless?" he said without taking a look in her direction.

"Wait... what?" Jirou turned. There was a slight shock breaking the monotone there. It took what he could muster not to roll his eyes, it was the typical response. Usually it came with a subsequent bout of superiority, although she had a distinct lack of that.

"I'm the first in my family's history to have a quirk. First generation as they say." He dropped his leg; it was beginning to cramp. "You should have seen my mom's face when she found me turning half our kitchen appliances into shitty doorstops." He recalled the memory with a frail smirk, he must have sounded nervous.

"So... what happened then?"

"It wasn't such a big deal at first. My parents were just caught off guard so to speak," he said. "My mom dealt with it, she made me see analysts, doctors... all that stuff. I got enrolled in all the mandatory quirk related things too and my dad... my dad did what he could. I can't remember much of it now. Then when I was about seven my sister came into the picture." He began to trace a circle with his finger on the ground next to his leg. "You know it's tough, yeah? It's harder for people without quirks to make money." He looked up to see her nod in silence, before turning his gaze back to the floor.
"My dad got laid off and couldn't support us much longer after that, the bills piled up and so did the booze. Shit went down." He spat onto the floor in front of him to rid himself the bitter taste. He didn't enjoy recalling the memory even if it bothered him less now. "I was still young but I couldn't just watch it happen you know? Being able to support myself as soon as possible would be the best thing I could do." He wasn't sure how long it had been since he'd told someone that, saying so much hadn't even been his intention. It had kind of just fallen out like he'd opened a clogged faucet, perhaps his uncle was to blame for that. He looked up at Jirou again. She looked like she'd just seen a ghost. "Sorry, I think I said too much, I didn't mean to freak you out." He cursed himself, good thing he hadn't said more.

"That's fucked up. I'm sorry, I shouldn't have pushed you," she said with a fast pace as she snapped out of it. "If you ever want to talk about it just ask, okay?" Her sympathy caught him off guard and all he could do was nod in reply. "This might seem kind of sudden, but I know the perfect place to go if you're new to the cit-" She stopped as a screech pierced the air.

Vrrrreeeeewww, the alarm resounded, it was a warning siren. They'd been briefed on it the first day.

"We'll talk about it later, okay? Let's go check it out," Jirou said as she got up and began pacing toward the door.

"Alright," he answered and shook the discomfort from his bones. Then he stood, banishing tremor from his hand through rigorous shake, before following her to the roofs exit.

[Eastern Hosu CBD – Shopping District – 4:36 PM]

"I can't believe the paparazzi tried to break into the school," Jirou said as she lugged on the wooden handles of a large bronze colored door connected to a three story building whose overhang now cast shadow on their heads. Behind him were not bustling street but quiet alley with eccentric drudgery in every window, obsessions such as antiquing and painting lined and stared at him through glass. They'd walked here after the final class bell, with her insistence.

"Kinda crazy," he said and went inside behind her. "Good thing Iida took charge like that." He really had, way better than Momo or Midoriya who should have been the ones to do it.

"Thanks for agreeing to come with me after all that, I always feel like a weirdo going to these stores alone," she said as the door slammed shut behind them.

"I can see why, it's not problem." It wasn't the first store she'd brought him to, maybe the fourth of fifth. At first he had been reluctant, with the break in and his heart almost beating out of his chest the entire time, but Jirou had eventually convinced him otherwise. He wasn't naïve enough to think it was actually the media that had broken in, he'd seen the mob of slack jawed idiots first hand when they'd harassed him, there was no way they were getting through something that was built like a fortress.

"Just can't find places like this anymore, the malls kind of sucked them all up," she said as he followed her down one of several aisles lined by wooden CD shelves.

He took a moment to look around and he had to admit it was rather magnificent. Along its ceiling hung gigantic brass letters that echoed its name ‘The Brass Record' in indulgent cursive handwriting. The place was some kind of retro music store, even he knew it was something that was rare to find now.

"Must be similar in Leineif, I'm guessing," Jirou said, breaking him attention from the room.
"Uhh, yeah. Sort of. There really aren't any stores... or malls or anything like that there." He eyed the CDs as he walked. "It was one of those spring-up cities, if you wanted something other than basic necessities you had to get it online."

She stopped and began flicking back each CD cover in the row with the practiced dexterity of someone who'd done this for years. "Sounds like a hassle."

"Sometimes," he said, stopping beside her. "Everything was kind of industrialized around where I lived." He took a stack of several discs himself and looked at each one by one. They weren't sorted in any way, shape or form he could tell.

"Must suck leaving your friends behind just to come to this dump of a city." She was nearing the end of her third row and she'd removed several tracks, that must have caught her interest, from it.

He rubbed his neck. "I guess." It wasn't like they'd decided to stick around that place either, this year had been do or die for them, in a sense. After you passed the high school entry age it became far more difficult. He stopped at he reached a Bob Dylan case, one of his uncle's favorites, it looked very old but in good condition nonetheless.

"Like I said if you need to talk just come to me," she repeated before throwing one of the four discs she'd taken back in the pile.

You seemed a bit lonely, he recalled what Kirishima had told him. A small curl of annoyance hung at the corner of his mouth. "There's no need to worry about me, I'm not five."

"That's not it." She turned her head toward him before she spoke again, "But it's not hard to see you're always on edge. It's weird, even if it's the first week."

"I just have a lot on my plate, that's all." That was about as close as he was willing to tip toe to the subject, if he risked any more his uncle would no doubt be the one to pay for it.

He put the discs back; none of them had really caught his interest but maybe not because they weren't his type but rather that he suddenly had more pressing matters occupying his thoughts. If "J" only wanted to hurt him then they could have already done it. That meant there was something else they wanted. If it was ransom then they would be sorely disappointed. He turned to see he'd fallen behind Jirou without realizing. She had already made it to the register. A threateningly tall woman wearing a high collared purple faux wrap dress guarded it. Her arms were covered with an odd sheen like a sheet of reflective tape and she had a solid dyed yellow bang covering the right eye of her rounded face, which also hid the tinges of short black fade on the rest of her skull.

"Got what you wanted?" he asked as the woman handed back the discs to Jirou.

"Yeah, that's everything," Jirou answered as she stacked the discs up. "Got a bag for these Meina?" She looked at the cashier, who reached beneath the counter, pulled out a brown paper bag and dropped it in front of them. Then, she shifted her attention onto him.

"So who's this Jirou, care to introduce me?" the shop keep asked as she leaned back against the wall and played with the long tip of her hair.

"Torenagi, Meina. Meina, Torenagi," she answered quick and to the point as she took the bag and placed the discs inside. "He's new to the city and I'm showing him around a bit."

"To-re-na-gi." Meina rolled the syllables on her tongue before sticking out her hand. "I like that, it's simple," she said with a smile.
"Uhh… thanks?" he answered as he shook the woman's hand. Now that he had a closer look he could see that her face and arms were covered in a weird scale pattern, like something you'd find on a lizard, or perhaps more accurately a skink. As he let go of her hand his own came away with slickness on it like part of her skin had come off with it, he subtly wiped it away on his pants which gave the uniform a slight tint of orange.

"Knock it off you pervy old lady," Jirou said while taping the paper bag up. She turned to him. "Alright, these are for you." She pushed the bag into his chest. "Consider them a welcome gift." He stood there dumbfounded in response as he looked down at it, he wasn't sure what to say. Her push became shove. "Come on, take them. I'm no waiter."

He grabbed the discs in a haphazard display and almost dropped them. "You didn't need to, really," he said while slipping the brown paper that held the discs into his schoolbag. "…Thanks," he added, now he felt bad about how he'd acted a minute ago.

"I didn't think guys like him were your type." Meina leaned forward with an amused expression. He could see a small tattoo of a chameleon crooning just over the neck of the woman's shirt next to a shiny pendant cut in the shape of a musical note, an eighth to be exact.

"What? I think you're getting the wr-" he began before Jirou nudged him hard in the ribs. "Ow… what was that for?" He wasn't sure what he'd done to deserve it.

"Don't indulge her." Jirou did not even seem a slight bit entertained. "Come on, let's go." She turned before he could even agree.

"If she's too rough with you don't think twice about coming back, doors always open," Meina said with a giggle before giving him a wink that caused him to shudder.

Jirou shook her head. "You never change. I'll see you around, Meina."

"Make sure you give Mika my best for me, you hear?" The woman then sat back down and picked up her phone from behind her, her interest in the situation appeared lost.

"What was that about?" he asked as he caught up to Jirou with a few faster steps, he had no desire to extend the encounter with the strange shopkeep.

"My mom's friend, she does that crap all the time so just forget it," she said as they walked back out into the street.

"If you say so." He scratched the back of his head, it felt like he might be better off not knowing anyhow. "So where to next?" It was rather cold out, shops were already beginning to pack up as closing time approached.

"Maybe we can get something to eat." He had to admit that sounded tempting; he'd lost the chance to do so at lunch with the alarm. Vrrm, his phone went, before he could reply. He ignored the sound but then she gave him a disapproving look. "Not gonna answer it? It's fine," she said before pulling out her own phone.

"Um… yeah," he said, there was no real excuse he could use to avoid it. "One sec."

1 – Unknown N\underbar – NEW

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Y
Enjoying.

Make. It. Last.

RILEY.

- J

The name was what had hit him. It was well, his name. The rest of the message with the exception of that line might as well have been blank. He looked up from the phone at the crowds surrounding them. There was no one in the sea of faces, not a single visage that caught his suspicion, yet he could feel himself being watched.

Three fingers swiped past his face. "…You're doing it again," Jirou said.

He stuffed the phone back in his pocket. "Something came up with my uncle," he said in the least flustered tone he could manage. "I gotta get back." Jirou raised one eyebrow in a brief demonstration of her suspicion. "It's urgent."

"Do what you gotta do, thanks for coming anyway. I'll see you on Monday." She gave a small sigh before going back to her phone.

He gave a quick wave before turning around one last time. "Be careful, alright?" he said, causing Jirou to give him an odd look before nodding. He felt like an asshole for leaving Jirou there by herself, yet if someone was following him then there was no way he could stick around her. As he mixed into the crowd he ducked his head, and quickened his pace with every step.

Chapter End Notes

*I don't own BNHA. OC material is my own.*
"Thanks," he said and took the plastic bag from the man's hand. Then he left the store and walked into the cold fog that caked it that afternoon. He didn't mind it, he much preferred it to the rain this morning from which it had spawned and the heat that was required to make it was a welcome addition.

As he made it back to the curb he stopped and adjusted the assortment of vegetables he'd bought before sticking them inside a larger black cloth shopping bag his uncle had left lying in the apartment. Carrots, potatoes and even a leek were among them all of which would help him get through the next few days but in spite of those he had a few things he still needed. To that end he fumbled a scribbled list out of his jacket pocket, rather than his phone. There were four things left on it, so he'd need to go further up the street to find the butcher that he knew was there beside a small goods store and a stall that sold tea on the cheap. It was a detour he'd been meaning to make sooner, though he knew what had made him apprehensive. He'd been checking for the slightest sign of anyone or anything out of the corner of his eye.

One of the few luxuries of living where he did is that it provided him with cheaper products. It was fortunate, considering his uncles unreliability which meant that sometimes he would need to be careful with what he spent his cash on. It didn't help that he'd wasted money on that broken listening device. Trying to return it hadn't worked and now he was stuck with it. That had left him a little short this week, though he'd already accounted for that; he would just have to eat cup noodles a few more times than he would normally withstand. Not today though, today he had to eat something proper. Nothing fancy per say, but something that would recover his energy. He'd decided on a soup that he'd made many times before, a hearty kind of broth that never failed to refuel him and his old friends. He was no cook but he could manage this much.

"Try it again," a harsh male voice growled from less than twenty feet away.

"Sorry sir," a young woman answered. "If you have cash or perhaps another card." She looked anxious, rightly so as there was a man in a dirty gray suit that might as well have been slouching onto her.

He stuffed his list back into his pocket and ducked around a corner, just enough to be able to hear and see the shop in question with better detail. It wasn't that he really wanted to eavesdrop, but something struck him as off.

"Try it again damn it!" The man slammed his fist down on the counters glass surface, leaving an inky splotch where it hit. *Beep*, the EFTPOS terminal went after a few seconds of the man pushing in the buttons.

"I-i'm s-sorry." the young woman stuttered at the counter and gave an apologetic bow.

"Fucking fuck! I'll get that bastard for this." The man seethed before throwing what he was paying for to the floor and storming out. Among the clutter was a plastic bottle of cough syrup and a packet of Alkalizer tablets.
It wasn't his problem but something bothered him about the man. He followed him with his eyes as he left the store, it wasn't anyone he knew but what stood out was that instead of hair the withered man had a black pitch like tar running across his head and down the back of his neck. The cashier rushed to pick up the mess he had created, so instead of staying ducked he moved away as he didn't want to be caught listening. Once he felt safe he looked over his shoulder and watched as the man walked in a stupor down the street. Once he had made it around fifty feet away he himself began walking behind at as slow a pace as he could while still keeping up. He did so for reasons he wasn't quite sure of himself, perhaps out of concern. Before long the man turned a corner into an alleyway at the far end of the market.

He counted to a minute before he followed into the alleyway, there would be no way to deny what he was doing if the man saw him follow him into the side street after him so blatantly. It was empty as he entered it, despite how spacious it was. It stretched between neighboring houses and he followed it a large way before stopping. There was nothing but fog on either side and he was unsure where the man had gone, maybe it was silly to have followed him on a whim but the situation may very well have escalated. It wasn't a mindless assumption, he'd read of it once briefly, the loss of control of one's quirk with the aging of one's body. Something like that was… relevant to his interest. He looked around one last time but decided that if the man was gone then that was that.

"You!" He swerved his head like he'd been caught in a car's headlights and watched as the man appeared from behind one of the low beige walls that looked exactly the same colour as those around it. "Who are you, who told you to follow me?!" The man slurred his words as he hobbled toward him. As he had presumed he looked old, at least in his fifties, his breathing was a wheeze at best.

As the man made a fast approach his own body gave a jitter and he stepped back. "No one," he answered. The closer he got the more it became obvious that this person needed help beyond what he could offer. He glanced over his shoulder, the wall was too tall for him to climb and escape.

"Don't you dare play dumb with me. Tell me," the man said as he spat on the ground in front of him which hissed and smoked in response.

He tried to hide his disgust. "Really, it was my own idea. You looked sick and I just wanted to make sure you're alright."

"Alright?" The man looked at him like he was crazy. "I'm better than ever." He gave a hysterical laugh before coughing into his hands with a sickening hurk. As he dropped the appendage it was covered in the same crap he'd left behind at the store but it didn't burn him like it had the cement.

The next action the man took was to try and grab him, but it failed, instead he fell against the wall next to him. His hair, rather his quirk, was slipping and spilling down his face like it was falling out due to some disease. "Shit, shit, not now. Not here. Argh!" He yelled and tore at it, wiped it but it came upon him twice as strong.

He covered his mouth and nose to try and not gag on the smell but it didn't help. Shock was creeping across his mind as he watched it, but he managed to mumble a few words, "Let me call an ambulance." He hadn't expected it to be so bad, the degeneration, or this rapid. There was no way it could be. The article had described the effect as gradual… like dementia or physical frailty, this was nothing like that.

"Get out of here, fucking kid." The man waved his arm only for the liquid to come with it, causing it to land on trash cans and brick alike. Everything it touched melted and it was like someone was burning hair and tires. He'd pulled out his phone to try and dial but it was making his eyes tear up, causing him to become disorientated enough to forget what he was even doing until he hammered
the emergency button. It answered, they always answered on the first try, but it wasn't the voice he hoped for.

"I'm sorry," the woman on the phone said. "The number you are trying to call could not be reached at this time, please try again later." As it faded a distinct crackle took its place, and then it hung up.

"Damn." He put the phone back and retreated a couple more steps and looked around. The alleyway was still deserted except for him and the man. It would probably take several minutes to find someone to help even if he retraced his path. "What's your name?" He had to keep the man talking.

"Fuck off. I don't need your help! They said they'd help me, make me better." The man looked up at him and he flinched at the sight. It was wracked with the pain he was no doubt experiencing; his skin was patchy and red like his quirk had begun to get through whatever protection it once held.

"At this rate you're going to be arrested or you might even die. Just come with me, we can find someone to help you." If reasoning wasn't going to work then the only thing left was to scare the man into submitting. He didn't want to try that, it could only work out worse for him no matter the outcome.

The man shook and laughed again. "I won't die," he said and stood straight. His pain was gone or ignored, he swept his hand across his forehead again. This time the skin peeled and crumbled and went with it. "I won't die, he won't let me. They won't let me. I'm important, they know I'm important. I'm going to show, everyone."

The man's words sparked confusion, he seemed so sure of himself even in the state he was in. The next thought and word came without prompt. "Who?" he asked as he watched for anything to hint.

"Wouldn't you like to know." The man tried to laugh but choked, black streaks erupted from his mouth and mixed with blood from his throat. Skin and a tooth dribbled down his chin and he didn't even try to get rid of it this time. Instead, he howled and echoed throughout the alleyway.

"SCRAM!" He pulled at his face, there wasn't much skin left, it was all drowned in darkness.

"LEAVE!" His fist collided with the wall, which was so doused it melted away.

"You need to come with me, or else." There wasn't much else he could do, intimidation was meaningless without the threat of his quirk to back it up.

"Or else what?"

"If a hero is forced to take you down instead then there's no way you'll be able to get any leniency." If the man went on like this, there was little doubt he'd be registered as a villain, that would be worse than any hospital stay or prison sentence.

He sat still and watched him before pushing himself to his feet, almost falling as he did so. "Fuck off, you think I'm scared of shitty heroes?! They can't take me on. Not anymore," he said with a gurgle that had a sting to it.

"What do you mean?"

"I'll show you." The man took a step or two forward before dashing toward him like some kind of horrific monster, he fell back as he realized the brevity of it. However it was short-lived, as instead of tackling him and dousing him in the oozing hair he jumped through the hole he'd created, and through another that he bashed into the other side of the garden he'd trounced into. Another alleyway sat beyond it.
He gave chase but was slowed on branches and bushes while trying to avoid the acidic ooze, it was horrific and he wasn't sure why he was even trying. As he hit the second hole he looked right, then left, went left because that was where the ooze went. Three turns of following it and most of his breath, then he was at a wall. A dead end. No hole had been punched into it this time, but he knew it was the right place because each section had been pelted and pockmarked. It was like he'd vanished into thin air.

There was adrenaline still in his system as he dialed his phone, no number in particular this time. It didn't matter which number because he only wanted to know one thing. It took three tries to even hit the right buttons because his terrified body was shaking so much. He managed it and a voice answered, a real voice, Kirishima's.

"What's up?" he asked. He let out a few breaths, closed his eyes and tried to calm down. "Dude, you alright?"

His hand clenched on the phone, he checked behind him again. The man was gone, this time for good. "Sorry, I must have mis-dialed," he said. "I was out for a run, my bad. I'll see you tomorrow."

Kirishima laughed. "Okay man, you almost gave me a heart attack," he said, before he hung up. In validation of what he'd experienced he took solace in the wall, one of the not drilled sections, it looked eerie and made him border on trypophobic. He tensed, then un-tensed and began to walk to find where he had left his stuff, with his mind still reeling on the man's words.

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[Yuuei's Campus – Front Gate – 4:05 PM Tuesday]

He walked at a pace that verged on tripping. He made it out of the class, through the hall and down the stairs in what must have been record time. His collar was itching despite the tie hanging loosely at his neck.

"Hey Riley, wait up!" He came to a pause mid step and answered with a confused look over his shoulder, just in time to see Kirishima jogging up to him. "You sure left in a hurry," he said with exhaustion in his voice, it was clear he'd run most of the way. "You excited for the trip tomorrow?"

The question was innocent enough but caused him to draw a blank before his eyes widened in realization. He'd forgotten. "Ah, yeah… sure man," he said and shook his head, there wasn't space for something like that on his mind right now. There had to be something he could do, however the more he thought the greater the futility became.

"Wanna hang out or something? Cool our heads off before the pressure-" Kirishima stopped midsentence as he was cut off by a dull vrrm.

"I can't today. Something came up." He turned his phone away without even thinking. Six messages, all in the span of a few hours, it had gotten so bad that he had resorted to turning his phone off just to stop it yet it had inexplicably turned itself back on everytime. Blocking the number was pointless and changing his own hadn't worked, only aggravated it so he'd ended up just switching back.

"Ah," Kirishima said. "That sucks."

He averted his eyes. "Sorry." He needed to call his uncle. He needed to know Alo was still okay.

"Say." The corners of his friends mouth hung open, like he was trying to find the right words. "You know if there's something wrong you can come to me, yeah?"

He swallowed and turned away, with his back to Kirishima. "…I know. Don't worry," He wasn't
aware of when he'd become such an open book but Jirou and him had made himself ill-y aware of the fact. "I need to go."

Kirishima stomped his foot. "You're acting real weird man, every time you look at that phone you look like you're gonna throw up. I don't care what it is, alright? I just want to help."

"I…" He paused. He wanted to say it, to allow someone else to know. Instead, he knew what the right thing to do was. "Why? Why are you so damn interested in someone you barely know?!" He hated himself but this was necessary. "Stop. Please, just stop. For your own sake."

"Come on, man." Kirishima grabbed for his shoulder.

He twisted his away from the grip. "You just don't get it, do you? I have to go, don't follow me." He made sure Kirishima couldn't see his face; it was the only way to hide his doubt and the struck lines. His friend, or perhaps just classmate now, didn't take so much as a single step after him but he could feel him watching as he strode away.

[South-eastern Hosu – Apartment Reception Desk – 5:47 PM]

"You have cameras don't you?!" He tightened his grip on the long desk, it was all he could do not to lose his temper.

"Calm down, boy." The old woman gave him a disapproving look. It masked her spite, which hadn't grown softer in her age.

"I need to know if there was someone was at my place while I was gone," he reiterated with a deep breath. "Please," he added, he knew anger would get him nowhere with this woman. She'd been as rigid the first time he'd met her, in a brief exchange with his uncle.

"I can't allow you access to those cameras, it would be against the privacy agreement of the other tenants." She shook her head causing the wedding ring suspended from a string on her long neck to do the same.

"Look, I'm not asking for much," he said in an attempt to sound reasonable. "Just check and see if someone tried to break in. Isn't that just as important for all your tenants?" He doubted she even had more than three, himself included.

The woman held her head briefly like she'd caught a headache. "…Fine, wait here boy," she said as she hopped from her chair that she seemed to pretend wasn't too small for her. She flung the beaded curtain back as she entered the back room, attempting not to catch her shroud-like garb on it as she did so.

The reception area was doing little to calm his nerves, all along the walls it held paintings that he doubted even the most stuck up art critic could find tasteful. Even the floor was varnished in some strange purple acrylic that made it dizzying to look at. Her painful taste in art décor wasn't what concerned him however. Someone had been at his door, he could tell. It hadn't been something as simple as a stray doormat that had given it away. There were marks of the wood rubbing against the frame. It was something that only happened if you didn't know how to open it. There had been an attempt to push it in from the outside.

Minutes passed as he tapped his fingers on the counter top before the beads were flung back again. "Well?" he asked.

The woman didn't answer at first, rather choosing to sit back down and arrange herself before
wanting to oblige him. "It appears the tapes malfunctioned. I'm afraid whatever was on them is long
gone," she said with a strange lack of courtesy. It was like she was scared of what she'd seen.

Malfunctioned. He didn't even have to ask to know what that meant, no doubt they all had a faint
 crackling to them that made them indecipherable. There was no point pursuing that any further so
 changing the subject was his best bet. "Did anyone come in here asking about me and my uncle?
 Anyone strange, like a man with thin brown hair?" Even if it was only a confirmation, he was more
 than a little desperate.

"Boy," she drew out the word this time as she leaned forward and entwined her fingers. "I don't ask
 questions, I'm not the police. Now if there's anything else I can help you with." She unentwined her
 fingers as if she was offering him something.

He muttered a quiet ugh in annoyance before turning away from the woman and pushing through the
 slim doorway. It was going nowhere and he was tired of being belittled by the hag. He jumped up
 the stairs to his apartment, taking each step without care and sometimes in twos. As he did he ran
 over everything in his head in quick succession. He had a pocket full of messages that were
 inaccessible. He was being followed by someone who didn't seem to exist. He'd witnessed a man
 disappear into nothing and now there were scuff marks at his door that could have been caused by
 anything.

It wasn't enough evidence, not enough to go to the police. They would probably not even indulge his
 pleading as more than paranoia even if he did manage to convince them something was happening.
 He pushed his shoulder into the door as he unlocked it, after which he took another look up and
 down the corridor before going inside. It was silent, not even the dog was making a sound, the only
 thing that he saw was a glint on sleek frost accompanied by the rustling of leaves.

[ Yuuei's Field Trip Bus - Unknown Location - 1:05 PM Wednesday]

A Trial of Rescue, he reiterated in his thoughts. It was the only hint, along with a few words he'd
 missed, that Aizawa had given them to the field trip before they'd left. His mind couldn't be further
 from it, all the excitement he should have felt had been systematically dismantled over the course of
days. He'd considered skipping but there were two decisive reasons he couldn't. Aizawa, first and
 foremost, and the fact that the prospect of sitting alone in his apartment waiting for something to
 happen scared the utter living shit out of him. A trip felt safer, much safer.

Sitting slumped at the back of the bus was all he could manage, he hadn't slept. All he had done was
 obsess which added to his now awful looking appearance. He'd kept his visor on to hide it but Iida
 had noticed that, now that he was the class president after Midoriya's resignation it was what he
 should have expected, the only way he'd convinced the guy that he needed to keep it was to act
 overly serious about the exercise. It was a bad excuse, considering they both had helmets but it had
 worked.

The messages were non-stop now; his phone was off and in his bag but he knew that wouldn't help,
 should he receive one it would turn on and let him know. Not looking at them was the only thing he
 could do to keep his head clear, otherwise he wouldn't be of use to anyone. It was a hard thing to do,
on the account of his classmates being rather noisy in the bus, but he welcomed their distraction in a
 way. It occurred to him now that he might have just been better off leaving his phone at home, but
 then he wouldn't be able to contact Alo.

"Heroism is more of a popularity contest than anything man. Flashy quirks and a bright personality
 have the upper hand no matter how you look at it," Kirishima said in a slight downbeat tone. "My
 hardening is a great quirk for combat… but it's far from mind blowing like Bakugou's and Todoroki's
"Hey your quirk is great! It's definitely at the pro level," Midoriya said. He himself doubted it was necessary to try and cheer him up as he hadn't seen Kirishima unhappy once in the past week and a half, with the exception of yesterday. Guilt hit him as he recalled it.

"Yeah. At least you aren't yelling over everyone every two seconds. Bakugou will never be popular with his temper." Tsuyu wore no smirk as she said it but it was obvious what she was trying to do.

"We've only been together for a little over a week, but everyone can already tell your personality is the equivalent of turd getting steamed in a sewer Bakugou." Kaminari chuckled. He had his feet propped up in the upper railing of the bus inches from Momo's head.

Bakugou glared at him. "Fuck you, what kind of vocabulary is that you dumb fuck? I'll murder you. And for the god damn record I'll be more popular than any of you shit heads, you just fucking wait and see." There was a distinct vein pulsing on his forehead just above the orange mask.

"See?" Tsuyu said with a quaint sense of satisfaction over the guy proving her point before lolling her tongue out of her mouth.

"What a vulgar conversation…” Momo covered her mouth as she spoke. "Do we not have better topics to dis-"

"All these quirks are nothing compared to my navel laser; the perfect combination of power and pizazz, I'll be a popular hero for sure," Aoyama cut in with a smug tone and a flourish of his hair.

"But it doesn't look cool if you get a stomach ache sweetie." Ashido patted him on the shoulder much to his dismay. "I wouldn't be surprised if Torenagi became popular, you saw how he sunk that building during the trial of battle. Not to mention the way he dodged Aizawa. Super cool."

"Not if he acts so depressed all the time," Sero said.

"I'm not in it for fame..." he answered, before averting his gaze out the window. He hadn't intended to sound so childishly brooding but he hadn't the mind to act otherwise right now.

"Maybe he can get work as a vigilante with an attitude like that," Kaminari said with a grin. "Next thing you know he'll be sitting on rooftops over the city." He felt his face burn even though he knew it was a joke, vigilantism was banned first and foremost. "Then he just needs an animal he fears and use that as hi-"

"Lay off, yeah?" Jirou cut Kaminari off which caused his mouth to snap closed. If it wasn't so public he'd have thanked for that second.

"You'll need fame to get the most work, no matter your motivations," Momo said to bring the topic back.

She wasn't wrong, he knew she wasn't wrong but that didn't help him right now. As smart as she was she hadn't cottoned on to his plight, though really the way he was going about it if Kirishima and Jirou couldn't, how could anyone? If they found out on their own, if he didn't give them clues, if he didn't act against "J" then perhaps. He shut his eyes, then went back to looking out the window. Anything more than that and he was like to be taken advantage of even more than he was, no one else needed to get involved.

"I think we'll be seeing a lot of you in the future man, there's no doubt in my mind." Kirishima shot him a large toothy smile and the burning sensation returned, causing him to turn his head down to
further the visor's protection. How aggressive he'd been the day prior seemed to have done little to alienate him, after his accidental phone call he had not been so inclined to ignore the issue. He could have blown it all then and there, he was stupid not to have checked who his call had gone to.

"Alright settle down brats." Aizawa turned from the front of the bus, if he'd been listening to their talk it didn't seem like he cared. "We're almost there. Your other two instructors will be meeting us on site." The announcement did little to quell the group and in antecedent fact it only made them louder, as he watched them all squabble he had to admit, he enjoyed this. If he made it through today he could get this under control, he was sure of it. As the thought crossed his mind phone sprang to life again with a vrrm.

Ignore it, he thought. Vrrm, it went again a few seconds later. Ignore. It, he played it off like he hadn't heard. Vrrrrrrr, it went one final time in a long desperate tone, now turning heads toward him. He glanced down, the screen was slightly darker through the visor but he could see it glowing.

Wait t~

We cannot wait.

Can wnotcami.

Wait t~

\-

- a remind/e/r.

Of our little game.\\

See~

. o

- J

PICTURE ATTACHED

It was nothing like a game, rather it was precise and decisive, like a death sentence served by a guillotine. He could feel the mockery of it in every little letter as well as the defiant sign off, the little "J" that lent him an irreparable sense of defeat. There was no seeing it through today, no getting it under control. The threats and the tiny nuances that had indicated it and how little his actions had done to prevent it, there had never been just one person. How obvious that fact had become to him had made him feel incredibly stupid in retrospect, not that it would have helped him. The image was no doubt just to twist that blade deeper, to serve as a final victory stamp. His lips felt dry as he
opened it, chafed.

All it contained was a white handkerchief. It was muddied in all sorts of discolored browns that one such trinket saw after years of heavy use. Underneath the mess one could still see the neat embroidery of his family's surname, one that Alo would never allow to keep far from his breast. He felt tightness in his chest, it wasn't the same as he'd felt over the past few days, this one was a rather deafening. The bus had grown very quiet and his breath quickened in pace as he grasped to comprehend it.

"Torenagi." He looked up, tearing his eyes away. "Torenagi." Aizawa was more stern the second time. "Get a move on, we're behind schedule as is."

He looked around, everyone else had gotten off and it was only his teacher and himself left. A peer out the window showed him that everyone was already well on their way inside the facility the bus had arrived at. It was a struggle to pull himself to his feet and he had to hold the corners of each seat as he passed by them in an attempt to not fall over himself. The phone was still tight in his hand as he made it to Aizawa whom gave him an uncomfortable glare.

"You've been burning a hole in the back of my head the entire morning, if there's something you need to say spit it out." His voice was unkind, impatient.

"Um…" He considered it for a second, just for the tiniest moment, before gritting his teeth.

"Well?" The man was eying the phone and looking more than a little disgruntled. At this angle there was no way he could have seen what it said, nor would the picture have given away any hint of what ailed him.

"N-never mind, it's nothing. Sorry, Sir," he choked out the words before ramming the phone in the holster on the leg of his costume that he'd attached himself.

Aizawa's glare continued, maybe to try and see the extent of his lie. "Don't waste my time." The man got off the bus, the brief period of care he had displayed was gone. He took a second before following to look at the giant dome outside the windows of the bus. It was without a doubt one of the most secure facilities in the world. Yet in his mind he could only think of that one phrase.

_Time is up. Riley ... see you soon._

Chapter End Notes

*I don't own BNHA. OC material is my own.*
The Beginner's Guide to Villainy

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

[Unforeseen Simulation Joint – Main Entrance Hall – 1:20 PM Wednesday]

There was a queasy upset torturing him as he walked up the back of the class crowd, which the structure of the gigantic dome failed to quell. It was built with safety in mind, half the props couldn't hurt you if you fell and the security was second to none, with alarms above each thick security door. On the inside it was split into segments, six to be exact, each housing a specific disaster with a shipwreck and a landslide among them as well as a smoking building in the distance. At the very center, where all these simulations met, was a vast courtyard with a fountain which made it more of a theme park than a training area.

They stood at the cusp of it, on the edge of a massive staircase that led down and could assist you in a quick descent if you were brave enough to slide on it's slippery sides, which mimicked the surface of a pyramid. On his right was a door, marked bathroom and med station, along with a set of five phones one of which was labeled emergency. It felt secure, so very secure that he wasn't sure how anyone could break in here, he might have dismissed the message as a fluke if he hadn't thought the same about the security barrier.

"Wow, it's the space hero No. 13! He's known for his phenomenal relief work and disaster support," Midoriya said. He was correct, a man in a large space suit had just trotted up the aforementioned stairs in front of them.

"Thirteen, where's All Might?" Aizawa asked him.

The hero was held up three tube-like fingers. "He's resting in the break room. Too much hero work on his commute."

Aizawa scowled. "That man truly is the height of irresponsibility. However, we have a backup plan just for this purpose after all. Continue Thirteen." He beckoned with a finger before leaning back on the metal railing.

"Right. Before we begin I just wanted to cover a thing… or two… maybe three or four?" The spaceman's composed demeanor had devolved into a strange prattle. "Well." Thirteen dropped his fingers. "Let's just start from the beginning. As I'm sure many of you know, my quirk is black hole, anything sucked into the vortex of my quirk is turned to dust." He demonstrated the phenomenon by picking up a pebble from the plant pots that lined the platform and disintegrating it by pointing his fingertips at it.

"It's the perfect quirk for disposing of wreckage and rescuing people," Midoriya interrupted.

"Yes, however." Thirteen held up one finger. "That also means it could easily be used for killing people. No doubt many of you here possess quirks that could be used to hurt, rather than help if used without thinking." He glanced down at his hands, he didn't need Thirteen to tell him that much. Their quirks were just a tad bit similar in their destructive regard but at least he had those gloves. "In this superhuman society it is important that quirks are strictly regulated. It's also important you realize that your quirks exist for the sake of helping others and to use them only in that pursuit."

His attention wandered from Thirteen's tirade. He knew he should have divulged that man's
disappearance, yet he hadn't, it would have been the right thing to do considering the danger the insane man posed with that acidic hair substance. There had definitely been something very wrong with him, like his quirk was falling out of his own ability to control it. He would do it this afternoon he decided, after school on his way back home, if he went to the station directly then there would be no way for them to do anything about it other than to confront him directly.

"Thank you for listening." He turned back just in time for Thirteen to finish with a bow.

"Bravo! Bravo!" Iida clapped and cheer enthusiastically, along with Midoriya. No one else seemed quite as impressed.

"Alright now that we have that long winded speech out of the way," Aizawa said as he scratched the scruff on his neck. "First things first-

Fwwwwhhh.

His teacher turned to look over his shoulder before swinging his whole body into it. The noise had come from something in the courtyard, near the fountain in the center. He looked past the man's shoulder and followed his gaze. He could see a small black swirl, like a wormhole from one of those science education videos. It cracked like a glass pane as a hand came through which sent the mist it was comprised of spilling in all directions in a wave. It ate at the floor and covered it like a vampiric cloak until it was nothing but a wall of abyss.

"Is… is this part of the exercise?" Kirishima asked as he came up beside him.

"No, I don't think so," he managed to whisper through a thick clog in his throat. The black puddle was gigantic now and he felt like a massive idiot. Eyes and feet and beaks and maws revealed themselves. It was a mess of monstrosities that was led at the front by a single man, covered from head to toe in a countless number of ghoulish looking hands.

"Stay back! Huddle together and don't move!" Aizawa shouted. There was no argument in the voice, not that he would have been able to disobey in the first place; he was already being overwhelmed by a sense of indescribable fear.

"Sir, who are those people?" Jirou asked. The edge in her voice betrayed she didn't really need to ask.

"Those, are villains," he answered as he slipped on the metallic goggles that had hung loose around his neck, then he gave a look over his shoulder. "Kaminari, try to contact the school with your quirk." He did so, bashing at and fumbling with it right away.

"Yo-you're not going to fight them all on your own are you?!" Midoriya asked. "Your style isn't suitable for multiple opponents Eraserhead, it's meant for stealth and one on one scenarios…"

"You can't be a pro if you're a one trick pony," Aizawa said as he walked up to the railing. "Thirteen." His face was stoic and if he had any fear of his own then he let not a single bit of it slip through. "Protect the students and proceed with the evacuation procedure." He didn't wait for a reply and flung himself over the railing before tucking into a downward slide on the slick metallic surface of the entrance platform.

"You heard him, don't just stand there," Thirteen said. "Follow me."

"Where is he?!" a hollow voice echoed across the courtyard from the many limbed man, it hung and rasped as it spoke like it had been pre-recorded, then recorded again. "All this effort we went through
and the symbol of peace isn't even here." He lurched on his feet like his neck was crooked before straightening himself. "Maybe. Maybe… Just maybe if we kill some kids we can draw his attention!" the man yelled as he put wrist against face and pushed his root-like hair aside. The black mess through which they'd entered swept itself up, coalescing into a cloud that resembled the shape of a person right behind him.

Aizawa reached the bottom as it happened, he hit the group of villains like a mortar and whipped three of them off their feet. As he pulled another forward two more fell behind him. Their teacher fought like a machine. Every inch of his style reeked of efficiency and almost exceeded logic in its complexity. His movement was purposeful, fluid and more importantly, dangerous.

"Is this for real?" Uraraka put her hand to her mouth and tensed, then backed off a few steps and spun.

"Yes," Todoroki said. "If they're after the All Might that means this is probably their only point of attack. It doesn't seem spontaneous, they must have been planning this well in advance." His voice wasn't even wobbling. If anything he was downright calm.

"All I'm getting is a crackling noise, they're jamming my signal," Kaminari said and gave up on his device. A crackling noise, he could feel stomach drop into his feet. All that ran through his head as he ran was that he could have stopped this somehow, if he'd just managed to do something, or anything for that matter.

"Students, we need to leave," Thirteen said in a dry tone before catching himself. "Now," he said in a much more stern, commanding voice. He snapped out of his fright. The man was right, even as he watched Aizawa sail around the mob of villains he could tell it was far from a winnable battle. He was buying them time as it was all that the man could do.

"Let's go." He tried to sound calm as he looked to Kirishima, but he must have been doing a piss-poor job because it was his friend who pulled him into the action. This was happening now, if he was prepared for it or not. Him and Kirishima stumbled to a halt as the door that Thirteen had singled out erupted in a black mist. It swirled and formed into the same man who had moments before accompanied the many-handed villain.

"Not so fast, little heroes." The mist spoke in a deep eloquent drone as his eyes formed as large yellow slits in the miasma. "I'm simply here to fulfill my role. Do you think to deny me the Honor?" the man asked as his misted body quaked.

Boom.

The mist shuddered as Bakugou's explosion and Kirishima's fist collided with it, dispersing itself slightly at the show of force. "You think we'll let you do whatever the hell you want?!" Kirishima's body was a rigid mess of his quirk now.

"Get out of here you bastard," Bakugou said as he pulled his hand back in an array of tiny explosions.

"Quite perilous… but that will not be enough," the misted man said as his body came back together like nothing had happened. His entire form began to enlarge and fall forward.

"No! You two get away from him and run!" Thirteen shouted with his hand outstretched before disappearing in the mist along with Kirishima and Bakugou. He backed away a step or two, like it would make a difference. The choking dark mist came over him, he felt only cold and saw only darkness.
"You will be scattered! Tortured… and slain," the nothingness said with a guttural echo, it was the last thing he heard.

[Location: Unknown – ? PM]

He landed hard on frigid stone, his first action was to sit up and let out a harsh incessant cough as air rushed to fill his lungs. It was old and dusty, a layered thickness built up over time. As he looked around he realized he still couldn't see anything. The darkness hadn't ceased wherever he'd ended up. He felt around to steady himself on a wall, which was equally as gelid, before grasping to pull out his phone.

The stone lit up as his phone blinked to life. It was a makeshift flashlight at best, but it far exceeded having nothing. He was in a narrow cave, not even three meters wide and only inches taller than he himself was. It wasn't hard to tell that while it was indeed stone that lined the wall it was actually synthetic, the rock had been placed deliberately. He must still be in the facility, he concluded. He pulled his phone around behind him and found there was a train track there on the floor leading away beneath some boulders. At the sides it bore what looked like crude wooden supports that were no doubt built to hold up the rickety looking ceiling.

He recalled there was one zone that had looked like a mountain which meant he must have been somewhere underneath in an area built to resemble a collapsed mineshaft. That meant he had to be in the north western quadrant of the USJ judging by where the entrance had been. There was nothing to do except walk, he decided. If everyone else was in similar situations then the sooner he got out of this the better, as he didn't want to become a burden that had to be rescued.

The dim light lacked width but it helped him keep calm as he walked, for a while all he could hear was his footsteps and the occasional click of a rock dislodged by his movements. He couldn't be entirely sure no one else was trapped down here with him, perhaps if he was lucky he could find them before he found the exit. It didn't take much time for him to hit his first altercation, a corner that split into two opposite directions. A few seconds of waving his light around revealed a crude chalk marker on the wall, a simple white arrow pointing to the right. On one hand it could have been intentional, to let someone find their way out. On the other hand it could just as easily have been a trap. He tapped his foot, unsure of what to do.

Creak.

His head darted to the left at the noise. He wasn't sure if his mind had played a trick on him but it was enough for him to trust the arrow and set off to the right. If it was a trap then whatever was down here would find him either way. As he made the turn he could tell it was a vast place, whoever had built it had taken care to make it as detailed as possible, to make someone feel the panic of a real mineshaft disaster. Suffice to say it was doing its job.

With every turn he took he picked up the pace, continuing to follow the arrows as he did so. Every few seconds he would hear a tiny malformed click or tchink that would send his skin crawling. He couldn't be sure if it was part of the places machinations or not but it was getting louder and he knew it was behind him. It was catching up and it made his stride almost turn into a run, which he might have obliged if he didn't think that he would hurt himself doing so.

Clack.

He pushed himself past another corner. There had to be an exit soon, every tunnel was beginning to look the same, despite his path having been marked.
He must have been going for ten minutes already; he could feel his breath beginning to burn in his lungs and not just from the dust. Maybe he was just running in circles, it wasn't out of the question.

He spun around at the call of the new and distinctly different noise. There was nothing he could see there but it had been so close, like it was touching his neck. Then he fell into the embrace of an entirely new room as he turned back. It was a dim antechamber that must have been the very beginning of the mineshaft, wreckage of carts and timber lay strewn across it and the rocks on the ceiling were almost threatening to collapse. He raced to the other end of the place toward a large iron door and almost tripped in the process over discarded tracks. Above it hung a fickle light that still dwarfed the one he had been using up to that point. It was floating in a dreary haze and lit up parts of the wall covered in a small purple fungus.

He turned and pressed his back against the door, the noise had followed him into the room but in the fringes of darkness he couldn't ascertain where it was. He jiggled the doors handle behind him, but it didn't budge, unease jumped him as he realised he was locked in here with whatever it was. He forced a long breath as he looked through the room, it slowed his heart rate, he couldn't afford to freak out right now.

He could break the door and escape and his hand twitched, then he dismissed the idea, it was too dangerous even if it was a simulation environment; he might end up caving everything in on himself. The misted man must have known that when he sent him here, that told him his entrapment had been hand-crafted. He wasn't getting out without whatever was following him finding him first.

He backed away as far as he could against the cold wall and his eyes looked to every corner before going back to where he'd come from, there were no other ways in or out. His muscle tensed as he watched the dark and it strained his eyes. It was all silent, but for the shift and movement of his chest. That was until within the dark an outline peeled away.

"So." The single syllable word rolled across the room. It was sharp and mechanical, perverse in its crudeness and cruel in its intentions. "So," it repeated, this time louder and more absolute. "Most excel-lent. Most ex-quisite. How de-lightful. Our guest of honor has finally arrived." The emphasis bounced between the letters almost like none of them belonged to the same person. It rendered every word it touched spine chilling.

The figure from whom it came emerged in its entirety through a single step. Light curled around its nose, it was long like the beak of a bird, which led back to the rest of the features it belonged among. It was caked in gray leather, a fake skin that made up a mask that covered the entirety of the front of the face. Hollow glassy eyes were stitched into it and it lacked a mouth. Tight straps led from its side around the back of its head to keep it in place as well as securing it to the neck, which lay connected to a heavy, weighted coat with a grotesque, stained apron resting down the front of it.

The figure threw its hands back, heavy and gloved, revealing a set of pincers that lined a strained
metal belt around its waist. "Now it can begin. My grand experiment! Oh how I have waited. Agony. In Agony. But not anymore."

"Who the hell are you?" he asked. It felt like a pointless question, now that it was too late to run away he only had one choice. He pulled his focus onto his gauntlets, they were his best defense.

"Oh my. Yes. You will know it. Soon enough." The villain tore open the lapel of his coat and reached inside. Every inch he moved let out yet another of the many of noises that had been haunting him so far. A set of heavy iron keys revealed itself with a *tchink* as the man rested it from the tip of his finger. "However. Does this not interest you more? You want out. Outside yes?" he asked as he rattled them in taunt. He gave them only a cursory glance before averting his eyes as he didn't want to betray his intentions. "Then come. Come. Come and take them I say."

The man snapped the fingers on his other hand, letting an echo ring out that caused a shift in the shadows behind him. He counted half a dozen as they stepped out of the dark each more malformed than the last. They shared a single gruesome feature in the shape of an exposed brain cavity on the top of their skulls. "Capture. Seize. My imperfect little creations." His voice droned as he dropped the keys onto his wrist and then fastened them to his belt.

Two of the creatures shuddered before lunging forward into the light, their forms were animalistic and movements imprecise. He could see the large scarring and stitching on their bodies as they launched toward him on all fours, despite missing parts of both their arms and legs. The first of the duo pushed down on its hocks before throwing itself forward with gnashing human-like teeth sharpened to a point. The flesh that formed its body was withered from years of apparent experimentation. He threw his hand up as it jumped and just as the maw primed to close on his hand he let it go. *Bang*, his gauntlet shook sending the creature flying back in a heap of rigor mortis. He hardly had time to think as he brought his foot up to make contact with the second beast. The steel cleat sent the creature's neck twisting like it had snapped.

As it fell at the man's feet he cocked his head sideways at him. "Magnificent. Yes. Magnificent, simply magnificent." The figure cackled within its own personal madness, not a true laugh but something derived from a gurgling pleasure. Satisfaction.

He put his hands up as he awaited more of the tactless creatures but the four that remained stood still, poised behind the man. This kind of thing was what all his practice was for; he couldn't afford to lose his concentration or his nerve, so instead he held steady. His breath pulsed in and out with a rhythmic distinction, like he'd been taught.

"There is no need to rush. Let us enjoy our time." He rolled his head on his shoulders causing it to let out a nauseating *crunch* before snapping back. He waved one of his hands forward, like one might do if they weren't satisfied with a waiter.

*Four to go. Stay calm.* He moved right around the room to give himself more space, he couldn't rely on his limited close range ability if they all came at him. The miserable things walked from behind the man's back in unison, these four were different to the other two, they moved with a sense of purpose and formation. They belonged as a group and appeared to each hold a role within it.

The one in front had blades protruding from various points on its wrists and calves. It moved poised on its hands and legs like some kind of nightmarish dog. Dentures made of sharp steel lined the aperture of its spine. The second to the right of the group possessed a collection of bear traps that stuck from various parts on its hunched body, they merged and melded with the skin snapping open and closed as the creature moved. The third was a disturbing sight, it had all four of its limbs ending in hands like a gorilla, only each was brittle and lithe and possessed needle-like protrusions on their palms. They oozed with some kind of dull green substance with every step. It flanked the left side of
the quadrant in a spider-like crawl. The final one caused him to back off even further. It stood far behind and carried whips that made up the majority of its right and left arms, a bloody malformed razor wire with barbs. It twitched with an eagerness that repulsed him on some subconscious level.

They didn't rush him. If he didn't know better he would have said they were rational, like they knew their strengths. It went without saying that one mistake would be fatal. He stopped as he hit the eastern side of the room. He'd made sure to keep his hands on the rock as he did. It wasn't as brittle as he'd initially assumed, even the collapsing roof must have been for show. He held his left hand at an angle toward the floor in front of him as he watched the assailants make their increasingly faster movements, the other he held behind his back out of sight.

The steel lined monstrosity was the first to make it. It ducked before it dived at him in three separate motions from left to right and back again. It was the grandeur of the movement that allowed him to catch it and he pulled his foot back to prepare for it. It hit the floor two meters in front of him and reared for its final leap. He pushed his heel forward as it did, like he was prepared to stomp down, causing the cleat of his heel to collide with the creature's nose. The countless knives it held skinned but didn't penetrate his shoe as it fell onto the floor with a whimper and reeled in disorientation as it struggled to pull itself back onto its legs.

"Compress." He shut his fist and the creature's limbs buckled as it's body slammed down like it'd been pulled by a magnet into the floor. The suction ended in a quick and violent crack as the creature's bones snapped on the ground and it ceased to move. He glanced at the thing in its pitiful, broken state before looking up at the remaining three. There was no emotion for their fallen comrade and the man far behind them didn't utter a single word in response either this time. Then he caught a glint of silver and red and ducked.

Wuh-tsch!

The barbed wire whip hissed as it sliced through the air in a lasso-like fashion but missed his head as he ducked, dust caked his back as it shredded the wall. He dashed right as the creature's second hand mimicked the motion of it's first, however it didn't work this time. The fleshy curl sang as it hit him, wrapping itself around his left arm and leg in a tight coil. The creature jerked as it snagged its arm back and caused the barb to tear through the costume and into his flesh. It hurt like hell, worse than any training exercise could have prepared him, as if salt and steel were mixing. He gritted his teeth against it and tried to ignore it. His heart was pounding as adrenaline surged and dulled the tearing of metal teeth through his arm.

Snap.

He looked to the right as the bear traps gave the creature away. It was galloping at him like a horse on its misshapen legs, having seen the chance to bite into him. He waited until the last possible second before pulling up his hand releasing the expulsion of the right gauntlet directly into the gaping jaws of agony. Bang, it flew backwards with a wail and landed several meters behind where it had started in a lifeless pile. He felt sickened for a second before he shook his head. These things, whatever they were, were definitely no longer human. Despite the resemblance he felt no qualm in striking them down in self-preservation, if anything it felt like an act of mercy.

He gasped and yelled, "Fu-ck!" It was all he could manage to utter as a sharper pain than even the razor wire serrated his calf. He pulled back as he looked down and glimpsed just enough to see the green liquid oozing down his leg all the way to his foot. The quad-handed monstrosity had given him a sweet reminder of his existence. It was crawling along the wall in a horrific fashion as it retreated before he could so much as retaliate. He gritted his teeth in attempt not to lose his cool before throwing up his unrestrained hand at the minion binding him. He could see it knew what he meant to
do, and he in turn saw its commitment to the task at hand.

His mantra caught in his throat as he closed his first, instead all that came was a cough. However the tremor irked him nonetheless. It's chest caved inward in a vulgar display of brutality as the compression tore at the cavity of its breast. It gave a frightened gurgle as its tongue fell out of its mouth before hitting the floor, its husk jerked and twitched before it became still. He tore the wire from his arm as the grip slackened before moving up his hand again. The final diabolical creation was still scurrying as it tried to evade his grasp like a frightened insect. He took aim and concentrated, however before he closed again he let his gauntlet fall to the man instead and held it firm.

Bang, the cartridge rattled a third time, this time with far more power. The brittle being hurled itself toward his master as the shot bounced through the cave with an indomitable crack. He knew at that moment that their obedience was absolute. It caught the bullet like it was embracing it, the right side of its body spliced as the frail bindings of its hands and feet came apart. It hit the floor and bounced few more times before hitting into the wall, splattering the green ooze everywhere.

He gripped his hand in order to still it before taking another look down at his leg, the wire had ripped his clothes and blood was seeping from it, worse than that however was the fiery sensation that was spreading throughout the wounds. He ignored it and turned on the man, who hadn't made so much as flinched throughout the ordeal. "You're next, unless you give me those keys," he said with as much fake bravado as he could muster.

The man tilted his head as the words but didn't answer. There was no way he could see what the man's face looked like, yet it felt like he was being mocked by a smile. He opened his mouth to try his threat again only for the words to be lost. His lips felt numb, it spread across his body in pins and needles before turning into the same dull nothingness. It took a ridiculous amount of effort to not fall over all of a sudden.

The man's hands cracked and creaked with a series of rigid motions as he fumbled around the inside of his coat again. "There'll be no chivalrous victory here. No. We cannot have that today. No happy ending." He snapped his fingers again.

The world swam and then he felt a sudden heavy grip on both his legs that almost made him collapse. His head lolled in unwillingness as he looked down. Several malformed limbs were climbing his arms and legs. They tangled themselves across his chest and back as the creatures grasped and reassembled themselves at the same time. It was like a weight that anchored his already immobile body to the floor. He watched in disbelief, it was the only avenue left to him now as it his ability to speak had been robbed from him.

"How utterly foolish. Noumu are not so easily dispatched. Punishment is deserved and swiftly delivered," the man said with a harsh indulgence. Smack, he felt a distinct blunt hit as the man's previously rigid hand connected with his temple. If he didn't know it's origin he would think he'd been hit by a truck.

"Now." The villain paused and leaned in, just enough to wipe away the blood trickling from the corner of his sedated mouth. "Let go of your fear. There's no need. I will make you better," he said as he nudged on his glove, tugged it from fingers. Fear heightened his awareness as pain pulsed through his nerves. Disgust and incomprehensible realization held secondary behind his body which refused to respond. All that remained for him was to watch.

"Yes." He clicked. "You will be my masterpiece. It will begin here." The entirety of the glove slipped from his hand and it revealed not flesh, but metal. There were sets of surgical tools where his fingers were meant to be, like some kind of horror movie.
Snap.

Even through his fading vision his senses were aflame with alarm. The blade of the scalpel reflected the dim light of the tunnel, he wanted to scream as it dug into the flesh of his shoulder but nothing came out but a stifled groan. All he could think of then was the risks he'd taken to prevent this and how each had been a mistake, the sound of malicious gears and cogs fell away as he lost himself to unconsciousness the next.

[USJ's Mountain Zone – Cave-In Simulation – ? PM]

He jolted awake and clutched his shoulder. He wasn't dead, somehow, no numbness, his breath wasn't leaving in short bursts and a curious lack of pain where there should have been plenty. Even more strangely he could see no visible signs of the scalpel that had so carved and etched into his skin, beside the ripped fabric, not even a blotch or wound; all that was left on his left shoulder was the same scar he'd had from the entrance exam.

There was a brief sway as he pulled himself to his feet. He felt like he should be glad he was even alive, that didn't fill him with a sense of relief however, more like a foul putrid realization. He'd failed to stop the villain, failed to so much as wound him. He only paused for a second as he dealt with that, before he remembered he still had to get out of here, he could let Recovery Girl figure out what the bastard had done to him later. He looked around and his attention fell on the iron door from earlier, the light above it was dimming like it was about to lose power entirely. The crooked set of iron keys now hung from the handle as if their part in this was innocent.

The iron door swung open with little resistance as he pushed against it. Another corridor was hidden behind it and there were no signs of anyone having come through here within the last month, let alone the last thirty minutes. Wherever it was that the villain had fled it wasn't here. He pulled his phone from his pocket again just to check the time. There was no need for a flashlight anymore, not even thirty meters away there was a wooden door with light spilling underneath it. He put the phone back in his pocket as he reached it, too much time had passed, there was no doubt he'd missed a lot. The doors lock rattled before coming loose, there wasn't a need to use his quirk on it. He squinted briefly as the light of the courtyard bathed him and he found he was somewhere close to the ruins zone from what he could tell, the tunnel must have stretched all the way past the landslide zone to a place near the entrance.

*Boom,* the ground beneath him shook causing him to catch a hold on the frame of the door. He saw it then, just beyond the cusp of trees lining the fountain to the left, the chaos of the courtyard in its entirety. All Might of all people was there, but he was far from alone. He was baring his knuckles in full against a creature that looked like a disgusting mix and match toy of bird features and blue skin. It was a Noumu, that's what the man had called it, or rather them, he could tell by the large missing cavity of its skull. The ground shook again as he approached the tree line at a pace that would not get him noticed, he didn't want to be seen and if he could slip past and just make it to the stairs then it'd be alright. He looked to the side, not far from All Might and the monster stood the many-limbed villain and his misted accomplice.

"Give up now. You're out matched," All Might said as he grappled the monstrosity. The Noumu flipped back as All Might hit it in the chest. However it caught itself and charged around the heroes back.

"I'm afraid that won't work All Might. Our Noumu here has shock absorption." The many-limbed villain shrugged. "The only way you'll kill him is by slowly gouging out his flesh."

All Might ducked as the Noumu's fist wailed past him. He rode the charge into a tackle causing the
Noumu to become suspended above his head. "Then all I have to do is wear him down and it's on to you!" he shouted as he fell back into a suplex. *Boom,* the trees rattled from the impact as dust flew from it.

"What a nice trick, trying to bury him in the concrete," the many-limbed man slurred. "He's just as strong as you are however, he won't be stopped by something like that." The dust settled and his stomach sank. It was true that the Noumu was half buried in the ground, however instead of being crushed it was submerged in a warp gate that came back up right underneath All Might himself. The Noumu's fingers were piercing All Might's sides and a deep red splotch was soaking through the hero's white shirt. If the man wasn't hurting before then he surely was now.

"Right where we want you, you made our game so simple. Nice work Kurogiri." The many-limbed villain nodded toward the black misted man whom had been the cause.

"It is my pleasure to assist, Tomura," Kurogiri said with an amicable satisfaction as he turned to All Might. "Usually I am against the idea of guts and viscera floating around within me, however for one such as you symbol of peace, I am willing to make an exception." The Noumu pulled on All Might's body and he began to descend, sink, submerge into the floor, it made it obvious what was about to happen. He gripped his leg in frustration as he watched from the bushes, he'd taken so damn long. He shook his head at the thought, what was done was done. There had to be something he could do now with the element of surprise.

"GET AWAY FROM ALL MIGHT!" Midoriya shouted as he flew toward All Might and the Noumu. He hadn't even seen the guy, not him or Tsuyu and Mineta sitting at the edge of the pond in the distance.

"Young Midoriya!" All Might said through a rather painful grimace. The air in front of Midoriya curled as he made it half way

"Interfering is not allowed." Kurogiri's voice droned as it emerged in front of him, black mist gaping to swallow the boy whole in his flight.

*Boom.*

"Get out the way fucking Deku," Bakugou yelled as smoke fell out from the black mist and pinned Kurogiri to the floor. He'd emerged from the right, against the sharp turn leading out from the ruin zone. Ice curled across the floor toward the Noumu from the same direction and a flicker of red came down above the man called Tomura. The latter dodged easily. Kirishima's blow didn't so much as scratch him. However the former froze over in a lattice of ice as the threads of cold caught it and held it still. All Might wasted not a moment in fighting its grip and tore himself from its arms before jumping back. The Noumu wailed as it disentangled itself from the warp gate the ice, causing its limbs to crack and shifted as it tried to follow All Might.

Back behind the bushes he braced his left hand by the wrist and closed his eyes. He was exhausted, but this much he could at least manage. "Compress," he said as he stepped around from where he'd been hiding. It was the clear shot he needed. The bird monster paused as it leaned into a stumbling lunge. It twitched and jerked before letting out a terrible ear shattering screech, as it ceased it's cry it's body contorted. His hand shook as the brunt of the brutes strength was weighed against the force he subjected it too. Its sternum pulsed and jittered before popping like a balloon, its muscles and guts tore and the ice cracked and spilled the contents across the tile beneath its feet. *Screeeeeee,* it wailed again as it fell to its knees, the arm and leg that remained to the Noumu dangled uselessly on its misshapen chest. It convulsed and shook as it tried to move, as if it didn't feel the excruciating pain of its injuries.
Then, fire hit his shoulder like someone had struck him with a hot knife. "S-shit," he said as he grasped at it. He caught himself with one hand as he fell backwards. "W-what the f-f…uck did that guy do to me?!" He tried to grit his teeth, however they rattled too much.

"Man these kids are all nearly unscathed, and yet here we are cornered and running out of options... at this rate our little league of villains will be a laughing stock." Tomura had disdain written on his face as he rolled his head toward the Noumu. "Noumu, retrieve our revolving door. I'll deal with these brats," he said, before looking at them like he was sizing each of them up.

"All Might, it won't stay down from that attack!" he managed to shout as the Noumu pulsed at the command.

"We have a volunteer," Tomura said with a slow kind of enjoyment as his eyes rested on him. "Young Tore-" All Might cut himself off as the Noumu fell onto its left side. Crack, the bones emerged from its broken body like the stems of a plant, flesh wrangled itself onto them as it did. Blue skin stretched itself quickly across its frame. Screeee! The Noumu howled as it stood back on its newly formed legs.

"You see now All Might? He's truly a match made only for you."

"I thought you said his quirk was shock absorption," All Might stepped back in front of Todoroki, Bakugou and the others protectively.

"I didn't say shock absorption was his only power." He readjusted one of the hands on his face by an inch. "Now, symbol of peace, let's have ourselves a fun little gambit. I wonder which of your precious students you value more." Tomura turned on his heel that caused a slight hesitation to flicker in the heroes eyes.

Crash.

The sound hit his ears and before he'd even blinked the Noumu was gone and Tomura was upon him. Time felt slower as the visor covering his face melted away, exposing a pair of bloodshot eyes hidden behind scraggly white hair right in front of him. They were cold, and dead. In all manner of the word he could only think of them as evil. He didn't even manage to utter a single word and the pain that was flowing through his body ceased as he comprehended it. The man threw the visor away and it shattered like brittle glass on the floor behind him. The fingers grasped at him, inch by inch, like he was taking his time with it, letting him know that this was where he would die.

Then, the fingers ceased to move, less than a finger length from his exposed face. "Oh, it's you," he said, pulling away his hands and throwing them up. "I almost made a big mistake didn't I, teacher?" His voice was calm and rational, untouched by what he had almost done. He looked down at him again. "You don't even know how lucky you are." There was a smidgen of his cruel smile, it was hard to see behind the hand that covered the front of his face but that made it all the more sinister. Then the villains malignant gleam was gone and he somehow felt very far away. Burning flooded back as he hit the ground with a thump. He wasn't even sure what had happened, let alone where he was. The intensity of the burn faded into a sting and then into a tepid ache as he sat there like a statue.

"Riley," a voice said. "Riley, hey." He now knew it was Kirishima, which caused him to look up. "Are you okay man? This isn't the time to be spacing out dude." It was a hard shaking that pulled him back to reality and caused sound to flood back in with a pop, like altitude adjustment in a plane. He clutched his head and realized the visor was gone. All Might was standing two feet away, and he was next to the others.
"I'm fine," he said, this wasn't the time to distract the pro from the real fight.

"As for the rest of you, you're all fair game," Tomura's voice said. The mere sight of him caused himself to shake.

"We can take these guys," Kirishima said as his arms sharpened.

"Stay back," All Might said before stepping forward. "And watch a pro at work." He jumped forward and the Noumu turned at him. The first hit sent out a gust, the second erupted into a column of wind and the third gave leave to an endless flurry of fists that cracked even the floor beneath the man.

Each punch hit with a weight, pointed toward the location they deemed most lethal, the head, the chest, the abdomen and everywhere else in a composite that looked more like a blur than a fight to the death. The Noumu staunched at each blow and All Might retaliated in kind, blood was spurting from his mouth and from the wound on his stomach. There was a strain in each of the countless blows, it moved with a power that mimicked what it might be like if one comet hit another.

He could barely keep himself nailed to the floor, in a literal sense. Trees sweltered and foiled and bent before being blown away only to land hundreds of feet from where they'd started. The Noumu bowed as All Might hit downward on its face, only for the creature to pile him in the stomach in a defiant blow. Bits and pieces of their bodies were becoming broken with each second, heat and intensity came with each demolishing blow.

"Let me to tell you here and now villain!" All Might shouted as they broke apart. "A hero…” He stirred and drove his fist upward into the Noumu's stomach. "Is someone that smashes through every obstacle put in their way!" Another blow landed, forcing the creature back. Three more, he counted and the Noumu stumbled, four more after that. Seven punches in total that each sent shock waves tumbling through the floor. "They." He gasped as he hurled the creature forward with his shoulder. "They don't give in!"

Screeee, the Noumu screamed as it reeled back, it recovered less with each step.

All Might reared his foot, his back, his shoulder and held his fist behind his back. "This is the truth behind Plus Ultra," he said as he tore forward in one swift motion. "**To go beyond even one's limits!**" Boom. The fist ripped into the Noumu's stomach, its blue skin scraped away as the muscle gave to the blow sending it upward. It hit the ceiling with a deafening crash before flying right through and disappearing beyond the dome.

The area fell silent and the shroud surrounding All Might steamed like he himself was giving it off. As he turned toward the remaining villains all he wore was a look of pure and utter anger which made the men freeze in fear. He tapped his chest. "Now then villains. It's time we put an end to this dance of ours."

"There's no way you could still be this strong. After all this trouble we can't fail at the final boss. I refuse to believe it." Tomura scratched at his skin before throwing his hands down and clenching his fists.

"We must end him, here and now. We must avenge Noumu. Even the symbol of peace has to have a limit." Kurogiri heaved and hissed as the mist re-coalesced itself around his metallic inner body. Then, the villains leapt at All Might, who stood as he awaited them. In that instant, however, Midoriya was between them, he had appeared almost out of thin air. A hand came out to meet him, spurting forward from black mist as if to catch him.
Bang. The hand fell to the side as a bullet hit it before pulling itself back through. Midoriya fell into a roll as the black mist collapsed in on itself like a cloak and swept the villains up, Bang. Fvweh. Bang, a few more hit and then the gun shots ceased. The villains were gone like they'd never existed. He looked up at the origin of the sound, there on the hill they stood in a line, the heroes that had come to save them.

He couldn't recall the events that had occurred after that. It was all more or less of a blur, like it was almost too surreal to have happened. There had been questions asked, paramedics called, answers given and medical attention received. It didn't even register when they'd arrived back at school, he didn't remember what Kirishima had said to him or what Jirou had wanted. The following day of classes had been canceled. He'd left through the front gate as normal, he'd walked home as normal and now he was opening the door to his apartment as normal.

He felt strange, a weak sort of strange. A serene kind of detachment from his body came over him as he collapsed on his bed. There was a dull hum from his phone that he didn't touch, the creeping cold of the gloves as they sat on his fingers and the touch of drowsiness that threatened to overtake. A throb began in his shoulder like a second heartbeat and everything went dark.

Chapter End Notes

*I don't own BNHA. OC material is my own.
[South-east Hosu – Riley's Apartment – 7:34 PM Thursday]

He awoke without haste or fanfare, only the simple thump and tick of a headache as it threatened his thoughts. It didn't matter as he had not the energy to think anyway. He must have slept for more than twenty-four hours.

His muscle seized, locking as he forced himself up, adding to what amounted to him feeling like shit, perhaps even more so than before he'd passed out. If he had the choice he would have easily slept through to the next morning however hunger had now overpowered that idea. He'd dared himself to check the message on his phone once, all it had been was Kirishima. His uncle hadn't so much as bothered to call like he'd said he would, it was possible he hadn't even heard what had happened considering his phone was probably still broken.

He didn't want to think about anything that had happened yesterday, he could still see the beaked face of that man whenever he closed his eyes. Though he knew himself, his mind would ask those questions whether he was willing to admit it or not. Before that happened the least he could do was to see himself sated. The kitchen light blinded him as he turned it on. He dimmed it with the knob next to the fridge and turned on the kettle. He undid the lid on the small plastic box containing the herbal tea the hawker lady at the stall had sold him. Zero caffeine, she'd assured.

His fridge was almost empty again, but it still had enough to keep him fed for today. Rather than raiding it for breakfast, or rather dinner, he instead decided to take an apple from on top of it, in this case it was probably better he ate something healthy. He prodded at his shoulder as he waited for the water, it didn't bite back like he expected. Had he just used his quirk too much during the incident? He wasn't sure if he was being honest but there'd never been a backlash like that, let alone one that made it feel like a pin was moving around inside his skin.

No, he concluded, there was definitely something there. Even if the wound was gone the holes that had lined his costume had told him that the whole thing being in his head was out of the question. He needed to see Recovery Girl, first thing. He turned the kettle off and poured a small portion of the water in the cup before spilling it out into the basin. Then he refilled the cup with the teabag inside and allowed it to sit, one minute like the woman had told him.

He took a gulp of it and it went down easy, it had a strong flavor for an herbal tea. Chamomile or something to that effect, though his taste buds were far from refined enough to tell for sure and frankly it didn't really matter. All that mattered was that it did make him feel better. The cup of tea took a short time to finish and the apple, along with a few other things he'd found, were soon gone. Before long he found himself sitting across from a tiny rubber ball which he weighed in his hands, it was normal in every way whatsoever. It was perfect for practicing his quirk on.

Rubber, in a way, was the Achilles' heel of his quirk, the way the material was formed made it nigh impossible to compress to the point of destruction. That meant he could use his quirk on it as much as he liked without fear as long as he remained careful. He took the ball in his left palm and held it with his right. Using one hand at a time was a sort of warm up, once he'd tried for a bit he would try and compress it between both. The closest he'd ever gotten to rupturing the material was not even three weeks ago, among his boredom.
As he closed his eyes he breathed in and out and then clenched his left hand. "Compress," he whispered. There was no need for anyone to know what he was doing. The ball trembled as the tremor hit back in retaliation. Another hit came with it, this one unexpected. "Shit." A gasp escaped as he held his shoulder in pain and the ball bounced away. A grit of his teeth was all he could do to hold it back. He trembled on his knees with his head resting on the table, eyes closed, as he waited for it to end. It took five minutes but it felt like much longer. When it was done he was covered in sweat and he felt sick, extremely sick. It was like a sting in his stomach that made him want to throw up.

[Yuuei's Campus – Western Hallway Bathrooms 3F – 9:22 AM Friday]

The door to the bathroom stall hit the side with a smack as he flung it back and collapsed to his knees over the basin. He grabbed the dirtied porcelain without the ability to hold back what was coming up. Heavy panting took the place of the vomiting as it passed and he allowed himself to fall back on the door of the stall.

It wasn't the first time that day. Each trip had been subsequently worse, and uncontrollable. He was tired, dehydrated and starving but unable to keep anything down. In addition he hadn't been able to pick up or remember a lick of what Aizawa had tried to teach them in class, all his focus had been stolen by something bordering dangerously close on a migraine.

He leaned forward to flush the toilet. As he looked down at the bowl he could see there were tiny cracks in the porcelain that weren't there before. The mere sight of them urged him to feel sick again. Instead, he refused to be, and picked himself up before making his way to one of the water basins outside the stall. There he let the cold water rush and then hit his face with it several times. A quick look showed him only his own sickness, obvious as it was, his pupils were like pinpricks and dark rings sat underneath his eyes. He saw himself but didn't recognize him.

Smack, the blunt sound echoed through the bathroom, as if to distract him from himself. A young male voice with an unnatural rasp carried throughout the bathroom, a tall boy with charcoal skin and white hair followed close behind. "It's pathetic, right? I thought this school was meant to be the best in the world."

"Yes, I wonder what principal Nedzu is going to say about it. Do you think the Sports Festival is going to be canceled? It is bigger than the olympics in many ways," another male voice said in return behind him, this one more heavy set and belonging to a boy baring a brown fur all across his body, he was more beast than man.

"It won't. Think, Yuuei would go down in flames if that were to happen," the younger sounding boy answered as he went up to one of the urinals on the opposite wall. He didn't care much for what the two were talking about. Rather than trying to listen he wiped his face down with a few paper towels that stuck from a machine on the wall. It didn't help much.

"Still, I can't believe they got into the school so easily, almost undetected. They took down both Sir Aizawa and Sir Thirteen, they almost happened upon Sir All Might too. There's no way this can end well," the older boy said as he adjusted his glasses, he sounded unnerved.

The charcoal boy laughed as he took the basin beside him. "Why do you sound so scared? No one's gonna come looking for you."

"Me? Scared? I could fight off one hundred villains if I had to!" The older boy reinforced his words
with an animalistic growl.

"Yeah, yeah beast boy, whatever you say. We should go swing by our sister class." The younger boy stopped mid-sentence and dragged the s as he looked at him. "Speak of convenient, aren't you in class one A?"

"Huh?" He'd only caught half of the conversation.

"Yeah, I saw you on the news. They had a whole segment about it yesterday." The boy encroached on him a step, his mouth ajar like he'd struck gold. "What was it like? Wasn't there a smoke villain made of pure darkness?" His teeth stuck in his mouth like mirror shards, the grimace of his excitement making his eyes look popped and veiny, creepy. "Man I would have loved to see him, how that would have felt."

"Leave me alone, get your kicks somewhere else," he answered, pushing past and making for the door.

The boy grabbed at his hand in an attempt to keep him there, his hand melding with the underside of the arm material. "Don't leave us hanging," he said. He pulled back to escape it on instinct, however he hadn't been able to anticipate the twitch of the quirk as it involuntarily shot down to the tip of his finger. The boy yelped. "What the hell?" He shook his hand like he'd been shocked. "What the fuck was that?!"

"S-sorry. I didn't me-" he stuttered as his shoulder began to burn again, he could barely contain the excruciation it brought with it.

The older boy towered over him. "What is your problem?"

"Nothing," he said as he fell back and tripped, grabbing at the corner of the door. He didn't fall but slipped as escaped in an awkward stumble, he had to find that damn woman, now.

"You aren't the first to come to me, sonny," Recovery Girl said as she tapped the chair and nodded for him to sit down.

"Really?" he asked as the sterile smell of the room hit his nose. It was cramped and likely a nightmare for anyone scared of hospitals, although he wasn't one of those people. In fact he was glad; no one would see how much of a wreck he was becoming.

"Yes." The woman wore a small blue visor and a typical doctor's coat with an atypical pink underline. "It's unsurprising considering what happened. So, tell me what's wrong." She grabbed a clipboard and sat down in front of him.

"I can't stop throwing up… I keep getting headaches," he said, even now he felt queasy. "And there's this sharp pain in my left shoulder that keeps coming back, especially when I use my quirk."

"Nausea and headaches aren't uncommon symptoms of stress. I'll give you something to help," she said as she began filling out the sheet. When she'd finished she put her pen down and walked over to a drawer on the other side of the room. She had no trouble reaching inside as the counters were rather well adjusted to her height. It was probably a degree of freedom being the head nurse at Yuuei allowed. "Now," Recovery Girl said as she returned to his side with a cylindrical bottle. "You mentioned pain in your shoulder. When exactly did it begin to hurt?"
He considered mentioning what had actually happened, then bit his tongue. Not until he was sure Alo was safe and the messages had stopped for good. "Two days ago on the bus back from USJ." That should be close enough.

"It's probably nothing but I'll need to take a closer look," the woman said and beckoned. He nodded and took the blazer off before unbuttoning his shirt enough to expose the shoulder in question. It looked no different than it had before. She pushed on it, though even as gentle as she was it was still enough to cause him to wince. It felt like he'd freshly injured it. It hadn't been like that yesterday night. "It's most likely from the injury you sustained during your entrance exam," she said as she pushed on the area around it as well with less result. "The stress from the incident must be exacerbating any strain you put on it during that time." Finally she pulled her hand away and began scribbling on the form again.

"Is there anything that would help?" he asked and shook his head. "I can't concentrate at all when it flares up."

"Like I said, it's probably nothing sonny. However as a precautionary measure I'll need to take some x-rays, to make sure the initial injury healed properly. Follow me," she said as she hopped off the chair. He hesitated. Then he found his own hesitation ridiculous and stood to follow her, there was no way he wasn't better off knowing.

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[Yuuei's Campus – Classroom 1-A – 2:36 PM Saturday]

Another days rest had done little. There's nothing abnormal about your shoulder, he recalled the prognosis. The thought was doing little to distract him from the squirming discomfort in the supposedly okay location.

He'd begun to hallucinate, he wasn't sure if it was due to the lack of sleep. Sometimes he'd see something at the corner of his eyes. It was like the shadows in the street were playing tricks on him, a flicker of movement or the dispersion of a shade. It could have been due to the pills, but he wasn't going to stop taking them. They had stopped his vomiting and they'd alleviated the headaches somewhat, at least he'd been able to think straight.

He pulled his hands closer to his body as he sat alone in the class. It felt like he was going insane, maybe he really was. If it was all in his head then it was no wonder Recovery Girl couldn't find anything. No, it couldn't be. He'd already reasoned that out, Aizawa had even sent their costumes off to be repaired. There was no mistaking that he'd been correct about that fact. The encounter in that tunnel had happened, there was no doubt.

That also meant it wasn't his quirks backlash that was doing this to him, that much was clear; his seclusion right now was proof of that. It was his punishment for what had happened during foundational studies not even an hour ago. They were meant to take turns sparring against each other and working on improving their hand-to-hand combat, some sort of follow-up thing in case they came into contact with a similar situation in the future.

At first that had been fine, especially since it was an excuse not to use his quirk. He'd taken the initial turn defending against Kaminari's attacks; the one Aizawa had partnered him up with. However it had been hard to block when it felt like everything was moving in slow motion, he'd had his unnatural state of torpidity to thank for that. A few hits to the gut combined with the micro-zaps from Kaminari's quirk were all it had taken to make him collapse.
You're leaving yourself open everywhere dude. It's getting kind of embarrassing, he recalled the words Kaminari had said after the third time. He didn't think he was a sore loser, or a naturally angry person. Yet something had overcome him in that moment, he could barely recall it properly now but he knew he hadn't meant to be as cruel as he had been. His arm was still crawling with fire from what had happened. First he'd taken a basic stance. Then he'd begun to concentrate on the ground behind Kaminari before advancing almost without thinking. He knew the guy was the type to panic, that was the weakness he'd been aiming to capitalize on.

Kaminari hadn't blocked. Maybe he hadn't been ready, he wasn't quite sure. However the result was a single strong punch straight through Kaminari's arms right into his nose. He'd already washed his knuckles since it had happened and the blood that had been on them was now gone. It would have been simple if it had ended at a bloody nose. However his trap had worked a little too well. As Kaminari had stumbled back his compression had exacerbated in a way he hadn't anticipated, even now it seemed unnatural. He remembered the gross crunch as Kaminari's ankle had snapped and even the words as the student had pleaded for him to stop.

Hey, hey man, calm down! We're only sparring, he had said as he was clutching his broken ankle. There hadn't been a time in his life where he could he truly wanted to see someone dead. Not in a way which he'd meant it at least. That moment however, he could say without a doubt that he'd felt possessed, all he wanted was to see the clown beaten bloody. It might have happened too, if Shouji hadn't held him back long enough for him to realize what exactly he was doing. The burning had almost been as strong as it had been at USJ then, maybe even worse, by all rights it should have burned a hole straight through his shoulder with how intense it was.

He rarely felt truly ashamed, however the abstract looks of horror from Jirou and Kirishima had done it, and Aizawa sending him back to class for taking the exercise too seriously had only served to compound the effect. It was like his friends hadn't even recognized him. The exact same script had been running through his mind since then. Every little bit of it was etched into his mind like a horrific motion picture, it was as if everything he'd been afraid of had transpired in one little instance. If Kaminari lost his foot because of him…

He could feel his hand twitching. The gloves that he usually donned weren't with him, they were at home. It wasn't like wearing them helped anyway, not anymore. The trembling was relentless with or without them. He couldn't even touch his desk; doing so would crack the surface.

He heard the door to class roll back with shick, the others were back from their exercises. "Yo Riley. How you holding up?" Kirishima said as he approached him first thing. He didn't reply. He was far too busy trying to stop his teeth from chattering. "Riiiley, you in there?!!" he said, louder this time as he reached for him. The touch felt vile, he pulled away like it hurt. It might have if he hadn't gone for the right instead of the left shoulder.

"P-please… don't touch m-me… I…" he said before cutting himself off with a shiver as Kirishima pulled his hand back.

"He's a bit pale don't'cha think?" Ashido remarked as she took the seat two desks over.

"It's okay dude, shit happens. I'm sure Kaminari is over it by now. You're not the first one who has wanted to want to hurt that guy. The manly thing to do now is to apologize, yeah?"

He looked up, Kirishima was right. Maybe atoning would make him feel better, "I'll be back," he said as he grabbed his belongings carefully and left the worried looking red head behind.

Finding Kaminari took almost not time, he was exactly where he himself had gone yesterday, though to his fortune Recovery Girl didn't seem to be around, she would no doubt have crucified him for
what he had done. There was no cast on the guys foot as he approached and he appeared fully
recovered from the injury he had received, if he didn't know better he would say the guy was using
his injuries as a way to skip class. That didn't make him feel any less guilty however.

"O-oh hey Torenagi... hahaa..." Kaminari shifted in the bed as he saw who'd come to visit.

He clenched his fists in a way as to stop the incredulous trembling. It didn't help. In a desperate
measure he dug the heel of his right foot into his left. His body switched its focus to the injury and
his hands stopped for a second, he took the chance to breathe in.

"I came to tell you I'm sorry. I don't know what came over me. Can you forgive me?" he said with as
much sincerity as he could possibly convey.

He looked at Kaminari when he didn't answer, the guy was rubbing his ankle. "It's okay," he said as
he got up off the bed. "I shouldn't have provoked you like I did. I was being an idiot, yeah? So let's
call it a truce." He struck up his hand. There was hesitation before he took it in a firm shake, the
trembling from the limb was gone for the moment. He immediately felt a little more normal than he
had for the past few days. Maybe if he could just get some help he could work throu-

Vrrm.

He closed his eyes at the sound before opening them again and looking down at the phone, perhaps
it was just Kirishima again, or Jirou.

1 – Unknown Number – NEW

The dark text left him feeling like a fool, he'd been naive to think they'd stop.

You. Are.

| Lend. Ours. |
| R.

Embrace.

The sensation came back immediately as he finished reading. He could almost feel his heart skip a
beat and he knew he had to go, he didn't know where but he knew he had to.

"I-I'll see you on Monday," he said to Kaminari while turning off his phone.

"Not going back to class?" Kaminari asked as he went to lie back down.

"I am," he lied, before tipping on his feet as he turned away before then walking out through the
door. His walk was aimless. No perhaps it only seemed that way from the outside. In reality it was
anything but. As long as he kept walking he didn't have to watch the world twist into a nightmare.
He didn't have to watch it grasp at him.

The further he walked the less he had to think and the more he could distance himself from problems
he had no control over. He could think of what to tell his teacher later. The idea that the luxury of
that remained to him was comforting, if stupid. As the day turned down it became cold, the kind of
frost that would nip at your skin until it found itself a way to bore inside. However he could barely feel it, not with the irradiation that seeped from his shoulder and spread through his body. It felt like needles being slowly pushed through his veins, cutting him as they scratched the edges. He kept his hands stoically at his side, he daren't even raise them. A single twitch would allow it, he was dangerous. His shoulder ached ceaselessly and his head swam. Lights blurred and melded into each other.

After three hours he ended up back in his neighborhood. The sun was slipping into the river as he walked down his street. The red building cut into his vision as he passed it, there was a man inside that he didn't even so much as look at. He no longer cared. He walked further toward his place, his head stayed down. The prescription bottle was still in his pocket, he'd taken a lot in a short time but he couldn't even feel the difference. A crackle drove through the air as he climbed the stairs. He knew from where it came. There was a desire and half a mind to go into the lobby and make it stop permanently. Slowly he slipped his phone out of his pocket and then it was gone before he reached the top. That left him with a small smile. The corridor appeared endless on either side as he walked toward his apartment. The beige and gray mixture of the walls was closing in on him, trying to choke him before the shadows that pulled on his vision could.

The handle of the door warped as he touched it.

Chapter End Notes

*I own nothing related to BNHA. OC material is my own.
Their slowest day

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

[Yuuei's Campus – Classroom 1-A – 7:15 AM Wednesday]

It was the drumming of his fingers and the buzz of gossip that led Kirishima to his conclusion as he waited for class to start. The twenty-first seat would again be empty today, as it had been for the third time that week, since Saturday afternoon after what had happened. He could kick himself for what he'd said, for not going with the guy after realizing after the fact what a damnable state he had been in and still probably was. As he leant forward to hide the fact that he was listening to every conversation, every whisper around him, it was obvious he'd made a mistake and it added to the ever growing lump in his gut.

"...Tsuyu told me that guy who broke Aizawa's arm. You know, the one with the hands? That guy almost grabbed Torenagi. Pretty scary, right?" Uraraka whispered to Hagakure, who sat next to her in a chair she had borrowed before class would start. He had noticed that everyone in this class liked to gossip, but that wasn't unusual.

"Is that why he's been gone?" Hagakure didn't look up from her phone as she asked.

Ashido looked back over her shoulder. "Makes sense considering what happened on with Kaminari," she said. "I guess he got cold feet or something."

Uraraka looked over at her. "Was it really that bad? I didn't get a good look with Momo as my partner."

"Didn't you see the bruises on Shouji's arms? It was bad alright. Aizawa didn't even get angry, he just told him to leave."

At that notion Hagakure became sparked enough to put her phone down. "You think it could have been him that broke that one B student's hand too?"

Uraraka shook her head. "I didn't want to believe it, but the description did sound like him."

"Oh man, if Iida finds him," Hagakure said.

"If it really was, then he'll be expelled. It's that simple really," Ashido answered. She had no expression, something he knew her only to do when she was utterly serious.

He didn't want to believe the rumors were true, but he knew they were. There was no mistaking it from the way Riley had acted to Iida's recounting of the incident. It was like someone had shot him, and that had only gotten worse after Kaminari. It still felt like it was too outlandish, Riley always seemed so careful with his quirk and with the way he acted. However he was far from blind, far too aware of that shell shocked look on his face in retrospect to what happened at USJ. It was the face of someone who knew they'd gambled just a little too much. Attempts to message him had returned no reply. It hadn't been easy to reach him even before USJ but since Saturday it had been total radio silence. The message he'd seen on that third day was still burned into it his mind, We are watching. Always. The possibility that there were more was likely. It wasn't like he hadn't been acting weird since well before USJ, there had been a particular sharp turn in his behavior leading up to the end of the first week. He wasn't sure if the conclusion was fair to make, a week wasn't much to judge someone by. Shick, the door to the class fell wide.
"Regardless of the rumors you might've heard the Sports' Festival has not been cancelled," Aizawa said as he came into the room. The bandages that covered his face weren't as thick as before. "It's time for Yuuei as a whole to put on a brave face. We can't be shaken by a mere villain attack, so we'll proceed as normal, it's important you prepare yourselves for the trials ahead. Your fight is just beginning." The man sat down in his chair as he finished his speech. Normally, he knew, he might have felt psyched at such an announcement. Now it only made him sick, like the school was just dismissing the obvious. Excitement could wait until he got to the bottom of this.

The day had paced along like an ambling old man as he thought about what to do. He might have gone and acted like a fool if he'd had the choice, but that wouldn't be fair to the one other person he knew that had a stake in this. Not to mention he didn't know where to start.

"Jirou," he said as he watched the girl get up to leave and got up himself to follow. "I gotta to talk to you." She paused and he thought she'd ignore him but then she nodded and ushered him aside. He followed her out into the corridor, to a section below the stairs that always sat empty.

"It's about Torenagi, isn't it?" she said as soon as she seemed sure no one would intrude.

"Yeah," he said and folded his arms across his chest, making his fidgeting less obvious. "Something isn't adding up in all this. His behaviour isn't manly at all."

"I was thinking the same thing. Err, about the adding up bit, not the manly thing."

He groaned. "We both knew he was acting strange didn't we?" All she did was return a shrug. "Damn it," he said and clenched his forearm so hard it could've hurt him if he wasn't doing it deliberately.

"It's too late for that now," she said, though she bit her lip as she said it. "I'll ask around a bit. You see if you can track down Kaminari and that one B student Hagakure was talking about, maybe they know something." He nodded once or twice as if figuring out if to agree, although he didn't even have time to argue the suggestion as she had already turned to leave with quick and purposeful steps.

[Yuuei's Campus – Library 2F – 12:22 PM]

"Torenagi Riley…?" the girl said as she peered over the library desk. She had a green badge stuck to her uniform collar, the skin it hit was scaled blue and she had gill-like slits on her throat along with narrow irises.

"Yeah, about this tall." Jirou put her hand above her head by four centimeters or so. "Shortish blond hair with blue eyes and uh. He kind of looks ill, or like he's dying?" She explained as best she could from memory but the dying part was correct. She'd mentioned it in passing, but he hadn't even acknowledged it.

"Um." The girl put her finger on lip, like she was trying to remember but couldn't quite get there.

"He always wears these white gloves on his hands," Jirou said as she pointed to her wrists.

"Oh!" Her voice lit up. "I remember now. He came in here last Monday," she said before typing on her computer and then turning the screen so she could see. "This is him, right?"

She looked at the screen, it was indeed Torenagi, "That's him exactly," she answered. The cropped part of the picture suggested the photo was taken well in advance, as his hair was far longer than she recalled it being. He actually had a smile, for once. "Did he mention anything weird, like a strange
"Odd?" The girl once again cocked her head. "I get strange requests all the time, you know, occult stuff and the like."

"Occult stuff?" She repeated in disbelief, Torenagi definitely hadn't struck her as the type to believe in that sort of crap.

"...Not him though." The girl continued like she hadn't heard. "All he wanted was some weird looking sci-fi novel and a long list of curriculum books," she said with a giggle. Jirou held the bridge of her nose then sighed. Useless, she thought as she turned away. Most of the lunch period was gone and she wasn't sure where to look next. She took out her phone to text Kirishima, hopefully he'd had better luck.

"Mr. Torenagi, I presume?" Nedzu's muffled voice came from somewhere.

Her head shot up and around like someone had pulled a trigger. She was sure she hadn't misheard, despite the sound being a half the floor away from her. It took her a second to locate it but through the window of the building she could see the bear. There was a wide man with him, dressed in a white suit. He was pulling at his breast, however when he found nothing there he resorted to coughing in the back of his arm instead. Nedzu waved to the man who then stumbled in behind him, before closing the door to his office. This was what she'd been looking for, she needed to get a better view, or rather listen.

[**Yueei's Campus – Classroom 1-A – 4:15 PM**]

Kirishima's search had turned up little, Kaminari and that 1-B student hadn't been much help other than confirming what he already knew. Riley was definitely still getting those texts, and there was no doubt something off about him by the sound of it. Maybe he really was sick and he was just overthinking it. They'd all experienced villainy first hand that day, even if it wasn't uncommon in the city. Even he'd felt rattled, perhaps Riley just needed a bit more time to get over it.

He clenched his knuckle, he knew there was point telling himself lies. Riley wouldn't have been there at all after USJ if that was the case. Not to mention what happened on Tuesday. *Stop, for your own sake*, the words had already left him with half a mind to chase the guy down and force him to confess what he was keeping to himself. He might have, if he hadn't thought it'd do more harm than good. He stopped clenching his hand and rubbed where his own hardened fingers has hurt him. There was zero need for this all to be so complicated.

*Vrrrm.*

1 – Jirou – NEW

Same spot.

"Anything?" he asked as he followed Jirou to the alcove they'd been in earlier.

"Yes, actually," she said as she once again made sure they weren't spied on. "I overheard Nedzu and Torenagi's relative, I think his uncle, talking upstairs."

"Uncle?" He leaned against the wall. "I thought he lived alone."

"He mentioned him once." Jirou shrugged. "The gist of it was that he basically hasn't been able to
reach Riley at all. He thinks he locked himself up in his apartment for some reason."

"Maybe he's just skipping class, he did look sick and he went to Recovery Girl too," he said, if only to hear what take Jirou had on the idea.

She shook her head. "First we're attacked by villains then not three days later he just up and disappears? I hate to say it, but it sounds too convenient." The ends of her jacks were twitching.

"So is the school going to do something?"

"No. Nedzu told his uncle to go to the police."

"Do you really think the police will care about someone locking themselves in an apartment? It'll be ages before they do anything." He realized it was probably exactly that reason as to why she appeared to be so unnerved.

"There isn't a chance," she said as she allowed herself to slide down the wall onto the floor beside him then looked up in his direction. "Tell me, what exactly happened with him at USJ?"

"Nothing really, All Might got both him and Bakugou out of the way in the bat of an eye. He did seem a bit out of it though," he said. "I did see him leaving some sort of tunnel, but I didn't really get a good look with the surprise attack we did." It seemed kind of irrelevant.

"A tunnel?" Jirou paused. "Strange," she said, like a thought was hanging on her tongue.

"If you think you know something just say it, I don't care if you're just speculating."

"Aizawa told us the six types of disasters, and a tunnel wasn't one of them. Riley was by himself down there."

A chill ran down his body. "Wasn't Ojiro by himself too?"

"Yes. That's why it's weird. A tunnel. All disasters, including Ojiro's, were on that map. There was no tunnel, which means when that mist villain put him in there there was no way anyone could have known where he was."

"And?"

She gave him an annoyed look. "They wanted to separate him without any chance someone would come, can't you see that?"

He didn't reply to that notion, he couldn't, because he'd just become absolutely sick of not doing anything. It was better to funnel it that way than to allow it to whiten and in turn freeze him. "A real man would go check himself," he said. "It's the least we can do." He could see Jirou's own realization sitting on her face like a she'd received a terrible omen, he took that as agreement. In the corner of his eye he caught a spot of spiky blond hair as it appeared at the alcove. It was underpinned by Bakugou's unwelcoming face. Perfect, he thought. If they were going to do this then they needed back up in case push came to shove with Riley, and this alternative was even better than asking Ashido to come, if he managed to play his cards right. He grabbed Bakugou before he'd even made it all the way down. "Blasty, come here, I need you."

"Let go of me you asshole," Bakugou yelled as he held him under his arm. He hardened as he felt the explosions but didn't let go. "What the fuck do you want?" He pried at the fingers but the full nelson he had him in now was more than enough to hold.
He grinned, in part to make it playful and also to hide what he had found out, what he wanted to forget. "We're going to find out what Torenagi is up to and you're coming with us."

His captive ground his teeth which he knew meant he was about to blow a fuse. "Why do you think I give a crap you hedgehog fuck?"

The excuse was a simple one, that he knew would quell the fuse to not explode. "If he's gone you won't get to show everyone you're class one-A's strongest right? Even you couldn't escape Aizawa like he did."

"That loser is so far beneath me I can't even see him anymore," Bakugou said. "Now let go of me damn it," he added with a snarl.

He allowed the fuming student loose. "Come on. Don't pretend like you have something better to do."

"I'll kill you," he said as he straightened up from the hunch. Then he looked at him, and something changed about him, the vein didn't pop on his forehead and his expression turned into a scowl. "Do you two fucks even know where to start looking?" Murder had left him.

That was almost too easy, he thought. The guy was reliable, in his own way anyway, USJ had proven that much. At least now they had a little bit of help, or a rabid dog to scare people into submission.

"He doesn't, but I do," Jirou answered. However instead of elaborating she held up her phone. It displayed a simple marker on a much larger map of Hosu, centred in the distinct south-east of the city.

"How-" he began, however she shook her head and pointed to her jacks. "Clever." He smirked. They set off without further discussion and with a volatile looking Bakugou in tow, out the gate, through the city and into south-east Hosu, and toward whatever lay there in wait.

[South-east Hosu – Jun-tae District – 5:12 PM Wednesday]

Kirishima could smell the pungent aroma of fish in the air. After around fifty minutes of walking and plenty of wrong turns it had hit him in the face, obnoxiously so, but at least it meant they were getting somewhere. It was about time too as the sun was creeping ever so closer to its inevitable setting. Everything around them had grown from state of the art to downright ordinary the further they went, every step allowed another shop to fade into an apartment with its lights off and its windows shut tight. Nothing around here felt like it had an identity, as if it could stretch on forever in the same way.

"We should have taken a bus," Jirou said as they stopped at a corner only different to any other by the addition of a shaded mailbox.

He glanced around. "No wonder Riley always looks so tired," he said. They were at an intersection that split into three and he wasn't exactly sure where to go next. In the distance he could see a fat red shop that looked like it had been ransacked. "Still not working?" he asked. Jirou had been having increasing trouble with her phone the closer they got to the destination and then it had stopped working altogether.

"No, must be bad reception or something," she said as she gave it an avid wave. "I think we're on our own." After another instance of frustration she tucked the phone away.
"It could be any of these apartments." He grasped at his chin as he looked at one of several. They were old and decrepit, not a place he'd prefer to live if he had the choice.

"Just fucking ask someone dumb ass, I'm freezing my ass off," Bakugou said with a twitch of his hand and a shiver, being cold had made him a lot less intimidating.

"Alright, alright," he said and pulled up his hands in compliance. It was his own fault for not remembering his blazer, not that he was going to argue.

"Well, let's just try that shop over there." Jirou pointed toward the red shop he'd noticed earlier. It did appear very much open despite the state it was in.

He crossed the intersection toward it and gave a glance into the windows of the other buildings as he passed them on the way. None of the them were open anyway by the looks of it, so this was probably their best bet. "So what are we gonna do? If we find something I mean." The thought had been dancing on his mind the entire time, annoying him more the closer they got.

"We just need proof that something is going on. Then the police will have to do something sooner rather than later." Jirou had her hands buried in the pockets of her jacket, though the sleeves were curled all the way up to her elbows.

"That's all we can do, I guess." It bothered him, as the walk over had provided a lot of time to think, and most of it had been negative. It didn't feel like a surprise anymore that Riley hadn't told him what was going on. He wasn't sure when he'd convinced himself he knew the guy somewhat well, however the trip over had made it clear that wasn't the case. Jirou had told him quite a lot of things he didn't know, perhaps because she thought them in some way relevant, however he had very little to offer in return. He would definitely fill that gap next chance he got.

He peered into the blurry door of the red shop as he got up to it, then when he decided he could see nothing he walked up its single step and swung it open. The bell clicked as he did, to let the owner know he had a customer. The light in the shop was on, and the walls were lined with boxes. They contained strange little gadgets, like equipment someone would use to make a movie. As he walked up to the counter the whole thing struck him as odd because the place had no register or even a shop keep for that matter.

"Hello?" He knocked on the table in hope of getting someone's attention. There was a door at the back colored in that same distasteful wine red, although unlike the outside the rain hadn't flaked and lightened its hue.

"There's no one here," Jirou said as she shook her head and poked her nose into several of the boxes. As she reached to take one of the cameras out of the box she stayed her hand. "Maybe I spoke too soon." She looked up and the floor above them rattled with a thump.

Thump. Thump. Thump, the floor gave another racket at a several locations, and then several more as footsteps descended through the walls. Click, the door behind the counter went, and a head poked through adorned with thin frame-less glasses. The man to whom it belonged had hair that was a discolored brown with a texture so stiff that it might have been modeled from cardboard. His face was square and the cheekbones on it sharp as broken glass. Small, almost lenient, streaks crawled down across it like indentations that originated from within his skin. As he stepped out he saw that the rest of him was nothing short of spotless in every detail and his dress every bit as indulgent. He had a pen in the breast pocket of his waistcoat like one of those old time-y newspaper chiefs, though he lacked the hat to go with it.

"Welcome. How may I help you?" he asked with a classy baritone which took him by surprise. He
hadn't expected it from someone who only appeared to be in his mid twenties.

"Ah," he answered as he caught himself, he wanted to be honest but not entirely. "We need directions." He allowed a nervous laugh that slipped out. "Any idea where this place is?" He handed the man a card he'd written the intended address down on.

He looked down at it over the rims of his glasses. "Oh my, yes, I believe I do." His voice was tinged by some sort of accent, English perhaps, that he seemed like he was trying to hide but it fell through nonetheless. "I would be delighted to help you. However… before I answer may I inquire as to the nature of your visit?" The man widened a smile as he scanned the card again, within it sat a neat row of teeth that looked like they'd been brushed until the gums had bled.

"What?" The man had seemed so polite just by appearance alone that his skepticism felt unwarranted.

"Do not get me wrong. This isn't meant as an offense." Although the nature of his tone had changed it had kept its unnerving formality. "Simply insurance that you aren't up to no good. I'm sure you understand?" He wasn't sure how to reply. It might have been the eyes that did it. They were brown and fixated as if the man had been awake for days. The air in the room felt stilted and much harder to stomach. "If you cannot tell me, then we might have a problem," the man said after his patience seemed to run thin, if he had been talking kindly up to that point then now he'd almost turned into an aggressive satire of that.

"We're simply visiting a friend," Jirou said just as the shopkeeper reached breaking point.

"A friend," the man answered and his face became stern. "And what kind of friend might that be?"

"What's it to you?" he said this time, though he wasn't sure how he'd managed it. He realized this man terrified him, like a wolf wearing someone else's skin.

"A relative." The man continued even slower as he ignored him. "Maybe someone you only met briefly." He dropped the card on the counter with a flick of his wrist, exposing the same quirk and showing it went all the way to the tips of his fingers.

"None of your business," Jirou snapped and grabbed the card from the table. He returned a shallow look, there was some type of anger on the man's face now, as if he'd been spat on, it made him nervous. Maybe the villains attack really had shaken him more than he knew.

The shop keep took off his glasses and let go of a small breath. Then the fixation was gone, and his formality regained itself. "Ah, yes. Quite correct, please forgive me. I forgot my manners," he said and gave a short bow. "This neighborhood is quite a refuge to a number of unsavory characters. My interest was only for your safety, many students get lured out here and are subsequently mugged, you see."

"So can you help us?" Jirou asked. If she had noticed the man's lapse then she didn't give it away.

He chuckled. "…Very well. As it happens you are right around the corner. Take a left and follow it to the dead end. It is the rather handsome abode with the trees out front."

"Thanks." Jirou turned to leave. The apprehension lifted, and so did the pressure of the atmosphere. "Let's go," she whispered as she bumped him on the shoulder.

"Now do be careful out there," the man said in the same cheerful voice he had greeted them with. It was unnerving now, rather than welcoming.
As he made it back out into the street he heard the door click. He looked to see the open sign now read closed, and the light was off. "Creepy as hell," Jirou said as soon as she was sure the man was actually gone. He nodded in uncomfortable agreement although it was still a small price to pay for directions.

"What the fuck took you two so long?" Bakugou said, for some reason despite the cold he'd chosen to remain outside. Maybe he thought it would take less time, he himself certainly had.

"Don't worry about it, it's just over there." He pointed down the road.

[South-east Hosu – Outside Riley's Apartment – 5:35 PM]

"Old bitch," Bakugou spat, this time he'd been kind enough to join them. The nature of his irritation had stemmed from the landlady's superior attitude. The best she'd been able to do was tell them about some noise complaints, but that didn't really mean anything.

"Whatever, at least now we know which apartment it is," he said as he looked left and right for the stairs, before realizing they were hidden only meters away within the trees themselves. Although the man had described the place as handsome it could definitely use another touch up.

"Even if we know the apartment we don't have a key. Let me try Torenagi's phone again, maybe he'll pick up," Jirou said as she put the phone to her ear.

"There's no way he's going to answer, and isn't your phone still-" he said before stopping. Brrrt. It had sounded like the buzzing of a phone.

"There," Jirou said as she pointed at a stray bush just beneath the lip of the stone holding up the stairs. He walked over to it and stuck his hand into the grass, and after a fitful search he found the phone that was making the noise. It was a stark black with a cracked screen, covered in a light green plastic mishmash.

'Jirou' the screen said in thick letters with a vibrating phone handle beneath it. The 'r' had been split in half and distorted by the crack.

"What's it doing out here?" he said, taking it.

Jirou shrugged she looked at it. "Maybe he dropped it."

He looked back at the stairs, there was barely a half meter drop from the place it could have actually fallen through. Not to mention it had landed in bushes nested within soil… with a cover on it no less. Unless he purposely threw it there was no way it would end up like this. He pressed on the home button and a lock screen popped up shortly thereafter. It read 12 New Messages across it, however a swipe didn't allow him to access them at all or even see the names of the senders.

"Let's go up," he put the phone in his pocket. The steps were slippery as he followed them up despite a lack of rain and the railing was too wobbly to make it even worth using. At the top he was met by a hallway, a fickle and suffocating thing with six apartments side by side. There were no windows in the front, simply identical brown and purple doors. He went to the furthest one to right, shunted into a corner. Apartment eleven, it read on the front. "Think we should just knock?"

"Well, it can't hurt?" Jirou stared back blankly.

He didn't need more encouragement than that. "Yo, Riley man, you in there? Open up!" He hardened the back of his hand and banged on the door. Nothing came back even after ten seconds of
waiting. Maybe he needed to try again, he thought to himself.

"Don't bother." She shook her head. "If he was locked in there he would have made some kind of sound, even if he was asleep," she said as she took her earphone off the wall.

"It's locked or jammed or something," he remarked as he pushed against the door and its handle, it wouldn't budge. The bronze sprayed material was malformed, like it had melted or fallen in on itself.

"Maybe we can find some other way. This place must have a fire escape or something right?" he said as he scratched his head.

"Or we can try and beg for the keys again," Jirou said, raising her brow at him like she was trying to offer an equally stupid suggestion.

"Get out of the way." Bakugou pushed him to the side. His right fist was emanating small trails of smoke as he approached the door. It would have taken an idiot not to realize what he was about to do.

"Hey-hey you can't just-" he said, almost pleaded, which caused the guy to face him with a damning gaze.

"I'm not going to stand here while you fuckwits argue over what the polite thing to do is. Either I'm going to blow this door down right now or I'm leaving." Kirishima scowled and then he nodded after thinking about it. He didn't have a single desire to have the landlady come storming up here after the ordeal a few minutes ago however he was right, they weren't going get anywhere at this rate.

Bang, the door blew open as Bakugou delivered a small explosive punch to the lock, the sides of it had brown and purple marks where the paint had rubbed. "Calm down man, you're gonna get him in trouble," he said with a groan. "You could have at least been a little subtle."

"Like I give a flying fuck," Bakugou said without looking behind him and then began to stomp his way inside.

"Well, the damage is done," Jirou said as she followed him.

"Right." He sighed, then he stepped into the room, where he was immediately met by an acidic smell, like vomit. It was preferably over the smell of fish, but not by much. It was dark inside the room, far too dark to see anything. The thick curtains that barricaded the windows were to blame he guessed. He could feel the crunch of glass beneath his feet as he turned to touch a spot beside a wooden coat rack, however he was met with disappointment as the area remained drowned.

"Help me get some light in here, Kirishima," Jirou said from the opposite side of the apartment. He obliged and carefully made his way around several things that felt like fabric. There were two sets of windows in the bedroom, and a single in the bathroom though he decided it for the best not to go in there. Light unveiled their surroundings as it spilt in. It was enough to see something that made his stomach turn. If he had doubted there was something going on before, he didn't now.

"It's like a fucking war zone," Bakugou said like even he was amazed, or perhaps impressed was more correct.

"Yeah, you could swear a bomb went off," he said and his stomach turned. It was like something you'd see in an action movie, but this, it was real. Something terrible had happened here.

Clothes littered the floor, among them a torn jacket embroidered with the name Leineif running down the side and a baseball cap that was coming apart at the seams. It was surrounded by what
looked like player cards and a printed page of recent match results, something an enthusiast might do. The cards themselves had their faces missing, like someone had shed off the surface of each one with slow pleasure or in a display of intimidation. Dishware that sat beside them looked like it had been dropped and exploded across the floor, leaving a white trail of busted porcelain dust caking it.

A raggedy sofa that graced the center of the living room had fallen on its back and a single wooden table that had probably accompanied it was tilted and thrown into the wall, which now had a meter thick hole in it. That wasn't the only hole however. There was another in what he could make out to be a Nine Inch Nails poster and a third in the wall of that led into the kitchen. What caught him most was the way in which the kitchen door looked like it had been cut cleanly in half, like it had been done with a saw blade or a laser. There were tiny puncture holes in the wall of the room behind it. He didn't even need to look inside to know that rest of the apartment was an equal disaster. The sofa let go of a small *smack* as Bakugou turned it back over, only for him to begin searching between the piles of debris the action had revealed.

"Do you really think we should be going through Riley's stuff?" he asked.

"This place already looks like a trash heap. It's probably enough for the police but," Jirou said with a slight pout, to which Bakugou grunted in agreement, then she began her own digging.

As terrible as it was he couldn't find himself disagreeing; he needed to know more. He ducked into the bedroom again, which allowed him to see that the apartment was smaller than it had initially appeared. There were no other exits, not even a fire escape like he'd debated with earlier. That meant either Riley had done this himself, or someone had found another way to get inside. It wasn't a pleasant thought either way.

There was a picture frame on the floor, broken in two. He knew it was wrong to take however he found himself doing it anyway, some part of it curiosity. It looked old and the quality suggested it was a copy of an even older identical picture. It was easy enough to tell the boy on it was Riley himself, he was alongside an older woman and man, and a girl, none of whom he himself recognized but were easy enough to guess at. He shook the picture from the shattered frame and stuffed it into the pocket on the inside of his blazer. He would make sure Riley got that back, wherever he was. There wasn't much else of interest in the room other than a metal bat, it was propped against the wall in the corner, if his friend had intended to use it he had never gotten the chance to do so. He shuddered and turned away, that was enough. They needed to call the police as soon as possible as they could do far more than the three of them ever could, especially with the backup of real heroes and not some students.

"I didn't find anything useful," he said as he approached Jirou. "How about you guys?"

"Bastards a goner." Bakugou shook his head as he dropped the remains of a small red figurine that had been torn beyond recognition. Jirou didn't even answer, that told him enough.

"I'm gonna give the police a call and then we can get out of here," he said in defeat as he took out his phone. "Thanks," he looked at Bakugou. He did appreciate that the guy had gone out of his way to help them.

1 – Unknown number – NEW

His eyes widened as he saw it and he opened it immediately, he wasn't sure when he'd missed it.

*Are you not curious?*
Allow me to allow you. 021093.
- J

"It's the same." He stared at it, then he slipped Riley's phone from his pocket and put in the number. Even though the screen was cracked it clicked and unlocked just fine.

"What? Show me," Jirou said as her and Bakugou walked over. He held up his own phone with one hand as he went through Riley's in his other.

The twelve new messages were from a mixture of Jirou, himself and oddly enough Iida. A short look told him it was nothing unexpected, Iida had hounded him as only a class president with a reputation on the line could. There had to be something else. It didn't take much more searching to find that something and as soon as he did he almost regretted it. There must have been ten, or upwards of twenty from the same unknown number and though he tried to open several only a handful came up as more than scrambled lines of unreadable crap.

"Take a look," he said and he held out the screen of Riley's phone so they could see as he opened a message that was at this point around three days old.

Did.
You. Think?
It was over?
We have only just begun.
- J

"There are more, dozens, and they're all pretty similar." He shook his head in disdain. He almost felt sick.

"No doubt now, it has to be related to the villains from last week," Jirou said as she looked away and around the room.

"The mist guy was called Kurogiri... and the leader of the pack Tomura. That doesn't help us much though." He needed to make that call, it was the only smart move. A wave for help when you'd accidentally been sucked into a riptide.

"Why the hell didn't that idiot tell anyone about this crap, aren't we his friends?" She didn't even bother to hide the upset in her voice now.

"Maybe he didn't have a choice." It was unlikely anyone could last under those types of conditions, unless they had a very good reason. There had to have been things, he refused to believe that Riley hadn't at least tried to hint them at it.

"We need to get the police involved. Now. The school too, they have to care if those same villains are involved." She robbed the initiative from him and took out her own phone again.

"This is all so." He grimaced and looked at Bakugou, though his expression was not one of distress
there was some disgust there. "I should have…"

"You couldn't have done shit," Bakugou said and stepped toward him and pointed at the phone. "Fuckers wanted us to find this."

That struck him, and made him realize how odd it all was, how convenient, everything about it. First they had all the trouble in the world finding this place and now things were falling into place left and right, and why would the kidnapper just give him the password to the phone with all the evidence on it? How had he even gotten his number for that matter. Vrrm, Riley's phone vibrated in his hand like it was trying to stop him from reasoning.

1 – Unknown Number – NEW

You are already too late.

Do you want to see your prize, heroes?

~

Dae-jin 1-8-2 Warehouse 1-G

"Dae-jin 1-8-2, Warehouse 1-G, got any idea where this place is?" he asked, Bakugou shrugged and Jirou gave up her call halfway through holding it to her ear.

"You really think it's a good idea?" she said. He could tell why, it sounded like a trap through and through.

"We can't just leave it can we?"

"We can, and we will."

"A man would go." He made his voice more stern and her face became as serious as he'd ever seen it.

"And become just another victim," she said. "That's not manly." The syllable of the word turned in her mouth like a viper, dispelling a crude idiocy over the concept.

"But Ril-"

"Shut up you fucks," Bakugou said, his head snapping to the door. Their voices became silent and he heard it, why he had stopped them, thudding of footsteps making their way down the hall at a rapid pace. He didn't want to think who it was but his mind wandered in panic. It could be the landlady who'd heard them or the police who Riley's uncle had surely called by now. Maybe even the villain, now back for seconds.

"Didn't anyone teach you trespassing is illegal?" a familiar voice, followed by a more familiar face rounded the corner and leaned on the sill. It was Aizawa, much to his relief.
"What the fuck are you doing here. How'd you find us?" Bakugou yelled, almost shouted.

"Watch your mouth and I might be more inclined to explain, Bakugou." Their teacher had an impatient furrow on his brow beneath the bandages. His combat ones were strung around his shoulders like he’d rushed to retrieve them.

"I knew what you were planning to do the moment you walked out of that building. Your duty to your friends is nothing short of predictable, Kirishima," Aizawa said and he felt himself wince as under his teachers glare as the man fiddled with the bandages around his eyes. There was a nasty scarring around them that hadn’t been there before, however for the most part the damage he’d suffered at USJ looked healed.

"No one’s seen Riley in days. We couldn't just sit by and do nothing." He clenched his hands. "And when we heard the school wasn't going to do anything." His throat clumped, preventing further words.

"You're right, officially the school can’t do anything. First a large scale attack and now a kidnapping… the media is going to have a field day," Aizawa said as he walked over to them. "This is beyond you. Give me the phone, I'll handle the rest." He held the phone between his hands before hitting one side into his palm. It was probably for the best. They were in over their heads. "Luckily for you I'm not going to tell anyone about this little break-in; you could have walked right into the villains hands," the words took him off guard, they were almost unusually kind. The man by all rights could have thrown them to the wolves and left it at that.

Vrrm,
the phone vibrated again just as he was about to give it up. Another message had arrived, he took pause to open it and look.

Do you think naïve?

1830. Time’s run out and the execitious sits infinitely.

～J

PICTURE ATTACHED

He opened the picture and blinked at it, unsure what he was seeing until he realized. It had been taken with a crap camera and in dim light but what it contained was very easily discernible in the fact he’d seen it many times. The gloves with the heavy looking ring bands on the cuff were the same as when Riley had been wearing them, only now shredded. They weren’t something he walked around without.

"Those are Torenagi’s," Jirou said if only for the benefit of Bakugou. "Sir, we have to go after it. There’s no way the police is going to get there before six-thirty." She handed the phone to the teacher, he himself looked at it not sure if to be shocked at her change.

Aizawa’s face had changed. He was no longer completely hinged, it was the look he’d had on his face during USJ as well. It was one of calculation and rationality. He folded his arms and closed his eyes as he tapped away on the front of his wrist with his fingers. "Change of plans," he opened his eyes again. "Come with me," he said, turning and striding out of the apartment.

It was difficult to dissuade his doubt as he followed the man, especially when the night was turning out to be so much more dreadful than he could have imagined. He kept it away, if he couldn't do this then he had no right to call himself a man, his whole charade would be for nothing.
Aizawa had driven at a neck breaking speed out of the pocket of the city. It was a godsend that nobody stopped them, though even if they had tried he doubted the man would have cared to entertain them. He knew they never would have made it without him, he’d counted down the time to the supposed deadline on his phone with every nervous minute that passed by. As the car came to a stop there was only eight minutes left, he didn’t want to think what would be if they missed it.

The handbrake crunched as the man put it into park and spoke, "This is the place. Everyone out, and stay behind me. Do exactly as I say or I’ll kick you out myself when we get back to Yuuei."

He didn’t need encouragement as he practically ripped the car door open to get free. The place they’d arrived at was barren, almost. Fences made of stocky bundled trees were at their back and the wind howled as it rolled up from the river bank to push into them, which caused them to sway and crack as if it were sparking electric wire. The ground near the path they’d come down was shattered with weeds poking up through it and beyond he could see the lights of the city shining through the night a long while away. The sun had long since gone and what it left them with was the equivalent of stark nothingness and a deep festering cold that had want to make his fingers numb. In front of them now was a row of warehouses, seven to be exact. The numbers were all the same but they were lettered A through G.

"Sir, do you really think he's in there?" Jirou asked as they trekked toward the end of the old dock.

"I have no idea." Aizawa shook his head just an inch. "Torenagi could be long gone."

"He has to be," he said. "All we've gotta do is get him."

"Do not make the naïve assumption that he will come willingly," his teacher said as they finally approached. He didn't answer that, there was no way he could believe what the man implying was even remotely true, yet he remembered this was the villains invitation, they wanted to be found.

Warehouse 1-G: Crate Storage and Shipping.

It was made of some type of iron, cracks and pockets of rust ran their way up the side to windows that were far too dark to see into. The roof wasn't much of a roof at all. Bits and pieces had fallen off the side and now sat in piles around it like some crude ironic decorum. There was a deteriorated handle that hooked into a door that opened to the side. Riley was in there, he had to be. He reached for it but Aizawa caught him by the wrist before he could so much as touch it. He freed his hand and pulled it back like he'd been shocked, then he realized what he'd done and then felt like an idiot, his worry for his friend had ruined his judgement.

"Jirou, see if you can hear anything inside," Aizawa whispered.

She let down one of her jacks and allowed it to crawl up the wall. It stuck itself into one of the concrete palings that had in the past helped to make the structure resistant to earthquakes, though he doubted it could so much as withstand a strong kick at this point. It felt like minutes but eventually she disconnected the jack with a grim look on her face. Instead of saying what she’d heard she instead held up two fingers, two people were inside is what she meant. Aizawa nodded in understanding.

"No matter what is about to happen in there, if I say run, you run." He placed his hand on the iron door and he found himself nodding without even a thought, even Bakugou beside him looked more cautious than he had. They had all learned what villains were capable of and this wouldn’t be a repeat of that.
Screech, the door screamed as it rolled open. What hit him first was the smell, a rancid sweetness that crawled up your nose and left a raw metallic taste on your tongue. There was a mixture within it, mould or something like the corpse of dead rat decomposing within the walls. It was a vapour that urged you to stay away at all costs, but there was no way he could.

They were in a corridor, the antechamber of the warehouse that would connect into the main section that opened into the back of the dock. A sound or two tainted the air as they made their slow steps along it, the ticking and clacking of a gear brushed aside by the harsh whine of metal rubbing against metal. It was with painful care that they made each turn as their teacher checked every corridor. He could sense the man was rigid because he was as well. It sat heavy in his joints and made the stretches of cramped narrowness far longer than they should have been. As they went the sounds only became louder, less like a mistake and more akin to a lure dragging them in step by step.

The hangar they came upon was dark, save for a single light at the rear of the complex. Puddles of water dripped into alcoves formed over years from holes in the ceiling and boxes with contents long raided lay pillaged at the ends of the walls. It wasn't wide, but in its entirety rather much like a desecrated church, thin and uninviting. Beneath the light stood what he might have mistaken for a statue, had it not been for the delicate movement of his arms and the occasional bob of his shoulders as he hunched over a chair. The man had a heavy coat on, much like a surgeon's ensemble. A gentle snap shook the air and a harmful creak followed it. All he could do was to stare and wait as the man's hands stopped, they only did because he wanted and not because of their arrival.

"You hear it. They have arrived. All for you. Aren't you glad?" The man didn't turn around as he whispered with delight to whatever was in front of him. "Don't you love it Tomura? When an experiment finally comes to fruition? Yes. I certainly do. It is the most exquisite feeling." He trembled with satisfaction, quivering the fabric of his robe.

"Just finish up freak show." The rasp made him shiver because it was like a haunt, an echo of a villain he knew, Tomura stepped out of the corner of the shadow behind the man. "Take any longer and it'll be game over for us even if you are our healer." There were no large signs of his injuries left, just ragged flesh where the bullets had wounded him but even those were covered by the dismembered hands.

"Yes, you are right. It is finally time. Time for data. Time for results. Let us get started heroes." The man's neck snapped as he peered almost one eighty degrees over his back toward them. It was grotesque and unnatural; as if he could see through every detail of their being in that moment. "I have something special. Very special. Very precious. Just for you. You are just on time to see my greatest creation yet," he said in a low, mad pitch as his beak stared down at them with eyes made of thick glass. He couldn't see what was in the chair behind the man. All he could make out were the leather straps that had bound it and now sat loose at the chair's sides. Red irritation bore on the wrists of whatever it was and intermittent silvered lines crawled up its arm toward the shoulder.

"Stop," Aizawa said but it did nothing to stop villain raising his hand.

"Come, now. You've been such accommodating guests. It is only fair and just. A fair and just experiment, it is the only way to see results." The man took his thumb to his middle finger and snapped which echoed as he spoke the last words. "I want to see everything, show this one all of it. Heroes." He stepped away, and as he did the single light burned brighter. It was not yet enough to see the room but it gave them a direct look at the derelict creature that was sitting in the high wooden chair behind him. It was a figure, much identifiable as human. It did not quite fill the throne it was being forced to occupy and it wore a similar mask to its master. There was a lack of a protrusion for the nose, which caused it to shine with a polished veneer in the pale light. There were slits for the eyes, which fell through as a dull blue that weren't focused on anything in particular.
Its fingers tugged into the arm rests and they splintered in response, then it let them go and rose to its feet. The rest of its body was not so covered as its face, with the exception of a shred to save its modesty. He could tell now that the silver gleam he had seen earlier was not on the skin but rather digging through it. They were stitches, spiraling their way up and down in a tight line from the left of its body before meeting at the shoulder and spreading to the flesh on the right in the same way. It stood at its height pale and slim, but not fragile. Its limbs twitched ever so slightly in an unnatural vigor, like it was testing each muscle before using allowing itself to use it. As it twisted its neck it let out a cacophony of nasty cracks and lurches.

Then, all at once it tensed.

"Get back," Aizawa shouted as he stepped forward. The figure had lunged off its podium and bound across the room at a frightening speed despite the awkward increments of its movements. They weren't human movements, animal-like would have been the way to describe them.

It threw a vicious kick at Aizawa's head as it reached him, which was caught by the back of the man's elbow and deflected downward. Before it could react the teacher grabbed its arm and placed his hand on its neck, and wrenched it backward. It didn't howl, scream or even utter so much as a sound as its shoulder dislocated. Instead it fell back and held still, and then pulled the limb upward and looked at it with its other hand. Not gently it took its shoulder and twisted, which gave a single crunch as it clicked back into place.

Aizawa shifted from his grab to a kick that took the creature back a foot. Then as he stepped past it he wound his bandages around its chest and across its arms and gave a strong yank that for a moment looked like it would pull it into the floor. The bandages tore instead, coming apart like fine silk in its hands. As it freed itself it brought its elbow around into Aizawa's back which caused the man to let out a pained groan. It then grabbed him only to have its legs swept out from under it, which caused it to hit the floor with a loud concussive smack. It got up like it's body was mechanical before returning to the pursuit of their teacher unhindered. There was malice in its crude savagery, its attacks were easy to read even for him, yet all he could do was watch. He didn't want to get in Aizawa's way or become a hostage.

"Die asshole!" Bakugou shouted as he brought his knuckle up to the back of the assailants head with a spark of red and white trailing from it. Bang, the room shuddered as the detonation covered it in smoke and sent reverberations throughout. A single metallic clang followed shortly, as the black mask hit the floor not two meters in front of him. He took it, and gazed at it before his attention was stolen by the fading of the smoke in front of him. It revealed features in an agonizingly slow way, a damnable increment delayed by the stunned slant of its face still stuck looking at the ceiling from Bakugou's blow. Even as he saw the traces of blond hair, and the dark rings under the unevenly colored blue eyes he didn't want to believe it. He might have been awestruck if he hadn't already had an ever growing suspicion.

"T-toenagi?!" Jirou said. It was almost hysterical yet more controlled, like she had been having the same thoughts he had been.

"Riley… buddy," he said. His friend, what looked like his friend, cracked its neck and stared directly
at him. It was a terrifying look, one defined by the lack of any recognition in his pin-pricked eyes, as if he wasn't quite there. "What the fuck did you do to him?!" he yelled at the two villains, hatred swarming and becoming collected like the leaves in a storm, everything that had felt so distant, so impossible now culminated.

"Finally, there it is. The look I've been waiting for," Tomura said as he touched his head with the palm of his hand, allowing streaks of his whitening hair to fall through the fingers.

Riley looked away from him, and toward Bakugou. It was a desire he had that wasn't quite revenge, perhaps more of an assessment of his threat. The small burns that had been inflicted on him by the explosion were visible for seconds before they scabbed over and then fell off. Bakugou parried the next blow as it came, and gave him a nasty burn across his chest in retaliation. The guy took it without care even as the skin peeled away, like he was sedated or numb to the pain that he should have felt. In some way it looked like there was enjoyment to it, a revelry that he couldn't quite put into words.

"It is even better than this one could have hoped, yet still there remains so much work to be done." the beaked man in the distance said, the eyes were almost reflective in the sheen of the light. He ignored him, there had to be something they could do to make Riley come to his senses. Even as he watched however he could see it was pointless, there was no driver in the seat in a way which meant that it wasn't his friends own doing, not from his own will. "Soon, he will become something even more. He is just at the cusp now. This one cannot wait."

The rambling drew his attention this time and then it came to him. If he could just take out that guy, and break whatever quirk he was using to control Riley then maybe it would be enough to at least subdue him. It was a signal out of the corner of his eye that confirmed he wasn't the only one with the idea, Aizawa had moved from his prone position to one closer to the villains.

He began to pound across the concrete access way, making echoes as he went. The familiar rigidity of his quirk crawled across his arms as he closed the gap between himself and the malignant man. It took only an instant, but it felt much longer than that. The villain raised not even a single hand as he jumped at him. Not a single notion of movement, or quivering fear, escaped. His hand felt like a blade, the sharp end of a scalpel, it would be hellish he knew but he was prepared to slice the villain in half if that's what it would take.

It was horror that he was met with, not vengeance and he recoiled as he realized he was half buried inside Riley's arm. He had almost sawed it in half in one fluid motion. When had his friend jumped in the way? He hadn't even registered it before it happened. His own blazer had torn on the impact, not able to resist the sharp power which he had used.

"Interesting. There is still yet room. Reshape, fix and improve. It will come in time," the beaked man spoke from behind Riley, who made only a cursory glance at the injured limb. It would bleed him out in mere minutes at the rate it was going without proper care. Snap, his arm went as slivers of the steel band crawled down from his shoulder and along from his wrist to merge on the gash. It tightened the skin and turned it from a lethal injury into a mere flesh wound.

"Back off, Kirishima," Aizawa shouted a warning at him as Tomura dodged out of his way with ease, without the help of his bandages the hero's moves had become more predictable and his style more basic. The injuries he was already suffering had exacerbated, his movements had become sluggish.

"Let's not play this game again Eraserhead. After all, you're only a mid-boss, there's no way you can hope to stand up to a protagonist."
"Come on Riley, snap out of it." He stepped back as his friend began to approach him. "Didn't you say you had a promise to keep? Are you just going to let them take that from you?" His friend paused in his step, appearing for a moment to consider what he'd said. Then he fell forward with a right hook. It was the unnatural speed of the movement that allowed the blow to hit him in the stomach, followed by a devastating kick into the same exact area. A yelp of pain escaped him as the kick winded him and sent him to the floor. Something felt wrong as he looked down, the hardening he'd put up on his stomach was cracked. Lines spread like fractures through the rocky skin, before repairing themselves like nothing had happened.

"Pointless. Don't you see? This one has already had enough time. There is nothing left. Nothing except what I have allowed," the beaked man said, with a hint of a laugh.

He looked up enough to see Riley raise his hand and tense it. The arm shook with a tremor as the quirk ran down it. Then nothing came, his friend dropped the hand and peered at it, before his ire fell back upon Aizawa who had red and swollen irises behind the metallic goggles. *Bang,* Riley reared back from in front of him as fiery trails struck at his body from Bakugou's hand. The explosions weren't as powerful in the damp air but it was enough to stun him and allow Jirou to pull him to his feet. He expected another attempt at the compression but nothing came, Riley had stopped moving entirely as if he did not even breathe.

"What a superb sample. However. This one thinks that would be enough." The beaked monster turned in one swift motion toward the hangar doors behind him. No sooner had he that it began to ooze with black miasma, it dripped and coalesced into an archway in front of him.

"Done with your sick little game, doc?" Tomura asked as the beaked man looked over at him and beckoned him to go first. There was a slight bow in it, like it was a whim of obligation. "It was fun heroes. Now you might appreciate what it's like to be humiliated." He flashed a cruel grin before he stepped backwards into the warp gate and disappeared. *Snap,* the beaked man's fingers went as he watched Tomura go, and then he himself took residence in his escape. Not that he looked like he needed to do so; he hadn't so much as raised a hand against them.

"Who- who are you?" Jirou demanded before the beaked man fully departed. His head turned, the sound was like rusty metal plates shoving into one another, like a sheath and a blade.

"You. You. Little girl. May call me Janus," he said, then, he was gone.

Riley shivered for a moment and then took a step back like an invisible hand had grabbed him on the shoulder. Then he changed his focus to the arch through which the two villains had gone through. He bounded toward it, further and faster with each step. Halfway to it a twine wrapped around his chest and pulled him back if only a centimeter. It was a thick cord, like a bungee cable only made of a thoroughly flexible metallic material. Aizawa was the one who had thrown it. It must have been a backup restraining tool in case his bandages failed to work.

"Don't let him leave." Aizawa's hair stood on end as he propped up one foot against a stray ground anchor which he then used to pull backward on the tether in his hand. His focus was all on Riley, to keep him from tearing the thing in two.

His classmate fell to his knees as he dragged himself against the wire, scratching at it and making his fingertips bloody. He could see the wire tearing into his skin as he approached him from behind. Before he could so much as hold him down Bakugou struck the guy in the back, between the shoulder blades, causing him to collapse to the floor where despite having no leverage he still clawed as if desperate to didn't matter as Bakugou pinned him by the neck, with his knees pushing down on him. He himself knelt down, looking for Jirou as to ask her to knock him out but she had already walked up to the black mass at the back of the room. She stuck her jacks in and then a shaking struck
the floor, like an earthquake but smaller. Her quirk made his teeth click and chatter as it worked and bits and pieces of the ceiling began to come down. Then the portal quivered, and began to close with a flickering dissipation.

"It has to be something physical on his body. Find it," Aizawa said as he tightened his grip. Riley still squirmed against both him and Bakugou, delivering weak but deliberate punches to whatever he could get at. It was pathetic and gut wrenching and that was how he knew there was no simple solution, no knocking him out. He looked him up and down, but there was nothing on the guy's back. He looked at Bakugou, whom obliged by pulling and slamming him into the floor with his chest exposed which made the scratching and punching worse. He gritted his teeth and hardened his elbow, bringing it down into Riley's stomach winding him just so he could take a look at the rough reddened skin underneath which several ribs had broken.

"The shoulder," Bakugou said as he took the calm in Riley's movements to put the weight of his upper body onto his chest into a wrestler's choke hold.

What Bakugou had seen was on the left side of his body, it was a gross malformed glob that wriggled and pulsed beneath his skin. "Sorry man, this is for your own good," he said as he hardened the tips of his fingers. Then he stabbed it through the center of the mass, piercing straight from one side and out the other. The texture of it, despite missing bone, made him shudder in disgust. It was as soft as if it had been chewed through by maggots. His friend struggled only once more against Bakugou's grip and then his arms fell limp, convulsions ceasing and eyes slamming shut. Only shallow breaths remained to betray that he'd fallen unconscious. He counted it a good sign, shallow breaths were still breaths.

"What the fuck is that thing." Bakugou said, pointing at a leech-like creature that crawled out from beneath the pierced shoulder. Hard silk ran out like webs from its soft shell. It got about a meter away before its body erupted in fire from Bakugou's explosion quirk, charring and curling it up.

The trembling all around them ceased and he looked up. Jirou had joined them. She bobbed down beside Riley and put one jack where his heart was. "Not good," she said, shaking her head as she looked toward Aizawa. "We need to get him out of here."

"You two, get him to the car. There's an emergency aid kit in the trunk." The teacher threw the keys at him, which he caught. He then took one of Riley's arms and slung it over his shoulder while Bakugou took the other. It was hard not to look at the slim tear where he'd made a hole straight through his friend's shoulder, upon which his head bounced with each step. As they began to leave the warehouse he looked back just enough to see their teacher peel the incinerated creature from the floor, wrapping it inside some leftover bandages and placing it in one of his pockets.

The commute was miserable, it felt silent and terrible and surreal all at the same time. Not much time had passed since they'd left the warehouse, but it already felt like a distant memory. That was probably his own mind trying to spare him the misery. It was hard to forget however, what with his friend who lay comatose right there in the spot between himself and Bakugou. Riley's wounds were gruesome at best and even the ones the madman, Janus, had stitched had begun to profuse again. They had tried their best to stem the worst of it but there was only so much an emergency kit could do, even now the seat beneath Riley was being stained.

Jirou, who had taken the front passenger seat, was stealing glances every half a minute and every time she did he could see the look on her face that made him wish again and again that he'd acted on his instinct sooner. It all seemed so obvious in retrospect. It made him remember what Thirteen had said, All your quirks could easily be used to kill people. He shook his head, how could he call himself a hero if he let this happen? Some friend he claimed to be.
"You better not be blaming yourself for his fucking wounds, it's all because of those shitty villains." Bakugou had apparently noticed his worried stare.

"Yeah," he answered. In a sense he knew the guy was right, but that didn't make him feel less guilty about it. They'd already arrived back in the city, for the most part. He wasn't keeping track of the time anymore but the shroud of dark that hung around them rather than flickering lights suggested they were taking a course meant to avoid traffic.

"Why did they go after Torenagi in the first place?" Jirou asked. It was in a way, the inevitable question at the back of each of their minds.

"I don't know," Aizawa answered as he drove. "Judging by those messages, they've been planning this little incursion long before that attack."

He smashed his fist down on the seat cushion. "I should have known. I did know. Something was up after the battle training, maybe I could have stopped it." He felt better having admitted it.

"There is little point in doubting yourselves," Aizawa said. It made him wonder if this wasn't the first time for the man, and if so, how many had occurred before it.

"How," Jirou began and stopped with a slight hesitation, she tightened her shoulders and looked at him. "How do you do it Sir, knowing this kind of shit is out there every day. How do you deal with it?" Aizawa didn't answer right away, instead letting his attention fall upon street after street as it curled out in front of him in the dark of the night. It was almost moonless, and his shoddy headlights did little to ease him through the thick of it.

"I want to tell you it gets easier," he finally said. "The truth is it doesn't." The man tapped his thumb on the steering wheel as he paused again. "It could be anyone… your neighbor, your friend, your family… at any time. The world isn't fair and this won't be the last time you'll be forced to realize it. There's a reason why not everyone is cut out for our life."

The car drowned itself in silence. The occasional look plagued him like a habit he couldn't kick. The wheels of the car turned much like his thoughts and he had an itch to finally see something familiar in front of him. Then everything would be alright again, he would finally be able to wash away his friends dried blood that still stained his right arm from tip to elbow through tattered cloth. It was then he felt a jolt, and he knew the night was not done with him.

"D-fucking touch me, get the hell off!" Riley flailed his arms around wildly, trying to throw off hands that weren't there. "Let me go. Let me go!" His arm began to weep again, the wound they had bandaged on his rib ripped free and his broken rib threatened to tear through the skin causing a shaded purple swelling.

"Hold him down, he's in shock. His wounds will only get worse if he struggles, we're almost there now," Aizawa said as he looked in the rear view mirror.

It took several desperate tries to attempt to keep him still, and in the end they only succeeded by holding both his arms and pinning him to the seat. It wasn't possible to be delicate and he found himself hating every minute of it. In bits of spasms he eventually stopped and then fell back into still unconsciousness again. There had been no sign of cognition in the rebellion, maybe it had been borne out of an instinct to fight back. Somehow though, the outburst had dawned one important thing on him. His classmate wasn't gone. His friend, was not gone. He was right here beside him, damaged but alive. Although he couldn't tell what those villains had done to him beyond the physical, they had saved him from whatever awaited for him beyond the other side of that fearful gateway. The thought filled him with a strange mixture of joy and melancholy. In the distance he
could see it finally, the welcoming lights of Yuuei's front gate. He heard a blaring of sirens that took the place of his insecurity almost as if to reassure him that there was nothing more he could do now.

Chapter End Notes

*I own nothing related to BNHA. OC material is my own.
How to keep busy

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

[Yuuei's Campus – Classroom 1-A – 7:20 AM Friday]

"Do you want me to tell you about how his head exploded against the side of the wall or some shit?!" Bakugou said as he threw up his hands at the students around him. "No? Then you can fuck right off." To his apparent ease, they did, though only a meter or so.

"It's just surprising. I didn't take you as the rescue type," Tsuyu croaked as she peered at him from her seat.

Sero gave a shrug. "Yeah, you're more the kablooey-pow bang power fuck shit up type."

"What part of this face doesn't scream hero to you fucks?" Bakugou wore a sneer on his face now that looked like it belonged to a monster.

"Gee, I don't know what in the world it could be," Kaminari said, rolling his eyes.

The first day there had been naught but silence. Then Aizawa had come in, and explained exactly the story Nedzu had concocted the afternoon before it after their return. The gist of it had been cut down to them three finding Riley unconscious in his apartment, rather than the fight in the warehouse. The implication was revenge over the villains failure at USJ. He could understand his classmate's aggression because of that, the questions had all been a bit relentless. It was starting to annoy him too, Riley wasn't some sort of object even if this was a heroics class.

The media held an even worse attitude. They behaved like rabid dogs desperate to get any piece of nourishment they could. Articles had come in torrents, rife with inaccurate assumptions and footage of his friend's apartment had followed as well as a sickening interview with that landlord of his. He'd been approached a dozen times that morning about it on his way to school, god knows how they found out he'd been involved so quickly. They'd used the kidnapping as an excuse to re-amplify their criticism of the school. Some went as far as to suggest that Riley was in some way compromised from what had happened, a common thread so to speak. They had no goddamn right to say that, it had barely been more than a day, and they didn't even know the real story. All of it had him wishing he had skipped like Jirou had, it didn't help that Recovery Girl had denied him any access to his friend's hospital room. No one was even allowed within fifty metres of it, he could swear there had even been guards outside it at one point and many policemen had come and gone.

"I freaked when I saw his face on the train," Ashido said as she tilted her chair back and forth.

"Yeah, at first I thought it was just a rerun of the USJ story." Uraraka nodded before giving Midoriya a nudge. "It didn't even take a week for those villains to already make their next move, I can't believe it."

Midoriya hummed his agreement but made not a single ounce of movement, like he was deep in thought. "They did it right in the aftermath of the first attack."

"If their hope was to catch the school off guard, they undoubtedly succeeded," Tokoyami said in that thoughtful folded pose he always struck.

"Torenagi's situation is certain to prove difficult, hospitalisation is however preferable to the
"alternative…" Momo said.

"I hope he ends up being alright," Tsuyu said.

"If they wanted him dead then he would be," Ojiro said.

"Which means they just wanted to make sure everyone was scared," Rikidou said.

Ashido shook her head. "I'm not convinced of that."

"That's enough, yeah?" Kirishima turned over his shoulder and in return he got stares. "Mr. Aizawa is gonna be here any minute."

"Kirishima is correct," Iida said after many minutes of having remained uninvolved. He had his arms leant on his desk and did not turn to look in their direction. "I insist you return to your seats at once."

Shick-thwack, the door went as Hagakure poked, what he could assume was her head, through. He'd hoped that it would have been his teacher, instead. "Is it true?!" she said as she leant on the doorframe. He almost groaned but managed to contain himself. Before anyone could answer a dark worn out face appeared behind her. He was in luck.

"Class started three minutes ago." Aizawa gripped her on the shoulder as he came through the door behind her, which made the girl jump in fright. "If you want to flap your lips I can arrange for you to take your classes in detention at lunch, if you prefer."

Hagakure rushed to her seat, and the rest of the class took them just as quickly. The teacher did not appear to be in a good mood, not that he ever was, and the bandages on his face were back. He flipped each page of the folder with his plans in it carefully, sliding his finger down the side of each as he took them out and placed them in front of him. Tsuyu raised her hand but Aizawa didn't entertain it, instead he shot her a glare that caused her to lower it again.

"Were the testimonies of your three-" He looked up and around as spoke, "-I suppose two classmates, not enough?" He corrected himself as he looked back at his forms. "You have all the information you need regarding those events. If you want to be heroes you don't have time for such concerns, let alone ones that involve petty gossip. As for the result of what happened, that remains to be seen. That is the reality of it. You'd be better off putting your energy elsewhere, such as the sports festival."

He began to write a set of numbers on the board. "This is the new date, circumstances have forced us to redouble our security again and so another delay is expected."

He shifted in his seat, irritation still burning him like a candle placed underneath skin and left to sear it. He wanted to do more, he couldn't, he wanted to be there, he wasn't allowed. He clenched his hand, his hardening rubbing the palm and making it hurt. It seeped from him and he forced himself to sit up straight, eyes narrowed. Sulking was useless, that's what Crimson would say, always look ahead. The next target, the sports festival. He gritted his teeth and focussed.

[ Yuuei's Campus – Gym Hall ß – 12:02 PM ]

Smack, the punching bag flew backward as he piled his rocky fist into it. Then he repeated the process a few dozen times. Taking his frustration out on the thing was helping just a bit to relieve the tense crook in his neck that had built up over the morning. He swung until his arms threatened to go numb but it didn't feel like enough yet, not if he wanted to start getting ready for the sports festival. They had just somewhere close to a month, which wasn't much time at all. Stretching out his arms returned some feeling to them and then he almost immediately moved onto the next exercise. Sit ups.
His quirk was the kind that required conditioning and lots of it, especially if he wanted to get up to the level of the pros. He was barely into his third set when the clang of the gym door opening stopped him. The hall had been silent other than him and the occasional bothering of a student as they passed through to access some of the treadmills and weight machines. However it was different this time in the detail that was Midnight, his teacher, who was coming directly toward him. She’d shed the teasing leotard costume that she wore in class, instead opting for a quaint beige skirt with matching blouse on, it made her look more professional somehow. The lack of a facemask encouraged that notion and also made him able to steel his nerves rather than get embarrassed.

"What's up Miss?" he said as he rested on the floor and wiped his brow. He didn't have much patience for interruptions right now, if he hurried he might still be able to fit in some push ups before class resumed.

"I didn't mean to intrude on you," Midnight said, looking down at him. "How are you holding up?"

"Holding up?" Then, he realised. "I'm great."

"That's good." She smiled then took a seat on a bench intended to be used in lifting the weights suspended above it. "Have you seen Jirou Kyouka? She wasn't in attendance."

"No idea." He had received a text or two but he wasn't about to rat her out.

"I see." If she knew he was lying then she didn't show it.

"Do you mind if I get back to it?" he asked with the least amount of impatience he could manage. If he didn't then he would begin feeling ragged right in the middle of the set.

"Go ahead, don't let me stop you," Midnight said, although she didn't make a move in an attempt to signal her leave.

"Thanks," he answered with a half-hearted smile, then he resumed from where he had left off. Each of his sit ups split into three parts, fast and rigid and to form. He'd poured over tutorials and even gone so far as to get personal instruction to optimise his regiment.

"It's alright to be distressed by what happened," she said after several minutes.

"Distressed?" he did his best to say as he paused midway through his motion but didn't completely stop. "I'm not distressed."

"Sweetie," she said, dropping the arrogance in her voice. "There's no shame in it. Besides, it was informed not inferred."

"Who?" He almost snapped his head in her direction. Then he regretted it, he'd fallen right into her little trap. He could see it in the smirk on her face. A little hmph escaped him. "I'm not."

Midnight leaned forward and clasped her hands together on her knee. "Look, if you want to talk about it, my door is always open."

"Yeah and why do you care so much?" Despite how honest her offer appeared to be he was getting riled up by it.

"Well, I'm your teacher first and foremost."

"And as the guidance counsellor for your class I can hardly ignore the significance of two high stress encounters in less than a week." She sat back again. "More than that though, and I can say this from experience, heroic work weighs on the mind more than the body. Things like this aren't something
you can just punch through.” He didn't answer as Midnight got up from the bench and began to walk toward the door from where she'd come. "If you see do see Jirou around, tell her to come and see me." She gave a small seductive wave as the door fell flat behind her.

His exhaustion gave way to panting as he was alone once more, an odd woman she was. In his mind he doubted he would take her up on that offer, though it did make him feel better. She was right. Some part of him knew Riley would be angry if he was released and saw him being gloomy like this, especially if he thought himself to blame. There was no way he was going to allow that to be the case. He rubbed his hand against his forehead, then got back to work.

[Yuuei's Campus – Outside Classroom 1-A – 7:23 AM Saturday]

"Yeah, I think I'm good on the pep talk. I don't care if she has good intentions or not," Jirou said. He had caught her on the way to class. She wasn't in any odd disarray like he'd expected, in fact she seemed perfectly alright except for the frustration a multitude of plastic bags in her hands were causing her.

"I figured that's what you'd say but I doubt you're gonna get much choice," he said with a cheeky grin. It was a bit hard to imagine how that would go. Jirou did seem like a tougher nut to crack for Midnight. "It would have helped if you hadn't skipped."

"You can tell her I'm still gone if you like." Jirou gave a dismissive wave before she dropped her bag from her shoulder and began rifling around in it. "You still got that picture, yeah?"

"You betcha," he answered and reached inside his pocket. "You gonna give it to Recovery Girl?" he pulled out the rowing pamphlet he'd put it inside in an attempt to keep it more or less undamaged.

"No," Jirou said and stole it from his fingers. She'd pulled a clear picture frame from her bag and had already pried the plastic apart to let the picture slide between it. The frame snapped shut as she let it go which now provided a much better, cleaner view of the picture. He hadn't taken a better look at it, but behind Riley and his family stood a large rural kind of house. It had a shred out the side, and the background of its stocky wooden exterior was barren but for trees and blue sky. It looked warm and welcoming, like a postcard.

"Cool… but why'd you go to all that trouble?" he asked. The gesture was odd for such an apathetic person.

"His place was totally wrecked, remember?" Her face slumped. "I figured this might help a bit. I got some other stuff too."

"I can't believe they still won't let us in to see him," he said. Now he understood her absence, it was her own way of coping.

"It's not a surprise. The condition he was in." Her eyes shifted away back to the bags as she rearranged them more comfortably before stuffing them into the schoolbag in their entirety.

"Maybe it was a good thing you weren't here. You'd have given Kaminari another bloody nose to accompany his first." It had pissed him off at first, but now, now it was hard to keep his face serious. Jirou gave a sly smile. "Whatever, I'll take that as a compliment."

"Say, you think Riley is gonna stay at the school? Considering." There would be no use for her to buy all this stuff if he had nowhere to go.
"No idea. I don't even know if he'll be the same person after he recovers. I saw the same type of thing happen with my mom's friend," she said.

"Huh?" His face widened, this wasn't a common thing but maybe he should be more sympathetic.

"Well, I don't mean exactly like that. It was just a similar situation, point being she's never been quite the same. My mom doesn't talk about it anymore, but yeah," Jirou answered with an almost too nonchalant shrug.

"When I mentioned the promise thing I'm sure he heard me. Even if it was just a little bit." He rubbed his arm and then remembered the blow to his stomach. His hardening hadn't fallen apart like that for what felt like a long time now, not since he'd been unskilled at it. Maybe it had been nerves over seeing him that way.

"I still don't understand it at all. USJ was meant to target All Might, there's no doubt about it," she said as she looked at him. "And that villain. Janus. You don't think he'll try again, do you?"

He'd thought about it, confidence would serve better than regret. That's what Crimson would say. "There won't be a next time. They aren't laying another finger on him."

"Aren't you just the chivalrous one."

He gave a click of his tongue to play off the fake mockery. "I'd prefer if you called it manly but whatever. I got it covered, even if I have to drag him by the neck to get him out of harm's way."

Jirou laughed. "I think he'd get pretty embarrassed if he heard you saying that."

He chuckled, true, his friend did have a tendency for that. "It's what heroes do, even to other heroes if it's right. Let's try the ward again this afternoon, it can't hurt."

"Sounds like a plan." It did seem to make her glad that he had insisted, although it was only a passing thought, the idea she was reluctant to see Riley gave him a hollow feeling. He wasn't sure what kind of person his friend would be from now on, he could only guess. Those cuts, those chunks, the slice he had himself inflicted weren't the type to wither away. The scar on his eye had never gone, and that was a joke compared to what he had tried to cover in flimsy bandage that night.

"We should probably get in," he said and she nodded. Most of their classmates were already in their seats and they were both late, despite their talk not having been that long. As he took a step he stalled, for the next second he felt an intense, murderous glare on the back of his head. He turned to look and found Aizawa's unimpressed face as if it had been carved from stone, right behind him.

"Kirishima, Jirou, Bakugou get yourselves to the principal's office," he said as moved in beside them.

"The fuck?!" Bakugou swore under his breath, he had been trying to get into a comfortable position where he could ignore whispers.

"Now." The man gave an inarguable look and a thumb pointing them out the door. He did groan this time, but followed the instruction nonetheless.

"Because of you two ass hats we're probably toast," Bakugou said as he slouched in one of five plastic chairs outside the fake looking wooden door to the principal's office.

"Are you worried? I didn't think I'd see that kind of thing from you. Maybe you do have a soft side," Jirou said in teasing tone.
"Let's see if you can be so snarky after I twist your head off you piece of shit." He looked like he might have, had it not been for Nedzu's secretary less than ten metres away from them.

"Oh man I'm so scared, some hero you are," she said, this time whimsical and in tune to a rolling of her eyes.

"Cut it out you two, principal Nedzu can probably hear your bickering from out here," he said. He'd had enough of being caught between their grudge match. Not just figuratively either, he'd unwisely taken the seat between them.

The door gave a click as it swung open. It might have hit the hard stone beside it had it not been for the metallic door stops with plastic heads on each side. "Quite right, Kirishima, it would help if you two minded your manners," Nedzu said as his head poked through. The doors seemed like they would have been too heavy for the man but he managed them with ease. "Now if you'll join me inside." He beckoned them.

He had to admit, he did feel kind of nervous as he stepped into the office. It was modest at first glance with a wide window at the far end, a well furnished desk in the centre surrounded by a comfortable set of high backed chairs. Creepy statues lined the walls that looked like they'd been sculpted right out of Beetlejuice, in a way it made Nedzu's office appear more like a super-villains lair rather than that of a principal. His attention wasn't kept long by the decorum; it was instead drawn to the man occupying one of the chairs. He was a bit too grimy even for his own liking with a formal looking white suit that might only qualify as such if it was forced through several dry cleaning visits. If he had to wager a guess this was who Jirou had meant, the aforementioned uncle.

"These are the ones that were key in the retrieval your nephew from his peril. An outstanding display of heroism I must say," Nedzu said as he introduced them with a wave. The man walked right past the small principal and up to them.

"So you three-" He grabbed his hand in a firm clasp and shook it against his will. "Torenagi Alo," he said. His body was one that had seen better days, even with the small hunch of a bow the man could manage it almost caused him to topple like an unevenly distributed pivot. "I don't even know how to thank you. Your principal here told me everything. What you did, on behalf of my family you've got our deepest gratitude. I wouldn't know what I would have done… I wouldn't even have been able to look my sister in the eye."

"We're happy to help. That's what heroes are for, right?" he said. It was odd to have someone thanking him so genuinely.

Alo wiped his face. "He was lucky to have people like you looking out for him."

Bakugou growled, then spoke, "Is this shit all you got us up here for? I don't give two shits what happens to that guy."

Nedzu shot him a stern look. "Bakugou. I would think it wise you consider the other result that could have occurred as a consequence of your meddling."

"Don't matter. You did a great service young man, more than those spineless officers." He didn't seem bothered in the slightest, which caused Bakugou to scoff and look away from the grovelling man.

"How is he?" Jirou looked past Riley's uncle at Nedzu.

"Torenagi is in a stable condition as of this time. However, he is still unconscious for now," he said.
"Can't we go in and see him?"

"I'm afraid not. I know it's difficult but don't let the matter sit on your minds," Nedzu said with a pleasant insistence, like he wanted her to drop the subject in front of the guest.

"Riley wouldn't wantcha to worry. That hard-headed kid has always been the one to try and take on everything on his own. I'll tell him you came askin' as soon as he gets better," Alo said with a fake looking smile.

"Then, can you at least give him this?" Jirou took out the picture in the frame she'd combined earlier.

"Where did you get this?" Alo said as his face lit up in recognition. "Nevermind that, I'll make sure he gets it. Thanks girlie." He took the plastic frame in both hands and gave it a long look. It was followed by a long draw in through his nostrils, an exhale through his mouth, which left him with a curled smile, bittersweet. He broke his inspection and lifted his chin, then he pulled a card from the inside of his right coat pocket and handed it to her. "If you ever need a favour, call me on this number. Anything at all, I'll be happy to help. It's the least I can do."

"That'll be all. Mr. Torenagi and I have some more things to discuss and it is time you returned to your lessons," Nedzu said and bid them out the door with a nod.

As they left it felt kind of brief, however not overwhelming like he'd thought it might after it was done. It was the feeling of something settled. The work mister explode-y fists had done on the apartment door probably helped with that, now that he thought about it. Maybe this was Nedzu's attempt to show them some of the triumph they could not so proudly relish in if they wanted to keep repercussions at bay. It was nice to finally see some positive consequence from what they’d done, and if not mentioning the kidnapping part helped to soften the blow on the school then that was what had to be done.

"Waste of fucking time," Bakugou said with a snort as the door closed behind them.

Jirou looked over at him. "I saw the look on your face. You can't say that didn't make you feel at least a little bit like a real hero," she said to which he turned away and resumed sticking his hands in his pockets while pouting in the other direction.

He grinned as he watched the two, losing the tension, the stress in his stomach in favour of a light fluttered whirring. The first person he'd saved was someone he knew, a friend, a frightening thing but in all ways right. He'd saved someone regardless. He was one step closer, the first real step and he was sure now, more than ever, he had needed to take.

Chapter End Notes

*I don't own BNHA. OC material is my own.*
The chains that bind

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

[There's Campus – Intensive Care Unit – 11:39 AM Sunday]

"When you're ready, Torenagi," Recovery Girl said.

They'd been very much alone since he had awoken that morning with only the occasional white coat fluttering in and out of existence. He paid them little attention for it felt as if weeks had passed. Recovery Girl did much to remind him it had only been four days and that he'd been incoherent and feverish rather than comatose. Four days, delirious or not, since he'd been rescued. It was dreadful to think and worse still because he didn't actually remember any of it, it was like a hole in his mind accompanied by a sluggish fatigue in both body and consciousness. It was as if he was flickering in and out of coherence, unable to focus on anything. Bits had begun to return now, coming back hazy and reminding him of the little threads that had been removed from his body. Reminding of the glee of the man who had done it to him, who had put him in here, who had strapped him to a table and forced him to attack his friends, his teacher, anything he could reach.

The long metal plate on his arm clipped off after two or three tugs. Beneath it were bandages that wound themselves all the way from his fingertips to his torso and up his neck. It was time to take them off and see what they were hiding, Recovery Girl was insistent he did, and he in turn had never thought a mirror could make him so anxious. He unwound the first as slow as he could but despite that he trembled before he even got to the left wrist. It was nothing less than hideous, zigzags and hundreds of lacerations interlaced like etchings down from his hand, up his arm and his shoulder, where he'd been run through, to just under his left eye. It was similar on the right side, however the line crossed across his collarbone to connect to the point where the creature had been rather than mirroring the first set. All he could do was to stare at them for a good long while. He didn't look... or feel like himself anymore. It was like someone had taken his upper body apart and stitched it back together like a ragdoll.

"While the injuries are more aesthetic than life threatening your body still needs time now to recover on its own."

It was hard to hear her even though she was right beside him, like something was muffling her words. "Will they- they," he stammered in his asking of such a simple question. Frustration touched his lips, shook them, and made him feel like idiot. He was an idiot. He felt so dumb.

"The pain will fade in time however."

She left the word hanging so he had no need to ask further. He averted his gaze from the mirror and down at his hands again. They were violent in their unease now and each of the cuts burned, if only slightly, like a reminder. The worst of his pain came from the gruesome triangular slice halfway down his right arm, where he remembered Kirishima had struck him. It was like he had touched a hot iron and it had stayed stuck to him. He dropped his hands and clenched them which brought further sting. A curse left his lips but it didn't amount to more than a whimper. The lingering disgust of whatever they had given him was still crawling its way across his tongue.

Recovery Girl shook her head. "If you want to keep the bandages on, that's your choice."

He looked down at the woman. Her face was a practiced mosaic despite the aged lines that wrinkled
it. This wasn't her first such experience, but there was some shared pain there that made it hard for him to swallow. Dizziness came next, before he could even answer. He dropped down into the stool. It was far worse than he could have imagined. She began to redo the bandages without his prompting, like she had read his mind, not that he could have even choked out the words if he'd wanted. As she finished the shaking stopped. He knew this was only a temporary solution but he couldn't, he didn't, want to think about that right now.

"Thank you," he said before pushing his fingers through his grimy hair and then realising how exposed he was. He pulled the rest of his gown back on, which hid some of his injuries from his sight but did nothing to nullify the dull throb from his left shoulder. The hole in it was closed, yet it felt like it was still there. The scar was no longer just 'barely' noticeable.

He didn't pay mind to the hours after them, letting them stray as they wished. A glance to the picture at his bedside froze him like a knife to the gut each time he allowed his gaze to drift. It was hard to resist it, for his mind waned in an attempt to put vivid, fractured recollection together so they made sense again. Bouts of unconsciousness had him tossed and dragged back, through setting and night. Clarity came with the next morning, like a puzzle which he could not make out until all pieces were together. He remembered it all up to a point. It was with it that hatred came. It seethed and boiled his veins, filling him and distilling until he was only left with one desire, revenge. He wanted revenge. It was an ache in his chest, a twitching of his hands, a terrible beast swallowing him and he allowed it.

Another day passed, was it Tuesday now? He wasn't sure. Nightmare had begun washing itself in with his recollection. When he closed his eyes he could see both their faces. The deep reflection in the lenses of the man's mask and the putrid hands that covered a decrepit face had become constant. Janus and Tomura. He knew he would never forget those names. They were the ones who did this to him. He'd forced himself to recall them, but how he knew them he had no real idea. Whatever had happened to him before the warehouse his mind kept hidden, a secret it refused to give up. He'd declined anything to help with the slithering heat of the cuts. Unwise, he knew, but he needed to remember the pain. It was the first step to making sure it never happened again. Before his thoughts could drift again the door of his room slammed back. The sterile hospital smell was replaced by a familiar and now welcome sweetness.

"Riley," Alo said as he burst in. It took but a few steps before he was at the foot of his bed.

"You're alright," he answered the man and gave a bittersweet smile as he watched his uncle pull up a chair.

"I should be the one saying that." His uncle's face failed in its attempt to stay composed. He looked tired and overworked by worry and he had every right to be.

"Mom… and Elle, do they… know?" He looked down at his hands again, what they would think mattered more than it should have, or maybe it mattered just the right amount.

"I took care of it. Just focus on getting better."

"And dad?"

"He-" His uncle paused. "He didn't have anything to say."

"Ah," he said, the utterance escaping him without prompt. It was a lie, though it was the answer he had expected. He knew that would sting but not asking was by far worse, that would mean he didn't care.

"Riley. Look at me," Alo said, in a tone calmer than he had ever heard him speak, causing him to
look up just to the man's lapel. Full eye contact was a bit too hard right there and then. "His opinion isn't important, you hear me?" He tried to hide his cough but failed. "Don't stress yourself out."

He gritted his teeth. It wasn't important. "What's going to happen now?" He was done dwelling, everything would be clearer once he got out of here. The question of when that was he didn't know the answer to, and even if he did he didn't know where exactly he would go. His apartment was... he held the thought, he didn't even know what his apartment was. Even if it wasn't trashed he didn't feel he had the bravery to return there regardless.

"Arrangements have already been made with the school. It's all signed and everything." His uncle explained with a wave of his left hand. A swindler's motion, a thing designed to downplay the implication that he often did.

"What 'arrangements?" These weren't words he felt prepared to hear, a tightness had knotted up his gut and stomach.

"Kumai, wanted to pull you out. She... um." He coughed again, it was vicious this time. "I-I didn't want to be the cause." His voice trailed off with a nervous rattle. Then he leaned forward with his hands rubbing over each other like a shady peddler in an alleyway. "There's no way you can return under my care, Riley," he finally said, after looking away and back to him again.

He bit his tongue. He didn't know what to say. That meant it was over. Even his mother wanted him to quit, that alone numbed him. She'd been his support in making this happen in the first place, just as his uncle had. He felt like a burden now, more than ever. He should have just stuck with what he had been given. His shoulder throbbed again, his arm hurt, his mind burnt.

His uncle cleared his throat before he spoke again, his words tripping over each other. "The school was rather insistent on it you see, to have you stay here instead, under their supervision."

He looked up and his apprehension tripled and then subsided as he made sense of the statement. Giddiness came but was extinguished the next. He didn't know if he was glad or not, if he should be. It suggested they either wanted to keep him within arm's length, or to keep something else away. He doubted their capability to succeed in that now, unlike before.

"They found the messages on your phone," Alo said, his expression and tone both taking a downward inflection. "I'm sorry." He broke for a second, in a way that he stuttered. "I should have protected you. Not the other way around." He wiped away the tears in his eyes with a new, clean handkerchief. He had never seen his Uncle so vulnerable. It was the only thing he could do to lean forward and grab the man. Alo resisted, then allowed himself, floundering in half-hearted acceptance as the rest of his sorrow came with it. There was nothing more to say.

"Tomorrow you'll be released and on the day after you'll return to class," Aizawa said.

No scowl, no emotion but for the one implied in his words. Nothing. Complete objectiveness paralyzed him as he listened. A Thursday it would be, a week and a half since it'd happened. He hadn't expected it to be so soon. That didn't mean he wasn't ready, sitting around was beginning to make him feel like crap and the longer he waited the harder it would be. The hospital room was like a prison now, hazed with the heat drifting into it from closed curtains and too little AC. He was burning up, for more reasons than one.

"As for the details, it's already taken care of," Nedzu said. He had been light-hearted, not that he had any other setting, but there was a care in his words. An avoidance of something he was reluctant to say.
Aizawa took the sketch he had drawn for them. It was an attempt to keep himself busy and to pin his memories down before they could slip away again. Three faces on three separate pages, Janus and Tomura and a third that looked familiar but he had no name for. It was the least he could do, he had already told them everything else.

"It goes without saying that this was an exceptional circumstance, had events not unfolded as they did you would be facing far harsher consequence," Nedzu said. So that's what it had been. If they weren't meant to be warding then they didn't register as they should, his loathing of his own actions was harsher in complexity.

Aizawa looked up at him over the edge of the page. "Do not expect a degree of leniency."

"I know, Sir," he said with a nod. He hadn't. If they had pity to offer him then it wasn't something he wanted. Revenge, the scent of it, that was enough.

"I'm sure you'll be hard pressed to speak about what occurred by not just your classmates but rather any who come your way," Nedzu said as he pulled out a form. "Staying out of sight for a time will mitigate it. However it may be better handled by a professional." The form read 'Recommendation for Counselling and Psychological Therapy' across the top. The rest was a mess of details and jargon that he would need to take far longer to read, let alone understand. "It is standard procedure. If you prefer to make arrangements yourself we can take that into consideration." He held out a metallic pen that looked handmade.

"No, its fine." He took it and signed at the bottom. He was sure all this had already caused enough trouble for the school. There was little reason to add more.

Nedzu nodded at him and took the sheet back before he spoke again. "Now. As for the matter of the events from that night, please listen carefully."

[Yuuei’s Campus – Outside Classroom 1-A – 7:28 AM Thursday]

His acquaintance to his new dormitory had been short-lived. The blame lay in an insistence that had delayed his stay in the ward by one day. That did not mean, however, that he had the luxury of sitting around for the day either and why he was now outside the looming classroom door trying to work up the courage to step inside. He wasn't quite there yet, even on the way there he'd stopped at two separate bathrooms just to check that the bandages hadn't slipped and that the gauze trailing up his neck to his cheek hadn't begun to peel. There was no way he could wear his blazer to hide them with the metal plate still stuck across his forearm. It was itchy, and it all still simmered with heat.

The class bell had already chimed, and he was rubbing his right hand despite not meaning to as it would draw attention. The scar on it felt as if it would peel if he kept going, despite it having been rendered as melded as something a year old by Recovery girl's work. There wasn't much more time he had left before his teacher would be here, if he wasn't already inside and marking his absence. Maybe he could pretend his injury was still too severe for him to attend and just go back to that bland little room they'd shoved him into. The building in question was on the other side of the school grounds with bleached stone walls and three stories. Long hallways with a shared bathroom and other facilities downstairs in turn, it could have been built more than two hundred years ago with how aged it looked. It was a pitiful thing really, but he hadn't expected more. He was lucky to even have it, glad he even survived to have it and it was the best they could do on short notice. His section of it was barren, and small. The room had grey curtains, a single stale bed that had lost its spring and a cabinet to accompany the meagre five foot wide closet where they'd stored a few spare uniforms. In the centre of it a small rectangular table made with some cheap material that couldn't possibly be described as wooden, more like plastic. On it had been his stuff, what little they could recover. A
single compact box.

Nedzu's talk had been compact as well, a rundown of what he remembered and a proclamation of what parts he was allowed to mention if it came to it. No word of the fight at the warehouse, no inkling of how he had almost maimed his classmates and his teacher to anyone who wasn't on Yuuei's staff. He shivered as he thought about it. Then he shook his head to forget it, he didn't need the sympathy. The best thing he knew he could do was move forward especially if he wanted to keep that spark of purpose, his revenge, ignited. He had no time to wallow, did he?

That begged the question why he was still out here. Instead of in there, there was no point in putting off the inevitable. It was already too late to flee. He rested his hand on the door and then he slid it back. A gasp and a multitude of stares was the first thing to come out of the full room and at that moment he wished he still had those damn gloves, to lend him some comfort. Tape wasn't half as good a replacement.

"Uh, hi," he said, in hopes of breaking the silence. He could feel his face grow hot.

Then in a distinct sense of déjà-vu it was Iida who accosted him, first and foremost, with a grab on the wrist. "Torenagi, welcome back. Are you alright?"

"Yeah." He pulled his hand back and forced a smile, the grip had sent hurt up his arm. "I'm fine," he said but not a single face looked convinced. "Really, I am."

"If you need any assistance do not be afraid to ask. As the class president I think I speak for everyone when I say we are here to support you." Tsuyu and Uraraka gave a nod of agreement behind Iida.

"Ah. Yeah, I get it," he said and his voice trailed, so he tried to grit himself, muster confidence. It didn't work well. "I'm sorry for making you all worry." He looked over Iida's shoulder at the rest of them and his fist clenched tight, more pain, he needed to remember that. "What happened… it was due to my own weakness, it won't happen again. So, please forgive me." He gave a deep bow to complete the speech. His mom had insisted that he learn how to do one properly, though he didn't remember when. This felt like the right time to do it.

He came back up and gave a look around the room as he established his priorities. First things first, he thought as he walked straight up to Bakugou's desk, where the student's feet were perched upon it. Then he met the irate boy's glare, despite his deliberate attempt to avert them. "Thank you," he said, this time banishing any hesitation from his voice..

"Yeah, whatever, nerd," Bakugou said. He sounded tired as he muttered it and broke the eye contact. It wasn't good or enough and he would repay him in full at some point but it was enough for now. He turned toward Kirishima and Jirou, both of whom were giving him a different look, a caricature of what they felt. The first was filled with guilt, and the latter with no small amount of anger and resentment.

"Your arm-" Kirishima said before he had the chance to speak.

He hid the limb behind himself. "Please, don't apologise. If you hadn't done what you did, what all three of you did then I wouldn't be here right now. I only have myself to blame."

"You- you… you." Jirou's seat gave a rough scratch. "You idiot!" she yelled as she grabbed his collar, causing him to move back a step. "Stop acting so fucking calm. We almost lost you." She looked away for a brief second. "Why didn't you tell us? Why didn't you tell anyone?!!" Her volume caught him off guard but not as much as the embrace did. It was small and quick, only half a second,
if that. He could feel a winding tension he didn't realise he'd been holding leave his body in a wave of relief and then he understood just how much the ordeal must have weighed on her mind.

"I should never have let it go this far. I'm sorry," he whispered as she let him go.

"Never again," she said. He nodded.

Then Kirishima grabbed him around the shoulder in a full blown headlock that held him down, this one didn't hurt, he had made sure to avoid touching the scars. "I'm glad you're back man!" he said, grinning.

He straightened himself under the embrace. "Yeah… me too," he said. He felt like he had overcome at least a small hurdle of what was going to be a long day and with that the room became lighter, like it had been an awkwardness shared. Tension, surmounted and resolved.

"Dude. You gotta tell us everything," Kaminari said.

There was a cough from the doorway, where Aizawa now stood. "I'm sure you all have plenty of questions for Torenagi but they can wait."

In a bit of a stumble his friend let go of him, ending the embarrassingly intimate moment just like that. He rubbed the back of his head and turned, he must have been grinning like an idiot as he walked to the back of his class to the spot, the twenty-first spot, where his seat still remained. A sense of normality washed over him as he sat down.

[Yuuei's Campus – Classroom 1-A – 11:31 AM]

The first few classes had been stressful. As he had expected, any second that Midnight and Cementoss weren't occupying them the attention had turned to him. It was the best solution anyhow, a heroics class was a heroics class and that meant that the more he told them the sooner everyone would leave him alone. Even now he had a huddle around his desk despite the advent of a break period.

"I'm glad you didn't die," Tsuyu said.

"…Thanks," he answered, trying not to stutter at the bluntness.

"Must have been pretty scary," Hagakure said as she leaned on the back of the chair in front of him.

He shrugged. "Like I said, I don't really remember much after I got home on Saturday. It's just a bit of a blur." He had recounted the improvised story a dozen times, adding some details here and there.

"What about your injuries, are you going to be all good by the festival?" Kirishima asked.

"It's already healed. Recovery Girl said I can have this off by early next week." He gave the plate on his arm a flick and it returned a dull pwang.

A visible relief spread across his face. "That's great," he said, smile broadening.

"It's detachable right, you could just take it off?" Kaminari asked.

"I don't think that's a good idea." There was no way he was going to allow anyone, let alone Kaminari to do that. He hadn't seen the triangular slice in its entirety yet, despite the unmasking. It would be different in daylight and aftermath.
"Come on, I bet it looks bad ass." He reached for it, but he held it well out of his grasp.

Kirishima pushed him away. "Let it go dude. He only got out this morning." The schick-thwack sound of their class door being opened by Uraraka stopped him from trying again, just by sheer surprise of what lay outside.

"Woah, what's with the crowd?!" Kaminari gasped at the sight of dozens of high peaks, some coloured and bleached by quirk and others malformed in body by the same. The variety was astounding and the number more so, like half of their year had crowded there.

"Yeah we can't get out, what's the big idea?!" Mineta said, with more of his fist than his body. Considering he didn't reach the waist of some of the students it was his only method and likely far less intimidating than he thought it.

"They're here to scout out the enemy, dumbasses. We're the class that survived a villain attack first hand," Bakugou said as he walked up to the crowd. "Not like there's a point, I don't have time to waste on these second rate extras."

"Stop that! You barely know these students. There's no need to call everyone an extra," Iida said with multiple apologetic motions toward the crowd, which bustled with murmur and displeasure in turn. A mishmash of messy purple hair made its way to the front. A student who was slim and tall appeared, with dark rings under his eyes. His face was plain and unnerving.

"I didn't think people in the heroics department were this arrogant. You know if you slip up there's a good chance you'll be transferred out of the class and someone else will take your place," he said as he looked Bakugou up and down. "I didn't come here just to observe, consider this a declaration of war. I wonder what'll happen to your bravado when I pull the rug out from under you."

Bakugou scoffed. "Get out my way. I don't give a shit about your declaration. I'll crush you and all these other losers just the same," he said. The crowd was almost teetering on the edge of a mob now.

"Bakugou, why did you do that?! Now we're gonna get shit from every other student," Kirishima said, frowning in a way that didn't suit him at all.

He looked back at him, then gave a fiendish grin. "It doesn't matter. None of it matters once you're at the top," he said then turned back to the crowd and shoved his way through.

"He does have a point," Tokoyami said, causing Rikidou to nod.

"That sheer simplicity, it oozes with manliness! It's getting me all fired up!" Kirishima was already back his usual self again. He found himself getting a bit psyched as well, maybe Bakugou's attitude was contagious. A few minutes later the crowd had dispersed enough for most of them to leave, but a few students hung around including one with silver shrapnel like pieces plastered around his eyes. He was shouting about something or other regarding their arrogance.

"So you aren't going to drop out of the festival Torenagi, considering what happened?" Tsuyu said. He'd almost forgotten she was there with the unexpected interlude. It was strange that she was concerned enough to ask considering how little they'd actually said to each other up until now.

"Well, Aizawa did say we only had three chances. I can't afford to miss out, can I? Even with my injuries." He wasn't even exactly sure what it actually was but dropping out of it was the last thing he planned to do, it would like telling everyone he wasn't fine. That was something he couldn't afford. He was fine, he thought as he rolled his shoulder and it spiked pain as if to disagree with him.

"Then let's do our best. Ribbit," she said
He nodded and resolved to swallow the pain, his quirk was worse than this on it's hardest days. If he succeeded at this then it would all resolve, no one would pity someone who won a competition and a bit of popularity couldn't hurt either. It might be worth it just to see the look on his dad's face if he did well. He still had to make that phone call, he remembered. It'd be easier if he still had his phone, too bad it was evidence now.

"Move it," a voice rasped through the crowd as one of the students dislodged himself and stumbled into the classroom. He wore an angry look across his face that made his charcoal skin look reddened. Despite that it was still ominous.

"Geez, what's this guy's problem?" Hagakure said as he pushed his way past her.

Iida placed himself in between the student and his obvious destination. "I must insist you leave our classroom at once, even if you're here to scope us out."

"I don't care what you have to say," he said and pushed Iida out of the way to get to his desk. "You're that guy… that did this to me." The student held up his right hand, a white cast was sitting on it.

A pang of regret hit him at the sight of it. "I'm sorry." He shook his head. "It was an accident, I didn't mean to-"

"The name's Kuroiro Shihai. And it doesn't matter what you meant to do, just remember the name. No matter how many people cover up for you it won't change a thing. You better watch your back during the festival." He glared then turned, the words sounded as if they were echoed from every corner as he lurched away, melding back into the crowd. He sighed and scrunched his hand together, even if he had been out of his mind that wasn't an excuse.

"Don't sweat it. Having a rival is pretty manly dude," Kirishima patted him on the shoulder.

"If only it was that simple," he said, biting his lip and getting up. Maybe he should try and catch up to that guy and make things right. Before he could so much as get two feet ahead his way was blocked.

"No skulking off on your own man, you're coming with me," Kirishima said, tugging on his other shoulder.

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[ Yuuei's Campus – Gym Hall Ø – Friday 1:50 PM ]

"We will be extending all heroic foundational classes starting tomorrow afternoon, until the end of the sports festival."

Instead of a practical heroics lesson on Thursday they'd had a theoretical one, and that was what Aizawa had told them. Three weeks, perhaps just a bit longer. He felt sure he was the cause for that, but as far as he saw it that didn't really matter. More class meant more time for him to catch up, not to mention he hadn't used his quirk since he'd come to, he felt eager to begin working on it again. The slack from his almost feverish practice prior to attendance was starting to bother him. Kirishima had used most of his lunch period to hang out with him and… it was nice, he had to admit. Weird, but nice. He'd still found his chance to try and catch the charcoal student, Kuroiro, at the door to 1-B classroom when the bell rang but he hadn't succeeded. It didn't seem like he wanted to be found. He would need to try again some other time.

"This, young ladies and gentlemen, is what we call a quirk strength and utility measuring machine, or
the Q.S.U.M.M for short," All Might said as he pointed at a blue cylinder held up by a purple post anchored to the floor, there were about ten of them in total. He raised his finger then spoke again, mustering a dismissive tone. "Think of it like a Richter scale for raw quirk strength. You," he said as he pointed it forward. "Young Todoroki, why don't you step up here and help me demonstrate how it works. I would show you myself but I'm afraid there wouldn't be a machine left to use!" He gave a hearty laugh.

"Very well," Todoroki said and paced up to the machine. He paused, then he flicked his wrist toward to the floor and brought his hand back up in a swipe causing the ground to erupt into an icy spear that wrought itself toward the machine. For a moment it looked like the Q.S.U.M.M would give as the spear skewered it's blue body, however the glance at victory was cut short by a loud clink. The attack had snapped like a measly toothpick, the thing didn't even have a scratch. The machine lit up in a bright magenta, then gave a long drawn out beep.

"Raw strength rating sixty out of a hundred. Predictability seventy-two percent. Recommended procedure; alter angle, increase impact velocity and increase projectile amount. Analysis complete. Thank you for using Q.S.U.M.M!" The light turned back off and the machine went silent once more.

"Nicely done young Todoroki," All Might said as he patted him on the back. "As you can see this machine will help you improve the basic usage of your quirk, it's equipped to deal with all kinds of quirks so feel free to go wild, creativity is key for those of you who can't deal damage directly. If all else fails it still makes a pretty good punching bag." The large man laughed again.

"Mr. All Might, how do we know how to quantify the results of this machine? A rating doesn't do us much good without context," Momo asked.

"Good question. That, young lady is the genius of this machine. The results are comparative to all those who've used the machine before you, all previous first year Yuuei students to be blunt. This should give you a good baseline to compare yourselves against."

"All previous students and Todoroki only managed to score a sixty? Man," Kaminari said.

Iida eyed up the machine. "It does indeed sound rather tough."

"I'm gonna smash that machine!" Kirishima said. Enthusiastic wouldn't be giving the look on his face justice. It was more like fiery determination.

"That's the spirit. Now, then get to it. Show me your heroic spirit!" All Might clapped his hands together and they dispersed.

"You're with me dude, I won't take no for an answer." Kirishima grabbed his shoulder before he could so much as contemplate a thought, only to have Jirou then hook the assailant hard in the ribs. He looked at her with a pained expression. "What was that for?"

"You really have a one track mind, All Might already assigned partners." She paused and leaned in close enough to mumble something. A quiet, "…don't forget," was all he could make out among the whisper.

"Right, my bad," Kirishima said before biting his thumb like he was thinking on whatever it was she'd said.

"Something up?" he asked.

"Don't worry about it," his friend said, breaking out of his silence before turning to find his partner.
He wasn’t sure what to think of it other than annoying but he didn’t have time for that right now.

Electronic voices soon cramped the room by the dozen, encased by the sound of explosions and shuddering metal that he himself was not the cause of. He had given up his turn to Todoroki in an attempt to entertain a thought that had been backing him into a corner since he'd awakened. It was pressing in that matter, and in all the thinking he had done he still hadn't come to the answer of the one thing that bothered him the most about it all. He had picked up bits of the puzzle and assembled them, yet there was something missing. Motive, simply put.

There was no point in deducing their primary goal, it had always been All Might, he didn’t need to dig deep to figure out why an alliance of villains would target the biggest obstacle standing in their way. However that made the circumstance stranger and Jirou had confirmed as much. Only two of them had been on their own during the incident, Ojiro and him. That, as far as he was concerned, meant it could have been either one of them. The texts were the differential that swayed the odds in his favour but they could have gone after Ojiro if they had wanted. That way it would have worked even better as a bait and switch if he had confessed them. The fact that they hadn't gone after Ojiro but him meant they knew his circumstances well and that someone had told them far in advance of the USJ trip. Nothing was an accident, or a coincidence. It had to be a person on the staff or someone with access to that information with a quirk.

It was the first conclusion he had reached, one of two, in the short time he'd had. The other had been far worse than the already concerning idea of an infiltrator on the staff. The needle that he’d found on his lapel had come to mind when he'd thought of it, and then it had made sense. His rescue had never been a game of chance, it had to be planned. He was sure that for all intents and purposes that there would be a trail leading Aizawa directly to him. The texts had acted two-fold in that sense, to unnerve and isolate him and to clue the pursuers into a trap. Kirishima had told him of the password to his phone he had received, which meant they had been able to figure that out too somehow. Despite that it still left the primary question unanswered; the specific reason it had to be himself. Perhaps it didn’t, over thinking had been his downfall befo-

"You won't get far by just sitting there," Todoroki said, interrupting him as the machine reset itself once again. "I'm done."

"Ah," he answered, having been caught off guard. "Right." He got up and walked to the machine, his entire train of thought was gone. Out of all the students, Todoroki was one of the few who had asked him nothing about the incident. Momo had only done so out of respect, but in this case he could tell something was different. He didn’t want people to ask or to probe, however he couldn’t deny it as odd. He shook his head as part of him told him that his speculation was ultimately pointless and frankly, he was glad Todoroki didn't act that way.

He raised his hand and ignored the itch, the burn of the action that made his concentration hard to summon. He imagined the cylinder in front of him, the wires inside of the metal and cushion. A breath or two later he had it again, of course he had it, he'd been doing this for years and years now. It came as a twinge at his bones and fingers. His breath drew deeper and silence followed like the change of pressure on a plane dulling his hearing.

"Compress," he said. He was sure he said, but the sound didn't leave his mouth. He said it again, nothing.

Snap.

He heard that, it rang true through him as the only sound. Cold followed, nipping and freezing and making it seem like his fingers were going to fall off. Although he opened his eyes he could see nothing. The dark murk spanned in front of him for another brief second. Then a click lit the room in
a single bleached like that fell from the ceiling onto a damp pockmarked floor. The walls were metallic, the air stagnant and utterly lifeless.

His hand was still in front of him. It was held out like a knife at the kneeling victim at his feet and he knew what would come next. Beyond Kirishima were three others that were simple and washed out like the background of a painting. It wouldn't move. Nothing would move except the breath in his lungs and the movement of something metallic behind him. Something, that wasn't right, he knew what it was. He knew exactly. It was a sound that scared him despite being threateningly numbing. His skin crawled and his throat wanted to gag. That wasn't allowed to him either.

Snap.

"R-r-r-i-l-e-y."

Every letter snagged another like they were connected by string and with each cut of it through the air his wrist tightened just a bit more. Steps splashed in puddles behind him as the sound made its way closer. His breath paced itself faster against his will, drowning him in a shortness of it as it perforated his lungs. It stung and stung but there was nothing to focus on but the steps. He couldn't turn his head out of fear, he didn't want to turn his head.

"Do you not see it? Ri-l-ley…"

He felt the material curl against the skin of his shoulder, each tangible digit bearing beneath it a metallic prong. His chest was aching now, every inch of his being focussed on not bringing his hand together.

"You… are… already… ours."

The fingers dug into his shoulder. His hand seized and his body spun, he jumped and gulped and stepped backward with a terrible exhaustion as if he'd been using his quirk for days on end without stopping. There was no effigy in front of him, only Kirishima, whole and unharmed.

"Riley?" he said as he took a few fruitful steps while looking him up and down. "You doing alright man?"

He was quick to answer with nod followed by a near exhaustive shuddering gulp that ran out of his control. "Y-yeah." He swallowed hard. "I-I'm I'm fine, completely. It was just a fluke." He pulled his hands to his sides before turning back to the machine that was mere inches behind him now.

"What happened?" Kirishima looked to his right, at the perched student on the bench.

"I don't know." Todoroki shook his head with an unpleasant stare. "But he shouldn't continue."

"Todoroki is right. Maybe you should take it easy," his friend said, to which he turned back just enough to see the worry spread across his face.

He shook his head. "No. Just let me try again, okay?" Without waiting for an answer he tugged at his wrist and aimed it at the machine, this time without closing his eyes. There was no reason for him not to be able to do this. His quirk was part of him, just another feature of his body. It was his to control. His alone. "Compress," he said but nothing came. Not a twinge or shudder. He looked at his hand. Nothing at all.

"Probably just nerves, dude. It's pretty intimidating to rank yourself against all the previous students." Kirishima hit him on the shoulder, which stung from the blow despite the refrain he had put into it.
He looked up at his friend and then dropped his hand completely. Maybe it was true, maybe he still had time. There was no need to push himself. Somehow putting it like that made it ten times worse, and made him feel several times more ashamed.

Chapter End Notes

*I don't own BNHA. OC material is my own.
Vrrm, the old purple phone hummed.

1 – E. Kirishima – NEW

*Any luck man?*

*Still figuring it out. Try!*

After responding he clicked the lock on the side before putting it down on the nightstand. The phone wasn't his, rather it belonged to Jirou, it was her previous model she no longer used and had lent him after class. His uncle had assured him he would get him another but it would need to wait until he came back into town. He didn't mind, it would do for now even if the screen was basically peeling off.

Maybe you should make that call, his mind interjected. Then he inadvertently didn't, instead he kicked his heels off the drab greyscale bed and toward the table sitting a foot away. On it was his box, and around it the few things that he'd removed from it over the course of two days other than clothes. A rubber ball, the now shredded jacket he'd been given and the picture frame his uncle had left him in the hospital.

He took the frame and gave it a glance before placing it next to the dainty lamp and the phone. The call could wait till he figured this out, he decided, before grabbing the rubber ball. He could do this, he knew he could but if that wasn't the case, well he didn't want to think about that. His grip tightened, a ball was just a ball just like a machine was just a machine, nothing more. Part of that was the reason why he'd refused Kirishima's invitation to go out and celebrate his recovery. It didn't help that the work his teachers had given him to make up for his absence would probably take up most of his Sunday, the only day off he had. It was more than a handful of readings and missives, it might have been simple work had the books he'd borrowed not been decimated. That, and the incident with the Q.S.U.M.M, still bothered him.

He closed his eyes and seized his wrist with his left hand. Instead of pushing his ire upon the object in his fist as he would normally have done the robots from the entrance came to mind as a replacement, with their metallic shells guarding those tiny shreds of circuitry within them. They weren't alive which meant there was no apprehension for him to use anything less than the full force of his quirk. It went well for a second. Then needles hit his thumb and forefinger before dropping as a shiver across his arm, forcing his grip to loosen.

"Fucking damn it!" He slammed his knee with his fist before pulling it back, allowing a pant to escape him. The ball went sailing out of the window as he threw it. He didn't even want to look at it. His neck stung like someone had stuck it with a sewing pin, or perhaps more likely he'd cramped a muscle in his fuming. His uncertainty spread as a rapid decay and tethered to his anger at himself. You couldn't be a hero without a quirk.
He sat on the chair opposite Recovery Girl as she checked out the ragged flesh below the metal plate. He didn't bother to look, feeling her touch on the skin was enough to know it hadn't improved in any way he desired. Despite the effects of her quirk it still hurt more than he cared to admit. This was his second visit in three days.

"It's healed enough. There's no need for you to continue to wear it," she said as she let go of his arm.

"Great," he answered while eyeing the casing, he'd been glad that it hadn't been colored something ridiculous like a child's cast.

She gave him a sceptical look. "And here I thought you'd be glad to have it off."

"I am," he said, standing. "Thanks, really."

"Sonny, I've worked in this field long enough. You can't fool me," Recovery Girl shrugged. "Say what's on your mind." He gave a slight grunt but didn't answer. "Stupid boy, you should be glad that you're even alive." The old woman shook her head as she filled out the required forms for the visit.

"I am. Of course I am." He felt his hand tense as he looked up at the mirror on the door. He didn't need her to tell him that. Reading about himself on Jirou's phone had been awful, he'd become just another one of the endless string of sensationalist think pieces. These scars reinforced their viewpoint. The only solace was that what they had dug up about his background had been limited enough, no one would know about that.

She walked up beside him. "People will talk, it's what they do. When you get to my age you'll realise it only matters what you think."

He saw her point, but that didn't make him any more willing. He could hear students whispering behind his back in the halls already. Displaying them these would be too much, there was no need to give people ammo. Not to mention that 1-B student. It would have been short sighted to say he didn't understand his vendetta, however why hadn't Kuroiro's injury been healed completely by Recovery Girl? He watched the woman. She had the answer but it didn't feel right asking her about it.

"That brace is coming off, today. Tape the wounds if you feel that's what you need to do, but I'm not putting you at risk of infection." She put a roll of what looked like athletic tape on the metal table next to him.

"Got it." He nodded as he took it. At least she wasn't giving him the same pitiable look that everyone had been. He was glad for that as it was beginning to make him sick. He didn't want to become 1-A's charity case.

[Yuuei's Campus – Counsellor's Office – 11:37 AM]

His scars itched. He had done a poor job of covering them on his own but as long as they weren't visible he didn't really care. The light suffocation of the stuffy room he was in wasn't helping, it had neither windows nor vents to peel in fresh air and the waving of a fan did little to relive that. It also carried a kind of visual annoyance that he hated, piled to the brim with books and plaques and all sorts of things that cluttered the rather small room with unnecessary baggage. The worst part of it was that he wasn't here by choice, this was where he needed to go now because of that outdated procedure Nedzu had talked about.

"Talk whenever you're ready, darling. We can go at your own pace," Midnight said as she closed the door and took a seat in a small backed chair that had been poorly reupholstered. She had an ashen
leather clipboard resting in her hands.

Of all the people he had expected he couldn’t say that she was the first to have come to mind. The R-18 heroine already did a nice enough job making him uncomfortable in class with her rather "humble" and "elegant" costume as both Kaminari and Mineta chosen to describe it. Now that he was in a room alone with her that was only made worse and stranger. She had at the very least opted to abandon her usual attire in favour of a plaid skirt and hemmed top combo that made her almost look like a real shrink. That would make this somewhat easier. He had been provided with a black lounge chair, repurposed from something someone might use to watch TV, not to spill out their thoughts.

"I don't know where to start," he said as he gazed at the cool beige tiles that hung above him. Maybe he'd get to count them all before he was rid of this.

"How about we talk about it then?" She gave him the question in a curious tone, one that was ample enough to avoid sounding pushy.

"It?" He didn't look at her from where he laid.

"The kidnapping." She finished the pronoun game as she pushed up her black glasses.

He tilted his head away from her and didn't answer. Her promiscuous attitude was the perfect cover for someone that got straight to the point, that much he could tell at a glance, she was the kind of woman who got what she wanted one way or another. Unexpectedly however minutes passed, it might have been longer than that with the silence and the occasional scribble on her clipboard. It kind of reminded him of a movie, the kind where the patient would eventually break down and tell everything. There wasn't a point in his mind where he thought that might not happen to him, far from it, he knew it was better to talk than to bottle it up. It was still the case however, that he had no idea where to start or maybe he wasn't quite sure when it had all started and that thought was far scarier than any hallucination. He knew then he wasn't yet ready to talk, not until he sorted his thoughts.

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[Yuuuei's Campus – Replica City – 2:57 PM]

"It may seem obvious but the only way to prosper as a hero is through practice. Then you must use that practice to gain experience and reach further," Cementoss said. The rocky man was his own homage to the way he spoke and thought. His face while flat carried a natural born calm, and his stocky yet certain stance reinforced that philosophy. "Now is the time for reflection on your experiences from yesterday. Use what you learnt from your session with All Might and dedicate this time to improving as you see fit."

It didn’t take long to find a space to himself. The city was a precarious one, in a way similar to the one from the entrance exam but resembling something abandoned by civilisation a long time ago. Trees wound themselves under the street and tore them up, and practically every skyscraper and hut was falling apart under nature's wrath. He'd only been able to shake his head at Kirishima when he'd asked about his quirk again. The guy had tried to mask his disappointment, but even then he had seen it. The last thing he wanted to do was make him worry again and that meant figuring this out.

He'd spent an hour with Midnight before she had dismissed him. There had been no comment on her part and no enticement or urging for him to behave less like a child, a simple nod and another appointment the week after. He stopped in front of a white building on the corner of a cement walkway. It was part of a mosaic garden someone had built, though now it was a disarray of flowers, vines and trees alike. He looked to see if anyone else was around, that was all that really mattered. Maybe he could do it with the right motivation and some privacy.
A grip of his wrist, as he had done before, began to the procedure anew. He aimed at the base of the wall. This time his fuel would be revenge, the same that had empowered him so well in the hospital bed. He saw the beaked mask in his mind, the grey moulding of the leather that formed onto the skin and the buckles that clamped the entire disgusting outfit together. No sooner did the quirk travel so too did he feel the sting of something causing him to stop. His head hurt like he'd been hit with a baseball bat. Pins were lodged across his limbs, and the muscles twitched like he was in danger. It wanted him to run but only the rationality over the mind was that which stopped him from succumbing to the instinct.

You are pathetic. Get a grip.

The words had come of their own will, yet he found himself agreeing. He'd been foolish for thinking revenge would help, if anything that time it had done nothing but make it much worse.

"Torenagi," he heard Cementoss's voice and froze. "Having trouble?"

He forced himself to look as the disorientation came to a close end. "It's nothing," he said as he wiped his forehead. The sweat that stuck to his hand was all he had to show for the last two days. He really was pathetic.

"If you are feeling pressured to hold back, there is no need. If the exercise grows out of hand I will bring it under control." His leaden mouth was curled upward at the edges, as close to a pleasant smile as the man could probably muster.

"It's not that." He cut himself off. The effect of the experience had almost worn off, but the man still couldn't have come at a worse time. He didn't want anyone to see him like this; if Aizawa found out he couldn't even so much as crumble a damn wall.

The ground behind him shifted as Cementoss approached, a made of cement bench rose from it. It had a crude back to it that made it look at home in the greenery. "Sit," the man said. When he hesitated the teacher gave him a light shove so that he fell onto it. "Now, talk." His voice was stern, not commanding, but more like the tone you'd use for a dog or something like that. It annoyed him, but he wasn't about to bring it up.

He tapped his foot but stopped before it became too much. "It's not that I don't want to. It's that I can't." He regretted saying it almost immediately. What a joke he was, at this rate he would have the whole Yuuei teaching staff giving him advice.

"To rush something like this is foolish, Torenagi. I know it must be stressful with the festival right around the corner." The man didn't really look at him as he talked, but rather around as if he was enjoying the scenery, all made of cement just as he was.

He frowned and shook his head. "The stupid festival is the last thing on my mind right now."

The man paused, as if to think then held up his palm. "I find what one usually needs is only a kick. As if you were jumpstarting a car. Do you see what I'm saying?"

"I don't think it's that simple." He took his right hand in his left and with his thumb he began tracing the small lines that peeked out from beneath the tape. A flat battery had a known solution, but something like this was like trying to figure out the foundations of a house without the schematics of the land.

"How about this." Cementoss raised a finger. "In light of your quirk, work on training your body instead."
Anger boiled up inside him from somewhere, a lack of patience, a disgust for being told to have patience that made the next words almost a shout. "If you hadn't noticed I'm not some great fighter. I couldn't even defend myself from some second-rate villains like everyone else, without my quirk I'm useless!" The man had to understand that his quirk was the only thing that made him valuable. Even now he could hear them in the distance, the shing of the occasional beam as it sliced the air, the sound of rock being smashed to bits and explosions that echoed harshly through trees and buildings alike. It was the sound of him being left behind, impossible to ignore. He was admittedly being a bit melodramatic, but he found it hard not to be in this situation. You know if you slip up there's a good chance you'll be transferred out of the class and someone else will take your place. The smug, offhand comment was getting to him now and the lie he'd spouted about the festival wasn't very convincing, even to himself.

He looked up. Cementoss hadn't said anything, simply opting to sit and wait, "Sorry, I didn't mean to blow up at you, it's just frustrating," he said. He felt like a child.

"No matter. Better to bend before you break." The teacher leaned forward. "To be blunt, Torenagi, train not to replace your quirk, rather if you have not the ability to use it then perhaps it is simply better to shirk the weaknesses that you can resolve in the meantime."

The man put a cement hand on his shoulder, it's touch had a strange warmth. "Heroes do not become heroes by being idle, they push beyond. The school's motto, if I recall. Think about it." He let go of the shoulder as he stood, and he was left to watch as the golem walked away with not a chink in his pleasant demeanour.

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[Yuuei's Campus – Third floor hallway – 12:18 PM Monday]

"There was no need for you two to come," he said as him, Kirishima and Jirou made it up to the top of the stairs. They stood on either side like guards, in a fashion that would have made it being anyone else uncomfortable. It still was, just less so.

"Yeah, yeah whatever man."

Jirou shrugged. "I still think you're an idiot for paying those book fees yourself, especially after the school already agreed to waive them."

He looked back at her and returned the shrug. "It's not like it's their fault."

A scowl crossed her face. "Bullshit, they're just as much to blame."

"And they're the only reason I'm still here, just like you two," he made sure the words sounded final, that much was still his distinction to make.

The actual cost had hurt a bit, the money he'd stashed at his place was obviously gone. What he had stashed in his room now was a stippance of whatever his uncle had happened to be carrying. After the books he had enough to eat but not much else, perhaps he could work out some kind of deal with Lunch Rush to get food cheaper and pay him back later, as he doubted the school would let him just go and get groceries on his own. He wasn't sure why he was giving it so much consideration as he hadn't had much urge to eat since his release and had made do with what dry food was in the dorm cupboards since then. They came up to the classroom just in time to see it was empty, there was still a lot of the lunch period left, so it was far from a surprise. At least it meant they would have some privacy for what he wanted to ask.

"I don't suppose you guys know any gyms or instructors close to Yuuei, do you?" he said as they
went inside. The idea had stemmed from Cementoss's words, which he'd had a lot of time to think on. They had called him to remember All Might's fight with the Noumu, where he had been half out of it, despite the precarious odds the hero had won that fight. 'Heroes smash through every obstacle' the man had said, and by that logic his predicament should be no different, all he needed was the right tool.

"A gym? Why don't you just use the gyms around Yuuei?" Jirou asked.

He shook his head. "It's not about equipment. Technique, covering up my weaknesses, that kind of stuff."

"Well good luck, you won't find much around here." She gave him an uncaring look.

"Yep, most of the traditional gyms and things shut down when hero agencies moved in, the rest is all tourist crap and stuff like restaurants," Kirishima said. "You could hire a trainer, but that's pretty expensive."

"Yeah, I'm not loaded. Maybe there's something else I can do." He leaned on his desk. Attempts to learn on his own had been futile, he could mimic the training and movements but it hardly helped his lack experience with them.

"Hey, if you want I can teach you a few things."

"No," he said with an utter insistence that would have impressed Iida. "You have your own training to do for the festival." He was not going to ask that after all that had occurred, despite the temptation of the thought having already crossed his mind.

Kirishima gave him a strong nudge. "I'm already at peak performance, man. It wouldn't be any trouble."

"Maybe it wouldn't, but I can't accept that, it doesn't feel correct." He dropped his hand, beside the guilt it wasn't like his friend really embodied the type of fighting he wished to learn anyway; confrontational and head-on wasn't the angle he was looking for.

He smirked, almost impressed. "Damn, that's a pretty manly attitude to have."

Jirou rolled her eyes. "A pretty dumb attitude."

"Yeah, but manly nonetheless," he said and his smirk broadened to encapsulate a laugh.

He growled and waved his hand at the pair. "You can cut that out."

"You should just ask the Aizawa, there's a bunch of programs the third year heroes have to help out first years, maybe he can hook you up," she said, crossing her arms.

He scratched his head. "Not much use without my quirk."

Her face had turned to a scowl. "Stop being so thick headed, Riley, and just do it."

"Maybe she's right," Kirishima said. "...She wouldn't use your name if she wasn't serious," he whispered, which allowed him a small smirk of his own. She gave a groan of annoyance however a playful yet arrogant smile had grown across her face.

A wild voice inched over Jirou's back. "Whatchu three talking about?"

"Nothing Hagakure." She put a hand on the curious girl's shoulder, as if she had sensed her presence
behind her long before she had snuck up, then she passed to go to her seat. The rest of their class followed after, with Midnight in tow. It was never quite predictable who they would have for heroics, but in a way he was glad. That probably meant they weren't doing anything practical.

"Afternoon my little rookies," Midnight said as the class settled. "Today we'll starting on one of several case studies. The first of which will be looking at the work of yours truly and that of Mr. Aizawa, so make sure you pay close attention." She slid out a box from under the desk, giving it a ginger tippity-tap with the tips of her fingers, it looked heavy and the paper filling ti spilled out of the sides of the lid. "Ah, before I forget. Torenagi, after class you are to head straight to the large sports field, the one Mr. Aizawa used for the quirk apprehension test. He has something he wishes to discuss with you." She finished her sentence with a wink.

"Yes, Ma'am," he answered but it came out flustered. It couldn't have gone otherwise as it was something unanticipated, did that mean that the man already found out? He couldn't be sure but it proved a dreadful bead that culminated in his stomach. Kirishima threw him an over the shoulder look of concern, but all he could do was shrug at that and dwell as the dread was accompanied by gloom, he was done for, finished. Finito.

Midnight chuckled, as if amused by his formality, before she returned to her usual poise. "Now then, class representative if you would be a stud and hand these out for me." She took off the lid of the box which burst willingly and handed some of the sheets inside to Iida. His lips felt dry, time had been cut short and there was nothing he could do now but face the consequence.

[Yuuei's Campus – Sports Field α – 5:15 PM]

Grassy knolls wound themselves like sprung coils beneath his feet as he leaned against the wall of the now nostalgic, if a bit broken, pitching field. Even the intimidation he felt now was the same as Aizawa hadn't yet arrived which could mean either something not serious or completely ridiculous, he guessed the latter. The barrier surrounding the school had grown taller in his absence, or perhaps it was his mind playing tricks on him after having not seen it for some time. It made him shift in his unease, stir in it, a barrier wasn't something that could keep the villains that sought him out.

"Stop your daydreaming." He looked away from the barrier and to his right.. "Come with me," Aizawa said, monotone in a way where you knew he was both bored and annoyed. He disappeared around the back of the wall he was leaning on.

Behind the wall, curiously enough, was a walkway lined by a green patchwork of shrubs and herbs that had taken root there. They walked in silence for a minute as they passed through a series of similarly embellished areas before arriving at a building that was more like an elongated hut than anything else. Click, the door went as Aizawa unlocked it. It was dark inside before a flick of the wrist breathed life into the room. It was bigger than he'd initially imagined. It probably erred on the length of a swimming pool with the height and width to accommodate up to twenty people or so quite easily. The floors were hard wood, and the walls a tanned crisp that flattened into a hollow ceiling with large beams arched across it. All in all it was plain, with the exception of a few chairs and a doorway at the back which, he assumed, must have connected to a storage facility or perhaps a fire exit.

"Get in," the man said. He did as he was told, and as soon as he had the door slammed shut behind him. Aizawa approached, now offering a thin strip of white bandage out to him which he took. "I'm sure you remember what this is."

"Nanofibre." He looked at the material. "Your nanofibre bandage." As he spanned it between his hands he could tell it was unique in both toughness and density, much more so that any rubber or
concrete, but not designed to hurt you.

"Break it," he said in a voice that commanded, rather than asked.

"I can't." He let the capture weapon drop.

"You can't, or you won't?" He walked even closer, backing him against the wall.

"My quirk doesn't work like that." No matter how he looked at it, there was no way the man didn't know that already.

_Slam_, he hit the wall as Aizawa's hand gripped around his neck just tightly enough to stop his speech. "You've done it before haven't you? You got through Kirishima's quirk," he said as he held his right arm at the wrist. "Not to mention your arm, which should rightly no longer be attached. None of those things should have been possible. Even your inability to so much as use your quirk, it's all tied back to those questions." He choked a gasp before the man let him slump and spat in disgust. "So tell me, what are you afraid of that hasn't happened already?"

"I'm not afraid." He drowned in a summation of his confidence, or rather a lack of it, at that point. None of it made sense.

"Then prove it. Think about what happened." He turned away. "Prove you're not half as pathetic as everyone is beginning to think you are. That saving you wasn't a waste of time."

"I'm not pathetic," he said.

The man threw a longer length of bandage at him. "Words are cheap, we don't need those who are useless, if you can't use your quirk you'll be removed just like that."

His hands clenched tight in defiance and, with the same manner of simplicity that one might turn a page or place a chess piece on a board, his Compliance turned to antagonism. Before he knew it he had begotten himself with terrible focus and concentration, he would prove them all wrong. Only, again it didn't happen as he wanted, not only that but worse still it was as if something had gripped his arms tight like cutting the entrance of a valve. His arms shook, they halted, they shook again. They shook worse, his mind claiming the fabric and gripping it tighter. A crunch, a sound in his mind. It happened again like a ticking bomb. A third time he looked around. This wasn't right. This wasn't-

And then he was gone, almost. In a blur it played out as he awoke in a chair, strapped and weighed by the frayed rubber bindings that had yet to be loosened. They soon were as the memory danced forward and he felt the creeping cold and heard a single snap of command, a bid of obedience. Every detail of it splurged and felt more real than it had when he had relived them in a dream. Disgust and guilt wrenched his gut. At the time he hadn't been able to feel the pain he had inflicted, the anguish of his kicks and the procedure of his quirk as it hit his friend with every bite and tick that should only befall someone you hated, a loathing born from the sole purpose of protecting his captor. There hadn't been a way to fully understand it until now, not when he'd been trying to forget it.

It sickened him to focus on that moment, that instant where the touch of his quirk hit Kirishima in an unusual way. His grip tightened, the tremor halted its increase and began to dissipate. Needles in his arms and wrists underpinned the notion of what it might feel like to have his joints fill with glass. It was peculiar in all ways and different, a push rather than a pull. It felt familiar. His grip tightened. Crack, his eyes shot open and tatters fell from his hands, a lingering of strips derived from the bandage they had comprised. His hands weren't trembling, not even a single bit.
"What the fuck," he said as he scrounged back a few inches from Aizawa, his eyes were wide and his mind a mismatch of what he had relived. It took more than a few good shakes before he was truly sure he wasn't still in that nightmare. It had seemed so real, just for a moment, it was hard to believe it wasn't.

"Sorry. It was a necessary deception." Aizawa scratched his head as he held out a hand toward him.

"A deception?" He ignored the hand as he gradually felt his heartbeat slow. If he stood now he doubted he would even be able to maintain his balance.

The teacher shrugged before sitting down beside him on the wall. "That's the way it had to be done. You can take your complaints to the principal if you prefer, but it's hard to argue with the results."

"I don't understand… how?" He stared at his fingers, they were still and set like cement poured in a live machine and left overnight, the sensation caused a strange pain to linger. The tape on his hands and arms had peeled away in sections, running up his arm like flayed skin.

Aizawa reached behind his back. "Has it never struck you as odd how you stop trembling whenever you put these on?" A moment later he pulled out a pair of white ringed gloves, wholly and destructively shredded beyond use. He entertained the rhetoric question with a nod as he took them. They looked entirely dismantled as the layers of white were peeling back like the skin on a flayed hand. "The tremors are symptoms of a bigger problem," the teacher said. "If the compression is what you express consciously, then they are the result and a side effect; an opposite effect to balance it out." He held up a strip of bandage that looked frail and decimated, like tissue paper.

"Quirks don't change. It's been the same thing since I was little." He tore part of the fabric of the gloves finger, it came apart the same way.

Aizawa scoffed. "Your quirk hasn't changed, don't be so naïve. We've had our suspicions since the entrance exam."

"That long?" He wasn't sure how they had come to the conclusion, nor how he had never seen it himself before now. It was something he wasn't willing to accept, not so easily.

"Quirks are hardly ever as simple as they appear, even with our advances in knowledge," Aizawa gripped his black hair by the length of it and pulled it back over the back of his head before leaning forward. "It was bound to happen sooner or later, that meant all that remained was to apply the right amount of stress. It's unfortunate that things happened as they did, Thirteen had a mind to push it more slowly, those villains had other ideas."

He wasn't sure what to make of it. He didn't need to ask now to know that the specific trial of battle he'd taken on was far from random. Neither were the little prods and pushes he had simply written off, they had all been planned. The abduction had interfered with those plans.

"When waiting stopped being an option the principal made the decision, in spite of how some viewed the matter," he said, before turning slightly toward him. "You need to know that the danger to you remains very real, those Noumus." He rolled the sound on his tongue. "They are nothing short of amalgamations of other quirks. No matter how they were created, it probably means that they are looking for certain quirks to do it."

He shuddered as he realised what his teacher meant by that. Had they really wanted to use him to create one of those Noumu? Is that what was meant by making him better? The thought was terrifying and worse still it made sense. It all too gruesomely brought back memories of that decaying man he'd failed to report not long ago.
"There's no reason to dwell on it, just consider it speculation. I've only told you because of your direct involvement." The man gave him a stern look. "It goes without saying that you aren't to breathe a word of this to your classmates. We can't risk causing another panic so soon with the sports festival coming up."

"I understand." He nodded his head but it felt weak. His energy had been sapped and he wasn't sure if he was even beginning to come to terms with it. It was insane, even dismissable if only it weren't being delivered by Aizawa himself. "I need to get those villains back for what they did to me," he said, as if to use it to cut his own way out of the confusion. A goal, he had a goal. Revenge, no matter what he needed revenge.

Aizawa searched in his pocket. "Take this," he said and held out a metal plate that was a quarter of an inch thick, it was about the size of a notepad with well rounded edges. "You're going to need to practice if you want to be able to use it. No doubt you have some catching up to do."

He took the plate from the man's hand with a natural curiosity. How calm the man was made all of it surreal. As he twined the thing between his fingers could see it was actually pretty strong, nothing he could bend just through sheer strength alone.

"Now as for the other matter to which I called you out here." Aizawa scratched his scruff. "It concerns your combat ability as a whole. It isn't up to scratch plain as that, if anything up till now is to go by you might rank at eighteenth or seventeenth at best. You, however, don't have the kind of quirk that'll cover that weakness unlike Tokoyami or Kaminari."

He mumbled back a tone in frustration. He wasn't too foolish to realise it but his words stung nonetheless, he had taken Cementoss's advice seriously enough but if there was no one to teach him then there wouldn't be much to do about it. A thought came to him at that, and a solution right in front of him. He had seen it multiple times, the way the teacher fought. It was an unpredictable style of fighting and had seemingly very little to do with the man's quirk. It was reactionary, defensive.

"Sir." He looked at the man with a question on the tip of his tongue. It was a selfish request to be sure, but something so serious justified at least trying. He had almost broken his promise, almost forgotten it completely in place of his fear.

Aizawa raised his hand to stop him. "I know what you're going to ask so save your breath. I'd already entertained the idea of training you at the principal's request. My quirk wasn't much use either before I learned to fight."

He went slightly slack-jawed, it still caught him off guard just how much the man gleamed off his intentions with every second. A single, "Thanks," was all he found himself able to muster in absence of something more sincere. Perhaps his respect was enough.

"Yeah, yeah don't get all sappy now," the teacher said as he failed to withhold the smallest inclination of a smile at the edges of his mouth, an unintended sign of his sympathy, before rubbing it away. "I just don't want you causing trouble for everyone else. Don't think I'm going to go easy on you just because of what happened." He nodded in return. He didn't want that, not at all.

"We're starting tomorrow, right after class. Don't be late, if I sense you're wasting my time we'll stop immediately." The man stood and made his way toward the door which slammed back to reveal a bright afternoon glare peeking over another taller building. He stood to follow the man only to be fenced by a hand on his chest and a serious gaze as he reached for the side of the door's opening. "Remember, those villains that attacked you are still out there. You might not be so lucky next time."

"Yes, Sir," he said and Aizawa dropped his hand in all it's megalomanic nonchalance before
stepping back out onto the footpath. He paused and his eye trailed to the curled tape on his hand before he dropped it and followed. Despite the sombre warning it wasn't going to get in the way of the sense of satisfaction that had taken residence. He would become strong, and he would get his revenge, no matter what it took.

Chapter End Notes

*I don't own BNHA. OC material is my own.*
Enantiodromia

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

[Yuuei's Campus – Classroom 1-A – 7:25 AM Tuesday]

He'd been at it for much of the night and even now before class he was flipping the plate in his hand. He had gotten better at it quickly as if he were stretching a muscle he didn't know he had. A closer look had shown it was made of some kind of alloy with its surface flecked by lighter and darker blends of folded metal. He had accepted it now but in truth his mind was still reeling despite the explanation he'd been provided with, to think on it made it worse as it only raised more questions, he had no answers to right now. Rather than try to think of some he instead speculated on Aizawa's training which he knew would not be tame.

The chair in front of him made a screech as Kirishima pulled it up to his desk. "Whatcha got there?" He peeked up from the plate to the eager grin adorning him and his keen interest in the small object.

"A gift," he said as he offered it to him. "I'm meant to use it for practice."

"What kind of practice can you do with a piece of metal?" He fumbled with it in his hands though found nothing special about it.

"Try bending it." He motioned at Kirishima, who obliged by sticking it between both his palms like some kind of compact press. The twists and jerks he made with it proved to attain little success and after the only thing he'd achieved was leaving a series of rough red marks on his hands.

He handed it back and shook his hands. "Damn man, feels like it's made of titanium or something."

He had expected the thing to be strong but watching Kirishima struggle with it had put that into perspective. It made the recent revelation all that much stranger, of how he hadn't realised or even have any inkling for so long. The urge of that thought had prompted him into reminiscing back to any part of his memory that may have held a clue but he'd come up dry. No recollection had been so clear as to act in a way in which he could have clued himself into it, like Aizawa had said, stress and pressure had been the main benefactor.

"Well?" Kirishima looked at him like he was expecting a miracle to spring forth.

"Oh, right," he said, realising he hadn't said anything for a full minute, before spanning the plate between his thumb and index finger. I guess I won't get any practice by just staring at it. As he closed his eyes he tried to recapture the feeling. He had refined it to a point but having just discovered it the day before made it nothing short of difficult.

It was the indication of a pin in his finger that he now knew meant he was doing it correctly. As he concentrated he could feel the rush of the quirk fall like a current into the plate, to define it as a push had been accurate, like energy was leaving his hand. As he finished he held the metal in his hand with care as although the effect wasn't visual on the sheet metal he could tell by how it felt, that something at the centre of it had shifted. He touched one edge of it to the desk and pushed down on the other side with his palm, slowly but surely the previously uncompromising metal curved about half an inch before he dropped it out of exhaustion. It still wasn't much.

"Is there a trick to it or something?" Kirishima said while inspecting the new malformed plating.
"No trick." He spun the plate on its side. "It's just," he tried to think of the word, "less dense?" he said almost in question of it. That was how Aizawa had explained it. He realised now that he owed the man too much and regretted the outbursts he'd had with both him and Cementoss even more. If the quirk was all he was in his own mind then perhaps calling himself and being called pathetic was correct despite his denial. Something still bothered him about that, though. If his sister had heard him talking like that. He frowned, at least now he could be glad he'd held off on that call.

"Here I thought your quirk was all about compression," he said with a nervous look on his face.

"You and me both," he replied with a sour look.

His grin came back. "Well, at the very least I'm glad to see you got your brace removed."

"In your seats. This isn't a playground," Aizawa said with a firm voice and firmer gait as he entered the class. "We have much to get on with."

It was with self-admitted annoyance that he found it hard to concentrate on the material in front of him, three case studies to be exact, that they were going over with Midnight. It was the kind of thing that was right up his alley yet he still found himself in preference of flipping the plate in his hands over answering even the most basic questions the teacher asked. It didn't matter he supposed, a lack of obligation was a welcome change and it wasn't like there was a shortage of other people eager enough to answer; he doubted even cement weights could stop Momo from raising her hand.

"Mrs," Momo said almost as if to prove his point. "If I may?"

"Go ahead sweetie," Midnight said with a large smile on her face. It was similar to the one she'd worn during their session.

Ahem, Momo cleared her throat. "I believe the answer is damage minimisation." He almost rolled his eyes. There was no need for her to pretend there was room for error, if there was something that bothered him it was snobbishness, although maybe he was just a little jealous.

"Correct, in this case Ingenium's primary concern was a swift and precise removal of the villainess Mastera, who was prone to causing wide area damage with her Giant's Mace weapon quirk," Midnight said as she pointed to various photos she'd pinned up in the blackboard. "I'm sure some of you are personally aware of how exceptional Ingenium's awareness of danger is." She gave a sly look to Iida. "And the sheer power of his right hook." It didn't take a genius to see how much the compliment made Iida glow since it was his brother after all. The subject had come up a number of times in class already; courtesy of Hagakure. She had gossip on everyone, both good and bad.

"Now, can anyone give me the quirks used in the second case study?"

Midoriya threw up his hand. "Kesigiriman's quirk enhances his speed and makes him more durable, Technoarachnid's quirk allows her to possess technology as long as she touches it, that makes the metal limbs attached to her costume even more fearsome," he answered before Midnight even got the chance to pick him.

"…Correct again, my aren't you all just bright," she said with slight applause.

He had to say he did admire Midoriya's approach, compared to Momo's because it didn't sound like he was trying to show off. He'd guessed that those numbered textbooks he was always writing in were related to his ability to recall all this information because he'd spotted the pictures that lined the pages once or twice, which were of heroes. It was pedantic to be sure but despite that he couldn't help but be impressed, it wasn't the kind of thing he'd have the patience to do. There had been an
urge, that stemmed from his panic over the weekend, to ask about what he'd written and tips about other students but he hadn't gone through with it. He was glad he hadn't as it would have been rude and not to mention unfair in more ways than one. Now all that still remained of that urge was to ask about what Midoriya had written on himself, and maybe that much wouldn't be an awkward question at some point, he'd have to keep that in mind.

The dedication, as admirable as it was, also raised other questions. How did someone with so much interest in quirks also have almost no control over his own? It was an odd detail. Then again he hadn't known nearly as much as he thought he did about his own quirk until yesterday. That could have been why All Might had taken such an interest in him, their quirks were very similar, as Tsuyu had pointed out. He didn't care that much about the answer, whatever it was, all that mattered was that it made him want to try harder.

[**Yuuei's Campus – Training Room 5 – 6:47 PM**]

He scraped the back of his hand across the fresh scratch on his cheek and it stung. It was one of many he'd gained in a short time, that he felt should have taken longer, and the herald of more to come. He knew he shouldn't have been surprised, he was nothing compared to this man, even if he was learning faster than he'd expected. Blocking Aizawa once or twice every now and then didn't save him from being knocked on his ass every ten seconds but it helped everything click, he'd widen his stance a little or adjust his posture each time, with each hour he divided himself from something absolutely abysmal toward becoming that which he knew he needed to be. A fighter.

Aizawa raised his hand at him. "Again," he said, his voice grating with impatience. This man did not mince words, and the patchwork of bandages on his face only added to the craze of his style.

He pushed his foot down firmly as the man flew at him again. It was almost a flurry in which the man moved, where his forward arm led but the other came around in a blow. A hard block met it and made his bone jar bluntly with pain but at least he didn't need both his arms to stop it that time. The man's foot swept and he stepped backward allowing it to go wide and barely giving him time to look up, just enough to see a fist tearing toward him. *Shit,* he thought as he swayed to the left to evade the move. The fist caught him on the shoulder at full speed with a hard *smack,* sending him falling roughly to the floor once again.

He pulled himself up and the man flung himself at him again. It was a flurry of movement, his arm would lead but it would be something else like a leg or shoulder that would deliver the blow. He saw the tell this time, raising his arm to stop the high kick, which jarred his bone with blunt pain. A flicker made him aware of the next motion, and he only avoided the jab intended to knock him down him by an inch as he jumped back. It did not occur to him to back off further, so at the height of the jab Aizawa leaned forward to grab him while stepping forward, placing his foot behind his ankle and smashing him into the floor at full speed.

"Shit," he cursed under his breath as pain flooded through his back. They had soft mats set up but they were intended to stop their sliding, not so much the effect.

"Don't allow your enemy to lead you into traps with every move. It'll let them exploit weaknesses in your stance, of which you have plenty."

"Yes, Sir," he answered. A series of short monotonous pants escaped him as he caught his breath. His teacher hadn't even broken as much as a sweat.

"Again," he repeated, to which he nodded and picked himself up once more. He gritted, no complaints, no whining, no excuses.
The red stone of the sidewalk skidded against his shoes as he walked, there was a slight chill in the air that wrapped itself around the now dark campus. There were no facilities to change near to the house that Aizawa had taught him in, hence he was tackling the night in nothing but the gym clothes that he'd gone there with. He rounded the corner of the dormitory building from the right, despite the left side being the closest to where he'd come from. It was a deliberate step just to prevent the irritating smell of a giant bushel of lavender nested just outside the entrance. He couldn't stand the stuff, it reminded him too much of his hometown.

Fatigue almost tripped him as he trudged up the small steps, perhaps wagering one or two hours of sleep would help that, he could work on his quirk and his missed schoolwork after that. He slid his ID card through the slot in the door and it clicked, allowing him into a dark communal area. The place was completely empty, not that he had expected more, he knew it would be a rarity to see one of the three or four others students that lived here. He headed directly toward the stairs, past the collection of armchairs and a kitchen that held a misshapen dining table with a lush set of paper flowers adorning it. The stove nearby let fall a dim blue light that no one ever seemed to turn off, it was enough to guide him through the odd assortment.

The elevator rumbled as he waited for it. He had to admit the dormitory was bigger than he had made it out to be, in reality its size was something close to a mansion. It really wasn't that bad at all, he'd just been in a bad place. One grievance he still held with it was the shitty wifi, but that was of minor annoyance, it was still enough to study with. Ding, the doors went as they parted. There was a staircase beside it but he was far too tired to put himself through that hell, at his old boarding facility at Leineif he'd had the displeasure of only using those exclusively; you needed a designated pass to use the elevators there. In his drowse he only just managed to avoid walking into the man coming out of the elevator. As his eyes slid up the white pant leg he realised whom the dirty outfit belonged to, Alo's face was partitioned by a similar look of recognition, although he seemed far less dishevelled than he remembered.

"There you are," Alo said, stepping out and reaching the light switch next to him. The room grew to a more visible spectrum.

"Uncle, I wasn't expecting yo-ah." His uncle dragged him to the couch behind him in one great embrace, then pushed him down into it.

His uncle bid himself to one of the curved armchairs opposite so that the only thing between them was a coffee table. "I came to see you," he said as he settled in opposite him. "But looks like I almost missed ya. Staying out late?"

"Yeah, I was, uh." He tried to think of an excuse. "Doing extra-curricular stuff." In a way it was true. If his uncle knew he was already doing something so rigorous as fighting he might get stressed out.

"Already?" His uncle raised a brow. "I guess you never were one to sit still."

"Sorry." He scratched his head.

"Hah! No need to say that, who am I to stand in your way?" The man burst in laughter which devolved into a hacked cough, the handkerchief that had sat clean and new in his lapel was already a stitch work of stains. "Do what you needa do, don't let anyone tell you otherwise. That's all I want out of you."

There was no way to hide his smile at the man's words. If no one else really understood then he knew his uncle did, it had kind of always been that way. That was probably why he had been the
first and only of his mom's relatives to fund his endeavour, it was more than he thought he deserved.

"Just…" His uncle squinted. "Riley, be careful, alright?"

"I will," he answered, not letting his expression deviate. He wanted to look confident, to not worry him. His uncle was a man of few serious moments, there'd only been a couple times around him where it had come through. He knew better than to mock it.

He nodded. "Well, lad, I better be off then, I left you a little something at your room. It was the reason I came up here after all," he said with another chuckle as he stood.

"Where are you headed?" he asked out of polite curiosity, his thinly veiled concern from their previous encounters was more apt and real now. Experience was a harsh mistress.

"Kanagawa Prefecture, gotta head around to Yokosuka, Kamakura, Yokohama and the like," the man sounded hoarse. "I'll keep in touch so keep your head straight. Anything happens, anything at all, call will ya?" He nodded as the man took his leave and the front door automatically locked behind him. To say his reunion with his uncle was short-lived was an understatement but he hadn't expected that aspect to suddenly change, he was kind of glad it didn't.

A short trip through the dull thumping of the elevator and he was back in front of his door. There was no sign of anything his uncle had left him, which concerned him only until he opened his room. Inside on the floor laid a phone that was almost an identical one to the one he'd had, Alo must have slid it under the door. It was wrapped in only a sparse piece of plastic Cellophane wrap to keep scratches from its surface. As he peeled away the material he could see it had come with a dark green case, something he didn't doubt his uncle had asked for specifically. A smile crossed his face again, smaller this time but content. In lieu of activating it now he placed on the crude table, he'd worry about transferring all his stuff later when he was less tired. He turned to his closet but stopped by the window and, on a whim, he turned to it.

A thin spear of yellow was hitting the windowsill, through the frost struck glass and from beyond the thick black girdle that made up Yuuei's walls. Hinges shuddered as he abandoned his task and instead undid the latch to pry the glass encumbered frame open, a single cold gust impeded from behind it like a vacuum seal had been released. The sight wasn't unique in the slightest and neither was the silence but that was exactly what he was looking for as he'd grown used to in his life time, a constant. It helped, in the same way a familiar smell or object might, it did not quell that ache he now felt of revenge and of the idea of those men, but, it was enough to stall. It was enough to realign him to a type of desire that he had experienced when he had first entered this school. A fluttering, a ushering of a step into a life he was carving out for himself, that of a hero.

Chapter End Notes

*I don't own BNHA. OC material is my own.*
[Yuuei's Campus – Riley's Dormitory Room – 5:33 PM Sunday]

The baseball made a soft *thud* as it tapped on the ceiling of his room with each throw. He laid there, stretched and exhausted from two weeks’ worth of work and effort that ached and weighed on his bones. Aizawa had been relentless and he in turn had tried not to be disappointing.

His training hadn't made him stronger in the traditional sense, yes he had gained a scrap or two of strength above that what he already possessed but most of their time had been spent on technique. If nothing else he now had a better understanding of the great variety of weaknesses his fighting style possessed. It was what you might call progress even if imperfect, he still lacked the experience to make it so, but that was one reason the sports festival would be useful. It was a chance to put it all to the test.

Despite the excitement of his training, something else held a stricter grip on the recesses of his mind. The continued *thwick* and *thwip* of the ball did little to shelter him from thinking over the phone call he had made only a small while ago. There was no way he could say it had gone how he wanted, it wouldn't be repeating in his mind if it had, however it wasn't like he'd expected it to go any different either. Being the first in his line to have a quirk meant his family and himself inhabited two different worlds, maybe that was why he had avoided it so long.

Livid was the correct word; for his father anyway. That was to say he himself was livid in remembering the words his father had said when he thought himself out of earshot of the phone. "Keep the little monster locked away overseas for all I care." It was hard to admit his dad had a way of getting into his head like no one else could. However to say he still held a hatred toward the man wasn't true, he wasn't one to hold a grudge like Alo was. It wasn't like he could blame the asshole for acting afraid, he'd been afraid of himself more than once. Besides, maybe if he showed him what a great hero he'd become he could work on rebuilding that bridge, family was still family even if a statement like that left his chest feeling hollow.

Mom's case, was different. She had pleaded him to move to another school in the area; to transfer over to one of the other options that had made their little list before Yuuei, namely Shiketsu in the west of Hosu and some other smaller one he couldn't recall the name of. He had refused, and he was sure mom knew he would, she hadn't pursued it any further after the initial suggestion. That kind of abstain pained him because he knew it was her worry that made her silent.

Elle hadn't been around, unlike he anticipated. Maybe he should have, the stoic nature of his parents were one of the factors that kept his sister at an arm's length to most of these affairs. That much he could be glad of; she didn't need to see him in the pathetic state his dad always tried to put him in. Not when he had promised her so much more.

The situation with Midnight had petered out, he had indeed talked. He had talked a lot. It had almost become awkward since it wasn't until an entire session and half later that she'd begun to speak back to him, maybe as payback for the first one. She had pinned the whole thing as a way to relieve stress rather than to analyse him, he was glad enough for that but didn't believe it.

"One more week." He groaned, even saying the words aloud did kind of make him nervous. Performance anxiety had always been something that latched onto him but disappeared once the task
at hand begun, he was sure this was no different. Partially to blame was that he had no real idea exactly what the festival was, as between his training and study there hadn't really been much time to check. All he knew was that it was a big deal. A very, very big deal, according to Kirishima. He should have asked then and there, but he'd been too ashamed to admit his ignorance. Maybe now was the time to read up on it. The day, as it was, had turned out nothing short of boring and there was little he wanted to do more than to continue working on his quirk. He couldn't allow himself to take the liberty as he'd overdone it three times over, any more and it would be bad so he had forced himself to rest and get used to the new phone. It had a few quirks, despite the appearance being very much identical.

His door rattled and banged like it had been hit by a heavy weight, causing him to rise just in time to have the ball he'd been throwing clock him hard in the forehead before hitting the floor and rolling off. "Shit," he said and rubbed the self-inflicted injury, he would love to say that was the first time that had happened. He rolled the stiffness out of his neck before lurching from his bed past the coffee table and, in the act of doing so, almost knocking the sheets and books strewn at the edge of it to the floor. He'd forgotten that it had been moved without his consent the other day. He didn't care about that right now however, what concerned him more was what someone would want at six in the afternoon on a goddamn Sunday.

The only thing he was met with to sate his curiosity was the mug of a certain shark toothed wannabe hero who promptly pushed him aside. "Hey," he answered then groaned as Kirishima trampled around his room. Kaminari stood in the hall where he had come from with a bit of a reserved look on his face, like he didn't really want to be here.

"Nice place you got here man," Kirishima said as he stopped. "It's… cozy."

"It'd be a lot nicer if you didn't destroy it."

"With how Jirou described it to me I thought it was more like a tomb. I figured I'd be doing you a favour." The redhead spun around several more times as he got a better look.

"It's thanks to her it doesn't anymore." She had been insistent on changing everything to make it less awful. He hadn't dared to stop her, not when she had that look in her that she sometimes got. In the end all the effort had gotten him something that at least resembled his old place, how she had replaced that poster was the real question, it had been signed and everything – an irreplaceable gift from his uncle.

"So." He turned to look back to Kaminari. "You aren't here just to sightsee are you? If you want something spit it out." Even if it was urgent they could have at least texted him first.

"We came to check up on you, you know, to see if Aizawa had killed you yet," Kaminari said with a grin that was nothing short of cheeky. "Those little training sessions of yours are kind of a hot topic you know."

It was Hagakure who was to blame for everyone finding out, she lived up to her quirk when it came to spying on people. "Yeah well, whatever," he said. It wasn't a secret, so he didn't mind.

"I don't know how you do it." The boy moved from the hallway to the doorframe. "Aizawa scares the shit out of me almost as bad as Bakugou, the only difference is I know that one of them can't beat the crap out of me and get away with it."

"I think it's awesome, though I guess I'm a little jealous he's giving you so much attention. Doesn't matter much though, not like his fighting style is compatible with mine. I'm more of the punch first ask later type of guy you know?" Kirishima began boxing the air in series of swift movements to
show what he meant.

"It just kind of happened." He fell back on the edge of his bed. "I thought he was going to throw me out for being a gigantic tool. Still, it's a bit of a rough time." He rubbed the place on his right arm with a thick wrapping of tape, he could feel the injury bleeding with a pain that had been aggravated by relentless training.

"Right and that's why you're coming with us tonight." Kirishima grinned wide to which he blinked back in confusion. "I'm all about training at the moment but relaxing a bit might do you some good."

"Is that really a good idea?" He hadn't left the school grounds since then.

"Oh no don't give me that look." His friend jerked him from the bed in one hard yank before grabbing him by the collar and dragging him toward the door. "No excuses this time, not after you blew me off on the last three. If you fall flat on your face in the sports festival it'll be on my conscience and I'm not having that."

"Alright, alright. Sheesh, you don't need to wring my neck out to get your point across." He snarled as he threw the hand off. It wasn't a necessary for Kirishima to persuade him, for once, as although he was reluctant he was also sick of sitting around in his room swimming in boredom. Besides he'd be with people, nothing would happen, he'd done stuff like this often at Leineif so this should be no different. He steeled himself, then grabbed a few things and followed.

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[Eastern Hosu – Mezawari Sector – 6:52 PM]

Overhead hung a glassy mishmash underpinned by the glow of a hundreds of tiny paper lanterns illuminating the festival ground. They lead them like arbiters toward the bottom of a massive stone staircase, on either side of which were arrays of green and red bushes flanked by large bowed statues. A path spanned out in front of them as they reached the bottom of the first plateau, now lined on either side by trapezes and stalls pinned to dirt by large metal pins and wooden posts. The glow of the lanterns now floated in a haze away from them, emitting a spark of red and rose that dispersed into the night.

They had collected a number of familiar faces that had lengthened their commute to well over an hour and allowed the air in turn to grow far more cold. A jacket, he was glad to say, was one of the things he had remembered to grab; the green and black wool lined article was the last piece of thick clothing he owned now. The rest was either unusable or destroyed, and from what Kirishima had said, it was probably better they just go and get him new stuff on the cheap some time.

"Dude, a damn amusement park, really?" Kaminari said with a grievous moan like the mere idea of it offended him.

"Not just any park my man, a travelling carnival," Kirishima said with unfazed enthusiasm. "They only come around when the sports festival does since it brings in customers."

"What a drag," he muttered and went back to his phone.

"I know for fact this stuff is right up your alley moron. Stop trying to act cool and you might have some fun," Jirou said, to which Kaminari gave a defiant groan. Beside her stood Momo with a strange joyful expression at the sight ahead that served only to ruin her usual seriousness.

"I think it looks awesome," Sero said as he got up off one of the banisters of the staircase they'd come from.
"Yeah," he said, stepping onto the first of several alternating tablets that made up the path. It really was elaborate, not quite like anything he'd ever seen before. Awesome was the right word for it and exactly the kind of thing that would never have existed in Leineif. The city was far too congested, too strictly organized, for something so frivolous.

Kirishima pushed past him then looked back over his shoulder. "Time to get into it," he said and strode into the guts of the revelry.

All they had to do from then on was follow Kirishima, as he had enough enthusiasm to carry the group by himself. Instead of having to focus on that he sort of dazed and enjoyed and took in what he could. There had been much prattle that he had missed out on while not in class, although much of it he didn't care for, who was interested in whom and other such semantics. He had never been one to involve himself in gossip, although that didn't mean he hadn't been a part of it his fair share. Still, from his point of view there was too much at stake to bother distracting himself with such things. Having said that there was some slight enjoyment that came from watching Jirou steal the occasional glance at Momo without her knowledge. Kaminari had mentioned them getting closer since they were attacked together at USJ but he hadn't quite figured out how close till now. It was some restraint he had to have in not snickering when he noticed the mild awkwardness between them on occasion.

"That went poorly." Momo had an almost cartoonish frown on her face as she looked at her contraption. It hadn't even moved the high striker more than halfway up its perch. "I should have just made some weights and just dropped those on it instead."

"I thought it was going to work," Jirou said with a shrug.

"It's alright, Kirishima is just a cheater," Sero said while making a poor attempt to hide his laughter.

"Hey hey." The accused waved his hands. "They said I only had to hold the hammer. They didn't say anything about using it. Besides you gotta admit that was waaay manlier than just swinging a little club."

"I guess miss top-of-the-class lost her mojo," Kaminari said. He had a peeved expression.

"Pay up Kaminari." Sero nudged him, and he retaliated by pushing him away.

"Torenagi you're my last hope, stop that smug bastard."

"I really shouldn't," he answered. He'd felt ragged earlier, he wasn't about to ruin the rush of energy he had now without a good reason.

Kaminari dragged him up to the machine by the shoulder. "Come on dude, are you a man or not? You can't just let him win damn it, my money is on the line here."

"Hey-" He shook his shoulder to rid himself of the annoyance. "-It's your own fault for making the bet in the first place."

"Mannnn, this is why you're a killjoy."

He tapped his foot and thought twice. Kaminari had opened up as the night got on so maybe he was the one spoiling the mood now by acting so reserved. "Fine," he said as he picked up the aluminium hammer, forming a curled smile before he spoke again. "But if I beat him you give me your winnings."

"...All my winnings?" Kaminari looked up at him then back at Sero and Kirishima.
"It's either you break even or you get nothing at all, I'd take it if I were you," Jirou said. "Just hurry up so we can get something to eat."

"Fine, you better not mess this up. My wallet is counting on you." He had a two thousand yen note clutched between his fingers.

With the notion settled he walked up to the machine, it was a stocky thing with a picture of a clown painted on its sturdy wooden face. The stark red nose was a buzzer and the one Kirishima had just barely missed getting to on his triumphant turn. At the bottom was a small button like mechanism which served as one end of a pivot, on closer inspection he could see it was rusted and shoddy.

He clenched his hand toward the floor briefly, causing tremors to tap at his wrist, before then stretching his fingers out toward the metallic button. Shivers raced down his wrist to meet the device causing it to wobble just the tiniest amount which he wagered would be more than enough. He stood and tapped the end of the hammer against his shoe, it might have been too light to do any real damage but what he'd done would be more than enough. He raised it to the button and then above his head, it swung down and hit with a solid *thunk* followed by the chaser racing up the machine into the clown's nose. It gave a loud succession of three rapid *tings*.

"Damn," Kirishima said and Kaminari sighed in relief as he put his money away.

"I didn't know you had it in you." Sero laughed despite his loss. "A bet's a bet." He took a small note from his back pocket and offered it to him.

"I was kind of just joking around when I said that." He dropped the hammer, which left an indent on the dirt floor.

"Hey I'll take it." Kaminari grinned.

"Better you than him." Sero pushed it into his hands. "Besides, it's worth it just to see Kirishima lose at something."


"Let's take that as a cue." Jirou turned away, with Sero, Kirishima and Kaminari in tow. He was about to follow too but turned just for a second to see Momo looking at the high striker.

"...and here I thought I had a firm idea of everyone's quirks." She leant down near the machine. Her face was stern like she wasn't happy with herself.

He walked up beside her and saw that the button that he had hit was shattered, caved inward like a sledgehammer had hit it. "That might've been a bit too much," he said as he squatted down. "Let's leave before the guy running the booth sees."

"There's no need," she said and touched the broken mechanism, unscrewing it completely from the rest of the machine. She gave it a careful look and then touched her arm causing a small cyst like gloop to appear on it. It burst in a static-y mess that revealed an identical but unbroken device which she screwed back on carefully. "Good as new."

"Why bother?" he asked. It was a nice gesture but it wasn't like the carnival staff would have even cared, half of them had been teenagers not much older than themselves, underpaid and understaffed. There wasn't a chance they'd have seen it anytime soon or done anything about it.

"It doesn't reflect well on the school, even something like this could be enough to cause trouble right
now." She looked at him. "Particularly concerning you."

"Ah… sorry." He hadn't really thought about it. Since they weren't in the school right now there was certainly a chance something like that might happen. No one had recognised him yet, at least.

"Apologies aren't necessary, as vice-class rep it is my duty." She shook her head before getting to her feet. "It should have been my duty to recognise the danger to you as well, I'm sorry for that." She turned to follow the others, leaving him alone.

He froze well enough as he watched her and then he took the old broken bell from the floor where she'd left it. A snobbish person wouldn't go to such lengths or take responsibility, however much as he felt it was misplaced, upon themselves. Now he felt he knew why there hadn't been a mention by Iida about what he'd done to Kuroiro, or repercussions for it beyond the obvious. The broken bell crunched in his grip, becoming no bigger than a golf ball, then he stuffed it in his jacket pocket before getting up to follow the others.

The rest of them had already finished eating by the time Momo and Sero had begun. It wasn't that they'd been fast but rather that the two were picky. He himself had downed some type of Karaage filled with beef rather than chicken, he hadn't been so hungry to begin with although he kind of wished they'd been close enough to that one restaurant. He had wondered how it had been doing since then.

Jirou groaned as she waited and watched the spectacle. "Will you two hurry it the fuck up?" Momo returned a scowl at the words, like a disapproval of the curse.

At least someone had the balls to say something, he thought. At this rate he was going to fall asleep in his chair.

"I would but I'm getting sick just looking at that crap." Sero stared at Momo's food. It was a sodium belated soup of battered vegetables in a twenty oz paper cup, accompanied by a plate of sugar coated and caramel delights. He could feel his blood sugar rise just by being near it.

"Don't knock it till you try it," Momo answered with a covered mouth. "Much better than that." It was true enough; Sero's food didn't look more appetizing either. It was an unrealistically healthy and expensive mulch made up of soy beans and fish. The contrast was rather mind boggling, though not as much as their arguing.

He shrugged. "I just can't believe someone would stuff so much down their throat, that's all."

"I've said before it doesn't matter how much I eat you health weirdo. Keep it to yourself." She set aside one of the two bowls she'd finished with.

"So," Sero said, trying his best to look elsewhere. "You guys nervous?"

"About the festival? Sure, with our reputation we're bound to noticed," Kaminari said with a nod.

"I'm going to show the world what kind of man I am!" Kirishima stood up and smashed his fist on the table strong enough to shake the bowls.

He frowned. "What, exactly, is it?" he asked, to the perception of one or two confused looks.

"Right. I guess you'd never have had a chance to see it," Jirou said as she turned her body toward the bench, she'd been sitting backwards up against it while counting her impatience. "It's basically a media stunt that the school plays into. The whole country gets into it, pro heroes and civilians alike."

"Yes," Momo said. "That is why it is also the best stage in the world and that means it has
considerable pressure. As for the actual competition, events are selected randomly however the final round is usually a tournament of some description."

"Sounds nerve wracking." He already felt slightly queasy at the idea of thousands of eyes watching his every move.

"Pro heroes are always in the spotlight Riley, better get used to it." Kirishima nudged him. "It's a good chance to impress everyone anyway."

"Sure impress, or you could end up embarrassing yourself in front of the world." Kaminari laughed.

"Hey, that isn't going to happen. There's no way we'll mess up, is there?" Sero scowled, though there was worry beneath it.

"Don't think about it. Focus on preparation." Momo put a soft white napkin to her mouth before throwing it in the finished bowl. "I'm finished," she said as she rose.

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[Eastern Hosu – Near Yuuei's Campus – 10:19 PM]

They'd squeezed the remainder of the fun out of the carnival in a reasonable amount of time, miniature Ferris wheels and other shenanigans could really only keep their group entertained for a number of hours. Pieces of their group had fallen away throughout, until finally even Kaminari had left, leaving Kirishima and himself well alone.

"There was no need to go to all the trouble, I woulda been fine," he said as they approached the far side of one of Yuuei's multiple quadrants. It peaked from out of sight, but the gate was still at least a few fitful blocks away on a tall hill. "Thanks though, I haven't really had the chance to do that in a while, it was fun."

"No problem my man," Kirishima said. "I know you can take care of yourself but I just didn't want you to get lost here. This city is like a damn maze, it'd be a blemish on my pride as a man to leave you high and dry in the middle of nowhere after I made you come in the first place."

"Yeah, you're right, even getting here from my apart." He paused. "My old apartment. It was a struggle."

"Got much experience living in a city?" He raised his brow at him as they turned into a damp alleyway.

"I boarded at my old school but before that I lived in a place that was about as rural as you can get these days. My dad is a bit paranoid about heroes and large cities." He shrugged. "I guess his paranoia isn't misplaced, is it?"

"Yeah, I guess not. Everything is kind of crazy in a hero hotspot like this," he said, grinning, which turned into a grimace. "Shit." He'd stepped in a puddle made by a crack in cement.

He chuckled. "Leineif city was a lot… cleaner."

Kirishima kicked his shoe to get some of the water off. "I never did ask you, did you get into the course without doing an exam? I know Momo and Todoroki did."

"No, I did an exam but-" He stopped as something felt off, like an object had fallen to the floor behind them. "Did you hear that?" he whispered.
His friend nodded. "Let's pick up the pace."

They turned lurched out of the alleyway in a fast walk. Despite how dark it was, and with only the flickering of streets lights above them he could tell the school was still over two and half blocks away. A trickle hit his face, rain. He looked up to see the sky had darkened and around him he noticed the subtle swaying of trees and the rattling of trash cans as wind picked them up.

He quickened his step and urged his friend to do the same, a few glances over his shoulder revealed nothing except the occasional hit of metal as something clumsily followed them. They made it two more streets, another alleyway. Muggers? He thought, then decided no, this person wanted them to know they were being followed. The streets themselves were empty and too inconspicuous which wasn't a detail that escaped him; they were near the heart of eastern Hosu. The streets should have been packed.

The rain was falling harder now and the stick of fluid covering the ground made it hard to ignore the light footsteps running in tandem with their own. He looked at Kirishima, and mouthed the word. "Run." Their jog turned into a sprint and although he could no longer turn to look he felt a spike on his back, a drunk and feverish craze threatening to tear the skin off if he so much as indulged to check.

A dog howled in the distance, a sign of life. Then it cut out like the owner had struck it, it was storming now and the rain had turned to bullets. The shaking of trees fell into the trembling cascade that a hurricane might cause. Water tossed itself through the streets from drains that were unprepared to handle the barrage. The steps were louder but unstressed. It was keeping up, overtaking with each second. One more block. Every step they took he could hear it take two. His lungs were aching and burning in a familiar sense that only came from running for a long time. All the running he'd done in his training seemed irrelevant now. It was a net, a corrosive and nameless grudge that was eating away at the world behind them.

They hit the hill and it hadn't caught them. In a few steps they were at the top and at that point he wasn't sure how the strike that seemed so inevitable never came. The gate hung in shelter as Kirishima struggled with the steel jaws for an eon. He dared and looked and wished he hadn't. It was beneath in the corner of a street, he didn't see it for a second. Then, the outline of the rain made it visible, a crouched humanoid husk darker in contrast to even the shadow surrounding it. It wasn't moving but it was staring at them, into them, through them. It was enough to make him shudder and his skin crawl, and then it was gone as the door shut on its visage.

[Yuuei's Campus – Riley's Dormitory Room – 10:37 PM]

He shut the door tight behind him and leant onto it as he gave it a second. There wasn't much to say, they both understood how lucky they had just gotten. "I don't know what the fuck that was but I'm really glad it's over," he said and moved away from the door and to the window. The rain was still hammering, it was impossible to see anything. A barrier would not have stopped it.

Kirishima was still panting and shivering. "Running away isn't manly but we didn't have much choice did we?"

"You saw it too right? Before the gate slammed shut." He looked back from the window and put the curtain in front of it, his friend nodded. "That thing was radiating the intent to kill us. It was just like USJ," he said. "We weren't even wearing our uniforms."

Kirishima let out an exasperated breath. "I'm soaked, dude, let's just leave it for now."
"You're right." They were still drenched. He went over to his closet and fumbled around inside, "Here." He threw a set of clothes at the guy, one of his three, it was better than letting him sit there in the cold. "I'll go find something to sleep on."

"It's fine, I can just go to my pla…” He cut himself off as he checked his phone. "Shit dude my parents are going to kill me."

"Better them than whatever was following us." He shrugged as he went for the door. "You live close by right? Just go and get your stuff in the morning." He shut the door behind him before giving Kirishima the chance to answer.

It was a struggle to find anything to make a bed with but after a short walk down the hall the abandoned supply closet had come to his aid. He came back with a wide thin mat and a thicker smaller one to lay on top, as well as a collection of stiff sheets that could pass as blankets and pillows for one night. The setup looked less than elegant when he'd finished with it. He flattened out the last of the odd bumps in the makeshift mattress.

"Take my bed for the night, kind of my fault you're stuck here."

His friend waved his hands in refusal. "Nah dude, a real man doesn't need handouts. Besides it's hardly like you knew some psycho was gonna chase us down."

"You sure?" He looked back at the heap. "That's gotta be like sleeping on stones." His floor was made of brown hardwood, like the rest of the dorm, uncomfortable to say the least.

"Lucky I came prepared then." Kirishima poised his arms which settled from skin to stone and back again. "I'll be fine dude so don't worry about it." To prove his point he jumped into a cross legged position on the temporary abode without a single sign of discomfort.

"Suit yourself." He shrugged, knowing better than to try and convince him otherwise.

"So Indiana, huh?" Kirishima asked a handful of minutes later after he himself had changed out of his soggy clothes as well.

He glanced back at him and slammed his closet shut. "What?" he said, the guy was still turned away to save him some embarrassment.

"Where you're from right? That's what the newspapers said."

"Yeah, that's right." He walked past him and took a seat on his bed. He'd expected him to bring up what had just happened, but maybe he had meant what he'd said about leaving it, or he needed something else to think about to distract him.

"What's it like? I've never been." There was a look on his face that suggested the question was more than simple curiosity.

"Humid." He tapped the table in front of him. "And boring."

Kirishima shuffled on the floor, looking away then back. "Then how about your school, Leineif wasn't it?"

"What about it?" he asked as he spread himself out on the bed.

"How about… any famous heroes that went there?"
He snorted. "No. As strange as it sounds Leineif Heroic Preparation Institute's primary goal wasn't to make heroes. Do you know what a military school is?" He asked, to which Kirishima nodded.

"It was something close to that. Its primary purpose was to beat any aspirations of heroism out of you by making the goal seem unreachable, submission by overdose so to speak." It didn't feel odd to talk about, it was the least he could admit to someone who had saved his life.

"Beat any aspirations… what?" He wore an alarmed look.

"It is where parents send their children when they want them not to pursue a heroic career, to put it simply, 'the heroics school without heroes.'" He scoffed at the words. It was a joke motto he and his friends had come up with themselves. "They wanted to make sure by the time you were done you would give up on it."

"Why the hell would you put up with that?" Kirishima's brow lay furled, like he couldn't believe a word of it.

"Heroic study is expensive and Leineif was not." he shrugged. "There wasn't a heroics school within two hundred miles of me that wasn't privatised, awful or expensive as shit."

"There must have been somewhere else you could have gone."

He frowned. "My old man would have hung it over my head if I refused. I was stupider then, showing him that I wasn't fucking around was all I cared about. That lasted about three years and then I took my chance, that was five months ago."

Kirishima dipped his head. "So that's why you didn't drop out after everything. That's rough man."

He hummed at that. "It is what it is. I'm here now, thanks to my mom, my uncle and a recommendation, so I guess it worked out." It wasn't like it hadn't taught him anything. The school kept some of his fondest memories, some he might not have committed had it not been for the pressure to keep sane. He shook his head to snap the thought out of existence, there wasn't a point.

"How is it in Japan then? I'm sure everyone wants to be the next All Might."

"It's tough competition. The entrance exam was pretty insane with the amount of people that showed up. It's a surprise both me and Ashido even made it in." He paused. "Then again I guess it's the same for Bakugou and Midoriya."

"You and Ashido went to the same school?" He found the thought weird. They barely acted like they knew each other, unlike the latter pair.

Kirishima nodded. "I was a bit different compared to now. Got in fights, did stupid shit that I regret now. I thought I was doing the right thing but I wasn't really helping at all, mostly just ended up getting in the way of real heroes." He frowned.

"I can't see it." It was outlandish to not have Kirishima be anything less than what he was now.

"I guess I should be glad. Ask Ashido if you don't believe me." He chuckled. "I told myself when I came here that when someone looks at me that would be looking up not down. If I can't be that kind of hero then I don't deserve to be one."

It only took a glance to confirm there wasn't so much as a hint of doubt on his friends face. "Well, you got one up on me there. I don't think I could be so righteous," he said after a moment before letting his sights fall on his right arm, it was still thickly covered.
"Something bothering you?" Kirishima blinked at the arm.

"Yeah." He scratched at one of the thin white strips. "I know I already kind of thanked you but I want you to know I would have been a goner if it wasn't for your help. You stuck your neck out for me even though I acted like a complete asshole. There's no real way I can ever thank you enough for that."

"Forget about it. It's in the past now."

He nodded. "It's just-" He wasn't sure how to phrase it. "-I can't stand the idea of pushing my problems onto someone else." He stopped pulling on the tape before it had the chance to come off. "I guess that's why I have these to remind me how much of an idiot I am."

Kirishima winced. "Iida already said it man, but don't be afraid to ask for help. Heroes have to stick together right?"

"Right." He let his arm fall back onto the bed. Even if it wasn't that simple that didn't mean it didn't make him feel better. "Right," he repeated and yawned. Then, a soothed breath left him, the white of light on the ceiling hazing in and out as he drifted. His eyes closed and there was a click of a switch, and then the world dripped away sight and sound both.

Chapter End Notes

*I do not own BNHA. OC material is my own.*
[Yuuei's Campus - Classroom 1-A – 7:26 AM Monday]

He tapped his fingers on the desk as he awaited his friends return, who had taken off at six that morning without even a pause, not that he had time to talk if he wanted to make the trip from his place and back. The rush was still an improvement over the chance of running into that thing again.

In retrospect the whole night had been kind of awkward and not just because Kirishima snored louder than anyone he'd ever heard before. No, rather it was the first time he'd shared a dorm in the better part of a year. It was a consequence of a simple thing he'd neglected to say, that was that his old class had dwindled more with every subsequent month there. The motto wasn't half the joke he'd made it out to be.

It was probably best kept to himself. Instead he took the plate from his pocket and flipped it. It had creases on it now and each side hung imbalanced. It wouldn't last much longer. He needed to find something more substantial to use his quirk on. Focus came and went and then he scrunched it like a wad of tissue paper before proceeding with the opposite. It was simple enough to make shapes now and fast enough that it might actually matter. As he was about to fold it again a hand snatched it.

"Isn't that just pretty, if heroism doesn't work out you could always make street art." Kirishima chuckled before putting it back down. "Here." He handed over a bag and inside was the stuff he'd borrowed.

"What's with the clothes?" Kaminari came up to them as he stuffed the bag away under his desk.

"I'm just returning them, we got caught in the rain so I stayed at his place." Kirishima pointed a thumb over at him.

Kaminari's grinned. "Oh-ho, a sleepover huh? I didn't think you two were close like that."

"You're getting the wrong idea," he said, he'd be embarrassed at the implication if Kaminari hadn't shown himself to be one to do this sort of thing daily.

"Very funny, dickhead." Kirishima cuffed Kaminari over the back of the head.

"Ow," he said and rubbed his head, only to have Kirishima grab him by the shoulder as if he wanted to interrogate him.

"Now tell me, did you notice anything strange on your way home?"

"What? No, I just went straight there." Kaminari shrugged. "Unless you guys categorise a power outage as 'strange.'"

The lights on the street had been flickering but that wasn’t really causation. "Maybe we should just tell him?" He glanced up and Kirishima nodded.

"Someone was following us yesterday after you split off."

"Following you?" His eyes widened with ridicule. "Did you piss yourselves?"
"Cut it out dude, this is serious." Kirishima sighed.

"Relax, I'm sure it was just your imaginations, when I left you guys you were like two feet from the school so who'd bother?"

He couldn't do more than shake his head at the suggestion. "It was watching us. It could have caught us but it didn't." The thought of it did frighten him even now. It was like it had heard them talking before that and knew exactly who they were.

"We should just report it and leave it at that, we don't have time to worry about this crap with the festival in less than a week," Kirishima said.

"Yeah," he said. It was probably better just to do it at this point.

"Better yet, I'll confess it and you stay out of it altogether."

"What?" He looked at him in disbelief.

"I'm not letting you get in deeper shit then you already are." Kirishima's tone was serious and, before he had so much as a chance to argue, the door to the class shook back with a shick causing his friends to leave him to rue in his seat. It was overprotective, to say the least.

The morning had dragged with his thoughts on the stalker. Kirishima had already enacted his plan and much to his own pride he was spending his time getting grilled right now in Nedzu's office. He had half a mind to go after him but he'd promised not to do it, inadvertently that meant he probably owed Kirishima one, though it had already become an insurmountable debt.

Crack, the wooden puppet shook beneath his grip, the whole thing was making him angry but he had better things to worry about. He still had to show Aizawa that he was ready to move onto the next step, despite being able to count the number of hits he'd landed on the man on less than one hand.

He let go of the dummies head, stepped back and lunged forward with his fist. Just before his palm touched he pulled the hand back and dropped his shoulder. The power of his lunge fell to his elbow as he gripped it with his other hand, driving it directly into the dummies cushiony stomach. He swept his body back taking his right leg with it as he'd been shown, then in one fell swoop he brought it back around into its splintered wooden head, thonk, it went as it hit the floor.

That had taken a while to get, he had to admit. It was just one of many small movements he'd been able to learn over two weeks however. They were all interchangeable, intended to be unpredictable and to disable rather than destroy. Aizawa had said his quirk was already lethal enough and it was all about giving himself an opening to use it. He was right about that.

He raised his hand and turned it over, then shut it tight. "Compress," he said and the dummies body faltered, tearing before collapsing inward on itself and off its shoddy wooden leg. It was finally back to where it had been before his kidnapping, maybe even stronger than that as long as he managed to keep his concentration. It proved difficult to do while trying to be on the offense, rather than the defence like he was used to.

Next to the dummy he'd destroyed was a set of two, these made of metal rather than any delicate material. They were designed not to fail easily, he knew. He touched the surface of the one on the right with his palm as there was no need to grip tightly for this, unlike for compression. The sensation of it was numbing, and went for a time, the tremor in his hand ceased and then inverted, a rigid mess of glass settling between his fingers like they were growing ever more arthritic. As he pushed it the
decompression became uncomfortable and painful and spread to other parts of his body. Still he held it. This was a necessity, pain was a necessity and failure an idea that did not exist.

[Yuuei's Campus – Training Ground β Changing Room – 4:17 PM]

"It was nothing," Kirishima said as he leant against the locker. "All they did was ask me a few questions before they let me go."

"So what did you tell them?" he asked as he undid the door in front of him, it was easy as they did not have the same dial combination locks his school used. Instead it was just a key that you kept on you.

"That I was alone, that I was sure I saw someone following me to the school. That kind of stuff, I didn't bring up your name."

"I still think you should have." He took off the gym top and stuffed it into the bag inside the locker. He checked his wounds, the tape was slipping; he hadn't changed it in several days and the rain hadn't exactly helped, even if the adhesive resisted water.

"It doesn't matter, what would they gain over the story I told them? It could have been any of us." He got up off the surface of the locker and put his bag down on the bench, he'd already finished changing.

"Did they ask you what you were doing at the school at ten at night?" He reached around his locker for the tape, after a few seconds of grabbing around he found it. There was nothing left but the spool, so he turned to Kirishima instead, who looked bored of his questions.

"I was making my way to my house when I noticed someone behind me, knowing I was near the school I went there because they wouldn't be able to follow me inside," he said like he was quoting a passage. Then his face became serious. "You think they got footage of me and you?"

"No, I doubt they have cameras out there," he said as he threw the empty spool in the trash. "If they did they would have seen who broke the wall when those reporters made it in."

He shrugged. "Well whatever, it's sorted for now, just keep an eye out."

"If the sports festival is as big as you guys say then it'd be a death wish for any villain to try anything." He turned to Kirishima. "I don't suppose you got any athletic tape?"

"Uh, yeah, sure." He unzipped his bag. Inside wasn't just one roll of tape, but two, along with a long elastic wire that one might attempt to pull apart to exercise.

"Thanks," he said as he took one then paused to look around, they were well enough alone already – they wouldn't have said much about his story if he they hadn't. However, he looked down at Kirishima. "Mind if I get some privacy?" He pointed at the bandages.

"It’s fine dude, I'm not squeamish."

"Please?" He knew that but that wasn't the point.

He shifted his eyes. "I already saw it once and I don't care what it looks like, yeah?"

He pushed the edge of the tape into his palm until it left a mark. Then, when Kirishima did not relent, he ripped off the old tape on his hands, bit by bit. Soon it all lay bare, including the worst on his right
It hadn't gotten much better as the old woman's quirk could only help so much. He put the new tape back over it, now practiced, and then buttoned up his shirt, put on the tie and slipped on the blazer.

Kirishima hadn't said a word throughout the process however once he was done he stood. "They're not as bad as you think," he said with a blank expression before passing him to leave.

He caught his reflection in the mirror of the locker as he turned to close it, then he flung it shut with a terrible crash that carried throughout the room. A shudder escaped, his friend was a terrible liar.

[Yuuei's Campus – Training Room 5 – 5:10 PM Wednesday]

He'd been throwing himself into it even more, even with his teacher throwing himself into it less as the week went on. It was annoying. Currently the man was curled up on the floor, sleeping away whatever it was that always ailed him. I know you're enjoying this you bastard, he thought as he looked down at the man. It'd been like this since Monday.

"It won't get any easier if all you do is stare at me you know," the man said, almost like he could see through his eyelids.

He grinded his teeth as he turned back to the dummy and gripped its head once more to repeat the process. It didn't matter that the guy wasn't as involved as he had been. He switched his grip again, firmer on the dummies body. He would be ready for the festival one way or another and he would damn well make sure that if his dad really was watching that he could stuff his words down his own throat. He switched his grip again. “Keep the little monster locked away overseas for all I care.” He hated the way he could recall exactly the snide, petulant tone he'd used. He let go, to switch his grip again. It was enough to drive him mad. He dug his fingers in.

"Enough, you look like you're about to blow a fuse," Aizawa said as he looked at his work.

"Sorry," he answered, his neck stung and his head was pounding. He wasn't sure what had gotten into him, he hadn't even thought about what his dad had said for a good week but somehow it had flooded back all at once. It was just for an instant his feelings about it had done a whole one-eighty.

"Doesn't look like you're gonna get much better at this for the time being." The man turned on him then prodded the metallic body of the dummy. "I can't stay I'm disappointed." He looked, and in response he felt his ears heat up. The dummy was malformed like wax melted by heat, he hadn't so much as realised he'd lost control in his tantrum. A dangerous habit.

"Since you seem to be so fed up I think it's best we move onto something different.” He moved back to the centre of the room. "I think you'll find this'll help someone like you far more in particular. There will be no need to open your yap for this, just pay attention and try to copy me." He gritted his teeth and watched as the man took on a peculiar stance.

[Yuuei's Campus – Counsellor's Office – 11:57 AM Saturday]

"Are you nervous for the festival?" Midnight leaned back in her chair, the dark black material squelched beneath her as she did.

"No." He hated how claustrophobic the room always made him feel, it made it hard to lie.

"You do seem, stressed, about it."
He shrugged. "Wouldn't you be? A world stage isn't really the best place for anyone to see these-" He waved his taped arm at her. "-For the first time, is it?"

"On the contrary, sweetie, participating in the festival after everything that has happened to you will only make you look better to the public," she said.

He tried not to roll his eyes. "I doubt that."

"There's no way to pretend what happened didn't but if you act confident then that's what people will focus on. Better yet, you might inspire someone who has gone through something similar, yours is hardly the only tragic narrative in this city."

He hadn't thought of it like that, he had to admit. There would be eyes on him for more than just checking out what he could do but also for what he had gone through. It appeared obvious now that she had pointed it out but maybe he'd been too moody to realise it. "I'll try," he said and nodded, much to the heroine's delight. She scratched her pen on the clipboard as she oft did, it didn't actually look like she was writing anything. Just two more days, he could feel his stomach churn at the thought.

Chapter End Notes

*I don't own BNHA. OC material is my own.
An eye for an eye

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

[Yuuei’s Sports Stadium – 1-A Waiting Room – 7:03 AM Monday]

The last two days before the festival had passed just as fast as the week before it. He’d rested as much as he could but his sleep had been fitful at best, he couldn’t get the damn image out of his head, that reporter from the start of the semester. He was glad one of the unseen perks of living on campus had allowed him to skip the gate and the reporters with it, any chance of seeing him in person had been nullified.

Despite his poor sleep he was far from tired, if anything his nerves keeping him alert as they drilled into his head. There was no way anyone would be able to see the scars, no way at all. He was sure of it, yet somehow that didn’t grant him any solace. Midnight had told him to act confident but that was beginning to feel easier said than done. Aizawa had worked him to the bone in the remaining time. He knew the man would never admit that the festival had been part of the reason for it but he was eagerly to show him that his effort hadn’t been wasted nonetheless. He did feel prepared to do just that.

“I won’t get to show everyone my dazzling costume?” Aoyama was glowering at the floor with a long face.

“...They’re disallowing costumes to even the playing field. I guess they want us to win on skill and quirks alone,” Ojiro said.

“That’s a shame, my costume is kickass,” Ashido said with disappointment.

“Truly a loss for everyone. Alas, so be it! The magnifique display of my navel laser will mesmerise those pro heroes,” Aoyama’s eyes almost sparkled as he spoke. He had been tempted to ask him why he mixed his sentence with French but he’d thought better of it; he didn’t exactly want a laser in his face from the prideful student. As for the costume thing. It didn’t particularly matter to him. His own was still completely busted and no one had thought to send it in to be repaired during his recovery, he’d have to make do without its mid range capability. He was certainly good enough to do that now, at least he hoped.

“Prepare yourselves everyone! We’ll be beginning shortly,” a small electronic voice buzzed across the room. Then the chair beside him clicked as Jirou popped down.

“You two holding up?” she asked.

“Trying,” he answered as he glanced over to Kirishima across the table.

“Better than ever,” he grinned. “Time to show everyone what we can do, yeah?”

Jirou nodded back, “You’re right.”

“Midoriya,” he heard behind him and he turned to see what was going on. Todoroki had confronted the smaller student.

Midoriya’s entire face turned white, “Yeah?” he gulped.
“You’ve managed to get All Might’s eye on you haven’t you? I don’t know how you did it, but
know this; I’m going to beat you,” his voice was firm and threatening. He wasn’t kidding around.

“Hey,” Kirishima walked up to the duo. “Come on Todoroki, there’s no need to set him on edge like
that.”

“I’m not here to play nice and make friends, this isn’t a team effort,” Todoroki shrugged and turned
away. It was apparent he’d lost interest already.

“Todoroki, I know you’re objectively stronger than I am,” he was looking down at his feet as he said
it, while fidgeting with the hem of his gym shirt, “and you have way more potential than anyone in
the here, that’s probably why you got in so easily…”

“Hey, don’t be so harsh on yourself man, and on us,” Kirishima said with a nervous frown.

“No, he’s right Kirishima. Those students from the other courses, they’re all going to be gunning for
us. It’s going to be a fight, I can’t fall behind, I refuse to fall behind. That’s why,” he looked up as
Todoroki turned back. “I’ll be aiming for the top too.”

“So be it,” Todoroki answered.

_Tch_, Bakugou tipped his feet off the table and stood between them, “You fuckers are both going
down, there’s only room for one.”

“A real social butterfly he is,” Jirou smirked. “As usual.”

Despite how silly their little display was all three of them were right, he had to admit. This was above
all else not a team effort and to that end he’d already made up his mind; he wouldn’t be the only one
not trying his hardest. It wasn’t time to show such weakness, not when there was far more than just a
trophy medal at stake.

“We’re beginning now. Please follow the curator and proceed to the stadium entrance,” the voice
buzzed once more.

The stadium was first introduced through a deafening roar, “Welcome to the grand melee
everybody! This year, more than any other, our hatchlings will be aiming for each other’s
throats to show you their all!” he could hear the belling in waves as Present Mic spoke. It sounded
like a lot of people, a hell of a lot.

“Let me guess folks, you all came here to the superstars of our event, right?! The ones who
fought off the villain’s attack with their golden skills,” the crowd cheered again, as they finally
made it to the entrance of the arena. “Well, wait no longer because here they are; the freshman
class of heroics one A!”

Light blinded him as he left the comfort of the narrow hallway, and for a second stage fright nearly
got the better of him as he saw the thousands upon thousands of faces in the crowd sizing them up
like meat at a butcher, _Just look straight ahead_, he thought before he tucked his head down again.

“Present Mic sure hyped us up… kind of makes me nervous,” Kirishima said as he walked behind
Bakugou. “How you feelin’ man?”

“I’m not worried, it’ll just make crushing everyone all the sweeter,” he answered.
Jirou bumped Riley in the side, “Come on stop hunching. Your uncle is watching, right?”

“Right,” he said. Aizawa wasn’t the only one he was trying to impress.

“Here comes heroic class one B, don’t be fooled, they may not look it but each have fighting power and cunning to rival their sister class!” Present Mic’s was coming from a station just above the arena. “Just behind them we have the general study classes B, C, D and E! Along with support classes F, G, H and business classes I, J and K! Give it up for all of Yuuei’s first year contestants!”

It was hard to hear his own thoughts through the cheering as they made it up to the wooden podium upon which Midnight stood, she was the judge for the freshman competition. After a considerable amount of time the rest of the classes gathered around it behind them. It almost felt like a cage, filled with a mixture of annoyance at them as a class.

“Someone should talk to Midnight about what she’s wearing,” Kirishima said, it was rare to see him blush.

“That costume should come with a warning…” Kaminari answered.

Tokoyami shook his head, “How inappropriate.”

“I’ll say,” Jirou said and wiped her forehead.

“Silence, everyone!” Midnight’s whip gave a flick and a crack. It was enough to spread quiet, at least momentarily. “Now that I’ve gotten your attention would the student representative of class one A, Bakugou Katsuki, join me on stage for the introductory speech? Come on don’t be shy,” she winked.

Midoriya looked like he was about to burst, “Our representative is Kacchan?!” he said as Bakugou disentangled himself from the group and walked toward the stage with his hands in his pockets.

“…Only for the heroics class,” a brown haired girl said behind them. “It’s a shame. Here I thought someone from the heroics course would at least know it’s always the highest scoring candidate,” she sighed, behind her stood the tall purple haired student. He couldn’t seem less engaged.

*Fucking cow,* he thought and ignored her. It wasn’t at all surprising that it was Bakugou who had scored the highest, he was nothing if not talented at destruction.

A sharp pain hit his lower back, “Shit, watch it,” he said as he turned to see what had done it. He was met with Kuroiro’s charcoal face, crowned by peaks of white.

“Enjoy yourself while you can, I’ll be making sure you don’t even get past round one,” Kuroiro said with a rasp before shuffling and disappearing into the crowd.

He stifled his groan. There hadn’t been a chance to reason with the guy. He was totally and vehemently set in his hatred of him. There wasn’t time to think of it as the microphone on stage buzzed.

“I only have one thing to say,” Bakugou spoke into the microphone. He could already tell it wasn’t going to be good, “I’m gonna win,” he pointed his thumb at himself.

“One A is so fucking full of themselves,” a deep voice shouted behind them, followed by a chorus of boos.
“Typical,” Jirou grasped her forehead. Despite his own annoyance he couldn’t hide a grin, it really was. Still, he had a feeling it would come to bite them in the ass later.

“As if we didn’t have a target on our backs already,” Sero said.

Kaminari tapped his heel on the floor, “And here I thought it couldn’t get much worse after last time.”

“Settle down, we’ll be moving onto our first event right away…” the giant black monitor behind her lit up and began to spin like a roulette wheel, it stopped after ten seconds with a ding like an oven timer.

-= Obstacle Course=-

“Today’s first event will be a race, riddled with traps and perils! Oh my how fun does that sound?” she said with a fake, maniacal laughter.

The starting line was rudimentary, a large gate draped on each side by a wall that made it even narrower than the entrance to the stadium itself. Everyone had crowded and shoved, and he had inadvertently ended up at the back of it. However he knew it didn’t matter where exactly he started, not for what he had in mind. This was one of the things he knew his quirk was extraordinarily good at.

His anxiousness had left him now in place of focus. What he was planning to do was probably downright unfair however he knew that he wasn’t going to win this race by speed, he’d seen that well enough in the apprehension test. He had to appreciate the philosophy that Todoroki had spouted. It would make him feel less scummy about it.

“It looks like all our contestants are ready,” Present Mic announced, “without further ado I’ll begin the competition on my mark.”

“Three…” he breathed in as the gates in front began to screech.

“Two…” he breathed out and raised both hands, just enough.

“One…”

“Start!” The gate shook with a clunk as it widened to let the competitors through. He could hear, feel the stampeding at the front edges, the cries of ravenous beasts hungry to get out.

He waited, just for a few seconds longer, and then it came. Ice furled beneath the students roping the vast majority of them to the ground, those that could took a step back in a panic as to not get caught. It froze over all the metal until the students had formed an effective plug over the entrance. It was an admirable job and one that he could hear Present Mic applauding through the ear ringing sound of his own quirk as it blew through every single bone. The ground between the archway shook. One might have mistaken it for the sound of the students rather than the tumultuous gap forming underneath their feet as the ground submitted to trembling. There was no way for him to pace it in its making, not if he wanted it to work. A silent apology was all he could muster, not that it would be enough to save them.

“Unilateral subduction,” he said with a modesty that did not match the outcome.

Crack.
The floor fell away in a single chunk, as if someone had at that moment decided to turn the road leading out the gate into a mosh pit. It reached far down the centre of it, eating and gripping at the legs of those who had been caught behind. Escape had been their thought he knew, but a terrible pincer had been his. Those who fell took those behind them with them until it became a mess of limbs within the one and a half metre drop. His work done, he dropped his arms. Those who stood still beside him were caught in shock of what had happened. He doubted they knew it was him, if they were paying attention they might have noticed the awful shaking in his arms. It was painful to him, however as he walked past the narrow sides of quagmire he had made a simple touch to the metal of the door reduced it to nothing more than a shaking and he was able to move freely again.

Sound came back to him as he did, “I’m not sure what happened but it looks like half our hatchlings tried to run before they could even walk!” he heard Present Mic say among a jumble of shouts and yells coming from the pit. It was selfish, and necessary he decided, if he wanted to win that is, and he did. Rather than think on it he sped up his gait into a dash. The track curved slightly as he went, now that he had done what he needed to do he had to pace himself or he wouldn’t have any juice left. His trick had bottlenecked the most unprepared of competition, effective enough for now, but not for long. Up ahead he could see the first plateau, Todoroki and the others behind him had barely reached it.

“Our competitors are finally tackling our first obstacle after the anarchy of the starting line, call it what you want but this race is not a picnic, now prepare yourselves for the unrelenting, unforgiving robot inferno!”

Steam and metal hissed together as the zero pointers fell in, there must have been at least twenty or thirty of them. Many more robots huddled beneath, these smaller, standing guard between the weak legs of their heightened guardians and reinforcing their defences. Even at a distance he could see the formation they imitated, like a phalanx in one of those Roman war movies. Needles of white spread as he made it, and he stepped back as he watched ice curl around Todoroki like a barrier before falling forward and jutting into the legs of the zero pointer in front of him. It froze in a flash with a cold skin flourishing over it and its companions, allowing the boy to slide between their legs.

Kirishima ran in after him, just in time for the icy carapace to falter and fall directly onto his head sending chunks of metal and ice flying the way of the remaining competitors. Shit, he thought as he covered his face with his arms to protect himself. However not a second later his friend burst out the top of the wreckage unharmed.

“What the hell Todoroki?! If it hadn’t been me someone coulda died you bastard,” he gleamed with the same rocky armour he always had as bits of metal twisted away from his fury, and then Riley wasn’t sure why he had worried in the first place. The guy was in his element.

“Looks like our cold-headed front runner is pulling ahead yet again,” Present Mic shouted. “But he certainly isn’t the only one!” several more students, Bakugou, Tokoyami and Sero among them, leapt the great barrier of robots.

He shook his head. There was no time to watch in awe, he had to find his own way past. He knew the machines weaknesses from the entrance exam, their heads and their legs. It was with little altercation that he formed the idea. It was on the left he saw his chance, where Jirou and Kaminari were already working on the smaller robots and the jumble of zero pointers hung in the loosest collection to each other. It was always in the heat of the moment that his thoughts became clearest and his quirk fell to become more of an extension to his mind rather than an execution of his body. He raised his hand before gripping it with his other and laying it pointed at the leg of the furthest machine, “Compress.”
Scree, the leg went as it collapsed one foul crunch. The machine swayed dangerously before it’s loss of support caused it to fall right into the one beside it like a domino and then come to a loud worthless halt. In place of where it had stood a sizeable gap had taken its residence, he didn’t waste a thought in going for it, as well as passing his hand across the wrought metal flesh work he’d rended apart. He almost shuddered as the tremor relieved itself this time, the effort had been far smaller than his previous work but the effect was compounding. His training had done wonders in that regard, he knew he could push himself much further now.

A step or two past the barrier he swerved to avoid the whoosh of an electronic arm, before it stuttered. Sparks fell from its joints as it face planted at his feet like a puppet with its strings cut. Jirou stood behind it.

“For taking care of those things,” she pointed back at the collection of wreckage he’d left in his wake. He nodded back as she began to run, and he followed to catch up. He was glad that out of all of 1-A seemingly everyone had avoided his trap.

The track ended abruptly as he made it to the next thing that stood in his path, “The Fall; ladies and gentleman, how will they handle this obstacle?” Present Mic said, evidently he’d discounted those who had already made it across. Namely, the two hotheads in front, Bakugou and Todoroki. They were spinning and twisting across the collection of ropeways that spanned across many brown pillars, ice stuck to those that had been used and others had been severed completely with ravaging heat.

He looked at each possible path but they were all identical, there wasn’t a way for his quirk to help him with this. Instead of attempting to be clever he knew it was better just to throw himself at it, the longer he waited the more the crowds he’d left behind would begin to catch up to him. As he hung upside down and made his way across blood rushed to his head, there had to be a better way than this. Three ropes later he hadn’t thought of it, maybe he could make it up on the last obstacle. Just as his fingers reached for the cusp of the fourth ledge he felt a snag in the wire, he looked up. The last thing he had expected to see met him, the displeased and angry dark face of Kuroiro.

“I told you to watch your back,” he scowled, as he rested one hand on the lynch pin securing the rope to platform he was standing on. “Bye, bye now.” he gave a little salute before he stood and gave it a hefty mind numbing kick.

Panic flooded his nerves as the pin went. He gripped the rope tighter on instinct as it swung down into the canyon with him in tow and just, by an inch, missed the opportunity to smash him face first into the thin bottom of the pillar. It was a miracle he even managed to hold on at all.

“Looks like its sabotage and subterfuge on the battlefield today, even class one B isn’t pulling their punches!”

His shoulders wrenched in their sockets as held himself up, Bastard, his mind snapped. Anger, pure utter anger had replaced his sympathy. If he wanted to play dirty then so be it, if he wasn’t going to get through then he would make sure neither of them would. He gripped the rope tighter and then spun his wrist around it until it was digging into his arm hard enough to almost cut the flow of blood to it.

Slowly he began to drag himself up the side of the pillar and with each step he took he winded the rope around his arm once more, he had felt worse pain, far worse pain. He didn’t count how long it took before he was back at the top, instead as soon as he barely made it back on solid ground he spun. He didn’t pause to catch his breath and instead looked for him. He was three pillars ahead now with only one left, snatching away his victory when he so close would make it that much more
bittersweet.

He clasped his hand, now burned by rope, tight and gritted his teeth as he focussed himself on the pillar. It barely even took thought with how thoroughly he wanted to see it happen, with how much impossible loathing he now possessed of the grinning little shithead atop it. The platform shook and his neck stuck with the same sensation before the rock splintered in seven different places. Shock was the last bit of grievance he saw on Kuroiro’s face as he fell out of sight into the pit below, however he wasn’t finished as he raised his other hand and several more pillars crashed, each more vital to the end of the obstacle than the last and each beneath students ahead of him. The only ones he chose to avoid were those of his classmates. At least they could still make it.

“Sixteen of our competitors are out just like that. What a reversal ladies and gentleman, now this is what I call an upset!” Present Mic boomed across the stadium.

He shook his head, it was pounding again. There wasn’t much left in his body either and he’d left himself practically stranded as he looked around. It hadn’t been a good idea, but it almost happened entirely on its own. Payback is a bitch, he spat over the edge. Another minute passed and it looked like this’d be the end, and so soon too, when he hadn’t even tried what he wanted to yet. Worse yet he’d inspired the remaining people on the pillars, many of them were now actively trying to throw each other in the drink after they had realised just how effective it would be.

“Torenagi, are you okay?” a small voice said behind him, he turned as his headache subsided, it was Uraraka.

“I’m fine,” he stood, and swayed slightly. He knew he should probably try to finish the race regardless of how much of his lead he’d lost from his earlier triumphs.

“That sure was risky… do you need a lift?” she said with a worried expression.

“What?” he asked, maybe it was the adrenaline flushing his body, but he didn’t understand exactly what she meant.

“I know it’s a race but, consider it a mutual favour,” she tapped her finger tips together lightly, like she did when she was nervous. “It’ll make my quirk look good if I can actually rescue people with it, and well, I kind of owe Jirou one so…”

He shook his head, “You shouldn’t waste your time help- Ah”

She pushed him hard in the chest, “Too late, I already kinda made up my mind before I asked,” she laughed as he fell backward into the canyon. A rush of vertigo overtook him as he realised he hadn’t actually fallen. With a big jump she took off after him, he hadn’t even been aware she was able to make multiple things hover now, let alone people.

Vrrm.

“Hey, hey watch out there. Air traffic coming through!” he barely swerved his head aside and managed to right himself as a girl flew past his shoulder. She had all manner of gadgets strapped to her, including a long grappling line that was rapidly pulling her to the edge of the wide chasm he’d created. Did she make those herself? it was impressive if it was true.

Thump, he hit the floor as Uraraka dropped him. She’d made quick work of it.

“I really owe you one,” he said as he got up and looked at her. It really had been nothing short of good fortune. Despite how much he didn’t want help, this meant the race was still within his grasp.
“Don’t worry about it, really,” she waved one hand up to cover her mouth. Nausea was a widely spread expression across her face, he knew it well enough as she had shown it often in the last two weeks in class when she’d used her quirk too much. She seemed almost used to it.

“I’ll make it up to you somehow,” he helped her to her feet, before he turned to take off.

The finish line appeared before the last leg of the race did and he almost slid to a halt as he hit the sand. Several hundred small curved bumps littered the path to the door leading back into the arena, and yet many hadn’t so much as dared to brave the soft terrain in spite of those ahead of them.

“Behold! The Land Mine Field! This final obstacle has an explosive surprise designed to slow you down. How are these young punks going to outwit our grand finale?!”

Boom! a red and pink mine exploded and the student standing it promptly flew several feet back. It looked like nothing lethal, but strong enough to knock you out if you got caught in a nasty way. He could easily estimate over sixty students around him and not far behind him, however only a handful were far ahead and fighting over first place. To call Bakugou and Todoroki’s lead disheartening was an understatement, but he’d abandoned any disillusion about placing well with what had happened. At least the duo was being dogged now, by Iida and several class 1-B students no less. Even Kirishima wasn’t far behind. He had to be kind of proud of his friend; he was running through the mines like they didn’t even exist.

“Midoriya? Get a move on!” Uraraka looked over her shoulder as she passed the green haired boy. He looked back, he hadn’t noticed when the guy had even passed him. That last obstacle must have taken far longer than it had felt like. He shook his head. He didn’t have time to think about it, or even why Midoriya was digging at the sand with a giant metal panel. There were far too many mines for him to blow up but he had a better alternative. The people who had successfully navigated it had left their indentations behind in the sand which meant he could at least use their path in the sand to his advantage if he was already behind. Carefully he stepped into each imprint, and then his step turned back into a jog as he became comfortable and further still into a run once more.

BOOM.

He turned back barely in time to duck, a metal plate sailed like a rocket just a few feet above his head. Along with it trailed smog of red and pink that traced behind it like some glorious infernal rocket. Atop it sat, in one of the more daunting sights he ever witnessed in his life, Midoriya of all people. What the fuck, crossed his mind first, followed a quaint, reckless goddamn idiot, as he realised how close the guy had come to almost decapitating him. It was clever though, damn clever.

“De-ku!” he heard Bakugou howl across in the field as Midoriya landed in a fuming heap of sand and storm right on top of the front runners whom all disappeared within it.

Damn, he thought as he watched, then he quickly begot himself again. The announcement of Midoriya’s victory that followed spurred him, he wasn’t out of it yet. He left the slog of the sand pit behind and almost stumbled as he reached the welcoming peak of the metal fringed door. There was no way to be sure how many people were beside him, all his focus was on putting one foot in front of the other. Even the tremor had lost its usual power over him in lieu of his desperation to make it across the finish line.

He collapsed as he hit the courtyard and not half a minute later sirens blared in his ears. The race was over, he knew, and he rolled over onto his back to let the toll of it take him. He was exhausted. He'd used his quirk too much and the only alleviation he got was from allowing it to dissipate into the floor. How long he’d lasted had come as a surprise, even to him. Letting Aizawa kick his ass for
three weeks was just on the verge of what he might have called worth it. If it hadn’t been for Uraraka though, he would probably still be out there and not in here.

“This concludes our first event, the obstacle race!” Midnight shouted across the stadium, causing him to finally get up. “Behold, your forty-two winners and competitors for the next stage,” she flung her hands toward the monitor again, which now held names and faces.

It was a variety to be sure, as the monitor flickered through five people at a time he could spot not just 1-A but a lot of 1-B and even a general and a support student. Kirishima was there in ninth and Jirou in twenty first. That sight made him more than glad. Then, as he scanned just a few spaces further down he allowed himself a sigh of relief as his nasty tactics hadn’t been in vain, his own name was there at twenty-fourth along with his face just to confirm it wasn’t a lie. As it found the last few students, including a sick looking Aoyama, the screen tore a bit into static and settled back on its default.

“My heart is pounding with excitement even though I already know the next event!” Midnight cracked her whip once more, “Tremble in anticipation everyone because I present to you our second stage for selection…!”

The screen’s roulette tumble restarted and let out another small ding.

---Cavalry Battle---

He knew whatever it was, it didn’t sound good.

Chapter End Notes

*I don't own BNHA. OC material is my own.

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New Placement Order:
1-21: Same placement.
22: Kaminari. (rank rose due to sabotage of others, originally 24th)
23: Same Placement.
24: Riley.
25-29: Same Placement.
30: Manga Fukidashi. (rank rose due to sabotage of others, originally 40th)
31-32: Same Placement.
33: Kaibara Sen. (due to sabotage, originally 22nd)
34-39: Same Placement.
40: Shouda Nirengaki. (due to sabotage, originally 33rd)
41-42: Same Placement.

Eliminated: Kuroiro Shihai (Originally 30th) - Sabotage
“Yes, you heard me right. Our next event shall be the human cavalry battle!” Midnight repeated herself. “All forty two of our remaining contestants will need to split into teams of two to four for this event and make a cavalry formation as shown,” she pointed at the screen, which showed an ad-hoc throne formed by All Might, Thirteen and Present Mic.

“Every team will receive up to four headbands based on the group’s individual ranks in the obstacle race. Every rank you gained means another five points to your total!” the screen changed as it got to the highest position, “The exception shall be one A’s own Midoriya Izuku, as the winner of the preliminary his and his alone shall be worth an astronomical one million points!”

Midoriya shrivelled, like someone had trained a gun on him. There was no envy Riley felt for the boy’s victory now, he was almost melting under the intensity of the other students greedy stares and for a second he too felt like Mdinight had made it almost too easy.

“Your leader will be responsible for the defence of their headbands and by extension their teams points so it goes without saying that you must choose them wisely. This time the top sixteen students will proceed to the final round. Please pick your teams with haste; you only have ten minutes to decide!” Midnight cracked her whip as a timer began behind her.

Ninety-five, he rubbed his chin. It was his own point value, not too little and not too great. His quirk was probably still his best bargaining chip at this rate, as defensively applicable as it was. He rubbed his hand, it was still radiating with the burns from the rope. He'd have to rely on his left if it came to it, it was a shame; he preferred his right.

“Dude, you gotta let me be on your team!” he looked up to see Kirishima and several other students crowded around Bakugou.

“What’s your damn quirk again?” Bakugou scowled.

“Come on man…!” Kirishima looked like he couldn’t tell if the guy was joking.

There was no way he wanted to be on Bakugou’s team, he doubted he’d even get accepted even if he did ask. It wasn’t the type of match where irrationality and hot-headedness would come out on top. No, this was something that had to come from careful consideration. Still, he wagered, if he didn’t find a group quick all the good candidates would be snapped up.

Midoriya was exemplifying that crux well enough as he recruited for his rather doomed team. It was fair enough that no one wanted to join a team that had such a ridiculous point score, it was a winner’s downfall to be in the spotlight, he supposed. Todoroki and several others were taking their matters into their own hands.

He was about to take a step he noticed something in the corner of his eye and stopped, “Hey you,” a voice said. He turned to see it belonged to the same tall purple headed student. His face hadn’t changed but it had grown more ominous somehow like the human equivalent of a banshee, behind him stood Ojiro and Aoyama, though something seemed different about them.
“Hey, you listening blondi?” he repeated himself. “You’re from one A right? You’re that guy that got roughed up by those villains.”

He clenched his jaw and nodded despite how rude it was, if only because he was beginning to understand, *People will talk,* he thought.

“Shinsou Hitoshi,” the student introduced himself with a friendlier tone than he had expected. “You’re still looking for a team right? And we need one more.”

He contemplated the offer, instantly something about the student had become eerily inviting. It was almost friendly but he couldn’t put his finger on exactly why. Maybe he’d just been acting like a tough guy during that time that they’d been briefly introduced, a competition was a competition after all. Surely this was his best bet, seeing as two others from his class had already joined him. It wasn’t hard to tell that the boy was smarter than he let on.

“Well? Do you want to join us?” he said.

Casually he tapped one shoe on the other before deciding, “Yes. It’s Torenagi Riley,” he answered. The least he could do was an introduction, “What’s your pl-” his tongue went slack in his mouth in an instant, and the thought was pushed from his head in a way that left him both alert and drowsy at the same time.

His new acquaintance smirked, “That was easier than I expected, even someone like this can still be so easily tricked… I guess one A is really just full of dumbasses,” he rubbed the back of his head. “This is a command,” he said and his muscles tightened against his will, “you’re going to defend my left flank no matter the cost. Sacrifice yourself if it means I don’t get hit.”

He could feel his eyes grow dull with every word the boy spoke, it was so enticing, so welcoming that there was no way he could ever refuse it. It was so strange, like he was about to fall asleep. He took a step forward against his will and blackness trailed in from the edge of his vision like clawed hands.

His shoulder flared and for a second he grabbed a hold only to have his fingers fight him. It was so vicious, so recognisable. His head was pounding, like someone was driving a battering ram into it for fun. It made him want to tear his hair out but he couldn’t, he couldn’t do anything.

All he could do was obey. *Ba-dumph,* he felt his heart beat in his chest. He had no other purpose.

Insanity cracked his mind and his vision blurred, blending into a sick extended miasma of loathing and fear from that night, a pool of hands and beaks. Then it fell away and lay replaced with a memory, of his sister, of a promise he’d made. It was his fault. It had always been his fault. Bile began to crawl up the back of his throat.

A strong clap over the back of his head jolted him from his hallucination, accompanied by the ting of fever and the dulling throb of a headache. Discomfort hung itself across the aperture of his spine and a violent convulsion followed it, causing him to throw up a fraction of whatever was in his stomach.

The writhing squirming abbreviated itself after a second of pounding the floor with his fist and then subsided, *What the fuck happened?* he thought through blurred vision, he could barely think straight.
in the turmoil of it, sound remained non-compliant until he was shaken the same way once more.

“Riley,” his eyes were sluggish as they rolled in his sockets, “Riley, look at me,” it was Jirou’s voice he was hearing with increasing volume. He hadn’t even realised when he’d fallen to his knees, nor did he recognise the putrid mess he’d created on the floor.

“What the fuck did you do to him asshole??” Jirou shouted. She was angry at someone, he recognised the tone as he had heard it far too often.

Then, he regained some semblance of what was going on around him and the first sight to meet his was that of Shinsou, it was disturbed and deliberate. Anger rose like ice in his veins, the same anger from before but briefer this time as it quickly drained away again. Somehow he felt almost completely calm.

“You listening to me bastard??” Jirou shouted again.

“I don’t answer to you,” he said, deflecting his gaze before walking past her.

“What happened?” Hagakure said as she joined Jirou in picking him up. “One minute you were talking to that weird guy and the next you’re on the floor puking your guts out.”

“I don’t know,” he held his head. It was blistering but he struggled to remember anything past the first word he’d spoken to him. He looked around, “How much time is left?”

“Less than three minutes,” Midnight said as she walked up to them. “Are you alright to continue?” she gave him a look of inescapable scrutiny.

“I-I’m fine. I just got a bit light headed from the race, that’s all,” it was hard to keep his voice steady but he hardly wanted the therapy right now. He could think about it all later, this was far more important.

“You don’t have to act tough around me, I wish you would understand that,” she said with a sigh, she looked disappointed in him. “I’m keeping my eye on you, alright?” she then turned and began to stroll back slowly but elegantly to the podium.

He looked up at the giant monitor, there was indeed only two and a half minutes left on it, Shit, he cursed as he swerved. There wasn’t an unfilled group that he could see.

“Did you see where Satou went?” Hagakure asked Kouda, whom shook his head. Kouda was rarely vocal, sometimes he wondered if the guy could speak at all.

“Over there,” Jirou looked in the direction where Shinsou had walked off in, behind him were still Ojiro and Aoyama, but this time Rikidou was there too.

Hagakure clenched her puffy white gloves, “That snake, I can’t believe he bailed on us.”

“I’m not so sure he did,” she shook her head and gave him a weird look. “You sure you don’t remember anything?”

“No, it’s all foggy,” maybe he didn’t want to. It was similar… scarily similar. “It doesn’t matter now. I need to find a group before the round starts.”

“Well lucky for you it looks like we have an opening,” Jirou said.

“Is that really alright?” he asked. There wasn’t enough time to be picky now.
“You really are an idiot you know that?” she smirked.

Their formation was soon set up, with Hagakure on top and Jirou at the front. He was forming the back of the weird horse with the help of Kouda, with his right arm burnt like it was it was hardly more useful for anything except holding the girl up with his shoulder.

“We should go after the one million, we’ll be stars if we pull it off,” Hagakure said as she jumped around slightly.

“I agree,” Jirou nodded.

“That’s a terrible idea,” he said. “We’ll just paint a target on our backs even if we manage to succeed.”

“Come on Torenagi, its go big or go home can’t you see that? Besides, his group doesn’t even look that tough,” Hagakure shrugged and the headbands she had tied around her head were spilling down her invisible back.

“It’s not their group I’m worried about,” they looked apt enough sure, Midoriya had assembled a menacing team complete with Tokoyami, Uraraka and that gadget girl who’d almost hit him, but their setup was far less intimidating than those around them.

It was Todoroki who worried him in particular, more than he had before. His line up wasn’t grand but it was purposeful. Iida breached its front with Kaminari and Momo flanking the sides. It was exactly the kind of team that he himself would imagine optimal, the icy student knew what he was doing beyond simple guesswork if that hadn’t already been proven enough by the obstacle race.

“Well we won’t know unless we try,” Jirou said. He wasn’t sure why she was acting so rash, maybe the heat of the festival was getting to her, that or she too had someone watching that she was eager to show off to.

He had learnt from his time at his old school that a bad strategy with a good team was still better than no strategy with a poorly co-ordinated one. Rather than prolong the inevitable he caved with a reluctant, “Fine,” instead. He wasn’t in a position to fight anyhow, he wouldn’t have a group at all if it hadn’t been for them.

Hagakure threw up her hands in a cheer, “That’s the spirit!”

He looked over at Kouda almost by accident. The guy had a pinched expression on his face that made it very clear that he wasn’t the only one who thought the whole plan was a sham. No it was more than that even, he stood so tense that it felt like the very idea of it was the equivalent of a pack of lambs being sent to slaughter. If only it hadn’t been for that bastard, he might’ve had more time. It might’ve made him feel more at ease if he knew exactly what the hell he had done to him.

“Are you ready and waiting my little dilettantes?! I sure hope you are, make the time count and get as vicious as you can!”

He loosened himself up as best he could beneath the weight of the girl on his arm. There was no need to focus on any doubts, this was their plan and he was going to see it through regardless whether he liked it or not.

“Three, two, one…” tension rose with every number and the belling of the crowd got louder and louder.
“Start!”

It began like someone had lit a barrel of gunpowder, an instantaneous boom as teams trampled in all directions. They themselves went and lunged straight through, toward the green freckled rider of the metal chariot in front of them.

“Oh Midoriya, you better watch out! I’m coming for you…!” Hagakure shouted as she rode, it was almost painful listening to her destroy their element of surprise.

“Watch it,” Jirou said as she veered slightly left from their initial approach, “we’ve got company.”

He didn’t have to so much as look behind him to see what she meant as in a mere moment the team in question had caught up right beside them. There was a silver haired student on top, the same one that had stuck near Kirishima and almost identically mimicked his quirk, if that was anything to go by then he knew that this guy wasn’t a joke. More gruesome still however was the one leading his throne, a student whose teeth looked like marble plates that gave his face a skull-like definition.

The skulled student stomped his foot forward at that instant and he had to slow not to get hit by the attack himself. It was a trail that travelled like a torrent through the pavement turning it to soft mush beneath Midoriya and his unfortunate group, however the attack didn’t seem to so much as faze him in the slightest. There nothing but confidence there despite him being completely cornered against a wall.

*Brrrrfhwoom!* the liquid beneath Midoriya shook as he took off like he’d been propelled. It was astounding to watch, almost enough to make him wonder if at some point he had missed the fact that the guy could suddenly sprout wings whenever he liked. The explanation was hardly that magical, the brunt of his jump had been thanks to a jetpack secured snugly to his back.

“Jirou!” Hagakure pointed.

“I’m on it,” her jacks extended up at the group in flight like nasty skewers.

The carriage burst with dark fog and her jacks were flung backward, “That won’t be enough!” he heard Tokoyami’s deep voice through the shield that surrounded them.

His interest flayed from the situation as soon as he knew she’d failed, and instead found itself on the encroachment of students around them. Not only were they turned around but now they were the ones pushed again the wall, “Hagakure, to the left!” was all he could muster as he tried to swerve, only to find his foot wouldn’t move an inch. A shitty grey paste had enveloped it, like a gunk of glue.

He saw the hand pass above him as a blond boy swiped at Hagakure’s head, snagging all but one of the bands with him, “Oh you almost make it too easy one A!” he said with a lofty pretentiousness, before his body vanished and left only the clothes behind, floating in the air about his chariot, “I’ll be taking these,” he laughed.

*A copycat?* he thought, before looking down at his foot again. He touched it carefully to free himself, causing the gunk to melt against the quirk.

“It looks like keeping their eye on the prize has paid off poorly for Team Hagakure! I told you class one B wasn’t playing around!”

Hagakure gave a whimper, “No way, all our headbands are gone,” she was desperately clinging onto the last one that she had, her own twenty-five point band.
Jirou said as she looked over shoulder, “Why the hell didn’t you defend yourself?”

“I-I don’t know, I freaked out. I’m sorry,” she almost sounded like she was going to have a panic attack.

Jirou fumed at her answer, “That’s not good enough, what the fuck are we gonna do now?”

“Stop,” was all he could manage, he was growing irritated. This wasn’t the time to squabble. As he saw it they were both to blame, as well as him, for enabling such a superb display of utterly crappy strategy in the first place. All they’d succeeded in is making themselves look like fools, in front of him of all people. He shouldn’t have let his complacency get the better of him.

He breathed, the battlefield around them remained in chaos but the attention had left them for the most part, “we need to disentangle ourselves right now,” he said. “There’s still time.”

“And just like that Team Midoriya takes a plunge, in fact it looks like most of class one A is falling right down into the dumps!”

It had only taken a matter of minutes and it had all been at the hands of the same students that had done it to their own team, he’d underestimated 1-B, severely underestimated them. He usually didn’t make that mistake. However now there was murder in the eyes of his classmates, he could see it and then he even felt it as he watched Bakugou cascade in a storm toward the copycat student, who he now knew was called Monoma.

“When are we gonna do something?” Hagakure asked and almost whined, “I’m freezing.”

“We only have one chance, so just be patient do exactly what he said,” Jirou answered for him.

It was a good thing the girl was so light and athletic. Even he himself almost couldn’t tell she was still on his shoulders, where she had been just minutes ago now floated but a single almost invisible twenty-five point headband. He tried not to think of the consequences of that, luckily she had resorted to perching rather than to continue sitting. It might have been too awkward otherwise, asking her to strip in the first place almost had been.

He was still watching precisely, it was Todoroki whom he had in his sights and the icy student was far too enamoured with Midoriya to notice him watching. He could see both of them through the glacier-like wall of ice the boy had created to separate himself from the rest of the competition. He’d already cracked the surface of it, enough to slip in when the time was right. Their fight was making good noise cover, just as Bakugou was serving as a good distraction.

Shadows collided with shields as Tokoyami threw his quirk at Todoroki only to have each and every single one blocked by two massive shields that Momo had created at his sides. Their defences were weakening now. It’d soon be their chance. He could tell by the goofy look that was slowly spreading itself across Kaminari’s face, and the dusty smoke that coughed from Iida’s heel.

His eyes flicked to the timer for one more look, forty-two seconds remained. The noise of the crowd was nothing but silent hedging in the back of his mind as he counted. It had to be the exact moment. He only had enough energy for one good compression left. Kouda had assured him he could do his part, through persuasive waves and nods and he knew he could definitely count on Jirou. They were both equally strong to Hagakure or maybe even stronger.

Thirty seconds. Todoroki flung Midoriya away from himself, but it was a futile attempt. All of Todoroki’s companions had stalled, just as he had expected. He was stuck in place and the green haired boy looked like he would do it any second now. It would be reckless, he knew, to do it at that
point but that was when Todoroki would be most vulnerable, the single most effective point to attack that he could think of.

It was on the fifteenth second that he tapped Jirou on the shoulder and in that same second that Midoriya charged toward Todoroki. All eyes were on the spectacle. He knew that in that second, as he ran forward and felt Hagakure’s muscles tense all at once and as his compression seized his fingers, that it was already far too late to stop what was about to happen. He could feel the weight of it through the pain of the tremor as it shook him. This needed to work, it had to.

The flames in Todoroki’s hand split apart as Midoriya flew past him and in no more than a few steps after that their own group had reached them as well. He could feel the rumbling of his quirk as the ground beneath Iida’s feet cracked violently, causing him to tip slightly forward. It was enough. He didn’t so much as catch Kaminari’s reaction as the electric student realised the load on his shoulder had become all the more heavier and unbearable, that they had gained an additional passenger. In less than a second he felt Hagakure’s weight on his right again as she retook her place and another to see the collection of two headbands in her hand, along with a third Jirou had swiped with her jacks and a fourth still clamped to the invisible girls forehead.

His team’s horse collapsed as the sirens wailed in his ears, it was over for better or for worse.

“That was quite a last minute show! Our freshman really aren’t pulling punches are they folks? Let’s see who our top four are!”

The black screen buzzed back to life once more, “In first place we have the cold-hearted prince and his righteous knights. Team Todoroki everybody!” the screen zoomed in on the victor. He looked displeased with the new nickname Present Mic had given him and his cohorts despite his best attempt at looking nonchalant.

“In second place, Team Bakugou with an ever admirable comeback,” if Todoroki had been passive then Bakugou was the opposite, he looked downright furious at not having placed first. However Kirishima, Ashido and Sero looked rather pleased with themselves.

Our third contender is… Team Tets- wait, apologies are in order! It appears that place will be taken by Team Shinsou instead! Tough break kids!”

Shinsou smirked as the camera rolled in on him, “Thank you for your co-operation,” he said as his chariot shook their heads with confusion. Team Tetsutetsu looked crushed to say the least as the camera rolled up to them in a second pity shot. He had to admit he wasn’t sure how it had happened either. He had hardly seen Shinsou’s placid team do anything during the round. Maybe he had missed it in his obsession.

“Last but not least, Team Midoriya! Our winner from the last round manages to hold on to his breathtaking victory by a mere thread! Don’t you dare count him out just yet,” the microphone cut off with a sensitive click as the camera zoomed in on the last group, the leader of which was practically in tears.

Jirou kicked the dirt, “Bummer, I was sure we had that in the bag.”

“Sorry, it was my dumb plan to go after Midoriya that cost us all our points,” even though the girl was invisible he could gleam the disappointment and resentment from her voice.

He wasn’t narcissistic enough to claim his plan had been perfect, there were always things you
couldn’t account for, like the sheer fact that out of the three headbands they had stolen from Todoroki the fourth he had kept was unlucky enough to be the exact one they had needed. Rather than a million points they’d been left with a pitiful one hundred and seventy-five, just enough to tie with the fifth place group.

As bitter as he was he shook his head, “It doesn’t matter, I’m sure with what we just did is gonna pull plenty of attention and hey, we did way better than some teams,” he wasn’t sure if he completely meant it but he’d never seen the normally cheerful gossip so gloomy, it was better than saying nothing.

“You really think so?” Hagakure’s shoulders picked up.

“He’s right, and it’s not like it was just your idea. It was mine too, so don’t blame yourself entirely,” Jirou shrugged. “There’s always next year, right?” she said, to which Kouda signalled in agreement next to her. He even looked kind of happy with how they had done.

He felt a grip around his neck, “That was a pretty damn ballsy strategy guys, sucks it didn’t pan out,” Kirishima said as he grappled him around the shoulder.

A scowl crossed Jirou’s face, “Yeah, well, I sure as hell am not rooting for you in the finals,” she kicked up a spike of dirt toward him.

“Hey! That isn’t fair, don’t jinx me you hag,” he stuck his tongue out.

Hagakure clapped her hands together, “Don’t worry, I’ll bring enough cheer for the both of us.”

“I knew I could count on you Hagakure.”

“Knock em’ out cold for me, yeah?” he said to his friend, who released his grip.

He held up his rocky fist, “Don’t worry, I’ll give them one with your name on it.”

“That puts a close to our opening ceremony everybody. The show will reconvene in an hour, don’t miss it!”

He heard his stomach rumbling and a hunger pang followed shortly after. He could use a break right about now.

Chapter End Notes

*I don’t own BNHA. OC material is my own.*
Mnemophobia

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes


His phone hung at his side, he’d been carrying it since he’d left the break room. It was courtesy of his uncle, a short and brief exchange telling him how he’d been watching and for a lack of subtlety how proud he was. Yet as he looked down through the thick glass window at the courtyard where it had all taken place he could only feel something just shy of disappointment.

It was a mutual feeling he guessed, considering how close his group had come, but that made the loss only that much more aggravating. He was sure there would be some kind of hint about how things had gone from Aizawa later, once all this was done, and that wasn’t something he was looking forward to especially because he hadn’t really been able to put what he’d been taught to use.

He turned away from the glass to continue walking. Sugar had kicked in after the call had ended and rather than return to the break room he had decided to roam and to think, he didn’t have much time before they were required to gather again. His arm felt stiff, he noticed, as he passed each of the large metal beams that cut through the arena to hold it up.

The rope burns had been healed and were now history but he’d probably overdone it nonetheless. It was hard to think the incident had barely aged a month since it had happened, it felt much longer. Jumping from one such feat of immense exhaustion to another had been far from a good idea. Maybe getting eliminated was a good sign for his health if nothing else.

Jirou and he had eventually come to a conclusion about what had happened leading up to the cavalry battle. It was simple really, mind control. Satou and Ojiro had confirmed as much after just a small amount of questioning. Though now that he mulled it over the quirk Shinsou had wasn’t so much mind control as brainwashing. He still couldn’t recall what had flooded into his head, or what had allowed him to break it. Had Jirou’s interference really been enough? He wasn’t so sure. If it was as similar as it had felt then he might regain those memories at some point.

Vrrm, the phone went in his hand.

1 – Kaminari – NEW

Yo you lost or something? Get your ass back here. You’re not gonna wanna miss this.

He checked the time, he hadn’t realised how much had passed. If he didn’t hurry he would miss the announcement of the next part, and if it really was some kind of tournament like Momo had said then it wasn’t something he wanted to skip. Not with Kirishima and many of his own class still in the running. Just as he turned to head back the way he came he saw something out of the corner of his eye, two spikes of blond hair that stuck out like horns, _All Might_, he thought instantly. What could he possibly be doing up here?

He was given a prompt and possibly very worrying answer, judging by the second person that came up behind the massive hero, someone he could easily recognise as thanks to his notoriety in the news, the second place celebrity hero Endeavor. The only thing more evident than the flames that spewed from every inch of his body was the hatred he held toward the man blocking his path. The whole thing made him hesitate to take leave, just long enough catch a few words of the heroes
“You’ll never be rid of that jolly attitude of yours will you?” even Endeavor’s words dripped with menace. “Just remember you fool, someday I’ll have turned that boy into a hero that shall surpass even you. That is the very reason I made that boy.”

Jackass, he thought as he stepped out of sight. He didn’t need analyse the context to know whom Endeavor was referring to, it was no secret he was Todoroki’s father. That knowledge was courtesy of Hagakure, once again. He wished he hadn’t stumbled upon the meeting; he didn’t want to be privy to some longstanding feud. Still, it was hard not to feel empathetic toward Todoroki even though he had grown very sure that the guy took the same stance on that sort of thing as he did.

He hadn’t even made it a step down the stairwell before he realised he hadn’t been half as subtle in his eavesdropping as he’d hope. There was a large hand on his shoulder, heavy and firm enough to tell him to stop moving. The only reprise was that the face staring down at him was not Endeavor’s like he’d dreaded, but All Might’s.

“Greetings, young Torenagi!” the man lifted his hand causing him to turn. “Quite an odd place to go for a stroll.”

He gave a shrug, “I had spare time.”

“Say, I don’t suppose you overheard anything back there, right?” All Might had sensational looking smile on him, something he hadn’t seen much of in the past few weeks.

He kept his face straight, “Overheard what, exactly?” he answered.

“Nothing!” that was enough to tell him everything he needed to know about the exchange. “Very commendable performance in the preliminary events my boy, I’m sure I was not the only one who took notice of the usage of your quirk. A shame we won’t be able to see it in the final event, but you must take these things on the chin as they say,” he mimicked the phrase by tapping his own.

He gave only a polite nod in recognition before asking, “Can I go? The final’s selection is about to start,” as much as he admired the hero in his own right, All Might looked nervous, and he himself didn’t exactly want praise or at least this wasn’t the person he wanted it from.

“Ah yes I suppose you best get back,” All Might nodded.

“Thank you, Sir,” he said as he turned. His neck hurt again. Maybe he should see Recovery Girl one more time before he went back, it was weird it hadn’t healed along with his burn, it could mean it was more serious than he’d imagined.

“Actually, hold on Torenagi,” All Might said before he’d barely taken two steps again.

As he turned back he wasn’t sure what he’d done wrong this time. Irritating might have been his first thought if it hadn’t been for the strange mix of the hero’s stern voice and serious expression that stood out to him, the man had something on his mind. It was almost comical in the way it sat so plainly through his chiselled features. It was like one of those Hulk posters his uncle had given him when he was little.

“What? was all that came to mind. If he hadn’t been so keenly aware of the stairs behind his foot he might have stumbled back and fallen in surprise, “H-huh?” he managed to stutter after a brief loss of words. As far as he knew the hero had never wronged him in any way whatsoever, “I-I’m not sure
what you mean, Sir?” he tried to pace his upward inflection.

“I am sorry to admit I have failed you as your teacher and it was due to the shame that resulted from my own actions that I’ve yet to confront you since your recovery. Please, sit and indulge me for a moment,” the hero beckoned as he let himself down across several meters of the staircase. It might have been that he was still in shock that caused him to immediately follow suit.

All Might looked guilt stricken as he turned to speak, “Let me start by saying my negligence is inexcusable. My underestimation of the villains at the USJ and the inability to assist in your subsequent capture and rescue, they are largely the fault of my own recklessness. There is something I often tell mys-”

“Please, stop,” he had already heard absolutely, sickeningly, enough. “The last thing I want is for anyone to blame themselves for what happened. Let alone you, All Might.”

“Young Torenagi,” the large man paused.

He shook his head to stop the pro, “All the crap, it was the result of my own actions and therefore it’s my responsibility. What I withheld, the attack at USJ. If I had just done more, said anything, it could have all been prevented. I put everyone else in danger, it was nothing short of selfish and yet after all that I was still given another chance. So, I refuse to have you apologise to me, of all people,” it took almost too long after he’d finished for the look he’d so grown to loathe begin to fall from the man’s face but he was glad to see it happen nonetheless.

Then the man moved, and the absolute first thing he did was raise his hand toward him, “I see you’ve already made up your mind. I can respect that, so let us both strive to be better. Plus Ultra,” he nodded.

He didn’t hesitate to shake the hand that dwarfed his own. The small gesture gave him relief enough to think that the hero understood exactly what he’d tried to tell him. The gist of those words was something he’d spent a lot of time beating himself up about before he’d actually been able to accept them. It almost felt nice to have said them aloud, to have someone give him a reason to talk so honestly about it. It was something he had previously only done with Midnight.

Even as their handshake broke and the man got up it still felt bizarre and surreal, I guess even pros let it all get to them sometimes, he thought and left it at that.

[Yuuei’s Sports Stadium – Freshman Platform – 9:55 AM]

Somehow he had arrived before Jirou, or at the very least if she was here he had not yet spotted her. In fact, now that he looked around it was very obvious not just her but all of the 1-A girls were missing. Whatever it was that had kept her it was probably important, she was always doing something somewhere with someone.

He had been half tempted to skip the ceremony but Midnight had made it quite clear it was a requirement rather than a choice. He didn’t see why it had to be, considering only very few of them would actually be involved and it wasn’t like he’d skip the actual fighting. What had tipped him toward going in the end hadn’t been the R-18 heroine’s threats but rather that he didn’t want his heart-to-heart with All Might to seem insincere by dipping, even if he thought the man would most likely not even notice his absence. All that added up to was that he was now here, in a crowd, trying to find a particularly spiky headed person.

He bumped Kirishima with his shoulder as he walked up beside, “Nervous yet?” he asked.
“Stoked actually,” he answered. “I’m finally gonna be on that stage l saw on TV every year, here’s just hoping it isn’t something shitty like the foam sword tournament they had that one time.”

“Hey, that was hype,” Sero said.

Kirishima folded his arms across his chest, “A fight where you can’t even use your fists isn’t something I’d call ‘hype,’ right?” he looked at Kaminari.

“Oh, huh what?” he looked kind of distracted.

“His mind’s in the gutter as usual,” Sero laughed.

“His and Mineta’s both,” Kirishima chuckled, even waving his hands over Kaminari’s face didn’t seem to faze him.

Curiosity caused Riley to follow Kaminari’s gaze toward the entrance, “I… can see why,” he said as soon as he did. If someone had held a thermometer up to his cheeks at that moment it might have exploded.

“Dude,” Kirishima came to the same realisation, which was the entirety of the female section of 1-A who had just entered the stadium.

Why in the hell would they do something like that? it was almost hard to believe they were wearing a line up of tight cut cheerleading outfits. Hagakure, however, seemed to be the only one into it.

“K-kaminari, did you put them up to this?” Sero was squinting, like he didn’t trust his own eyes.

“Any second you guys wanna kiss my feet now is fine by me,” Kaminari smirked, “and Mineta’s too.”

“What in the world happened one A?!?” Present Mic said through a strange gurgle, like he’d just spat out some coffee.

Momo came beset at that instant with something furious as she realised they’d been tricked, although all she did to act on it was nudge Jirou, and whisper in her ear, enough to make her turn toward them.

“I hope it was worth it,” she said as advanced one step at a time. “I’m going to fucking kill you Kaminari and you too you little grape!” she shouted as she began to run. He had already strategically averted his eyes, he knew better than to get in the way of a woman scorned.

Crack, Midnight’s whip stopped the non-sense as it hit the stage, “Settle down rookies, this isn’t a peepshow. We have a tournament to decide.”

You can talk, he thought. Midnight’s outfit was easily the most revealing of any even if he included the involuntary cheerleaders.

“This year’s tournament is quite simple,” she pointed her finger straight at the black screen which lit up at her command.

-=One-on-One Bracket Style Tournament=-

“The one-on-one no holds barred brawl, a crowd favourite!” she picked up the wooden box that he hadn’t noticed had been lying at her feet. “To determine who shall fight who in this traditional bracket based tournament we’ll be drawing lots. Now then, if the team who placed fir-”
“Please, excuse me…! Um,” Ojiro had struck his hand up. “I’m sitting this one out,” he stumbled through the words before being immediately drowned out by several gasps.

“Ojiro, what the hell?!” Kirishima shouted.

“Ojiro,” Midoriya said, whom he could see him watching Shinsou intently.

“I… I don’t even know how I ended up here. I don’t remember anything leading up to the last few seconds of the cavalry battle, I’m sure it was due to that damn guys quirk,” he glared at the boy in turn.

“Screw that, if you prove yourself on stage then it won’t matter!” Hagakure said. Others were murmuring in agreement, he could say he shared her sentiment. It was downright idiotic at best to throw away a chance like this when the cavalry battle had already been more luck than skill.

“That’s not the point damn it. It’s my pride that’s on the line here! Knowing that I didn’t fight as hard like everyone else did to get here, I just wouldn’t be able to fight to my fullest,” he shook his head at Momo, “man, your outfits are really ruining the moment here,” he chuckled as he wiped away something at the corner of his eye.

“I feel the same way as you do Ojiro, it isn’t right,” Satou said behind him. He looked absolutely destroyed, that was the only way he could think to describe it. “It’s all just a big blur, there’s no way I can claim I earned a place in the finals. Give my spot away to someone else more deserving.”

“That’s,” Kirishima was almost trembling, “…super manly!” he said with utmost adoration.

“A highly unusual development but Midnight is the judge of this competition, so ultimately the choice comes down to her.”

Midnight looked insulted, “How downright callow, to throw away an opportunity like this,” she said as she raised her whip again, “I’ll have you know, greenhorns like you,” she brought it down with a thunderous crack, “Deserve all my love! I hereby acknowledge Ojiro Mashirao and Rikidou Satou’s decision to pull out of the final round!” the announcement got more than its fair share of cheer, it was loud and ear drum shattering enough that there was no doubt they’d instantly become crowd favourites through virtue alone.

Midnight put her hand on her hip, “Still, that leaves us two competitors short,” she pouted. “Team Hagakure and Team Kendou both placed fifth so one person from each should probably go up. Would both teams please make your decision?”

Kendou raised her hand, “Sorry, but I’d rather you nominate team Tetsutetsu in our place. It’s not right for a group like us to go up, we could barely move at the end. Isn’t that right girls?” she looked behind her at the three others, whom nodded in turn. “See? Better someone who’ll give it their all goes on up.”

“Y-you guys! Are you really sure about this?” Tetsutetsu said. He looked like he was about to cry.

“Don’t get the wrong idea, this isn’t a favour Tets, the way I see it it’s simply the way it oughta been,” she gave a pleased smile.

Kirishima looked astounded, “Damn she’s pretty manly too.”

He felt a tug and then a jerk on his collar, “Get over here, you’re part of the team too you know!” Jirou pulled him along to the side of the crowd.
He almost gagged as she let him go, “I wish people would stop doing that,” he said.

“Yeah, yeah whatever. Who do we nominate?” Jirou asked.

“You. Isn’t it obvious?” he pointed at Jirou. He did want it but who wouldn’t? He owed her however, more than just a little bit. The least he could do was this.

She almost jumped back before saying, “What, why?” he hadn’t expected her to react like that.

“Well, um, your quirk is the most versatile for close combat and based on the trial of battle it’s really the only logical choice, not to mention you’re good at keeping your cool,” his explanation felt mediocre at best.

“Now I know you’re not serious, I freaked out just as much as Hagakure back there, I’m just better at hiding it than miss invisibility.”

Hagakure kicked her shoe at the cobble, “Well, I can’t do it, I’m the reason we’re in this mess in the first place. It’d feel like I’m disrespecting Satou and Ojiro.”

Kouda waved his hands up frantically like some kind of mime, then he performed a series of wild hand gestures that looked like they meant absolutely goddamn nothing. Maybe he was frustrated at not even being considered.

“I agree with Kouda,” Hagakure jumped in the air.

“Same,” Jirou nodded before looking over at him with a mischievous smirk, “It’s the only real choice.”

He wasn’t too dumb to take a hint like that, “No. I totally misread Todoroki’s team a- Mmffphhf,” the rest of his words were cut off by Hagakure shoving her gloves tight over his mouth, she’d probably retrieved them in lieu of the interlude.

“Are you finished making your decision Team Hagakure?” Midnight asked over the heads of the crowd.

“Yes. Mrs, we’re nominating Torenagi for our group, that’s our final decision,” Jirou shouted back.

“Very well, that makes one of the two, how about Team Tetsutetsu?” she turned.

He pulled the hand off and spat the felt out of his mouth, “You guys really didn’t need to do that, my plan was pretty awful,” he shook his head.

“Stop being so modest, dumbass,” Jirou rolled her eyes.

“She’s right, because of you everyone got to see we weren’t so hopeless after all,” Hagakure said as she bounced gently back and forth on her heels. “It was really cool you know.”

He had to look away to hide his brightening face, “I still don’t think I’m the best choice, but, thanks,” he was finding it hard to hide his smile, “So I really have to ask, why are you still wearing those damn outfits?”

Jirou blushed, “Oh screw you,” she punched him hard in the arm. He couldn’t say it wasn’t worth it, payback for putting him on the spot like that.

“Right then, with that matter settled Tetsutetsu Tetsutetsu and Torenagi Riley will be joining the line up, that should bring us back up to sixteen. Shall we go ahead and draw those lots?” Midnight shook
the box in her hand. “And then we’ll have a short break for some recreational activities,” she added as almost an afterthought.

Drawing lots was a sluggish process, far slower than he could have imagined. Maybe it was just his nerves, they’d come back with the turn of events. He swallowed hard, there was no way he could waste this, hopefully his uncle was still watching. As his turn finally came he went up to reach in the box, he knew about half were left, it was easier since Bakugou had already been paired up, with Uraraka of all people. He rolled the billiard ball in his hand as he took it until the numbered side came up, nine. That meant he was up against number ten, in bracket B.

Aoyama, he didn’t even need to look at the board to figure it out. The boy had shown off his number like it had been some winning lottery prize.

He left the stage with an errant step and pushed through the crowd, Kirishima might have reached for him once and he might have even congratulated him again he wasn’t sure, as he looked at the number again his mind was already elsewhere.

Chapter End Notes

*I do not own BNHA, OC material is my own.

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New Tournament Brackets (in order of competition):
Bracket A: Shinsou vs. Midoriya, Todoroki vs. Sero // Iida vs. Hatsume, Kaminari vs. Ashido
Bracket B: Riley vs. Aoyama, Tetsutetsu vs. Kirishima // Tokoyami vs. Yaoyorozu, Uraraka vs. Bakugou
Fetter Matter

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

[Yuuei's Sports Stadium – 1-A Spectator’s Stand – 10:30 AM]

Not an hour had passed before he was slumped in a chair, looking only half-heartedly down on the
makeshift cement arena that Cementoss had created with his quirk. It wasn’t that he was annoyed or
distraught, it was in fact quite the opposite, he was trying to avoid looking over at Aoyama. The
spare time he’d been allowed due to the recreational activities had bought him precious space to think
and think he had done. Possibilities had spread themselves in his mind, and conclusions and odds.
He’d come up with a plan, now he just had to wait to use it.

“Midoriya is fighting that general student first, Shinsou,” Uraraka said.

“Ohhhhh,” Hagakure almost moaned, “I hope he wins,” she sounded worried.

“Ye of little faith, there’s no way that little guy is going to go down easy,” Ashido said.

“Come on, Midoriya,” Ojiro whispered under his breath. Both he and Rikidou had worried
expressions.

He would be lying if he said he wasn’t interested in the match, considering what had happened he
was very eager to get another look at that quirk, something was still bothering him about it. All his
speculation about it hadn’t brought back memories, only the feel of incision. Maybe that wasn’t
something he should be getting distracted by, he had bigger problems.

“Looks like it’s starting,” Rikidou said.

“Yes,” Mezou answered as he watched Cementoss finish his work. It looked almost effortless to the
hero to manipulate the tons of concrete and certainly demystified another aspect of Yuuei’s ability to
even function as destructively as it did. There was little doubt most of the USJ had been his work
too.

“We’re back folks and not a second too soon! I can feel the bloodcurdling excitement in the
air, these students are ready to tear each other apart! Are you ready for the first match?! If
you would be so kind as to help me welcome one A’s rising star Midoriya Izuku-”

Jirou leaned in as the crowd roared, “You know that guy is still watching you, right?”

“Who?” he asked and she pointed a finger over to the stand held by class 1-B. He didn’t have to
guess to know who within the crowd she meant as Kuroiro was making his glare more obvious than
a searchlight.

“And in the other corner, an underdog from the general department, Shinsou Hitoshi! This is
lookin’ like a fierce matchup already!”

The two had barely entered the arena when he could see Shinsou begin to talk. It was an unusually
calm face he made as he did it and an equally speechless one as Midoriya listened to him. It was
enough to make him realise what was about to happen, the mean streak that crossed his classmates
face only placed itself to confirm the thought. He was sure Ojiro had talked to him, hadn’t he?
“Let the round… begin!”

“What the hell did you say?!” Midoriya took off and then came to a complete and utter halt.

Ojiro gripped his hands to his head, “You idiot! I told you! I warned you!”

Riley leaned over the edge of the banister just to get a tiny bit closer of a look. He mightn’t have had to as he already knew what he would find. Midoriya’s eyes were glazed over and vacant, the grip of the quirk had already asserted control. Then, to the horror of the crowd he simply turned and began to walk, one foot in front of the other toward the out of bounds line at the edge of the arena.

”I don’t know what’s going on but Midoriya appears to be forfeiting the match, is Shinsou really that scary?!”

“Come on Midoriya, not like this,” Kirishima said.

It was almost over now, he knew. The thing was a death grip and a pleasant one at that, one he had almost succumbed to himself. Every inch that he crawled it seemed like it was getting stronger, forcing the muscles to move, willing them to move.

*Crack*, the sickening sound rode a gale has Midoriya broke his fingers, enough to make Shinsou shake from the power of it. A single eye signalled the depravity, the degree of his classmates rage as his self-inflicted injury hung at his side.

“No way,” Ojiro’s mouth was agape, “he broke it, holy crap…”

“I think I’m going to be sick,” Jirou looked disgusted.

Shinsou stepped back and shouted, “So you’ve got that much friggin’ power just in your fingers, count me jealous. It must be nice to be so blessed you little dipshit.”

Midoriya gritted his teeth. He knew better now, he could see it on his face despite not being able to believe it. Pain had been the trigger, or rather the release. He counted no more than three steps out of the many that followed before Midoriya gripped his foe only to receive a slug right in the face. He didn’t let go as Shinsou hit him twice more and broke his nose before he fell tightly into his opponent, turned and pulled. Shinsou hit the floor with a back-breaking thud and one foot over the edge of the line.

“There it is, what a comeback! Midoriya stands victorious in the first round! A short and sweet battle to start us off, you can’t argue with that!”

It wasn’t grief stuck on Shinsou’s face, as he lay on the ground and looked up at Midoriya. Maybe it was acceptance or something else. He peeled himself off the floor and the crowd cheered, causing him to stop. There were many of them congratulating him despite the loss and it was easy to understand why, he had almost won without so much as touching his opponent.

Manipulating quirks were almost unstoppable and that made them terrifying, as he knew far too well. More shocking than that, Midoriya had broken it through sheer power of will. As happy as he was for his classmate he wasn’t sure if that made him weak, but it left a bad taste in his mouth nonetheless.

There had been a short but decisive pause between the end of the match and the start of the new one. Eventually both of the next competitors had found their way to the arena but it was almost like
Todoroki wasn’t quite there as he stood opposite Sero. There was no way in hell the guy was nervous, he knew better than that. Something had happened, something that had even made the crowd silent as he waited for the match to begin.

None of the others had said a word either, nor had they offered Midoriya much more than a pat on the back as he returned. They were all too focussed on the stillness, the maddening tension of the air as it curled and twisted in icy but invisible fringes. The only one who hadn’t seemed to have noticed was Sero himself or maybe it was him pretending not to. Either way it was like watching a deer that didn’t know it was about to be swallowed by an avalanche.

“Begin,” the words barely left Present Mic’s throat before it happened.

Tape curled around Todoroki’s body but he didn’t flinch or move to resist it. It was ice that crawled out between the edges of the quirk that bound him and it licked and ate its way up the material toward Sero who severed it in panic. It didn’t matter, monoliths of cold had already gripped his feet, they swept up his body like a spider’s web immobilising him. It twisted further past him as the ice grew into a spire and then swept cold into the spectator stand that was enough to make him grip himself as it shivered him. It drilled like an incarnation of icy rage through the upper echelons of the arena before rushing out of the stadium entirely. It hung sharp like the fine point of a needle.

“What the,” Rikidou said almost quiet enough to be a whisper.

“That was more than just overdoing it,” Iida’s teeth rattled as he said it.

“Sero is unable to move, Todoroki wins by knockout,” Midnight said. Half her body had been caught in the blast but it still paled in comparison to Sero, who was now almost an ice statue.

“Don’t mind it kid, it happens to the best of us,” his sympathy was echoed by the crowd.

He had not once seen Todoroki lose his cool however he was pretty sure he knew why, just this once, he had.

The addition of the arena’s new icy architecture had taken a long time to clear safely and by the time it was completely gone the temperature of the air had dropped several degrees below freezing. Todoroki hadn’t returned after he’d left the stadium, his father had soon done so as well, coincidences weren’t made so cheaply. Now he had an idea exactly why Todoroki had that burn scar, the very thought of it disgusted him, maybe because it didn’t look so different from ones, or rather specifically the one on his arm.

“The third match between Kaminari Denki and Ashido Mina is about to begin, hopefully this one will last more than two seconds,” ahem, the man cleared his throat.

“Oooh there they are! I’ve been looking forward to this one,” Uraraka said.

“Placed any bets yet?” Sero asked, despite Todoroki using fire from his quirk to free him he still lost like he’d gotten multiple shades of frostbite.

Kirishima fell back in his seat, “I should be rooting for Kaminari since he’s my bud, but…”

“He should win,” he answered. “As long as he doesn’t panic,” the electric student had the tendency to blow his entire load at once. That much wasn’t a secret. He’d done well enough to conserve it in the cavalry battle.

He had grown to like Kaminari more then he cared to admit in less than two months, maybe it was
because Kirishima forced him to constantly be exposed to the guy’s overtly crude and sarcastic humour. It reminded him of one of his old classmates, however unlike him Kaminari actually had a genuine side. It made sense why Kirishima had fallen in with him from day one. Hopefully he showed that here.

“Let’s get this show on the road! Three, two, one... start!” Present Mic made his best impression of a starting gun with his voice.

Ashido jumped forward and acid spread like spittle across the arena floor causing it to hiss, the slick surface caused her to slide forward at dazzling speed as she closed the gap toward her opponent in less than the time it took to blink twice.

_Bzzzt_, the air crackled and the ground hummed. Kaminari’s skin began arcing with shades of yellow as electricity coursed through his system. It was a more refined version of what he had been subjected to during their spar.

Ashido went past Kaminari and spun on her acid trail three times, sending thin waves of acid sailing through the air in all directions. The liquid singed with cloggy smoke as it touched his electric skin before falling to the floor. Ashido came to a stop as her slime trail ended and turned back, there was a pleasant look on her face.

_Nice_, he thought. She wasn’t able to get through, all he had to do now was catch her and release all his energy.

Kirishima shook his head, “It’s over,” he said.

“Huh?” he asked, the reaction had made him curious.

“Just watch, you’ll see what I mean,” he answered.

Ashido began to slide again, around Kaminari who was still channelling his field, it didn’t matter how she approached; the thing had one hundred percent coverage. However she kept going around, and around until she’d formed a slick slime ring around him. Then she began to move toward him, slowly and deliberately, a connection of the thick trail led back to the circle she’d drawn. Then she kicked as she lunged, a bicycle kick that made a large arc in front of her and sent a wall of thick acidic slime flying directly at Kaminari. As it did she jumped after it.

_Fffffff-bzzzzzzz_, Kaminari was covered in black smog as the electricity conducted poorly out of his body into the massive ring. Through it he saw Ashido duck and then come up with one swift, fatal-looking uppercut that slugged her opponent in the jaw.

“Told you,” he said as Kaminari fell with a slump.

“And just like that it’s over for Kaminari, that’s a lot of power in one punch!”

He pouted, “I guess I underestimated her,” maybe it was time to rescind the notion that he rarely did that now that he was zero against two.

“Ashido might act a bit hyper sometimes but she’s really good at reading people, when she gets into a fight it all just seems to click for her,” Kirishima said.

“I see what you mean,” he slumped in his chair. It had been an impressive strategy, maniacally so. The ring of slime had made Kaminari touchable, just long enough for her to do something.

“Oh god he’s doing it again,” Jirou said and pointed. She didn’t need to, he was already well aware
of what she meant. It was becoming steadily more difficult to ignore the insane mumbling of Midoriya only three seats over from him.

“You’re already scribbling away,” Uraraka watched over Midoriya’s shoulder. “No rest for the weary, right Deku?” she giggled.

Midoriya stopped his mumbling and shut his book faster than Riley could have thought possible, “U-Uraraka,” he said as his ears turned red, “I didn’t see you there.”

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to startle you. I just wanted to take a look…” she backed off slightly, “I can’t believe you’re already forming counterstrategies for how you see each match play out.”

“Oh, r-right. It’s kinda just what I’ve always done, um, it’s my chance to observe the amazing quirks of everyone outside our class,” his face lit up, “Oh, speaking of which I actually compiled tons of notes on you and everyone in class one A, too!”

He was trying his best to avoid eavesdropping on the pair but it was hard not to. As he had thought to himself before, that booklet was giving the guy a serious edge. Now after having dwelt on the reasoning of it some more it was probably better that he never read it, if he did he might end up pigeonholing himself into what Midoriya had written about him and taking for fact everything it said about others.

“We’re almost halfway through folks and what a show it’s been so far. Let’s see if the next matchup can raise the bar even higher, please welcome to the arena one of the most solid competitors so far; Iida Tenya of heroics one A and his opponent the girl who blew everyone away with her strange array of gadgetry; Hatsume Mei of the support department!”

He hadn’t even noticed how quickly everything had been cleaned up, let alone that Iida hadn’t even been around in the first place. Present Mic’s showboating might have been to blame, as expected he was perfect for this kind of role. It wouldn’t be a stretch to think that his popularity and widely applicable quirk was what won him a job at Yuuei, rather than his fighting ability. Though he doubted that was shabby either.

“What sort of strange mix-up is this? Iida looks like he came here straight after running through a supply closet!”

He leaned in closer and then saw that his classmate did indeed look ridiculous, more ridiculous than he had ever seen him before and considering it was Iida that was saying something. He had plates all over his body that connected to steel tubing that arched from his back into what looked like jetpack boosters. It was like he had an exoskeleton. Hatsume looked relatively strange too but it was a cool sort of futuristic look, if a bit tacky. She was grinning in the most fitting way behind her headset, like a mad scientist.

Hmm, Midnight mumbled through her microphone, “normally special equipment isn’t allowed unless you apply for an exception permit prior to the festival.”

“I’m sorry Mrs, since Aoyama had his belt I thought it’d be okay,” Iida said, his voice was being amplified by a microphone on his shirt. “I apologise profusely for my transgression but please allow me to wear these tools, the ones that Hatsume offered me as a sign of sportsmanship. They are proof of her mettle, her grit!”

“Your naivety Iida, it’s so… adorable!” the woman said as she twirled her whip again. He knew she really loved that weapon, so much as to even bring it to their therapy sessions as awkward as it was. “As long as you’re both in agreement to these arrangements I’ll allow it, just this once.”
Jirou sighed, “I can already tell this isn’t going to be good.”

“You too, huh?” he said as he glimpsed at Midoriya, who was biting his nails.

“Begin!”

Iida dashed and in an instant he was in front of Hatsume, it was speed the likes of which he had never seen him display before. It was almost too fast, because Iida then flew right past her as she pushed herself out of the way with a giant metal pole that extended from a heavy belt around her waist.

“How does it feel Iida, the speed, the manoeuvrability? Isn’t it fantastic?!” Hatsume said as she jumped in between Iida’s almost wild attempts to hit her with a kick, each which she dodged with ease.

“Why you…!” he said, there was already exhaustion on his face after less than a minute.

As Iida missed a punch Hatsume looked up at the crowd, “Do you see my creations? Just think how easy it’d be to capture and subdue villains with tools like these. They’re easy to use and quirk compatible!” it was like she was doing a sales pitch. He could tell she was the kind of girl who had talent and knew it.

Three or four more minutes passed in a wild goose chase and Iida made no more progress in capturing her, on the exact mark of the sixth minutes passing she pressed a button that lit up Iida’s metallic backpack in a variety of colours, before sending out several billiard ball sized pellets skyward as she came to a stop next to him.

“That’s all for now folks, can we give a big round of applause to my sponsor and demonstrator, Iida Tenya?! Thank you all for viewing my lineup, I’m always open to any business inquiries, call me,” she said before the daylight was tinged by a strange blue secretion as the fireworks exploded into letters and what appeared to be a phone number.

“You played me for a fooooooooooool…!” Iida said in an extended almost comical yell. It was fitting, considering he’d just spend seven minutes getting embarrassed in front of the world, Riley knew he could count himself glad he hadn’t ended up with her in the tournament.

“I… I can’t even watch, holy shit,” Sero rolled back with laughter.

Kirishima wiped away a tear, “No fucking kidding, that was almost painful.”

Jirou turned then and gave him a solid smack on the shoulder, “Dude, you’re already meant to be in the waiting room, get outta here.”

“Shit,” he said and jumped to his feet. He’d forgotten in the spectacle, and he still had a preparation to make.

“Break a leg dude!” Kirishima yelled after him as he disappeared into the tunnel.

Riley walked paced down the passage as he gently dragged his hand across the perfectly smooth concrete wall that lead to the gaping white entrance of the stadium. It had taken him a handful of minutes to get down here but now he didn’t want to rush, he wanted to make sure it was completely ready.

Thought had already reached that point again, stuck somewhere between a shipwreck of nerves and
an utterly rational point of view. As he came closer to the gaping maw he slid the fingers until they
hit a crack and then lifted them all at once. He curled his left hand into a fist, it was the ace up his
sleeve, a single indistinguishable tremor that gave no hint at its use as light blinded him and he
entered the stadium.

“Here comes our second competitor! I’m sure many of you know him well enough already as
someone who was set upon by villains, only to come out alive; Torenagi Riley of heroics class
one A!” he might have been affected by Present Mic’s introduction had he already not felt so
encompassed in the task at hand, he could barely even hear the man nor the crowd behind him.

Fifty feet, he thought as he judged the distance from his own white marker to where Aoyama stood.
He took a deep breath and wrought out his fingers to try and beat away any lingering doubt.

“You’ll be my shining gateway to the top! Merci camarade, try not to lose too pitifully,” Aoyama
spun as he blew kisses to the crowd.

He ignored the taunt and instead fell into what Aizawa had taught him, his body hung an inch lower,
his left hooked loosely behind him and his right sat at chest height in front of him. He knew he had it
correct by instinct, the man hadn’t let him leave that Sunday night before he had been sure it was at
that point. It was almost like a Karate stance in its adaptability but it lacked the firmness of the martial
art. Rather than basing itself on counterattacking and power it instead relied on unpredictability. He
had also given it another singular purpose that was all his own.

Aoyama’s posture was exaggerated by comparison, however he knew better now than to risk
underestimating anyone again, especially one with a quirk so in line with his own. A ranged battle
was something he couldn’t oblige as it would be almost a certain loss. He had seen the destructive
power of the laser beam quirk more than once, how it could drill and tear through rock and with
extra oomph even some metals. That is why he couldn’t afford to mess this up, why concentration
hung heavy across his brow.

“Begin!”

He swerved to the side as the laser just barely missed him, his ears stung as it passed. He hadn’t
expected it to be so loud, yet he had expected it. He took his first step and fell to the right as he did,
the acrid smell of his shirt smouldering crawled up his nose, the fabric on the shoulder had been
eaten away ever so slightly as a second laser passed. One inch to the left and it would have torn right
through him.

“Looks like those words were no bluff, Torenagi is struggling to approach.”

Fourty-two, he counted down as he regained his footing and used it to grab a few more strides.
Another laser jutted as the belt blinked, this one swept and followed him as he ran diagonally away
from it and toward Aoyama.

Twenty-six, he kept his hands still in his stance as best he could, maintaining it wasn’t perfect yet,
there’d only been so much he could learn and practice. If he made one misstep that would be the end,
the closer he was the harder he knew it’d be to dodge. It was the belt that made it possible to do
though, it lead and told with every sparkle exactly where he had to move before it happened.

Eighteen, he thought. Bzzzt, the laser went as it surged past him and cut the ground in a merciless
array of destruction, he could feel the heat of it burn the follicles from his skin as he took a great
stride past it.

Twelve, he could almost touch him now. All he needed was one opportunity but even a graze this
close could lay him out. That wasn’t going to happen though. At this distance he could see it on Aoyama’s face, the shreds of desperation he was all too familiar with. The panic as doubt began creeping its way into his heart.

He kicked his foot down and forward as he saw Aoyama’s body tilt and not a brief second later he slid under the laser that passed only inches above his head. It was like he’d been told, a mind thrown was a fight lost. He felt so much more alert now, so much more aware of every detail as he came to a stop not a foot from his opponent.

He came back up with the full force of his right shoulder and landed it squarely in Aoyama’s chest, the laser flew wide as he tried to uselessly fire it one more time. It was enough of an opening to pull forward his other hand and place it on the guy’s stomach, just above the belt he held so dear. He felt his arm start to seize up as the quirk let itself into the material and into the skin and bone beneath, it was uncomfortable but he had grown used to the equilibrium.

His grip took Aoyama firmly by the shoulder before he could regain his balance, there was no way he could allow him to get another chance to fire his weapon. He brought his knee up as he pulled his adversary into it, he could feel as the ribs cracked and the air as it left Aoyama’s lungs. The boy slumped onto his shoulder from the blow and he caught him before letting him down on his back carefully, there was no need to hurt him further.

“I can’t let anyone use me as a stepping stone,” he said in Aoyama’s ear before he stood back up, just in time for Midnight to walk over.

Did I overdo it? he thought as she leant down and stuck her hands on his stomach. It had been his first time using it on something not made of metal and rubber. Maybe he had been a bit too rough. Still, it was easily within Recovery Girl’s grasp.

“Four broken ribs and a minor contusion. Unconscious,” she said as she looked at what felt like him in particular. Her glare was half discontent, one third disapproval and maybe even one sixth impressed.

“Aoyama is unable to continue, victory by knockout goes to Torenagi Riley,” she said as she waved her whip up at him.

“Torenagi Riley continues onto the next round with a brutal finish! Now if we could get a stretcher in here,” paramedic robots had already begun beeping behind him as he stepped off stage and walked toward the foyer he had come from.

He wasn’t sure what he felt as he entered the tunnel and the voices faded away into the background, it was some mix of joy, relief and just a hint of pride. There was no way to entirely pin it down but he knew it had come from the undeniable fact that he had succeeded on his own. No one had been there to help him through the fight. That feeling was just enough for him to revel in for a few fleeting moments, it spread as a keen giddiness as he dropped his back into the wall.

Chapter End Notes

*I don’t own BNHA. OC material is my own.*
The prisoner's mindset

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

[Yuuei's Sports Stadium – Outside Waiting Room 1-A – 12:12 PM]

Exhaustion overtook him all at once as the adrenaline flushed from his system once more, his overuse from that morning’s events were beginning to catch up with him. If he wanted to stand a chance in the next match then he would need to cool off. At the rate the matches were going it didn’t feel like he was going to get much time to do that.

The door of the waiting room swung inward as he reached for it, behind it was Kirishima. “What are you doing her-oof” he gasped as he was pulled into nothing short of a brief albeit painful bear hug.

“I saw everything, nice work man. I knew you were workin’ on something but I didn’t really expect that you know?,” he said before grinning. “Does that mean I can call part of the close range club now?”

Riley rubbed the back of his neck, “It still needs work,” he said as he remembered. “Aren’t you gonna be late? They’re already calling your name,” his match with Aoyama had only lasted a few minutes at most.

Kirishima’s expression grew wide, “Oh crap, I didn’t realise how long I was in there,” he pointed a thumb over his shoulder. “I got… kinda distracted. You’ll see what I mean.”

It didn’t take much of a glance to realise what he meant, that being Uraraka sitting at the table with her head in her hands and Iida’s arm on her shoulder. She looked ready for a breakdown which considering her opponent probably wasn’t very far from the truth. It made him want to reconsider entering. Then, he realised Kirishima was no longer beside him but instead far down the corridor.

“You better not lose out, you hear me?” he shouted after him, to which he returned a thumbs-up before disappearing around the corner. He knew what it actually meant if Kirishima won but he’d gradually been preparing for that eventuality ever since he realised what beating Aoyama entitled him to, a chance to fight another person; a chance to test his newly applicable skills further. He would worry about it when the time came.

Hunger overtook his need to stall and stole awkwardness from the room in front of him. He could feel the tension as he went in, but he needed to hurry if he wanted to see his friend kick that Tetsutetsu guy’s ass. He went directly for the steel basin only to have himself struck by Iida turning around directly into him.

“Sorry, Torenagi,” he said. “I didn’t see you there,” he looked back at Uraraka before he stood and then held out his hand. “Very well done on your match, you’ve surely set an example for the other classes to follow.”

“Uh, thanks,” he took the hand and dropped it just as fast. “It was pretty sloppy honestly,” he saw a small monitor hanging above the desk he’d been sitting at, he guessed that was how Iida and Kirishima had watched it.

“No matter,” he shook his head. “In the case we happen to face each other in the final round I wish you the best of luck,” he said before walking to the door, “Best of luck to you as well Uraraka, I know you can do this,” the door slammed shut behind him.
He took the last few steps to the basin, unsure what to say, “Good luck on your match Uraraka,” he frowned as he tapped his fingers on the steel. It was the least he could do for someone who was the only reason he’d made it so far. It wasn’t like he wanted Bakugou to lose either since he owed him a fair bit more but he understood what she was going through.

“T-thanks Torenagi,” she said but remained sagged in her chair.

He took a large gulp from the faucet before dunking his entire face and hair under the cold stream. It had gotten unimaginably humid over the course of the day, just the kind of weather he hated the most. Todoroki’s little ice display was surely to blame.

After some relief he turned the tap back off and went to make his way to the door. He stopped beside the table as he did and took an apple which he threw underhand in the air before catching it over hand and taking a bite. All the while he wondered if he should say more, he wanted to. He took another bite before turning to leave.

A few steps in he held at the door and then turned back, “I… get really nervous too, you know? When I know someone is relying on me. Then I remember what I want them to see and I try my best to be like that, I know that might sound a bit silly but it helps.”

Uraraka looked up and turned to him, then gave him a nod with more backbone in it, “Yeah, I think I get it. Thank you.”

He let the door fall behind him, maybe he had made her nerves worse but he really hoped he hadn’t. That kind of thing usually was what made him want to try again even when he messed up with his quirk or his training. The apple core landed in a trashcan as he passed it, he needed to get back to the spectator stands quickly. The match had been very close to starting already from what the monitors had shown. There was no way he wanted to miss the conclusion, or even the start for that matter.

As he made it up a few steps with more sunlight a face passed him by, namely Midoriya’s. He looked distracted, or maybe fixated was more accurate. There was only one way he was going if he was going the way he himself had come, to the waiting room. Maybe Midoriya could cheer Uraraka up a bit, frankly it would have been laughable not to notice how close two were.

He made it back into the stands just in time to see Tetsutetsu viciously pile his fist in Kirishima’s stomach, only to have him return the favour with an equally painful one. It was like he was seeing him fight his own reflection and in many a way that wasn’t far from the truth since their quirks were so similar, like a battle of stone against steel.

“Grats, now I guess I don’t have to kick your ass all up and down the campus,” Jirou said expressionless as he let himself down next to her.

“…Right,” he tried to fake a chuckle. “How long have those two been going at it?”

“Maybe five minutes, but you didn’t miss much honestly.”

Kirishima swung his arm above Tetsutetsu before bringing it down on his head like an anvil, to which the guy gave him a swift painful punch across the jaw. At their feet he could see scuff marks but absolutely zero trace of either one having been pushed back more than a foot. They were beaten blue and bloody both and it would be over soon, for better or for worse.

He was sure he knew who he wanted to fight less, but he had to admit Tetsutetsu’s variant of the quirk was better suited against himself, steel was simply a better defensive mechanism again compressions even if it was slower. Decompressions on the other hand… he’d have to wait and see.
“This is it you bastard, you’re going down right here,” Tetsutetsu said as he grabbed Kirishima’s left arm and held it tight.

“No, you’re the one who’s going to go down,” Kirishima entwined his arm with the one already holding it in a steel-stone latch.

Wham, they both struck another simultaneously with what looked like enough strength to shatter the skull of any normal person. Then, just like that they both fell backward and hit the floor.

“Double knockout, it’s a draw!” Midnight said.

“Looks like we’ll need a tiebreaker after our two hard heads wake back up, what a display of virtue that was! We’ll have a short break as our competitors ready for the last two bouts of the quarter finals,” Present Mic said as two stretchers carried his friend and the foe away.

“That was not the way I expected that to end,” he rubbed his lip with the edge of his palm. Evidently the determination of his sentence would need to wait a little longer.

“Well, makes sense, he’s never really shown the ability to give up. An immovable object and an unstoppable force…” Jirou said.

He heard Iida before he saw him as he walked down between the aisles, “Who won?” he asked, with a withdrawn looking Midoriya at his heel. He hadn’t even considered Iida’s absence, which was weird considering he’d left the waiting room before he had.

“It was a draw,” Tokoyami answered as he stood and walked past Iida, Momo fell in short behind.

“A draw huh?” Iida touched his chin, “Very curious. one B is every bit as strong as I imagined.”

Kaminari tapped him on the shoulder, “So dude, how’d it feel kicking Aoyama’s teeth in?”

“Gee Kaminari, how did it feel getting your teeth kicked in by Ashido?” Jirou answered before he could.

“Hey that wasn’t my fault, I just got blinded by all the smoke you know?”

Ashido snickered, “Serves you right hiding behind your quirk like that.”

Hmph, Kaminari fell back in his chair. “You guys are such spoilsports. Fine then, how did the hell did you lay him out with just that weak ass knee, Mr. Torenagi Riley Sir,” he gave a mock bow.

“I don’t think I should say,” he answered.

“Come on dude, you never tell me aaaaanything,” he pouted.

“Unlike you there are some people still that are still actually in the tournament, you really think it’d be a good idea for him to say his strategies aloud?” Jirou said. “It’d be like asking to lose.”

“Well, at least I got further than you did,” he shrugged with a grin.

Jirou’s eyes turned into slits, “On the coat tails of Momo, Todoroki and Iida sure.”

“Jesus fuck, shut your traps already,” Bakugou finally snapped.

“I’ll explain after the tournament, yeah?” he said to the electric student behind him.
“…Fine,” he answered with a disgruntled expression.

“I’m sure you could just ask this guy,” Ojiro slapped Midoriya on the back causing him to almost drop his booklet. “I thought his eyes were going to pop out of his head watching that.”

“I-I mean, I was just caught up trying to figure out what Hagakure was talking about, you know last week?”

“Shut up Midoriya!” Hagakure clasped her hands over his face, giving him a sense of déjà-vu.

He felt his face go sour, “So what exactly did you see, Hagakure? I thought you quit after the first time Aizawa pinned you to the wall and threw you out,” he couldn’t say he cared half as much as he was letting on but she deserved it frankly.

Hagakure squirmed, “N-nothing, I swear.”

Kaminari put up his feet on the back of his chair, “The only reason I wanted to know was because if I were you I’d just have shot that guy down, I mean a laser is fast and strong but one good hit with your quirk would be enough, right?”

“I can’t do that,” he shook his head at the notion. The line of questioning was beginning to make him uncomfortable.

“Why? I’ve seen you use it on metal and shit before, a belt should be easy, what gives?”

He felt himself frown, “You’re right, but if you could crush a building with your hand would you risk it? All it takes is one misplaced thought. Just one meagre second of me losing my concentration and that would be that. That’s why I won’t do it, not to someone like Aoyama anyway.”

“Jeez, I didn’t want you to get all serious on me, killer,” Kaminari wiped his brow, he looked almost sorry he’d asked.

“You can’t say that after you’re the one who instigated,” Jirou rolled her eyes.

“Regardless, quite the noble outlook,” Iida said.

“It’s not best suited to heroism,” he clutched his hand. It wasn’t something he wanted to think about any longer.

“I disagree, I mean. It’s like Thirteen’s quirk, right? I think it’d be pretty good for rescue,” Midoriya said.

Iida nodded, “Yes, they are indeed pretty similar at least in some aspects.”

Hmm, he answered as if he was giving it thought. It was really only pretend, he already knew and he already had his reasons. It wasn’t that he had wanted to oblige Kaminari in the first place but if anything it did validate one thing; his new style used his quirk far better than his old one ever did for this kind of thing.

“Sorry about that extended break everyone, just building the tension! Let’s get right back to this shall we? Next up we have an enigmatic duo, please welcome Yaoyorozu Momo and Tokoyami Fumikage both from heroics class one A!” he watched as the two stepped out into the ring, if either of them had a drop of doubt then they didn’t show it.

“Begin!”
An arm fell from Tokoyami’s back in a dark slither and hurled itself at Momo as the rest of the miasmic raven followed behind it. A slim shield took the first hit as it popped in a static filled squelch out of Momo’s arm, driving her back two feet on her heel. A second arm swung around as the beast tore the ground between the two like it was made of nothing harder than sand.

_Tchink!_ the shield went wide as it was hurled from her arms and she barely managed to materialise another one to take a third brutal hit. This one was larger but only served to more easily provide a bumper for the shadow to crash into, it hit and hit again as an exhausted look of panic and fever struck her face in a way that he hadn’t seen before. It was ghastly, like she’d inherited the discomfort of someone who’d never seen a battle in their life, let alone heeded a scratch on the cheek.

“What are you doing Momo…” Jirou said under her breath as inch by inch Momo slid backward.

The shadow swept up off the ground as its talons let go of the metallic barrier between it and its target. It swam high into the air before it reversed and began to dive like some kind of a phoenix toward Momo once more. Three steps she took as she reared herself against the oncoming force, only managing a flimsy grip on the tall iron barricade she had flourished from her own body.

The shield shattered as the shadow ploughed into and through, severing the metal and rendering it virtually useless. Momo’s legs snagged dust with them as she flew backward and barely caught herself from falling over, she looked bewildered as she waved her hand before a slice of metal bar slid down into her palm.

“Yaoyorozu Momo has lost, Tokoyami shall move onto the next round by way of pushing his opponent out of bounds!” Midnight said before Momo could as much as move with her newfound weapon in hand. The bar fell as if she had lost the strength to wield it, before she turned to leave with an expression carved by deep lines. Her opponent hadn’t even moved an inch.

“Damn,” Kaminari said. “That was almost unfair.”

“What a fierce quirk, he didn’t give her so much as a chance to breathe,” Iida said.

“It’s so good at offence and defence, Tokoyami is definitely one of the strongest in our class,” Midoriya said. He was tirelessly noting it down, on a page that had an unflattering picture of Tokoyami on it.

Jirou nudged him in the side, “Did something seem off to you about that?”

“Well, she didn’t catch me as the type to lose her nerve if that’s what you mean,” he answered. He didn’t need Midoriya’s write up to know Tokoyami was nothing less than a maddening foe, although considering the repertoire Momo bared, she should have been able to do much more.

She got up, and walked two steps out of the isle, “I’m gonna check it out, I’ll be back in a bit,” she said before turning away.

He followed her with his eyes as she left. It was an unexpected response but not unfounded, half the time when she talked to him it’d be about others in class. As much as Jirou hated to admit it he knew she cared far more about what was going on with everyone than she let on, perhaps almost rivalling the amount that Tsuyu did despite her being far more blunt about it.

“Here they come, your final two competitor’s for the first stage of the tournament, Bakugou Katsuki and his opponent, the girl I know I’ll be rooting for, Uraraka Ochako!”

“There she is,” Iida pointed to the right tunnel as Uraraka walked out of it.
“…And there’s Kacchan,” Midoriya said with a gulp. The match hadn’t even started and he was on the edge of his seat already.

He watched the two competitors walk onto the arena. It wasn’t tension that rocked the stage but intimidation, like someone might experience if they were fighting the equivalent of a lion with nothing but a set of toothpicks. He remembered the sickly looking burns he had received at those hands once and he had relived them too many times, there was nothing he could now however but hope that Uraraka had overcome her own apprehension.

“Begin.”

Uraraka threw herself forward, with desperation of a quick victory dogging at her heel as she jumped straight into the mouth of the beast. It was in no more than a grasp of the moment that he had to contemplate the move that it was covered in a fiery cone as the floor was caught in an explosion of brimstone.

Bakugou punched down into the smoke he’d created, seizing his view on something blue dodging between it. His hand met stone as he pinned a jersey down, Uraraka’s jersey, and he flinched as he saw his mistake. The girl was already behind him, within grasping distance.

*Boom,* she flew backward in clouded ash.

“What the hell are with that guy’s reflexes…” Kaminari said.

“Yeah, it’s almost inhuman,” Sero agreed.

Uraraka renewed her charge but another turbulent wave tossed her aside almost immediately, three more hit her back with every attempt she made to get up covering the arena in a dense choking fog that one could only see bits of the girl in between. It was with a broken stumble that she made it out of the soot maze, covered in a thick layer of it from head to toe as she swiped her hand across her bloodied chin.

“I’m still standin’. You hear me?! Give me all you got!” she roared the words.

He almost couldn’t believe it. She hadn’t made a dent in her opponent, there wasn’t a fleck on Bakugou whatsoever yet she was standing her ground beaten down as she was. It was unthinkable how she was staying composed in spite of it.

An explosion left Bakugou’s hand and ricocheted through the air as the glycerine flung forward and ignited in a fiery interconnection of deadly cherry bombs, she dodged and it glanced to the right allowing her a few steps, only to have another catch her on the left arm and a third that reset her progress back to nil. Chunks and bits of stone fell where she did before disappearing within the haze surrounding her.

“I can’t say I disagree with the audience…” Present Mic coughed. Riley looked up and around to see what he meant, the crowd had begun booing. Slowly and surely it picked up and turned into a cascade of foul mouths at the rough treatment Bakugou was giving his opponent. It threatened the momentum of the match as the two fighters split.

*Bzzt,* the microphone buzzed like someone had yanked it, “Shut your mouths you imbeciles, if you think he’s toying with her you might as well stop watching right now,” he easily recognised the voice as Aizawa’s, he’d heard bits of it in and out throughout every other match and the distaste in it made it even more obviously so.
“This isn’t a fight between two people who demean each other, Bakugou recognises Uraraka as a threat; an equal and is on guard as a result. This is a fight where both of them are doing everything in their power in order to win. If you can’t see that and still call yourself a pro, then do us all a favour and find a new career you fool,” the crowd bustled as the microphone cut, and then settled in a display of reproach of their own depravity.

The epic of the disarm might have swayed him briefly, if it wasn’t interrupted by a deafening sound of a Bang, as it rolled across concrete and marked it like a scorched canvas. Uraraka had dodged this one and she was close, close enough for the smoke above their heads to clear and the rumbling of fireworks to stop as everyone saw it.

There were hundreds upon hundreds of concrete shards that hung above like a net above Bakugou, each was a knife that carried the promise of a victory that now sat closer than ever. A shudder of precarious anticipation fell across the arena as the weapons quivered and then fell in one distinctive shing. The sound split into millions as each shard felt the full weight of gravity begin to pull them once again hurtling toward the earth.

It was a clever plan, one dangerous enough that it might have worked too, that was if she was facing anyone else. A spark like the ignition like that of a firelighter left Bakugou’s fingers.

Ka-boom!

The ploy revealed scattered into pieces as the fire collapsed on it and swallowed it whole, debris and rubble was all that rained back down, not an arsenal prepared. The heat of the flame shook and swept up the walls of the arena and threw everything back. It was nothing short of a raw display of power.

Uraraka’s leg caught as she scraped along the concrete sending her hurtling into a heaped pile wherein she then collapsed. She pounded her fist down and pulled herself to her feet, she gained no more than a few finger tips before her legs gave out again. Her stratagem had been crushed although hardly forgotten.

It was silent for all too long as the last remaining pebbles fell and then Midnight stepped and stooped down beside Uraraka, there was only the slightest hint of a flinch before the woman shook her head, “Uraraka is unable to move, Bakugou advances to the next round.”

All he was left with was empathy and he felt dirty for it. It had been too much to watch, to try so hard only to fail at the second where it mattered most. He understood now why she had done what she’d done in the obstacle race, it wasn’t Jirou who had told her either.

Empathy gave and respect filled its place.

[Yuuei’s Sports Stadium – Spectator Stands – 1:22 PM]

Riley moved over as Jirou sat down and Momo squeezed in beside her. The girl looked, well, fine if he was being honest, though it really was hard to tell since she held herself with too much dignity for anything to stand out within her monotonic expression. He was still reeling too hard in what he had just watched to try anyhow.

“Damn Bakugou,” Kaminari said as Bakugou walked with tight step back to the exact chair he’d been in earlier, “you didn’t need to be so heartless while blasting down a fragile girl.”

“Shut the hell up,” he answered. His look was still the same as when his match had ended, like he
was sick to his stomach. “When you look at that girl, tell me where the hell you see ‘Fragile’.”

He was right about that, Uraraka was anything but delicate, she’d proven as much. There was no way the crowd hadn’t taken note of it.

“Indeed, I have rarely seen such tenacity,” Iida said. He seemed unperturbed about his friend’s loss, though he could have just as easily mistaken the look with relief.

“Did Kirishima go again yet?” Jirou asked.

He shook his head, “They’re about to start,” he answered before leaning over the edge. Cementoss had just about finished setting up what appeared to be a concrete table.

“Let’s welcome them back, Kirishima Eijirou and Tetsutetsu Tetsutetsu, for a tie breaker round. The winner shall move onto our spectacular quarter-final.” the crowd was already riled up as the two reconvened at the small construction. It must have been something they’d been waiting for, or the previous match had just elevated the crowd tenfold.

“He won’t lose,” he said aloud to no one. They had never talked about it, Kirishima and him, that night of the rescue. It was an odd detail to think about now.

Kirishima and Tetsutetsu clasped their hands together firmly in indication of the arm wrestling, upon which Midnight rested her hands to signal exactly when they were to start.

“Begin!” Present Mic said and she released their hands.

Rock swelled over fingers and arm and head as steel did the same. Then came strain as muscles tensed in one great opposing push. The sweat was almost instant as it pried itself between miniscule chinks in their armour and amplified their resolve. It was a stalemate once more, an unrelenting and quiet one but they were done mincing words.

Inch by inch Tetsutetsu began to push Kirishima’s hand down over the course of several minutes. Each bit was an eternity hard fought enough that it looked like their arms might just snap at the bone rather than come to a conclusion. It was when his friends hand was almost bowed that he knew they’d reached the ninth inning, it was either he made one last push or that’d be that.

Come on, he had his teeth gritted.

Kirishima gave a glint sideways at them. It hadn’t even lasted the time it should have taken to register it. His grip tightened on both the pedestal and the metallic hand, the flesh on his own was cracked and red. The expression on his face had turned crooked and serious as he pushed back, or maybe even pulled at this point.

It happened in one swoop, one thin strip of the iron as it ran along the wrist and split it. Smash, the hand went as Kirishima piled it into the platform hard enough to crack the thing in two and leaving his opposite on the floor beside it as he fell from exhaustion.

“What a tense tiebreaker, however it looks like it’ll be Kirishima Eijirou moving into the quarter-finals today, better luck next time one B!”

Kirishima leant out of the pedestal and panted before raising one fist triumphantly in the air to greet the cheers. Then he turned to the downed student and offered him a hand, which his new steel companion took gracefully.

“You gonna be alright?” Jirou asked, maybe he’d gone pale.
He exhaled his uncertainty, “Yeah,” he nodded.

“You can always bow out you know.”

“I won’t,” he rubbed his neck as it pricked. Kirishima would never forgive him if he did, he hadn’t even considered it. They hadn’t fought once since then, it was something he knew he had to do.

“With that settled let’s move onto the quarter-finals immediately with our crowd favourites; Todoroki Shouto and Midoriya Izuku.”

“Already?” Iida said.

Kaminari yawned, “About time, I was about to fall asleep after we watched Kirishima arm wrestle for fucking years.”

Considering what he knew he couldn’t say he hadn’t been anticipating the match with a reserved eagerness. Todoroki hadn’t even been back since he’d fought Sero and his face was still curled in a scowl. Midoriya’s expression was painfully similar to his opponents but maybe that was for different reasons, or that he had from the beginning hoped for this very scenario, their confrontation in the waiting room was enough to justify that reasoning. Whatever it was, it hung between them like a weighted curtain.

“Start!”

The truce broke with the crackle of ice that led into a violent surge. It frothed as it washed over the arena toward Midoriya who didn’t even so much as move an inch. At the last possible second he reared back and with a flick came a deafening smash. His finger broke as the splice of storm cut the stream in half, but he still hadn’t moved, the wind whipped cold tendrils back in Todoroki’s face.

“What will the icy prince do now? Midoriya smashed his ice in one fell swoop!” it had been precise and sacrificial. Midoriya had lost a finger but he had faced down the attack. A move like that, he knew, took a certain amount of bravery to pull off.

Todoroki wasn’t so easily fazed, a second cascade followed the first and hurtled like an array of icy spears, a palisade that came at an angle this time rather than upfront. It shattered like the first and another finger lay discarded. It had been a pebble in the water, repetition by chance that allowed the temperature to fall slowly once more.

“Shit, shit I’m already missing it,” Kirishima said as he almost fell down the steps. He was panting like he’d run, “What the hell happened? Midoriya’s already lookin’ half out of the battle,” he said as he sat down.

“He did that to himself,” he shook his head.

“I guess Todoroki is just that strong… must be nice being able to use attacks that blow up the entire arena, huh Bakugou?”

“It’s not as easy as you think you idiot,” Bakugou answered. His eyes hadn’t yet left the field. “Quirks are like anything else. If you tear a muscle you can’t use it, if you overuse your quirk…”

He knew what he meant, in his own case even if he could relieve the tremor there was only so much that could help. It was an imbalance at best, but hardly a gauge of his energy. Even now he hadn’t recovered much, not even half the amount he would need to repeat that show from the obstacle race. He knew he had wasted too much there, even if it had paid off.
Smash, a third finger. Then a fourth went as well with a disgusting crunch. Ice was chunking up Todoroki’s body now, it was a tell of overuse. However no amount of ice could compare to the reddened glob that hung at Midoriya’s side now.

Todoroki swept his foot back before raising it and stomping down, as he did he ran forward with it and the icy path expanded below him raising him up. It jittered and came out in hexagons that left Midoriya nothing in option but to jump backward in fear of being encased. As he did his foot was caught and a smash followed as the wind howled.

Ice shattered and Todoroki caught his stance as he fell from his bridge, Midoriya had lost his arm in exchange for his legs escape and now both his limbs hung uselessly from him like the spindly arms of a doll. There were deep wrinkles of frustration on his face, and then he said something that he couldn’t hear but sharpened Todoroki’s eyes. Midoriya looked drowsy as he swung his arms up and one of them lay covered in a layer of white. It was probably too cold to even move much at all.

Another procession dripped from Todoroki’s fingers. It leapt and touched the floor before turning into a tide, a wave of damnable freeze that this time aimed to maim whatever it touched through the sharpened edge of hundreds of small shards.

Smash, the ice cleared and parted on either side of Midoriya. He’d used his already crippled hand to tear it asunder.

He’s tearing himself apart, he thought with disgust but he could see the obsession in Midoriya’s eyes, the ideal of victory keeping him standing even as limbs clenched and tugged in defiance of their fate with lacerations lining them like a gory mural.

“You think,” Midoriya shouted between laboured breaths, “you think you can win using only half your power? You haven’t… you haven’t even put a-a single scratch on me yet…” his arms tensed, “So get over here and fight me!” he howled the challenge even as his body shook on the verge of collapse.

Fumes of ice and wind bubbled as Todoroki ran with an icy scythe following him closely through the floor, as he reached he swung it upwards bringing the sharp edge of the ice up like he was going to chop Midoriya in half. He ducked to the side and it went wide, a broken fist careered into Todoroki’s gut and sent him flying into a crumpled mess at the edge of the arena where he struggled to pick himself up.

“Why the hell would you go this far?! Answer me,” Todoroki wiped away the blood he’d coughed up.

Midoriya took a few steps, each more hurtful than the last, “I want to live up to expectations…! I want to become a hero people can rely on! That’s why don’t you see?” Ice dripped down his arm as bits of it cracked, “I can’t even begin to understand your resolution Todoroki, but even then. The idea that you’ll become number one without giving it everything you have…” he gave him a scornful look from behind his shattered fist. “It’s a fucking joke!”

Smash, Todoroki went wide again, this time he barely kept himself from being blown out of the ring. He stumbled as he got to his feet with ice almost covering his entire body.

“Can’t you see?! It’s your own power, no one else’s. It’s yours!” Midoriya said.

That instant something changed. It changed as Todoroki swayed on his feet and his expression wasn’t anger, nor anguish but realisation of something. The arena ignited in a conflagration that consumed Todoroki and the collection of glacial structures melted under its intensity. It burnt enough
to turn the cold air to a heated furnace; an amalgamation that resided within the centre of a harsh sea made from icy chunks. The heat settled as a cloak that emanated from half his body.

It would be the final attack now. It was clear from the one thing they had never read from Todoroki’s face, a single smile that looked warm rather than dead. The pacified inferno invigorated itself as he began to move forward one step at a time and then began to run. Midoriya’s body answered in kind as he flung his whole body in the attack. Walls came up but it was far too late, a typhoon met a hellfire that no amount of cement in the world could stop.

Fww-BOOM.

The wind hit first, pushing him back into his seat. The nova came second as it razed the walls away and twisted out of the stadiums ceiling in a display of megalomania. It ate at itself and gutted and combined and then fell apart. As the smoke cleared there was one left standing in the centre of the smoke. Midoriya slumped against a wall from which he fell into the grass.

“Todoroki Shouto… advances to the finals! Just what have you been teaching these kids Eraserhead?! That was crazy!” Aizawa did not so much as answer even a hint.

It felt like eons before he could breathe again, he hadn’t even realised how still the air had become.

“That was freaking insane!” Kirishima said before turning to him, “I don’t think we can top that but I’m sure as hell gonna try!”

He nodded absent-mindedly. He was far too busy watching the competitors leave the arena, one in a stretcher. Uraraka’s match had been bizarre but this had been catastrophic. He was sure something must have happened between the two that they didn’t know about, what Midoriya had said… it was too strange to not have some context. He dared a look up where he knew Endeavor was watching and then he knew his answer. The bastard was grinning, almost laughing at his son. It made his blood boil and the twinge in his neck returned, he felt for it but there was nothing there. It stuck this time, maddeningly.

“Iida and Ashido up next,” Sero said, “guess that’ll be interesting enough. Maybe Ashido will actually get a challenge this time.”

“Hey not you too bastard,” Kaminari hooked him in the gut. “I was just going easy on her cos she’s a girl!”

Kirishima laughed, “Bullshiiiiiiit, she kicked your ass three ways to Sunday.”

“You okay?” he hadn’t even noticed Jirou staring at him.

“Yes,” he shook his head but the feeling didn’t fade. He felt dizzy like he was dehydrated or something, “I need to think,” he said as he steadied himself on each of the aisles chairs. It wasn’t hunger. He’d eaten more than enough today but maybe he should have drunk more. His brain felt like it was being hit by a mallet, like something was tearing its way out from the inside.

He leant on the cracked basin as he lifted the water three, four, five times to his face in succession. Each did only a minor bit to soothe the disorientation clawing at his mind but eventually it did calm it. He hadn’t made it to the waiting room like he’d planned but it didn’t matter now, he felt better despite his neck still acting like it had been spliced at the base.

The trembling in his hand stopped. It was almost scary how much of a symptom it was, he’d barely
been capable of shoveling liquid from the faucet with the degree to which it had shaken. It felt like only a short time had passed, he’d seen bits of Iida and Ashido’s fight on disparate monitors how he hadn’t been able to so much as comprehend it. He let go of the basin and brought water back up once more. There wasn’t much more time, he needed to come up with a strategy against Kirishima.

_Thonk_, the bathroom door went behind him as someone else entered.

“...And here I thought I’d have to catch you right as you went in the ring,” he could tell without a look it was Kuroiro, his spiteful voice was one he couldn’t forget.

“What the hell do you want?” he turned on his heel.

“Well first I reckon I’m going to give you something to think about,” he cracked his knuckles, “and then I’m going to make sure you never reach your little match.”

His heart stilled, “I don’t know why you’re so determined to pick a fight with me,” it was beginning to get ridiculous, “I told you more than once what happened was a complete accident, I wasn’t myself…”

“And I told you I don’t give a shit what your excuse is. People like you need to get what’s coming to them, it’s the only way you’ll learn some humility, that you can’t do anything you want and get away with it just because you had a laughable run in with some villains,” Kuroiro walked closer. “Judging from your skirmish earlier I doubt you can put up much of a fight and your idiotic classmates aren’t here to protect you now.”

“Fine then, do whatever you came here to do if you think that’s what I deserve, i’m sick of trying to appease you,” he’d had enough, his guilt over it all was gone and if this was what he wanted he wasn’t going to fight back. There was no reasoning with his type, he knew that well enough.

_Hmph_, Kuroiro grunted as he punched him straight in the gut, it was enough to make him fall backward into the wall and barely miss clipping his head on the porcelain bowl.

He spat, “Feel better yet?” it hadn’t been a strong punch but anger still tinged him in response.

“Not yet,” he pulled back his hand again.

_Thonk_, the door went again and Kuroiro’s hand stopped.

“I guess this is what heroics classes have to resort to, is it?” a harsh voice said, causing Kuroiro to turn.

“I know your tri-“ Kuroiro stalled midway through his sentence.

“That’s what they all think, now leave the stadium and go for a little ten kilometre jog you lapdog,” Shinsou said. Kuroiro’s hand fell and he made his way to the door like it was now his only desire.

“Thanks,” he said before he bit his tongue. He didn’t need anyone messing with his head right now.

“Thanks,” he said before he bit his tongue. He didn’t need anyone messing with his head right now.

“Whatever. Finding you took far too much effort so just listen to what I have to say, or don’t, I don’t really care,” he shook his head. “Has anyone else recently used a control quirk on you?”

“What? No,” he let slip before he could stop himself.

“I plan on staying the fuck out of your head for a good long time to come. There just aren’t many people like you and if there’s one thing I hate it’s those with a similar quirk to myself,” he turned
away, “Whatever it was it looks like it’s long gone,” he shook his head before leaving.

He wasn’t sure what to think as he grabbed for the basin to pull himself up. His stomach pulsed slightly from the impact he’d received but it wasn’t much, the guy had probably wanted to draw it out. He turned the tap back on, what the hell had Shinsou meant by what he said? The gist of it was obvious enough but-

**Bzzt,** "Would contestants Kirishima Eijirou and Torenagi Riley make their way to the stadium for the third round of the quarter finals?"

He cursed himself, he was out of time.

Riley trudged heavily as he entered the ring and faced Kirishima. It was something more dust filled now and somehow denser then when he had done the same with Aoyama, perhaps a side effect of the colossal explosion that had happened two rounds ago. Whatever the cause it leant the arena an undeniable heat that gave him a lethargy that he simply couldn’t shake.

Thought about strategy had resulted in almost nothing. A few ideas, a few glimpses at what he could do had been all he could grasp with what had happened prior but he knew it all came down to speed and if any of his friends punches connected it would be over just like that. He had maybe one good attack in him, he had to make it count.

“Riley,” Kirishima said as they waited for the signal, “Come at me with all you got,” it was simple and earnest but beyond it was something more that he didn’t say. Something he had to prove to himself.

He nodded, it was enough to sever any remaining apprehension he had, “I won’t hold back,” he answered. Despite having only shreds in his mind he would use all of what was left to him, all that mattered was here and now and all that other crap could wait. He let himself fall back down an inch, which his hands poised in his stance, his whole body ached.

“Start.”

He stepped back twice and the fist swung past his face, he knew Kirishima always took one foot forward to give his punch extra power when he was serious. The follow up came from his left, Kirishima’s other hand, it was fast but his training was enough to let him duck in time despite allowing a small slice to graze his skin.

Three, four, five he counted his steps as he dodged backward, he was already concentrating on a specific point.

“Take your beating like a man!” Kirishima grinned wide as he threw another fist, six, he swerved.

They were almost at the edge of the ring now, exactly where he needed him to be, there was no way to overpower him through pure strength alone. Not with his level of energy. Seven, eight, nine, his foot met the second to last tile and his hand began shaking. The jabs were getting too fast now. He would need to take one to make it work.

It shook his bones as the right hook collided with his arm, sending a jitter throughout his body as the blunt pain of it snuck itself into every available muscle and crevice. He gritted his teeth against it as he took a step forward toward his opponent and hooked a foot behind the one he had led with. It was the only vulnerability he had spotted in the thick omnilateral stone that covered him. He swept his leg back as he reached for the neck and shoved his weight down into the grip.
Kirishima fell but there wasn’t surprise on his face, and as the compression went off he knew he had made a mistake defined by the single loud *sklit*. His friend hit the floor as the ground cracked beneath him and ploughed him into the concrete in one massive pull, nothing short of what a steamroller might apply. Yet the armour did nothing more than scratch and crack just a tiny bit.

“I knew you were up to something, you can’t fool me that easily,” Kirishima said as he pulled himself back up. The cracks had already repaired themselves and his plan became recognisable. He had waited for the exact moment of the hit and thickened his carapace at the point of impact.

He took a few steps back as Kirishima advanced on him, “That stung a little bit but you must be pretty worn out now,” he said with a laugh. He knew he’d been a fool to think he could penetrate the quirk with such ease, a dire miscalculation, a result of the time he hadn’t had and the energy he’d squandered.

A jab caused his world to spin as it caught his jaw before another swiped across his chest and tore the fabric. He felt dizzy as the pain of each blow caught him and sent him falling back just slightly further toward his defeat. He could feel his breath squeeze out of his own body and the tremor shaking him as he tried to apply his quirk which instead didn’t come. There no resource left in his body and his opponent was virtually unharmed. He fell as Kirishima punch turned into a shove and left him on one knee, his muscles were burning in clumsy conformity.

You can’t win, the words flooded into the back of his mind, he almost wanted to vomit with how hard it ached his skull and rammed itself with needle like precision across his body, You aren’t worthy of it. He held head as it came and went in a crackling derision. It was mesmerising and crawled around in his head with sickly enticement.

Bleugh, he almost threw up as Kirishima put a rocky fist against his side hard enough to throw him back a few more feet. There wasn’t anything except pain and anger at himself left. He was too weak to show his friend his resolve, too sedated. He pulled himself to his feet and waited as Kirishima arched his arm back, at least it would be over soon.

I will show you how weak you are, Riley, a gleeful chuckle followed it.

His body seized like it wanted to contort but didn’t budge. Then an iron grip curled around his neck, it tore his head up and all he could behold of the situation burned itself fiercely into his retinas. Animosity spiked and amplified as focus spurred and all manner of pain and violation that had come from the pounding and stinging in his head disappeared. It was replaced with an unmitigated hatred and a dire awareness that set to innervate his nerves before overriding every inch of resignation he’d felt only moments before, he no longer wanted to lose or win.

He only wanted one thing.

The hand buried itself deep in his stomach as it hit him but it left no hesitation. He caught it and grabbed it and set it into a hold like a vice, the sharp rock sliced his palms but it didn’t matter. His arm twitched and brutally quivered as the tremor shuttered like the fierce shaking of a jackhammer. Heavier and heavier Kirishima’s arm became as he held it, so many more times heavier than any arm should have been.

“Such. Precious. Armour,” he recognised his own voice as it spoke but the words didn’t belong to him, his eyes didn’t belong as he looked at Kirishima. He let go and his opponent fell and cracked the floor under the new weight of his own body.

He gripped Kirishima’s face in one forceful blow of his palm and all his tremor fell out of him as it absorbed into his friend like a sponge. Then he lunged as if he was a ferocious beast and his vision
swam red with entropy. All he wanted, all he wanted was to kill him. It was his only desire. There was no sanity left to him to contemplate otherwise.

*Smack,* his skin pricked with pain as it turned red against the hard rock, *crack,* the armour broke and wiped the remaining feeling from his hand, replacing it with furor. *Crunch,* he felt his own rib break as Kirishima hit him back and brought with him an insatiable joy.

Every punch delivered began to be traded for a response and every inch of his breath hurt his lungs before being washed away by adrenaline. The carnage fuelled him to hit harder and faster, every bit of it was savage, brutal and honest. He couldn’t get enough, he wanted more, the rushing of his blood as it travelled to try and circulate his body, the ebb and flow of his mind as it took in each moment. It was relentless and infectious; a vat of primal emotion.

Then as resistance left the body below him the fury in his knuckle subsided, a thousand searing knives took its place throughout as his senses tried to play catch up. He could see the flesh of his hand peeling away and there were flashes of the ivory of the bone beneath it. Kirishima was still pinned below him but his shell had long since cracked as exhaustion had flooded, how long had they been fighting? All he could hear was both of their ragged breaths and nothing else.

He felt malice again as it bore into his mind, *Now is your chance to end it,* every word stung in its implication and vehemently fought it’s hold. *End it you coward!* it wasn’t what he wanted and he could feel his body quivering as it fought him.

*Kill him,* it was a command not a request, *If you won’t, then I will,* he felt dull again as it reasserted itself over every fibre of his being, as it took his thought. His fist came down before he knew it.

*Crack,* he fell back as it struck concrete and easily shattered it. His mind was racing, what had he been doing? Thinking? He kicked back as he crawled off his friend and his body no longer resisted him. It had all been what he wanted but there was no way he could have wanted it.

Self-disgust rode wild as spasms jerked his body and breathing settled as a shiver. Light-headedness caused splotches of white over his vision as he realised he was losing blood. It trickled out through his fingers from his stomach through deep cuts.

“Kirishima is unable to move…” he heard and then his mind sat blank with vacancy.

Riley jerked from his repose and instinctively clutched the metal bars surrounding him. He let them go as he realised he was in a medical ward, one probably connected to the stadium. His outfit was torn in several places with crimson splattered on it however no injury remained. He’d probably been visited by Recovery Girl.

“You finally awake?” Kirishima said, catching him in his fluster. The guy was right next to him in another hospital bed.

He shook his head, there was no sting, “Kirishima, I’m sor-”

“That was freakin’ awesome!” his friend punched a fist into the air. It left him utterly confused. “I thought I had you at the end there when I broke your ribs but damn man you can take way more than I gave you credit for.”

“What do you…” then he remembered it all, the anger, the loathing and the desire to kill. It must have been splayed across his face during the match but somehow Kirishima hadn’t realised it wasn’t him. That *thing* was not him but it was still on his mind, in his mind. It was the same as when he had attacked Kaminari and Kuroiro. He still felt it in his bones as an unnatural fever, a derived energy
that shouldn’t have been there. It was horrifying and accompanied by sickness. He needed to call the match off, something was wrong with him, something was very, very wrong. He had to…

“Not everyone gets to have a manly brawl like that, let alone two in a row. I'll definitely win next year,” Kirishima had a coy grin. “Just sucks that I won’t get to fight Bakugou, but hey at least seeing you two scrap it out should be almost as good.”

_Ba-ku-gou_, the name split his mind with realisation, “How long was I out?”

“Couldn’t have been more than an hour, I think Iida and Todoroki are going at it right now, you should be up in like twenty minutes maybe.”

“I need to go,” he said as he dropped off the bed, he had to find Midnight, or Recovery Girl or anyone. He could try to explain it later, exactly what Shinsou had made him aware of. He had to stop his match with Bakugou under any circumstance, even thinking the name made his mind flood with anger, whatever it was it wanted it to happen.

“Um, okay dude. Good luck!” he heard Kirishima shout behind him as he smacked the door that led into the hall open and took the entrance to a flight of stairs that headed in the direction of the announcer’s booth. His neck was stinging him like a taser now, like it was trying to stop him from acting against it. Any hopes of it having been a hallucination, some kind of sick mirage were far out of his mind now.

The stadium was arranged in a way where he’d have to go all around the bottom floor to make it where he needed to go. It only took till the third staircase to leave his head crashing from the pain and and his body struggling against a wall. His movement felt slow, too slow. He would never reach Aizawa in time like this.

He punched the wall hard and drew the focus to it with pain, it numbed his head only slightly enough for him to start walking again. Yet as he looked around he didn’t see the same place he’d been in, walls were cracked and the little light there had been was drained, holes had carved themselves from pockets and alcoves dug deeply into the concrete as if it were now clay. It dripped with water all over in small rivers in ways it shouldn’t have, it coalesced into streams where it met the floor and ran despite the lack of elevation before disappearing into invisible crevices.

It was intravenous and unnatural and it looked so endless, he could hear the drip and splash of water that shouldn’t have been possible. It was getting worse in every second as it twisted. He wanted out and he needed help, he wasn’t afraid to admit that now. All of his muscles felt dazed and forced him to slump to the floor. He reached for his phone only to find it wasn’t there, had he left it in the waiting room? He didn’t remember.

He breathed and the tunnel twisted further, it was almost too dark to see and the ground held more puddles of murky black water than not. As he managed to take a step one of the many allowed him to catch his own reflection in it and what he saw spun him with fear. A face not unlike his own but with features so corrupt he could barely recognise it looked back. It was ambivalent, placid in its demeanour but a calamity in its structure.

It’s smile cracked and thin steel wires lay bound taunt between each lip, it threw him off balance as he tried to flee its nightmarish visage. The concrete tapped him hard in the back of the head with a _thunk_ and his vision blurred. It had lasted less than a tenth of a second but there was no way, he had seen so much of it, there was no way it was real. It was all too much.

Darkness caved on him as he heard the sound of as buzzer but he didn’t want to open his eyes, “Torenagi Riley make your way to the main stadium immediately or face disqualification!” the
call sounded so abnormally submerged.

“They’re waiting for you, shouldn’t you go? Here, You don’t want to be late,” the voice was almost like a whisper. He huddled against his knees in response, tighter to the wall.

“So pathetic,” it perforated throughout the malformed tunnel, “so fucking weak!”

He dared a look up and around but saw nothing. “Who the hell are you?! Get out here,” he shouted down the tunnel. It couldn’t have the man who first came to his mind. There wasn’t a way it could be, the voice sounded too young, too informal, despite its malevolence rivalling it.

“They should really have let you rot. All of this would have been so easy and I could have had my fun, now I’m just here to finish what I started,” the air dripped and beat its way about the words as they became hoarse. It sounded so close to him now.

“Fuck off,” was all he managed to say, the oxygen in the air was encumbered by water and made the atmosphere oppressive.

The last thing he heard was laughter as everything blurred in a bright mess. It was nothing he could take.

“...versus Bakugou Katsuki!”

He heard the words but he had no idea how he’d ended up in the middle of the arena. Every moment felt like it was being shown to him as a photograph, each hung still before fading into the next. The sedated effect ended and the lapse caught up as his perception of time realigned itself chronologically.

“I’m going to end you,” he snagged a glimpse, enough to know who was standing in front of him. He didn’t answer. It was like he was looking into the maws of a demon, one that was eager to tear him apart.

“Let the second round of the semi-final begin!”

He threw up his hands on instinct however they came with only half the commitment and a quarter of the strength. He wasn’t ready. There was no way he could have been. He’d had no time to think, the opportunity had been robbed from him. He could barely feel his arms let alone use them to defend properly.

Flames ripped through them and threw him back and he could feel his flesh sear as the blast burnt him. He couldn’t so much as stand before the next came, and the next and the next. Each explosive blast forced him further back, making him feel the pain just slightly more as if Bakugou was trying to make each hurt a margin greater than the last.
“Fight back you bastard. How the fuck did that spiky haired shit lose to someone so pathetic?”

A kick hit his ribs and sent a thimble of blood through his teeth. *Pathetic,* the same word sparked resentment laced with acceptance. He was right, only he was far more honest about it. He didn’t deserve to be here. He didn’t want to be here in the first place, something else wanted it.

“Use your damn quirk on me. You think I give a shit you coward?” Bakugou said as he spit down at him. *Am I a coward?* he wondered. Yes, he supposed so. It was clear enough now that what had been following him in the tunnel had never really existed. He’d just wanted to deny it.

He had no strength left to fight whatever it was that lurked. The events prior had taken care of that singlehandedly. His resistance ceased as he fell over an edge in his mind, like he’d missed a step on a stair. There was nothing left but emptiness for a second. A fear of what took hold settled. It was something he couldn’t fathom. Even the pain of the burns paled in comparison to the utter disgust it held for everything, that he now held for everything. Rage filled him as it converted from his defiance, it took him again and far more strongly in this time than its last. *You could never escape me,* it said. It was right, what a fool he’d been.

Then he perceived it all, the tensing of Bakugou’s muscles in his right arm, the swing of his favourite weapon. He caught the fist effortlessly, “It hurts, Bakugou. It. Hurts,” he said as the flames quenched in his hands. “Is this what you want? A good old fashioned slaughter?! I’ll give you just that, I’ll give you exactly what you want,” he felt his grip tighten and a grin etch itself across his face.

“Compress,” he felt it’s malice as he looked directly between Bakugou’s eyes. Then the fist collapsed in his hand, he watched the agony of the bones snapping spread across his face and he felt his own agony too as his hand was crushed alongside it. It should have made him want to scream, to kick, to cry out but instead all that it did was make him embrace it. The pain was sweet and made him feel alive, it was joy incarnate made physical and born from anger.

“What is this tact…” Present Mic’s voice had lost its enthusiasm.

He let his hand fall as it became useless, *This frail body, you’re so weak. You’re so weak! How could a weakling like you think himself better than anyone?! You need me, with me you’re nothing.*

“Don’t give me that look,” he tilted his neck as he watched Bakugou grasp his hand, “you were asking for it,” his neck gave a sharp distinct *click.* “I gave you everything you wanted, just like him, that red idiot.”

“Fuck you!” his opponent reared back his other hand and plunged it forward.

It only took a single movement, a single thought from the putrid hatred that filled him, that filled it, the air curled as he caught the explosion with his remaining hand and let only the tiniest shreds through his compression, he could hear it cackling in his head, it’s head, *Do you see now, what it means to be in control?*

He saw nothing, he only felt it all. A marionette on strings as it launched a blow to Bakugou’s sternum and caused the bones in his foot to fault under the intensity of it. Burns made his skin feel alight with ecstasy, explosions were useless against something that relished in pain and knew no mercy. There was no way to protest it, no way to even use his own mouth to yell at Midnight to stop him as the compression dripped from his hands and cracked the ground around his feet.

An advancement of his leg gave it a scald, another sprained the ankle yet didn’t sway it and a third even threatened to break it in several parts. Every attack as it hit his opponent was his, yet it wasn’t.
The hatred belonged to him but not at all. It was like he was a passenger in his own body, only briefly checking in at each station of its self-destruction. It was the strangest state of chaotic flux.

At a point his mind would tap and remind him, make him aware of what he was doing and then sink away again. It sounded so cruel, it was so cruel. It had him in his clutches, in utter depravity. It wasn’t right, he knew it wasn’t right. There was something he had forgotten, something he had wanted to prove, to show to someone somewhere, someone who was relying on him, looking up to him.

He could see past Bakugou into the crowds as he took each step and advanced with each swipe. In terms of it all he had checked out, it had filled him with utmost compliance. However there were faces there that peaked through the shattered glass of his mind, the window that so narrowly allowed him a glance. They were people he respected, cared for and owed something to. There were some he even admired. All of them were looking at him like he was some kind of monster.

It wasn’t meant to be this way. After all his training and big talk this was the best he could do? No, he had worked so hard. He’d put so much time in, dedicated himself so much to it. It wasn’t meant to be this way. He had so much to prove still, if he let it all go to waste like this. It wasn’t meant to be this way. He had witnessed so much, seen so much desperation.

Enlightenment was what came as he thought of it all, the entire day and all he had seen. It didn’t have to be this way. Then something beset him and gave a shudder to the boiling of his blood. It allowed him a sharp second of clarity, enough to wrench back his body for only a pause, *I’m finished being a puppet. Never again.*

The influence on his mind slackened as he came to a stop, and his opponent looked confused as heavy panting escaped him. It wouldn’t last long enough to say anything to him, he was sorry he couldn’t give the guy the fight he deserved. Maybe it was selfish but he had already begun to concentrate.

He placed a hand over his stomach and looked toward Midnight, this action would be his declaration, a testament to his change and a recommitment to his resolution. It wasn’t going to end this way. He wouldn’t allow it to end this way. He didn’t want to become a monster, that wasn’t what he’d promised his uncle, it wasn’t what he’d promised his sister. He dearly hoped she wasn’t watching, seeing him this way.

A tremor shook his arm and he smiled at the heroine, “Midnight, I forfeit. Thank you,” there wasn’t a way he could have foreseen the day turning out this way but he was glad in a weird twisted sense he didn’t fully understand. It wouldn’t prove anything to anyone except him but that was more than enough.

“Midnight, knock him out before-” he heard Aizawa’s voice spout through the receiver in her ear, even at this distance it was crystal clear. There wasn’t much point as he knew any kind of action she could take would be far too slow. That kind of time wasn’t left to him, not if he wanted to keep himself as himself.

“Compress,” as the words left his lips he watched the realisation spread across her face. Now, he was sure, he was the cruel one.

“Torenagi!” it was the last word that passed into his mind, the last sound that rang into his ears as she ripped the cloth from her shoulder in hopes of using her quirk, however his breath was already null.
The world had derived into a muted spectrum of washed out colour as he perceived it in all its stillness. The silence was peaceful. It was him sticking to his promise, even if it meant his own annihilation. He felt the quirk strengthen. He felt himself splatter blood across the concrete. He watched the world slant on its axis as a chill gripped itself around his heart. His rage was smothered and the monster along with it.

He hit the ground with a soft *thud*.

Chapter End Notes

*I do not own BNHA. OC material is my own.*
Phantasmagoria

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

[Location: ??? – TIME UNKNOWN]

Dying wasn’t as scary as Riley had imagined, it had mostly been him walking and sometimes not. Everything around him was an abyss of his own mind, a void cut off from ones peripherals but perfectly in touch with recollection. One by one every memory he’d ever had played out with more precision than he could have ever imagined.

It was one that always kept in him engrossed in particular though, it felt so vivid despite being a parody of another. He knew why that was as he walked through it. It was the memory of a nightmare. It would begin again and again with himself in a large field that he recognised for reasons he wasn’t willing to admit, he knew now that was what had shaken him in the cavalry battle. However that felt distant now, unimportant.

In it there was always grass beneath his feet and a circle of trees that came from his back and edged like a titular circus of gnarled branches and roots. It was a cold thing where moonlight would trickle in between interspersed partings of clouds onto the ground in front of him. There would always be one figure there and sometimes more, but this time it was three.

As he approached he could feel the shadow of the forest behind him thicken up with every step and follow him toward the centre. He knew that whatever he did he never wanted to be caught by it. It was hard to make any progress with his whole body shaking and sometimes it would cause him to trip. He remembered hating the quirk when he was little as it would always make him cry his eyes out with how harshly the tremor struck his arms. His mom had always been there when it had, she’d assure him it was only temporary and then it would leave him soon after like premonition. The memory made him smile. It wasn’t relevant now, not to this place, the place he’d kept dreaming of since he’d left it almost seven years ago.

He could see the three were a family as he made it within a few metres of them. It was always strange the way the girl would be looking away from him, averting her gaze like he was terrifying when she herself had no features on her face and her parents had none either when they existed. All they carried was blisters and cracks, little ornaments that you could only ever see at this distance. No one else would have them even if they were there, not that he would ever be able to recognise or put names to the faces that joined them, he’d only remember then when he woke up. They were the faces of those whom had shunned them, innumerable in amount and endless in contempt.

The end of it always began with a hand that the little girl reached out to him, like she was overcoming her fear. It was always a struggle to touch it but he couldn’t resist, sometimes it felt like it took almost days to do it, almost years. He would regret it every time he did manage to reach. The limb would always tangle and then collapse in on itself in a way that impossible and horrifying. Never once did the man who was her father stop her from doing it, not even as her body smouldered and left a stump where her arm should have been.

An inferno would take them soon after, take him soon after. Then he would be walking again with the occasional voice flooding in and out from a place he couldn’t think of. It was always quaint, like it wanted him to remember something that for the life of him he couldn’t remember.

__________________________________________________________________________________________

“…Damage?”
Riley found himself in a medicated stupor as he opened his eyes, only to figure the feeling hid a pain that instead manifested itself as a pulsating ache across his entire body. His lungs filled with air as his mind started back up. It was like he’d been submerged in unfathomably deep water and had finally resurfaced.

Thin haze still covered his vision but details painstakingly began to seep through, first was his own body draped in a loose blue hospital gown, then to his left arm as he saw it was tarnished by a thick cast that reached all the way from his upper arm down to his hand. He didn’t need to try to realise he couldn’t move his fingers inside or even the arm itself. His left foot looked much the same as it lay encased in a sling suspended from the ceiling. He made the connection that they were both broken. Bandages encumbered the rest of his body thinly but tightly, leaving only his face untouched and culminating most on his stomach. If someone had told him he had swallowed glass he would have believed them but he knew the reality was far worse.
A sharp beep divided his attention from his wounds, the machine it came from was monitoring his vitals and overhead an IV drip sat, liquid trailed down the tube and into his arm. His head felt tired, his body more so but that wasn’t enough to stop him from seeing her, Jirou, behind the medical accessories slumped in a chair at the edge of the room. There was exhaustion on her face even as she slept. It hurt him for a second, he’d burdened her again, one of his closest friends in this place. How long had he been unconscious this time?

The analog clock at the height of the room told him nothing except that it was three-forty nine in the afternoon, he assumed by the trickles of light that hit the floor between drapes. Maybe someone had found his phone, but he couldn’t see it as he scanned the nightstand. All he found were the worries of more people he had upset, as it was compiled in a mixture of different cards with alternating lavish and poor handwriting between them. It must have been more than just a couple of days.

He needed information but he didn’t want to wake Jirou just yet, instead he hit the service button on the remote that sat conveniently in a holster on his bed before closing his eyes for further drugged rest.

A thump pulled him back from lucidity once more, he’d almost fallen asleep in the short time it had taken for someone to answer it. It was a woman that had come, small and fierce and with a sharp pace that characterised itself in tandem with her cane. Recovery Girl walked until she made it to the side of his bed, then she lifted the instrument high above her head. He winced but the hit never came, instead all he heard was a sigh.

“Boy, you are a fool,” she said, “I should never have given you permission to participate in that tournament. It was far too much.”

His throat was still dry and numb with whatever they’d injected to him as he tried to answer, all that came out was a groan at first. Then with a little more effort the word came out as a small “Sorry,” it was all he could manage.

“Luck is the only reason you’re here, that your quirk stopped as soon as it did,” he knew that already. He knew exactly what his quirk was capable of when it came to that.

“How long?” he stuttered.

“Four days,” she shook her head, “I can assure you right now you won’t be leaving for another three.” She flicked her cane toward Jirou, who was still burnt out, “She’s been visiting every day since you were admitted and she wasn’t the only one. I’ll be back shortly, try not to move too much,” Recovery Girl left the room and slammed the door shut behind her loud enough to be only deliberate, as it awoke Jirou. Guilt swept over him, he needed to make it up to her.

She rubbed her eyes and then blinked, “Hey,” he managed to say, the stick of his treatment was getting less so by the minute.

“Torenagi, you’re-” the words that ended the sentence left her as she rushed to her feet and over at him with discontent on her face. She gave him a harsh punch in the chest as she made it. A few grunts of pain escaped him as a result even through the effect of protracted analgesic.

“I guess I deserve that,” he coughed. His throat almost felt back to normal.

She grabbed the bar of his bed causing it to rattle, “Why the hell would you do that? Do you know how worked up you got Kirishima, and Tsuyu and even Momo for fucks sake?!”

“I had to do it, it was the only choice I had,” he knew a simple sorry wouldn’t cut it this time. The
faces that had been burned into his mind as if it had only happened yesterday were promise enough of that.

“That's not good enough, not nearly damn good enough. Tell me what the hell is going on with you,” she shook her head.

He swallowed hard, he wasn’t sure if he could find the right words, “Whatever you saw out there, whatever you saw fighting Kirishima and Bakugou, it wasn’t me. Not what I could call me. I know you must think I sound crazy when I say that-”

“I do,” she grasped her head.

His finger twitched but he couldn’t make a fist, “It’s all the fault of that bastard, that same bastard villain, I’m sure of it. I can still feel it in my head. All it wants to do is to try again, to kill them both with my hands. It was like I couldn’t control my own body, just like before.”

“How can that even be possible? Kirishima stopped his quirk…”

“I wish I knew,” he had been told about it, he remembered, the little insect parasite she had watched their friend rip from his shoulder. “But I’m not gonna give whatever it is another chance,” he coughed once more.

“That’s not a solution. It sounds insane,” she turned away. He could see the anger in her hunched shoulders.

“I know, I’m just as confused about it as you are…” he was demanding too much of her, of everyone. It wasn’t right.

“I don’t really understand,” she shook her head and stopped fuming, “but after what I saw on that night, when I saw that villain and heard what he said, how he talked. That’s the only reason I can even think to believe you.”

“Don’t tell anyone, especially Kirishima. I don’t think he has any idea what happened to me out there.”

“He deserves to know,” she turned back.

“I know, of course I know that and I want to tell him but if I don’t know what it is then how the hell can I give him a sincere answer? You know how he is, it’ll eat him for weeks, he doesn’t deserve that,” not now, when he’d finally been given some semblance of closure.

“Then promise me if you feel it happening again you tell me, no matter what.”

“I will and not just you,” he wasn’t really sure if he could, she was strong but that thing, it was inhuman. He still felt so exhausted, but that shouldn’t even have been a surprise. “Don’t think I’m getting out of this bed anytime soon though,” he couldn’t even move his arm well enough to grab his now throbbing ribs.

“Considering what you did to yourself…” she trailed off.

_Thonk_, the door rolled back, Recovery Girl had rejoined them alongside a small trolley of medical supplies. She didn’t look as agitated before, had she overheard them talking? “Lie back,” she said.

It took almost an hour as burns on his skin were turned from tightly knit bundles into shades of mere discomfort by pecks. The pain only lessened itself slightly from the quirk and it left him enervated,
many more of his injuries still remained despite but that was all she had been able to do. Jirou did seem more at ease as she watched the process, even though it made him uncomfortable to have her see his cuts, the scars that Recovery Girl had to expose to treat him. It didn’t matter, what was done was done.

“I can’t be sure your wounds won’t reopen, so for your own good you must not try to leave this bed,” she said as she redressed his injuries.

“Don’t worry, if he so much as tries to leave it won’t be the wounds that kill him,” Jirou said in the most pleasantly terrifying way.

Recovery Girl gave a chuckle, “I’ll take your word on that,” she said before turning to the door, only to have it slide back in her face with a shick.

“Riley,” Kirishima said as his slack-jawed face burst through, accompanied by Kaminari and Momo as well as Iida, strangely enough.

“Kirishima?” he struggled to raise his hand more than a few inches toward his friend however most of his confusion was drawn to Jirou.

“I told him I’d let him know when you woke up,” she said, “didn’t expect him to bring three more though.”

“Man what the hell happened? That fight was fucking gnarly dude,” Kirishima said as he came up beside. He would have considered telling him then and there, had he not been surrounded.

It was difficult to think of an explanation on the spot, but he recalled what he had said before, “My quirk backfired on me, it was a miscalculation on my part. I didn’t realise how much I’d been exerting myself during our fight,” it was plausible enough, after all what kind of mad man would crush his own hand? It was ironic that he knew the answer. “Sorry,” he said almost as an afterthought.

“It goes without saying you should be more careful, the way the match ended,” Iida paused, “The injuries you sustained could have easily been fatal,” he looked like he hadn’t slept, like he was on edge or bewildered. His uniform was dishevelled, not pristine like he normally kept it. His demeanour struck him as far more serious and rigid then usual somehow, perhaps he felt responsible.

“You and Midoriya could both learn something from pushing yourselves too hard, I don’t know how you do it,” Momo averted her gaze.

“I know, I should have forfeited sooner,” he said. He would if he could have.

“You shoulda seen Bakugou after you did though, dude went completely fucking ballistic,” Kaminari said. “I’ve never seen anything like it, especially after he took out Todoroki like it was nothing.”

“No kidding, I can’t believe they went as far as to restrain him,” Kirishima sighed.

“Is there a recording of the match?” he had to see it all for himself, not just the way he maimed his own body but in which manner his competitor answered it, he knew such an easy victory could only have seemed shallow to the prideful student.

“They’re everywhere, all over the city,” he grinned wide. “Kinda feels like we became celebrities overnight, even heard some stuff about you dude.”
“…I’m overjoyed,” if he could have made the motion to signify his sarcasm he would have. The last thing he needed is for that becoming the first thing people associated with him, not when they would surely tie it back to the first incident. The articles were still floating about well over a month since and they didn’t even know the true events. They didn’t know that villain.

“So how long until you get your next chance to injure yourself?” Kaminari asked. The expression was coy but genuine.

He tried to move his leg in response but it didn’t budge, “Three more days if I’m lucky,” he answered.

“You were already walking a thin line. Please don’t take your injuries lightly,” Momo said.

“And once you’re out we can have a rematch,” Kirishima threw a fist playfully at his shoulder.

Jirou caught his hand, “You have a one track mind.”

“Hey, it’s what I do,” he pulled his hand back.

There was no way he could allow his friends request to happen, even with how determined he’d tried to sound with Jirou he had absolutely no clue as to what exactly had caused it, other than his anger and that damnable piercing that had threatened to chop his head in two. At the very least that hadn’t follow him through his unconsciousness, for now anyway.

“Yes, Mr. Aizawa is sure to want a word with you, having both of us absent for the ceremony made the school look poor,” Iida shook his head, “As it were, Momo and my own visit were mostly to give you these,” he motioned to the bag Momo had at her side that he hadn’t even noticed. She unzipped the tartan case at the top and took out a stack of books that should not have fit within it.

“This is the material for the rest of the week and supplementary options when you finish with them. As class representatives if you do poorly on your exams it’ll reflect on all of us, so try to keep at it during your recovery,” she said.

“So… ceremony?” he asked as he took them, despite how thin they were every bit in them had been written in Momo’s scrupulous handwriting before being copied. At least now he could keep himself busy.

Kirishima looked over, “You didn’t tell him Ji-”

“Speak of the devil,” Kaminari turned as the door went back with a thunk. It was indeed Aizawa whom had joined them.

“Get out brats, I need to speak with Torenagi,” he said, “Alone,” he added when they failed to move. The metallic feet of a chair screeched as he slid it up to his bedside, he had no expression on his face but the squint of annoyance. Then, as the door closed it changed to something more neutral and default.

“Sir,” he said.

“For someone who just tried to off himself you look better than I thought you would,” he said, making him realise he’d been smirking ever so slightly. “I hope it was worth it,” he fumbled with something in his pocket. “This is yours,” he held out a small bronze medallion baring the Yuuei letters with a card attached to it, shaped into All Might’s face.

“What?” he was clueless enough about it till he remembered what Kirishima had said moments
before, “Shouldn’t this have gone to someone else?”

“Iida, however he also had to withdraw due to unforeseen circumstances. Hence as far as the school is concerned you tied, maybe it’ll serve as a reminder to keep you from trading blows with your own recklessness.”

He let the medallion slip between his fingers, as he took it. It was heavier than one would expect, on its imprint he could see Plus Ultra engraved in fine lettering. Unforeseen circumstances, he thought. That could have been why Iida had been acting so strange, so much more uptight. If he’d wanted then surely Momo would have been a good enough delivery person, or even Kirishima.

“You did better than I expected,” the man’s bleak facade slipped for just an instant. It might have been enough to make Riley’s head spin off his shoulder, if he had been able to move it enough. He had never heard his teacher mutter even a sliver of praise in their time spent.

“You and I both know what you resembled out there,” he said with his face set back and regained. “I’m sure that was one of the reasons acted as you did.”

He nodded, “It was the same, but…” he looked to the door, he might have continued if he didn’t know better.

Aizawa sighed as he looked where he was, then he leaned in and spoke with less volume, “We’ll continue this after your little vacation, however it goes without saying if the issue should arise again then only one course of action can be considered.”

It stung for a second but it wasn’t something he hadn’t figured, “I get it,” he answered. It wouldn’t come to that.

“Then work it out quickly,” Aizawa said before he stood and then reached into his lapel, “I asked Recovery Girl to prescribe these for you,” he threw a capped bottle into his lap, as he took them he could see they were pills with a small yellow label marked Tramadol on the front. “You’ll soon be glad I did, I assure you.”

“Thanks,” he nodded as the man made his way to the door and pulled it back with one screeching thunk causing the three students listening on the other side to come tumbling back in. “Hopeless,” he shook his head before leaving.

Kirishima looked back the man with an embarrassed grin, “Sorry, Sir,” he added.

“He’s psychic I swear,” Kaminari said as soon as Aizawa was out of earshot.

“Considering even I heard you,” he said with as sardonic a tone as he could. Hopefully Jirou hadn’t helped them hear much, or at least kept it to herself.

“Not like it was anything interesting, unless you consider pain meds interesting,” Jirou gave a half-hearted shrug that did a little to calm his suspicion.

“Man honestly you lucked out, the amount of boring shit you mis-” Kaminari looked down at the books Momo had left him. “Well I guess you won’t be missing it now,” he said with bemusement. “So you wanna show me that trick?”

Jirou gave him a glare, “He hasn’t even been awake for two hours dumbass, whatever you’re so fascinated about can wait.”

“Maaaaan,” he moaned. “Whatever, I’ll just ask Midoriya like Ojiro said.”
Recovery Girl passed by the door, “You lot have five minutes, let Torenagi get some rest. You can come back tomorrow,” she said, before walking off again.

“I guess we should head off, you just take it easy Riley, yeah? If you need anything just lemme know,” Kirishima said, “oh right, you forgot this,” he reached into his back pocket and pulled out the phone with the dark green cover on it, “Get better quick,” he said as he threw it onto his bed and turned to leave.

He nodded as the three left with a goodbye that dragged on too long, though it probably only felt that way because he was nothing short of drained. It was weird to think he’d been completely unconscious not more than a bit ago, he could barely recall shreds of it if anything. It didn’t matter now, he was only able to keep his eyes open long enough to press the button that served to switch off the light in the room on the side of his bed.

Hours had passed and sleep had left him, a different kind of worry had replaced his shaken body’s dilapidated state. It left him unable to get rest for more than one or two hours at a time, and he knew he’d have to act on it if he wanted to stop it. That’s why he had moved his phone from his lap to the nightstand and back again about five times now, to judge if he had the nerve. It would have been told and explained to her by now, probably even two days ago.

His grip on the medallion was still tight, so much so that he could feel it turning his skin red. Most of his feeling had returned now and the IV was beginning to do less work by the second it felt like, or maybe his body was finally beginning to realise that all hell had broken loose and gone into a pain fuelled litany in order to fix it. Checking time had been something he’d done every five minutes he was awake, to see that it would be late enough in the morning, though he should have done it over two hours ago, it was probably almost midday there now.

The grip on the medallion weaned a little as he pushed his finger to find the contact. His uncle had called him earlier, it wasn’t a particularly happy conversation and neither would this one be. He knew what it came down to was another defence. He deserved it to be nothing less than that, and worse still he knew that no matter how carefully he planned the words that feeling would cause them to collapse into a cluster fuck of pleading, she had a way of doing that to him, not that he ever thought she intentionally did so. It probably made him a bad person that it wasn’t the first time it’d come to this.

He still hadn’t read the card, he realised, the one attached to the medallion. It was almost illegible in the darkness of the room, his phone made only an adequate illuminator for that purpose however it did allow him to see the handwritten scribbles on it, they had the kind of satirical lavishness that one might have if all they did was sign autographs all day. It wasn’t done in haste however, he could tell as much by the way the ink had hung thicker on the end of certain words like the pen had dwelled.

As a hero it is the folly that we must face our struggles alone, and that worse still those struggles are what we - All Might

It was heartfelt and all too cheesy but it was what he needed. It was enough to push the button he already held poised, to reinforce once more that this was the path to pursuing the life he wanted to have and to put the phone to his ear as it held in dire anticipation.

“Yes Riley?” an aged female voice picked up after naught half a second.

He collected himself before answering, “Hey Mom.” He could tell she had been crying.
* I do not own BNHA. OC material is my own.
The morning of his release had been filled with unrelenting rain. It tapped the pristine windows relentlessly as he walked beside them to his classroom, or rather hobbled to it with the help of a crutch.

“I can do it myself,” he said as Kirishima held the large hallway door open for him once again.

“I’m sure you can tough guy,” his friend shrugged to which he could only groan his annoyance before having to humble himself.

_I should be glad_, he thought. It would have taken an extra hour if he’d come on his own and he was lucky to even be on his feet again let alone able to attend class. It had taken the full three days as he had been told to expect but he had indeed been discharged, albeit with a limp and a feeling of incessant pain in his stomach.

His injuries had been cleaned up considerably at the discretion of Recovery Girl and enough so to conclude she was nothing short of a miracle worker. What remained on his body now were very few of the bandages he had originally received, only the ones surrounding his two casts on his left ankle and his forearm remained as well as the ones that were tightly wound around his abdomen, with a bit of coaxing Kirishima had even helped him reapply the old tape. He needed to as he couldn’t wear his blazer with the cast on.

“There we are,” Kirishima said as he pulled the 1-A door open with a _shick_.

“Thanks,” he answered before making his way to his seat with no small amount of awkwardness. Despite being predominantly right handed basic tasks had proven difficult with only one limb, he could barely move the digits on his left and most of his right was preoccupied with keeping his legs from giving out under him.

“Guess we’re the first here,” his friend said as he sat on top of the desk in front of his own.

He yawned, “Considering you went and helped me at six in the morning on a Monday I can’t say I’m surprised.”

_Heh_, he said, “I do feel a little guilty about it.”

“Don’t,” he shrugged before trying to release some of the cramped tension in his shoulders. A week in bed hadn’t done him any favours in relieving soreness.

“Riley,” Kirishima said expressionless, “I know you pushed yourself for me out there, so thanks,” he held out his fist.

He bumped it back with his own, “It wasn’t just for you,” he said before reaching into his pocket. Even with what had transpired and his worry of it happening again he couldn’t say he regretted the events prior to his fight, having beaten Aoyama and even made it that far on his own was still irrefutable and if he hadn’t been so demolished he might have even stood a chance against his friend.
Pop, the cap on the bottle went as he pried it off before delegating out two of the nasty white pills inside onto his desk, the bitter aftertaste in his mouth renewed itself as he swallowed them with the help of a water bottle, Aizawa hadn’t been joking about what he’d said. As whatever Recovery Girl had kept him on while incarcerated drained out of his system the pain of his own making had amplified tenfold in turn. He’d slept through the fiercest of it but it still stuck.

“I think this is for you,” Kirishima said as he returned from the front of the class with a leaflet of sickly green notepad. “Smells rank,” he dropped it on his desk.

“What?” he asked but his friend only shrugged. It wasn’t hard to figure it out as he unfolded the note, it did indeed smell and no less overwhelming than the shitty deodorant Kaminari insisted on dousing himself and the entire locker room with every other afternoon. Inside was Midnight’s handwriting formed with almost artisanal little letters.

Torenagi, need to see you during lunch, my office.
- Midnight

“Great,” he said before he crushed it and flicked it away. It wasn’t even a surprise, she’d told him as much would happen during her brief visit in the ward.

“It’s probably for the best,” his friend shrugged.

“…Right,” he frowned and leaned forward on the desk. She had been one of the two who had been closest but he was far more interested in what the other one must have thought.

Thump, the door hit the hinges as it opened, “Yo, yo, yo,” Kaminari said with Bakugou just behind him, the latter didn’t say so much as a word at the sight of him as he found his seat. He guessed he shouldn’t have expected more, “so you finally got out, huh?”

Mhmm, he answered, “Took long enough.”

“Don’t worry I’m sure you’ll be back in there before you know it,” he said with a light hearted tone followed by a laugh. “Now, if I remember you made me a promise.”

“Ah,” he remembered, the trick, “I can but you’ll be disappointed,” he answered. He had thought about his quirk a lot since then, specifically about what he’d been involuntarily shown at the hands of himself. “Actually, I want to try something else, you got a book or something?” he looked at them both.

“Oh, sure,” Kaminari rifled through his bag before dropping it once he had found a slim metal ruler.

Good enough, he thought as he took it and placed it on the desk with his good hand and then rested his fingers on it. A tremor after a mild second of concentration confirmed what he had thought, It’s exactly the same. “Try taking it now, carefully,” he said as he lifted his fingers. There wasn’t a way for him to gauge yet how much it had done, not after only his second time.

Kaminari grabbed the end of it and pulled it roughly only for it to reach the edge of the table and drag his arm down with it, “Holy shit,” he said as he lifted the ruler back up with both hands, as if it were some kind of heavy staff.

“So that’s what you did during our match, no wonder it became so hard to move,” Kirishima said, “there’s much more to your quirk than you led us to believe, huh?”
“I wasn’t misleading you,” he shook his head, before he had fought Kirishima he wouldn’t have even thought it doable, “I didn’t even know myself. It’s so different to compressing an object. I guess I kind of locked myself into the mindset that there wasn’t anything beyond that, if Aizawa hadn’t helped me I doubt I would have figured it out.”

“Count me jealous,” Kaminari said as he dropped the ruler back on his desk, allowing him to touch it lightly and undo his previous efforts. Even the small use of his quirk had already left him tired.

Kirishima looked at him in disbelief, “You can pump out enough electricity from your fingers to run a small town, what could you possibly be jealous of?”

“Yeah but I turn into an idiot if I do.”

“I mean, your dumb…ness is more like what would happen from a fuse overloading,” he said as he handed the ruler back, “There isn’t much chance you’ll hurt yourself, that’s gotta be an upside. Do you really want me to tell you how many times I’ve broken my own fingers using my quirk?”

“I guess you’re right but I gotta admit against somebody like Ashido it’s pretty hard to use.”

He shrugged, “If it makes you feel better I thought you were gonna win, you might have if you had been able to direct it instead of blasting it out of yourself at random.”

“Direct it, huh?” he folded his arms before putting them up like he was holding some imaginary bow, “Like some kind of Tesla cannon,” grinned as he aimed it around.

“Yeah,” he laughed, “like a goddamn Tesla cannon.”

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[Yuuei’s Campus – Counsellor’s Office – 12:05 PM]

“That’s the last thing I remember,” Riley said. He had stated everything in a matter-of-fact way but he wasn’t even sure why he had bothered, Midnight was probably far more aware of the events then he himself had been. Her silence had given him anxiousness, the kind that prods at you when it feels like someone’s sole purpose is to interrogate you.

Her pen came to a halt, almost making him jump with how constant it had been throughout the past half hour, “I’m going to be straight and to the point with you Torenagi, I am concerned about your mental wellbeing, now more than ever.”

Hmm, he answered. The heroine was blunt when it came to this, though he found it more annoying than anything. All the incident had left him with was more problems that he needed to solve and far more fixation on figuring out exactly what the villain’s goals were. He didn’t feel depressed or sick, quite the contrary, at least if he didn’t count his physical injuries.

“It’s important you know that there are several ways to mitigate symptoms of traumatic events, ones that are available to you if you feel you need it.”

“I don’t want more pills if that’s what you mean,” it didn’t feel like something he could solve in that way.

“Then work with me and try some of these exercises between our sessions,” she said as she held out a brochure, which he took. “These should help if you feel the same symptoms, anger and the like, meditation in particular should be effective.”

He flicked through the pages of the pamphlet with one hand, there were far too many pictures to
count, “I don’t know if I really have time for all that.”

“Then make time, Torenagi. Saying you’re fine and acting stubborn is not the way to approach this, eventually you’ll just find yourself crack and if I had to guess that is exactly the desired result.”

He looked up at her, “Is it really that hard to believe that I’m really as fine as I think I am? Yeah I still see his fucking face when I close my eyes sometimes but who wouldn’t after that? It’s not the same as before, I can handle it.”

“That attitude is precisely why I am worried, you act almost as if you aren’t aware exactly how serious implications of what you did at the sports festival are,” she had a strained look on her face. “By all means the last thing you should be feeling is ‘fine.’ Does it not worry you how similarly the events mimicked those that you described during your rescue? You need to remember helping you is my primary concern here.”

“Ma’am,” he grinded his teeth, “it’s not like I attend these because I’m hiding my worry, or that I’m pretending not to be scared of what might happen, I come here because I gotta to avoid being kicked out. Besides, if I let myself get overwhelmed by what happened am I not giving them the exact same result?”

“That is one way to look at it,” she wrote once more. “So say, if theoretically you were expelled, what would you do?”

“I won’t let that happen,” he gripped the leather chair almost instinctively. “There’s no point in thinking about it.”

“To what end?” she asked.

“I made a promise,” he answered after a pause.

“What kind of promise?”

“I can’t tell you that,” he shook his head.

“Torenagi, if becoming a hero is what you really want then you need to do it for your own reasons, not someone else’s.”

He leaned his hand on the chairs leather rest, “I am but that doesn’t mean that my own desires are the only ones that matter.”

“Is there a particular reason you feel responsible for them?”

He furled his brow, “Well I’m the one with the quirk, aren’t I?”

Midnight gave him a piercing stare at that but said nothing. Instead her eyes went to the clock ticking slowly away above both their heads.

“May I go, Ma’am?” he asked as he noticed it.

“Yes, you may,” she said and he got up toward the door. “We’ll begin meeting again at the scheduled time from now on, and do those exercises, they’ll help.”

“I will,” he answered as he shut it behind him and leant on the wall to the sound of an exhausted sigh. The session had been more heated than he would have liked but she had incited greater agitation than he could stand. He hardly wanted his new issues to somehow become about his family.
instead of the real cause, especially when that cause was related far more directly to the reason he’d been forced to get help for in the first place.

Though he hated to say it everything the woman had said was true, very true, even if he was convincing himself otherwise. He despised that he could still feel it there, lingering and it did scare him just how close the two events were and more so what he had done, that control could be so easily wrenched from him like that. However if he let himself rescind to a state that he’d been in prior to the USJ attack then that was what he was really afraid of, a position where he had no power to act from his perspective. That’s why it really was different, it was something he could have an active and visible hand in managing and preventing and he would make sure that was the case. Having said that he couldn’t say he was looking forward to next Saturday.

He checked his phone while he still had a wall to lean on. The whole thing really had killed most of his lunch period in a gradual torture, not to mention it had left him drowsy, it always made him feel drowsy. Twenty minutes wasn’t much time to get anything done, not enough to try and practice his quirk but enough to try and play catch-up on those notes as mundane as it was, fortunately he didn’t have a billion deadlines like previously. His morning had been filled with disorientation and well-wishing to that end, though less so than last time. That would be what one might call the result of self infliction.

“You,” someone said, Bakugou, he thought. He barely had time to turn as a palm slammed past his face and into the wall behind him.

“What?” he rolled his neck. He wasn’t in the mood for this kind of thing right now even if he had expected it to happen eventually. Had he been listening to Midnight and him? There wasn’t a desire to have another Kuroiro on his hands.

“You know exactly what you bastard.”

“If it’s about the match then I am sorry-”

“Fuck that, you’re going to tell me exactly what that thing was.”

His heart dropped, a crowded hall wasn’t the place for this, “Keep it down.”

“Screw you,” Bakugou's face was scrunched up like he was hoping to simply see whatever it was he was looking by being way too close to him.

It took what he could to not lose his cool, “I have abso-fucking-lutely zero clue what it was, there, are you happy now?” the burst made his head hurt, maybe he really should try those exercises.

There was a mean glare in his eyes, “I’m keeping my eye on you Scarface,” he said.

“Gee, how sweet of you,” he pushed the hand out of his way as he best he could. It didn’t put up much resistance, the white gauze covering it might have been the reason, that much he’d figured out was his fault. An ever growing list, he thought.

“You think I’m kidding around asshole?”

He looked back over his shoulder, “If you aren’t kidding around then next time you can do me a favour and stop me before it happens again. Is that enough for you?”

Hmph, Bakugou answered.

It was a better outcome then he could have hoped for, he knew the guy was temperamental enough
to actually try and do exactly that. It was a cheap but effective safety net; an inoculation of sorts by someone he knew had already been exposed. Hopefully no one else would have to be.

[Yuuei’s Campus – Classroom 1-A – 12:31 PM]

It was in the afternoon that Aizawa joined them at last and now not surprisingly so he knew the reason for the man’s absence that morning.

“I’m glad you were able to get your bandages removed Mr. Aizawa,” Tsuyu said before he had so much as reached the blackboard.

Aizawa scratched at the delicate scarring beneath his eyes. It was like the flesh that had healed over it was alien to his own in colour, “The lady was a little overzealous in her treatment, but I’m sure I’m not the only one who has had that revelation,” he threw a disapproving look around the room.

“However let’s put that aside, now that everyone is back today’s heroics class is going to cover the results of the sports festival, specifically this,” he waved to the board, which let up in turn.

Nominations Class 1-A:
Todoroki – 4,057
Bakugou – 3,471
Iida – 307
Tokoyami – 268
Ashido – 150
Kaminari – 124
Yaoyorozu – 108
Kirishima – 96
Torenagi – 34
Uraraka – 22
Sero – 14
Jirou – 5
Hagakure – 3
Kouda – 1

“Usually the results are less skewed than this but it could hardly be helped with two of your stealing the show,” the man said as he turned to his desk to retrieve a stack of wilted papers.

Kaminari almost tipped out of his chair with how far he collapsed back, “The difference is practically night and day.”

“First and second are completely flipped and some of the people who got far didn’t end up doing so hot either,” Kirishima turned back at him, to which he could only shrug.

There wasn’t much to say about it, the way he had looked it wasn’t a huge surprise. If anything it left him wondering how he had even scored any nominations to begin with, it was probably only due to his placement in the semis and that borderline showboating manoeuvre from the obstacle race; some pros must have realised it had been him just like All Might had suggested. His own maiming was only different from Midoriya’s due to intention, not result.

Hagakure let out a small cheer, “It’s not much but three is still better than none,” she said.

“How the hell did you get nominations when they literally couldn’t even see you? Where is my just desserts, this is so rigged!” Mineta said before drowning his face in his desk.

“Enough chit chat, regardless of whether or not you got any nominations I’ll be sending you all to
“get some much needed workplace experience as they say,” Aizawa said as he began passing out small whiteboards, “for that to be possible you’re going to need to pick some hero names.”

*Hero names?* the phrase repeated itself in his mind and in a murmur of those around him, he had hardly expected that on his first day out of the hospital. It seemed like the others hadn’t either after the week of mundane classes Jirou had described to him and he’d reviewed.

“Now this matter is too trivial for me to care about, so I’ve invited Midnight to assess your names in my place,” as if on cue the door slid back and revealed the heroine.

“Afternoon my sweet little rookies!” she winked as she strode in and took centre stage. “These names are going to be a big factor in how people see you from now on, so give it some thought and impress me.”

“A heroic name? That’s tough…” Uraraka whispered beside him, “you got any good ideas Torenagi?” she looked over and gave him the last whiteboard in the stack.

“None,” his answer didn’t take much thought as he himself had never given the topic much thought to begin with. In Indiana it was popular and commonplace to carry on a familial heroic name, but considering that wasn’t really an option to him he’d probably have to think of something new.

“Get to it, I can’t wait for you to show me what you have in store,” Midnight said.

He tapped the blue marker board as he began to think and after several minutes of writing things down and then adding them to a growing blue smudge on the back of his wrist he’d become stuck. It was harder than he’d thought it’d be, to make something meaningful and unique enough to be remembered. He wanted to avoid names from movies, he knew that much, and although a spin on a mythological name like Aeolus or Ajax had meaning to them they failed to evoke a memorable tone. Not to mention they had nothing to do with his quirk, that was the same reason he’d avoid names like Valiant.

“You thought of anything, Iida?” he asked. The guy had been hunched over in front of him the entire time. It looked like he was hard at work despite having barely moved.

“Oh, ah,” he turned. “Not yet, this is pretty difficult isn’t it?” he said with a cheerful expression on his face more characterised by the fake smile that accompanied it.

“Yeah,” He answered. He already knew why the class rep had such a demeanour on and he had refused to speculate about it further with Kirishima and Kaminari after they shown him. It made sense now why Iida had been so strung out during the hospital visit as his own injuries would have mimicked in a more frightful way the very thing that had pulled Iida out of the festival alongside him.

*Ingenium cut down in cold blood, in critical condition following the attack of the notorious hero killer, Stain,* the title had been numbing enough to read. Attacks on heroes by villains were nothing new but it was different when the hero involved was related to the one of the most complacently accommodating people he’d ever met. Bad things happen to good people, he’d learned that much in his life.

“Jamming-whey, like Hemmingway?” Kaminari said, “That’s so clever.”

“Yep, you can thank me later,” Jirou said as she turned away with barely a contained snort.

“Now since we’ve already had a bit of time does anyone want to volunteer to go first? Don’t be shy,” Midnight asked and tapped her hand on the small podium.
“I shall,” Aoyama said and stood and almost flew up to the stage. It was hard to be sure if he was shaking due to eagerness or nerves. “Here it comes!” he announced as he held up his board.

**I cannot stop twinkling.**

Sero shook his head, “That’s not a name that’s a whole sentence, dude.”

“Yes, it might be better if you shortened it here and there,” Midnight smudged out the blue marker on the board and rewrote it to something much shorter.

“You’re correct, Mademoiselle, that is even more dazzling,” Aoyama snapped his fingers. His face was beaming as he returned to his seat. Riley was glad enough that the sparkling boy had acted no differently toward him now then he had before the festival, he seemed to have taken the loss in stride.

“Anyone else want to give it a try?” Midnight looked around but no takers came, “You only have a little more time before I start picking you out myself. Come now, there’s no reason to be embarrassed.”

“Ooh, I’ll go,” Ashido raised her hand.

“The stage is yours,” Midnight waved her up.

“Alien Queen!” she shouted, as she held up a board with the same name. Above it was scribbled **Hero of Ridley.**

This time it was he himself who could barely hold back a snort, it was too much even to imagine the mere image in his head of Ashido being ten feet tall and making acid spitting noises.

Kaminari groaned, “We’re doomed.”

“Guess it’s my turn,” Kirishima walked with a confident gait and the whiteboard strapped under his arm before hammering it down in front of him. “Red Riot,” he read out what it said.

*Crimson Riot?* he thought as he read it again, his homage was straight and to the point, it suited him.

“Very nice, if you’re looking to take a name like that with weight attached to it, I sure hope you’re willing to live up the extra pressure,” Midnight said.

“I am prepared for it,” Kirishima grinned. He did certainly seem like it.

Good names piled out in streams after that, Sero, Tsuyu and Uraraka among them. Jirou had settled for Earphone Jack and Kaminari for Chargebolt which were both impressive, at least to him who had yet to find one. Tokoyami’s name had also taken him by surprise, modelling itself after the Japanese moon deity Tsukuyomi, a thing he only knew about because of a terrible live action movie his uncle had made him sit through and one he would never admit to actually having watched. Soon enough there were only a few of them left who hadn’t yet gone up but an idea had crossed his mind.

*Clever men try to change the world, wise men change themselves,* he thought as he wrote what it had inspired. He wasn’t sure whom the quote was from but it was something one of the few tolerable teachers at Leineif had once told him. As he finished he knew what he had come up with wasn’t much but he liked the sound of it.
“Only three to go, Midoriya, Torenagi and Iida. Oh and Bakugou who needs to rethink his name, who do I pick? I think it’ll have to be,” she looked around with a mischievous expression. “Torenagi,” he beckoned at him with a finger.

*It’s like ripping off a bandage,* he thought as he struggled up to the front with his crutch in hand and the whiteboard wedged between his casted palm. It hadn’t been a day but he was already starting to get sick of it.

“Here,” Midnight held his left arm up by the shoulder so he could turn the board around with his right. It took more effort than it should have, he was still reluctant.

*(The Density Manipulating Hero)*

**Terra Alter**

He had written it as neatly as he could in both Japanese and English, however there was still some confused faces as they tried to make sense of it.

“Oh, I see. The Latin world for earth and the English word alter, something akin to ‘altering the earth’, right?” Midnight said and he nodded, she was right on the nose.

“Huh,” Jirou said. “Now I feel like I should have incorporated some other language.”

“Yeah,” Ashido nodded, “wait, Aoyama why the hell out of all people didn’t you choose a name in French, are you even really from there?” she threw him an accusing look.

*Hmph,* Aoyama answered. “Now, now, there’s no need to be jealous of my name just because it outshines yours.”

“Jealous…! Why you,” she jumped up from her desk.

“Um,” he said as he looked at Midnight, he was getting tired of standing in the awkward position he was in.

“Right, settle down now. While another language is a good way to add some depth in a saturated market you need to keep in mind it could just as easily backfire if your concept of the language is poor,” Midnight said, “Having said that, I like it Torenagi, it’s not overly extravagant but it’s unique and let’s people know what you’re about, it should fit nicely. Although, one change I would suggest is cutting down ‘density manipulation’ to something smaller, like,” she drummed the board with her fingernail before it came to her, “Picnokinetic.”

“Picnokinetic?” he asked. He wasn’t quite sure what that meant.

Midnight nodded, “I think it’s a more adequate term at this point,” she said as she handed his crutch back.

“Here,” Aizawa held out a sheet with a bundle attached to it toward him which he took and then went back to his seat with. On the sheet, he could see, were boxes for nomination decisions and in the bag he assumed were the actual names, two whole pages of them. Bakugou and Todoroki had so many that the man had to give them a digital copy, rather than a physical one.

“Iida, show me what you got,” Midnight said as he took out his phone. *Picnokinesis, manipulation of density within objects, most known instances of quirks associated with this term are Emitter-type,* it was certainly more elegant than he had put it.
“Iida, not you as well, are you sure?” the statement caused him to look up. Iida had chosen his own name just like Todoroki had as well. It wasn’t what he had seen written on the template moments ago.

“Yes, sorry Mrs,” he looked down and away. His look had grown even heavier still.

“If that’s how it is,” Midnight shook her head, “Midoriya, if you could come and finish off our little exercise, please?”

“A-alright,” he had the whiteboard gripped between his bandaged fingers as he went up and with a gasp from Uraraka he turned it around.

Deku.

*Hmm, *Midnight said, “It’s kind of cute in its own way.”

As much as the teacher liked it the only response he could elicit was his own confusion, not just due to the reaffirming nature of Bakugou’s scoff but by the fact that the only time he had heard the name was when it had been thrown toward Midoriya as an insult by the aforementioned party. Still, it was better than ‘King of Explodo-kills,’ the name that Bakugou had proposed still made him smirk as he remembered it presented, it really was too much to take seriously.

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[Yuuei’s Campus – Riley’s Dormitory – 10:23 PM]

Riley closed the door behind him with food in his right hand and crutch under his left. He rushed to put down the hot bowl next to the nomination sheets and an empty mug of fruit tea, teriyaki noodles weren’t anything substantial to eat but with the research he still had ahead of him and the amount of time he’d spent with Recovery after class it was the best he could do. She’d insisted on continuing the same physiotherapy he’d first been forced into after the kidnapping, stretching out his fingers and each of his limbs in turn and making sure there was no permanent damage, the visit had helped a tiny bit to the point where his left fingers actually worked a decent amount.

It had taken the majority of his afternoon just to get an idea what each of the thirty-four names he’d been given were known for and where they operated. He’d tacked each bit of his crude research onto the original list and after much deliberation had narrowed them down to just six that had caught his interest above the others.

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Frankly his spread of choices was broad, even after the work he had done he wasn’t really sure where to go from here since each one of them was famous in their own way and the fan websites he’d look at were limited at best. Maybe he would be better off asking Kirishima, or even Midoriya for advice, although the way the latter had stressed out over even his standard set of names made him want to think twice about it, it’d probably push his brain into overdrive and trigger that creepy mumbling he sometimes engaged in.

He could begin categorising them by what he wanted to learn rather than what they were about, it made sense considering he’d forgotten to ask Aizawa about their training sessions in lieu of what had happened, although he guessed that for the time being they were off. He didn’t mind, as much as he had learnt it was probably better he branched off a bit, otherwise he’d just become a copy, which would be ironic considering the name he’d chosen.

That still left him with the primary conundrum though, what did he want to learn? Logic dictated the next best step was learning how to do something he didn’t find himself sufficient in. One thing that came to mind was fighting multiple opponents, his quirk wasn’t fast enough and he couldn’t say he was good enough at hand to hand to even approach that feasibly yet. Which of these names could teach him that?

Thunk, a firm hand rattled his door, causing him to look up. Nothing else followed it, causing him to get up and answer it. It was odd, but it wasn’t like anyone without some authorisation could get in the building.

At the foot of his door sat a small brown package and naught else, not the person who had delivered it or anyone down the hall from him. Whoever couriered for Yuuei was very good at what they did, at least for someone who didn’t need signature for their deliveries. He might have hesitated to take the suspicious package inside had it been so very not suspicious at all; a familiar sender’s address sat orange and obvious on a tag attached to the cover. Several express and urgent stamps littered it. He took it and closed the door behind him, it was no doubt the result of the phone call. Carefully he placed it down on his table among the chunks of academic and personal junk books he had piled there, he should have probably considered returning at least some of them by now. A short fumble with the outside had him reaching for a scissor, the thrice enveloped block was a sure sign of his mother’s paranoia about sending valuable things in the mail, though he had no real idea what it could be as something as mundane as this hadn’t so much as come up.

Their talk had been more difficult than their last but he had succeeded in calming her down after a long time. It was times like that he hated, she was always the kind of woman who held herself in dire reserve, just like dad, however that meant when she did break it was a big deal. It was probably an illogical thing from any perspective because the less serious she sounded the more trouble he knew he was in. This time that had led to sanctions, he had promised to call her every week now and to let his uncle know when he wasn’t going to be inside the school for any reason. It was still better than the alternative and if nothing else he had been glad to know Elle hadn’t been able to watch the match like he’d feared, she was still staying with his dad’s parents for the moment.

Snip, the scissor went as the last bind snapped and revealed within an ornate box of sorts that he recognised only in passing but hardly enough that he knew what laid inside. If he remembered mom had always kept this one locked up in a glass case, to protect the delicate woodwork on the tiny frame that gave it an intricate kind of beauty.
Click, the overly sophisticated brass clasp went before popping and allowing him to open the box. He had half expected another smaller box but instead there was a card and beneath that a chain. He took the card out first and flipped it over to read what it said.

This medallion was my father's and his before him, I think now is the right time for you to have it. Please allow it to keep you safe.
– Kumai Torenagi

He traced his fingers across her written letters, they were small and delicate, scribed in her own language. She rarely ever signed her name, whatever this was it meant more to her than he could probably imagine since he had never personally known his grandfather, the man had died before he was even born.

He took the silvered necklace from its resting place by the chain, it had a small Japanese letter on the face of a round signet like plate that he didn’t recognise and which lay surrounded by some even smaller ones, he wasn’t sure what it was actually made of but it hadn’t tarnished in any way a silver necklace normally might. That could have been due to the nature of its upkeep, meticulous and dutiful. He had rarely seen her polish them but he knew she did it every day, it was an activity he had written off as boring at the time but now he understood better. It was probably one of the last physical reminders she had of him and now she had chosen to send it to him with all the risk that entailed.

As disjointed as his feelings toward his grandfather were he couldn’t help but feel that the necklace had intrinsic value to it. It wasn’t because it was extravagant or even that he empathize with a man he only knew by proxy but rather that it was special to someone that was special to him. A part of a memoir his mom had shared with him alone.

He hung it around his neck. It felt almost soothing as it touched his skin.

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[Yuuei’s Campus – Lunch Hall – Wednesday 11:47 AM]

Riley pushed his lunch tray aside to make room for the stark sheet that he had kept within his bag, the pain medicine always made him lose most of his appetite shortly after ingesting it. Hopefully the pain would fade soon because the bitter brew certainly wasn’t becoming easier to swallow.

He flattened the sheet out in front of him on the table, it was somewhat of a mess now as he’d rewritten and replaced the names several times. He hadn’t noticed at first that Aizawa had taken the liberty of filling in their chosen hero names at the top right of the sheet. It was kind of touching, like it made it more official in a way.

Class 1-A: [Torenagi Riley] – Work Experience Week Choices [HN: Terra Alter]
First Choice: Gang Orca Hero Office.
Second Choice: Edgeshot Hero Office.
Third Choice: Kagan Hero Office.

“Make up your mind yet, Riley?” Kirishima asked from his left, “you gotta get it into Aizawa today,” he said as he struggled with the positively gigantic mound of food he had ordered for whatever reason. It was all fibrous, hefty doses of vegetables and grain food, he knew that was the kind of thing that made his friends quirk last longer.

“Yeah, I know, I’m getting there,” he answered.
“Lemme look,” Kirishima stole the paper before he could so much as answer.

“Hey-” he tried to wrench it back, only to have an elbow shoved in his face.

“It’s no use dude. He did the same thing to me earlier,” Kaminari said, “bet he’d do it to Bakugou too if his wasn’t on a thumb drive.”

“Like I would let him,” Bakugou glared.

Kirishima looked up, “I already saw, you chose Best Jeanist didn’t you, McSplody?”

“Fuck off with that name,” he answered.

“Yes, yeah whatever I know you love it,” he grinned before turning back with the sheet. “You really sure about these nominations? Those first two have more physical based quirks than what you have, and I don’t even know the third guy. It’ll be rough.”

He knew that, that was exactly why he had chosen them. “I wanted to find a way to fight more than one opponent at a time,” he answered. They would have more experience than anyone in that.

“Then go with Edgeshot, not Gang Orca. The guys built like a monster but Edgeshot he’s something else. His rank isn’t a joke, none of those top heroes ranks are. Best Jeanist isn’t an exception either, they’re all the rule.”

“He’s right, rank trumps outlook when it comes to this stuff,” Kaminari said.

“You think so?” Riley asked as he grabbed the sheet back.

“Just shut it and change it, even a fourth grader knows this kinda shit, how are you so clueless?” Bakugou said.

He shrugged, “Fine,” Bakugou had been trying to work him up on purpose the whole time and not just because of his usual disdain. It felt weird being in the presence of the exact three people who had experienced his rage, though he hadn’t felt a wink of anything close to that since then. It was still just… there.

“Here,” Kirishima held out a pen, rather than a pencil, “now you won’t be able to change your mind and as a bonus you won’t have to wear one of those silly Gang Orca helmets that the guy makes for all his subordinates.”

He took it and began rubbing out his previous efforts, “You’re the one who’s making me change it in th- ah,” he gasped, cutting himself off, a simple touch on his neck had done it. It was the strangest feeling like he was being robbed of something. A growl from Bakugou and a quick turn of his own revealed it was Monoma Neita who had nudged him. He had a snobbish grin on his face, one he had been prowling around with since before the festival.

“Watch where you’re going, man,” Kirishima said.

“Oh-ho sorry, I just wanted to get a closer look at one A’s resident nut job after that little show during the sports festival,” Monoma said as he gave a sarcastic little bow.

He ground his teeth for just a second and then let it go. It wasn’t something to get riled up about, he had been called worse. It was natural it’d be this way after what he was sure everyone had seen, after all he’d watched the footage too, it had been nothing short of gruesome. It was like he’d been possessed.
“What do you want?” he asked.

Pang, a can next to his head went as it compressed with poor precision and violent caricature. It would have startled him, had it not been for its familiarity. It was unmistakably his quirk. Another can went the same way. Monoma’s compressions were rudimentary, not enough to shake the ground or crush a building. Perhaps enough to sprain a finger or pop a balloon. They might even be able to rend the blood vessels in someone’s brain.

“Don’t mess around, it’s dangerous,” he said. After all, no one knew it better than he.

“Yes, some might call it downright villainous. Is that why they were so interested in you?” Monoma chuckled.

He almost felt his eye twitch at that, the words hit too close to home, “I don’t know what they wanted with me, I’d prefer if you dropped the subject,” he was trying not to lose his temper, it was already close. He could feel it smouldering.

He chuckled, “Oh man, what a tragedy it would be for someone from one A to fall from grace into the taint of villainy. That sure is a scary thought, how can we even feel safe around you?”

It came back all at once, $D^2on^-t+youw_a^t^sh_u-t_hi_m_up^-$?

$J^-st_letme_talkagain. T^{true}_{stme}$. He took a deep breath as it ran through his mind. Yes, he did want it.

“Frankly, it’s a shame they haven’t expelled you yet.”

His right hand tightened, that was the last straw-

Kirishima jumped to his feet, “That’s enough!” he yelled, “What the hell is wrong with you?!” there was anger in his voice, terrible scorn unlike him.

Riley let the bench go, which had curved slightly inward with his hands indentation. Then he breathed again, this one more empowered than the first, he had to calm down like Midnight had told him. As he stood he leaned his legs against the bench itself so he wouldn’t fall and grabbed Kirishima’s shoulder gently.

“It’s alright, I can handle it,” he forced his friend to sit back down. Then he ran the tips of his fingers on his left hand across the edges of the tape on his right arm. They came apart in bits, and every second he pulled them off he made sure not to look at them but at Monoma instead. The last fell to the floor as a clump, uncovering the worst of it all.

Monoma was looking everywhere except at his arm now, “Take a look, then look at me and say what you said again. I want to hear it,” he didn’t even feel an inkling of resentment and the way the guy shrivelled at the command told him it wasn’t worth it to hate him.

Slowly but surely the boy drove his eyes at what he was showing him, “I still feel it sometimes, when I’m treating them and looking at myself, even when I sleep, every little stitch being driven carefully into my skin. It’s something I could never forget, not when I carry these with me each and every day,” it was hard not to sound angry, it was too real for that, but he made sure not to fall back into its reach.

He raised the torn arm up, bringing it just within inches of Monoma’s face, “There is no way I would ever allow myself to become the thing that did this to me and I don’t need some fuck head like you who hasn’t even come within a thousand feet of a real villain, throwing his commentary around like he thinks I give a shit,” he let his arm fall again.
“So please, just go, before I do something I really am going to regret,” he had half a mind to snap at him, like some kind of bulldog, to make the student scurry like the rat he was. However he knew he couldn’t, not if he wanted these words to stick.

As soon as Monoma shivered he knew they had, his pupils dilated like he’d been half an inch from the most horrifying thing he’d ever seen. Then he turned and stumbled, before almost running out of the cafeteria. The caesura of action made him acutely aware of how many people had witnessed him say what he had. There was empathy from the few classmates who knew but worse was the rest who stood in confusion, like it was something they couldn’t comprehend.

He hid his arm as he sat; he was out of tape again. A seeping shame fouled his mood.

“Damn it,” he cursed aloud as he made it to the fourth door in a series of ever frustrating hallways that led back to class. He could barely open them by himself even now and it made him want to kick himself for being the cause of the inconvenience.

Kirishima had helped him calm down a bit and had lent him what he needed again but still the bile and displeasure rivalling the annoyance of his mind hadn’t subsided. He was mad at himself, mad that he had almost lost control again over something so trivial. It wasn’t like he wasn’t used to stares after the incident, or the occasional question but Monoma’s words had bitten him just a bit too deeply. He didn’t feel villainous in any sense of the word but that didn’t make someone implying it hurt any less. Some time alone would help, then he could rationalise.

“Hey, wait up! You’re Torenagi, right?” he only turned briefly to see who it was, enough for him to decide he didn’t want another meet up with a 1-B student, especially not their class rep Kendou.

“I’m not really in a chatty mood,” he said before he rammed his shoulder into the door more forcefully than he intended, causing him to stumble against it and the crutch to drop to the floor. Just before he fell a hand caught him.

“Just wait a moment, I need to talk to you,” she said as she picked up his crutch and handed it back. He was ready to assume the worst. She probably wanted to tell him off for how he had threatened her classmate, maybe even for Kuroiro too.

“Look if it’s about Kuroiro I’m sorry, I already tried to make it up to him and he isn’t having it,” he made no attempt to hide his discontent.

Kendou sighed, “It’s not that, Momo already explained that whole thing to me. I just wanted to say you shouldn’t take what Monoma said to heart, he’s just a bit of insensitive idiot, ya know? He never means anything by it. It’s just how he is, so try to forget it ever happened, alright?”

“Its fine, I’m alright. I don’t need someone like him to understand,” he turned back to try the door again.

“Let me,” she pushed the door open wide with an elongated hand, more than enough for him to get through, “I know it’s not my place to say this but those scars, they’re nothing to ashamed of and I’m sure I ain’t the only one who thinks so.”

He looked back over his shoulder, he hadn’t been prepared for that, the turmoil subsided just to the point where he no longer felt queasy and dizzy at the same time. He muttered a quiet, “Thanks,” as gratitude as the door slammed shut between them.

[Eastern Hosu CBD – Shopping District – Sunday 11:20 AM]
The leaves crushed under his feet as he navigated the cobbled street, it was a phenomenon that shouldn’t have been on account of the season but strong gales were surely the culprit. It had whipped the street into frenzy and left it mostly empty, quiet enough to navigate for once without the need to almost yell to speak to one another. It was made better by the loss of his crutch the day prior, though his shin and wrist were still encased in flexible braces. It was a better outcome than he should have been able to hope for after a week of nonstop frustration.

“So what kind of shit does Midnight make you talk about in those sessions anyway?” Jirou asked with deliberate step, she knew exactly where she wanted to go.

“I don’t know, stuff. Lots of stuff,” Riley answered.

She rolled her eyes, “Oh gee stuff, that’s nice.”

“If I told you it wouldn’t make it very confidential, would it?”

“You’re right but I still want to know.”

“I’m sure you can use your imagination.”

They rounded a corner wedged between two thinly separated buildings and then he recognised where they were, the hanging signs and wild assortment of specialty shops had almost given it away but it was the brass musical note that hung from the ceiling of the gang way that beat them to the punch. The music store looked no worse for wear but at the same time no better either, like it hadn’t been touched by anything in the almost two months they hadn’t been there, maybe it’s because they had approached from the opposite side compared to last time.

“Wait, why are we here?” he stopped and turned to her as they reached the door, “I thought you said you just wanted to get some extra clothes for your internship,” it was weird to think it was already tomorrow.

“I do,” she rolled on her feet like she was hesitant to say, “buuuuut you did kinda mention you wanted to chop your locks before so I figured we’d make a stop, Meina does requests like this for me once in a while.”

He had said that, he remembered. The trails of wispy hair were beginning to grow precariously close to his eyes, “Here I thought she was just a clerk or something,” he said as he pushed them back.

“Hah, no, she owns the entire building. Not that she uses it for anything more useful than storing a few tens of thousands of CDs, she made it big back when she still did hero work,” she grabbed the door to yank it open.

“A hero? She didn’t strike me as the type,” he followed her inside.

“She’ll tell you about it if you ask nicely.”

The inside was different than before, much different. The long rows of racks lodged by the fistful with CDs had been replaced with categorised tubs of genre and genre then subdivided by subgenre and then alphabetically beyond that, there must have been somewhere around sixty of them. It made the previously crowded store feel much larger and allowed a firm view of its entirety, guitars lined the walls with signed portraits framed beside them backed by a distinct tint of brass, honey yellow and ash grey that threatened to jump out at you.

“Meina, you in here?” Jirou shouted.
“One sec,” a voice called back from behind a door on the far end, after a second it crashed open, “how are you my lovely little hero-lings?”

“Fine,” Jirou answered, “you redecorated?”

“My collection is growing faster than I can get rid of it,” Meina giggled. Her previously yellow bangs were now a pinkish red and she had replaced her dress from last time with a tight cut shirt that had the letters ACDC on it as well as being encumbered by all manner of gaudy string necklaces.

“You barely make any attempts to sell it,” she smirked. “Anyway, you got my message right?”

“You betcha,” Meina walked up to him, and he backed off a tiny bit. “No need to be shy, I know exactly what to do. Join me, won’t you?” she said as she turned away and headed back toward the room she’d come from.

He looked at Jirou who promptly shoved him forward, “Go on then, I’ll be out here,” she said.

“Right,” he wasn’t sure why the prospect of a haircut was making him nervous. As he followed Meina through the wooden door he could see the place was much larger than even the room before it, it was like an apartment separated into several sections including a stove, a loft bed and a lounge of tacky chairs that looked like they belonged back in the seventies.

“This way,” Meina called from ahead, through another door. This one looked like it had been locked, as it sat ajar with a key still in the handle.

“Whoa,” he said as he entered. It was almost psychedelic. Every wall was covered in patches and splotches of thousands of colours without missing a single crevice. It lined up like a palette as it went around the room and went back around itself. It was hard to even perceive them all without going dizzy. The place was almost barren other than that, only a few bits of furniture sat in the centre of the room where the woman stood.

Shhh, she said as she motioned him to the chair, “This is a secret, I don’t think people would take my shop seriously if they saw what I keep hidden back here,” she said in a cheeky tone. He doubted anyone took it seriously anyway considering how retro the whole affair was from head to toe.

He took the chair or rather bar stool, “I won’t tell anyone, I just didn’t-”

“Expect to walk into the equivalent of an LSD fuelled dream?” she laughed and he nodded, “Yeah, I get that sometimes. It’s a passion of mine, though I guess anyone’s quirk is their passion. Hold on while I get some things,” she said before walking out of the room again.

He spun around the room and looked at each colour for just a split second. There was quite literally nothing else to look at. It was weird, why would anyone want a place like this? There also weren’t any mirrors, maybe to lessen the confusion.

Clank, a small cart went as Meina dragged it in behind her, “Now then, let’s get started,” she said as she reached him. On it he could see multiple scissors of different designs, a bottle of water, a hairdryer and a brush. “Any requests or do you just want me to go wild?” she smirked as she put an itchy drape around his neck that reached just down to his waist.

“I need it short enough that it doesn’t fall into my eyes, it distracting when I use my quirk,” it was really the only thing he would admit to caring about when it came to his hair. Making sure it stayed reasonable was usually the main struggle.

“Gotta,” she said as she wet his hair with help of the bottle. “So Jirou told me your quirk is
“Yeah,” he answered and stopped himself from nodding. “I guess it’s closer to Picnokinesis though,” he corrected himself as he remembered Midnights words. Maybe he should amend that with the quirk registry. They were sticklers for that sort of thing, Aizawa had made that very clear during some of the lessons on heroic law they’d had.

“I saw it during the sports festival broadcast. Looked pretty fierce,” snip, the scissor went again and he felt a strand of hair fall onto his shoulder. “I was kinda curious why you forfeited though, looked like you were holding your own.”

“I wasn’t,” he said as she tilted his head down, “by the time I got to that match I could barely keep myself standing,” the tale sounded convincing as he retold it now, he’d had plenty of practice from last Monday.

“Is that so?” she said with a light inflection, “I guess anyone would struggle to fight someone monstrous like that, especially after passing out in the round before. That Bakugou is just my type, you know?”

“What?” he almost made the mistake of turning as another of piece of his hair fell out just above the ear.

Meina chuckled, “Don’t get me wrong, I’m not a creep, he’s far too young obviously. My fiancé was just like him though.”

“Your fiancé? You’re married?” he hadn’t noticed a ring on her finger and she hardly acted like she was.

“We broke up before we actually got married, she and I no longer agreed on what was important. I guess that’s the way it goes,” she sighed.

“So, uh,” he desperately wanted to make it less awkward. “You used to be a hero? Jirou told me. That’s how you managed to afford all this, right?”

“Yes, for a bit there I did a lot of reconnaissance and target takedown, that was almost,” her scissor stopped, “twelve years ago now, I think,” she said before resuming. “Turn your head,” she grabbed him by the chin and moved him right which, despite uncomfortable, he allowed.

“What’s your quirk, if you don’t mind me asking?”

“That’s not a rude question,” she laughed, “Adorable little thing aren’t you?”

He felt his ears turn red, hmph, he scoffed.

She put down a scissor and picked up a different one, this one shorter than the last, “My quirk is called Hue,” she said.

“Hue? So you can change brightness or something?”

She gave another chuckle, this one short and amused, “Not exactly. How about I show you?”

“Sure,” he answered. He watched as she walked up to one of the many coloured tiles on the wall and touched it with her thumb, fore and little finger. The paint beneath it, a mixture of turquoises dried up like she’d stuck a paper towel onto a wine stain, the result ended up on her arm and halfway up it like someone had tattooed her.
“Seems useful,” he said.

“Oh yeah, streets artists are lining up for it,” she giggled before she began to take very ready strides back toward him with her hand tensed.

“Wait what are you?” her palm struck him in the scalp and made him just a tiny bit disorientated for a second, he grabbed the spot she had struck, “Jeez, what was that for?” he hadn’t intended to make the previous comment sound sarcastic, if that was the reason.

“All done,” she said as she picked up the hairdryer and blew it roughly all over his head. “Let me find a mirror, I have one around here somewhere.”

“What did you—” he was sweating all over with dread.

“Take a look,” she said as she found a small hand mirror in the bottom of her cart.

He could barely believe his eyes as he took it, “I just wanted a cut,” he stuttered. He held the shortened edge of his hair as he fiddled with the mirror to get a more exact look. It went from the front around the right side fringes to somewhere at the back, a distinct tinge of dark teal highlight. He put the mirror down, “You’ve gotta change it back, I look ridiculous.”

“Aha, no. I think it looks good, plus it’s short like you wanted, right?”

“It’s dreadful,” he whined as he looked again. Then he stood and threw the drape off, he had to wash it out or something but he wasn’t even sure how, perhaps it would be better just to shave it all off but it looked like it went right to the roots of the affected strands.

“Here I thought a teenager would be up for trying new things,” she chuckled.

“New things?” he spun at her. “This goes beyond that and you know it.”

“Calm down and sit,” she pulled him back by the shoulder and forced him to oblige. “How about we make a deal, you keep it in for a week and if you still don’t like it I’ll give you free cuts till you make it big,” he growled in response, that wasn’t a deal he wanted. “Or I can never resolve the quirk and you’ll be stuck like that for life, would you prefer that? My quirk doesn’t fade you know, that’s why I was such an effective hero.”

“Oh yeah, what the hell could colour possibly do to stop a villain?” he said with spite.

“Permanent blindness, the inability to walk around in public ever again without people knowing exactly who you are, you know that sort of mundane useless thing,” she answered, “I can give you another demonstration if you prefer,” she held up her nails.

“No, no way. You win,” he backed off slightly. There was zero chance he was letting her make it even more teal. A week, he could last a week, right? Even if that week was the internship week, the prospect of a pro seeing him like this was equal parts frustrating and embarrassing.

“I’m glad you’re beginning to see it my way,” she chuckled, “but I guess I need to be honest with you, I didn’t do it because I wanted to be mean to you, really. Let me show you something,” she said as she walked in front of the chair and turned her back to face him before slowly pulling up the edges of her shirt, enough to make him avert his eyes. “Relax,” she said. “I’m not an exhibitionist.”

He gave it a second of hesitation then took her word. She had been right about it as she certainly wasn’t but frankly the sight he now saw was far more awe worthy, or perhaps even frightening. On her back, there were two lines, gashes, that travelled in a perfect parallel line from the bottom right of
her back to the top of her neck and even further than that, it tore up and through the fade of the hair on her neck like someone had used a hook to do it.

“Shit,” he said as she dropped the shirt back down and then he bit his tongue, “Sorry,” he added. It had just slipped out due to our gruesome it was.

“It’s alright. I’m sure out of all people you can empathise, right?”

He looked at his right arm and nodded, “Yeah,” he said.

“I used to be just like you, you know. I plastered myself with all sorts of ridiculous things just so no one could see it,” she said as she pulled up a chair opposite him.

He fiddled with the tape, “You did?”

Mhmm, she murmured, “I was ashamed, I didn’t want people to see me as a victim. I even tried to use my quirk to hide it,” she laughed. “Kind of ridiculous if you think about it.”

“Doesn’t sound ridiculous,” he said.

“It was. I would spend hours trying to fix it, I even went as far as to consider getting plastic surgery, some hero I was. But then eventually I realised, the more I tried to hide it the more attention I drew to it. I was letting it define who I was when I was so much more.”

“How did it happen?” he asked as curiosity got the better of him, there was no way it could have been a simple accident, not a wound that looked so deliberate.

Meina paused, then spoke, “It happened after the last job I ever took as a registered hero, my fiancé, she had… has, a quirk that allows her to turn any calcium in her body into fangs, like you’d see on a tiger from the ice age,” he could see pain on her face as she talked, “Have you heard of trigger?”

“No,” he shook his head.

“It’s a drug,” she said, “usually in the form of a needle, nasty stuff that enhances ones quirk to the point of self destruction. The pain of it usually makes users lose the ability to even act rationally.”

He felt his expression widen a bit, “Like they go berserk or something?”

“Yeah, it’s crazy effective. You wouldn’t expect it from something that looks so innocent, a little yellow vial of liquid that’s probably no more than twenty millilitres. That’s what she got stuck with because of the reputation I had. Some crazed maniac with a grudge just got her with it in the middle of a café. The next thing I know she’s going insane.”

“I’m sorry,” he said. It sounded terrifying and very close to something else he knew, however there wasn’t a way it could be the same thing, he was sure Recovery Girl would have caught something like that, not to mention he hadn’t exactly been stuck with any needles prior to his fights. His problem was similar, but different. “Where is your fiancé now?” that detail had escaped him if she had said it.

“She couldn’t deal with what she had done despite it being my fault, so we split up. I visit her every once in a while in Aomori where she moved to isolate herself,” Meina shook her head. There were no tears in her eyes but a distinct sadness that had sat there for a long time. “Things like this are something you get over as you get older, that’s just how life is. I bet you’ll get over what I did to your hair too and realise a little change can be a good thing.”
He touched the teal and pulled it down. He had almost forgotten it with what she had told him. He saw her point; maybe he really was overreacting to what she’d done. There were far worse things than a little hair dye. He looked down at his arm, far worse things that could have happened instead of scars, as well.

“Thanks,” he said as he got up.

He left the store with his shoulders hunched, alongside an amused Jirou at his side, “I’m holding you responsible for this,” he scowled.

Jirou snorted, “If it’s any consolation I think it doesn’t look half bad.”

“Hmph,” he answered.

“Did Meina say anything to you in particular?” she asked.

“About…?” he tilted his head at her, causing a stray edge of the teal to hang within eyesight. She could have chosen to torment him with a worse colour, he supposed. That didn’t mean that he liked it though.

She shrugged, “Forget it, it doesn’t matter. Now smile wide for me,” she said as she pulled her phone up to his face.

“What are you-” the phone clicked, “You didn’t,” he looked at her with daggers in his eyes.

“I promised Kirishima I’d show him,” she chuckled.

“Give it,” he grabbed for it.

“Nah-uh, it’s too late now!” she jumped out of the way and held the phone up, it was already sent.

“I’m going to get you back twice as hard now,” he frowned. “Was this your plan all along? I knew it was too convenient.”

“Well, it was mostly Meina’s honestly, though I didn’t think she’d go this far. She knows what she’s doing though. It suits you better than you think,” Jirou said.

It wasn’t that he didn’t appreciate the wisdom the woman had given him but he really could have done without the practical component. He could already imagine Kirishima’s reaction, and he didn’t want to think about the rest of them, especially Kaminari.

Vrrm, his phone when in his hand. It was then he realised that he didn’t have to try and imagine at all.

1 – Eijirou Kirishima – NEW

Duuuuuuuuuuuuude.

He died a little inside as he read it. If he tried maybe he could find a bridge to jump off of before they met at the train station tomorrow.
* I do not own BNHA. OC material is my own.
[East Hosu – Train Station – 7:34 AM Monday]

The tiled floor jittered as another train passed close by, enough to make his body vibrate as it did in all its noise. He’d gotten up at six thirty and arrived here at seven thirty but it had been in vain. He was still stuck waiting for others to arrive before Aizawa would address them. In his hand rested the case marked twenty-one and across his shoulder a heavy Yuuei sports bag. He’d put both together to ease a week’s worth of stay but the weight of it had him thinking he might have over packed. He had no time to give it more thought as something grabbed him roughly by the back of the head, a hand he realised.

“Oh my god, I didn’t think it was real,” Kirishima said as he let him go.

“Jirou is a dead woman,” he mumbled. She was already gone as Aizawa had given her special leave to take her own transport since she had to be there at seven. He would have done it too if his wasn’t so much later at nine.

His friend reached for his hair again and ruffled it, causing the teal strands on the right to flourish. "Hey, at least now you stand out a bit," he chuckled as Riley pushed the hand away.

“I already stand out enough,” he said and waved at his taped wounds before striking his head into the post again. “Edgeshot is going to think I’m a clown,” he moaned. There was some solace in the fact he wouldn’t have to limp there, thanks to Recovery Girl. He only had two lighter braces now and no pills.

“It’s not so bad,” a voice came from behind Kirishima. “At least now you can add ‘I won a fight against a can of paint’ to your resume,” Kaminari said as he poked over his shoulder.

“Holy shit,” Kirishima burst out in laughter.

“Yeah, yeah laugh it up you dicks, I’ll get Meina to do the exact same thing to you,” he said then swung his bag around to hit them. “I bet your red would look great with some purple you bastard.”

“Alright, alright I’ll stop,” he snorted. “Everyone’s here anyway,” Kirishima said as he begot himself from his amusement.

“I’m sure you’re all eager to go but I still need to a roll call, so get your asses over here,” Aizawa said from beyond the two idiots. Finally, he thought. At least he’d be free from his torment.

“Can’t believe it’s gonna be a whole week. I can’t wait to see what Fourth Kind’s got in store,” Kirishima said as they went to gather up with the others. “You gonna be alright finding your way to Edgeshot’s place Riley?”

“I’ll be fine, I’m not that hopeless,” he had it all saved on his phone, it wasn’t actually all that far. Edgeshot’s confirmation had obliged him to come to the Hosu branch rather than the one all the way up in Niigata city. “I am bit nervous though.”

“Try to shake it, can’t let a real pro see you freaking out under pressure,” he shrugged but didn’t seem so quite sure himself. There must have been worry on his mind as well.
“...Kouda, Yaoyorozu, Kaminari... Ashido..” Aizawa counted off names while ticking them, “Torenagi...” he looked up at him over his clipboard. “You are Torenagi, correct?” he said with a flat expression.

His shoulders dropped in a slump and a miserable sigh as Kirishima’s laughter started up again. “You’re never gonna live this down, you’re just lucky Sero isn’t here to see this,” he said he hit him on the back.

“Now you all better mind your manners with the heroes, you’re not just representing yourselves out there,” the man stuffed the clipboard away.

“Got it!” Ashido said.

Aizawa shook his head, “That’s yes and Sir, not ‘got it’ Ashido,” he said to the sound of several snickers.

“Yes, Sirrrr...” she answered.

“Now, get on with it,” Aizawa waved his hand and their group split.

[Central Hosu – Downtown – 8:40 AM]

He had found central Hosu to be a city locked, a nest of stairwells and corridors shaken by the rumbling of city life above and villainy below. New houses erupted within the corpses of the old and rickety sheds stood broken and long overtaken by the overwhelming pressure of a city that had in its lifetime seen more than one revolution. It was in its own way revolting but even among the stench of it all he saw faces of people not besmirched by annoyance or resignation but rather by content and welcoming smiles, possibly induced by the vigils of heroes that cluttered around them that served as a reassurance of relief against potential tyranny.

It was after a tirade that he had finally found it, an hour of navigating it all. He had gotten a few over the shoulder looks on his way there but it wasn’t anything he hadn’t expected, no one had confronted him before he made it; maybe they didn’t recognise him through the hair. The street he stood on lay in the shadow of a greater street beyond it; the hero offices, he had found, were clustered toward the middle of the city.

He stopped in front of a building or rather a mound in the earth that was highly unlikely to be considered liveable in the first place, all that gave it away was a single door that led down into it and the large embossed letters that sat on the front.

Edgeshot Heroic Office

He could see beyond the low wall at the sides of the entrance as he approached, the ground surrounding it was a lavish array of flowers that were arranged in sixteen alternating quadrants spread over the entire plot. Each was red, yellow or blue and made the place look like the most conspicuous oxymoron it could be compared to what it was trying to be. The pure idea of subtlety was lost on it but he figured that was on purpose since a hero agency would be trying to stand out not blend in. He might have appreciated its beauty had he not been in a hurry.

The lobby he entered was long and contradictory. Lights hung in ceramic foil from the ceiling letting a dim gloom spill onto the tasteless art lining the walls and the identical crimson flowers in pots beneath them that led him endlessly ahead. The floor was a chic composite of the dreariness that came with deepened hardwood and the only thing that lent the space sound other than the distinct etching of pen and paper that came from a desk thirty feet away.
As he inched closer he could see it was a sleek and modern but an internal mess. Papers lay scattered in piles of organized chaos as the figure behind it, identifiably a woman, continued to sift through them as if she didn’t even know he existed. Her garment was a tight black garb like some kind of ninja that left no space for anything beneath it to move and was undeniably made for combat.

“How Ma’am,” he said as tried to hide his unnerve. The only thing he could see was her amber eyes which harrowed through slits in her mask. “Um, I’m here from Yuuei Highschool, for the work internship week. It’s uh, Torenagi Riley,” the woman didn’t so much as flinch in recognition. “I think… the school sent word ahead that I was coming.”

Her pen halted and her wrist twisted with an unnatural flick of meticulous precision. It sent the pen flying toward him before he even knew what happened, followed by a precise metallic thud as it hit him in the forehead like some kind of bull’s-eye target before falling to the floor. It wasn’t something that he could have avoided at this range, let alone expected.

“Too slow,” the woman said in unflinching monotone.

“H…huh?” he felt dumbfounded.

“Your guard was down, if I had been a villain you would be dead right now,” she made a motion like she was cutting her throat with her thumb, “remember that next time rookie.”

He wasn’t sure how to respond to that, it was a paranoid philosophy but he couldn’t say it was exactly wrong, however he wasn’t yet cynical enough to begin treating every new stranger like they were out to get him. Maybe in his position he should have been, it would have saved him the stinging pain now on his forehead from the miniature ambush.

The woman opened the desk draw to reach inside of and pulled out a heavy two-set of stainless steel keys, “Take these,” she said as she dropped them next to some kind of shipping form. “That door,” she pointed to the right, “after that take a right and two more lefts, numbers on the key, leave your luggage there and put on your costume. You have five minutes, so don’t dawdle.”

He took the keys after a moment of judging if she was going to slap him as he tried, when she went back to her papers he took his chance and fled through the door. Beyond it was something identical, he might have mistaken it for the first hallway had it not said guest wing on the far end above another door, rather than take that he instead went through a door to his right and two more left like he’d been instructed. By the time he found the room that matched the keys indentation he was sure five minutes had already passed but he went inside nonetheless.

The room, which he assumed was his for now, was plain like the rest of the facility. All it held was a bed, a nightstand, an ornate wooden table with one of the crimson flowers and a rather well stocked bookshelf that sat wedged next to a full length mirror. It was hardly big, more like the size of a prison cell. Hopefully he wasn’t going to spend a lot of time in here.

He dumped his stuff on the bed and unlatched the case, inside was his costume that he hadn’t worn since the USJ attack. It hadn’t changed significantly from what he could tell as he rolled the visor in his hands, maybe the plastic that made up the front of it was more flexible now he wasn’t sure but the cuts that had been made through it were gone, the ones Janus had made, he almost shuddered.

Rapidly he undressed in front of the mirror. Even though he had the urge to hurry he couldn’t help but pause at his reflection as he put each piece of the costume on, he hadn’t stopped to look at himself properly like this since he’d been shown the scars for the first time after the kidnapping. There was a noticeable thinness to him now which he suspected was the result of medical emaciation. In no way did the weight loss seem healthy and the nagging tiredness that accompanied
it told him he needed to stop getting hurt. Other than that the biggest difference he noticed was literally him, or rather his height. He had grown maybe another one or two inches without noticing it, that probably explained why the legs on the costume felt shorter. At this rate he would almost be as tall as his dad soon, not that that was saying much.

He stopped looking at himself as he put the helmet on last, which hid the teal of his hair well enough for him not to feel uncomfortable, although the braces under his costume almost did that instead since there wasn’t much room to begin with. Now all that remained was what to do next, now that he recalled the woman hadn’t actually told him exactly why he would only have five minutes and whether or not to even come to the lobby when he was ready.

The question was answered for him as his door opened with a click. Revealed to him was a twig-like man veiled in the same robe and mask the woman had been before him, evidently his time had elapsed.

“Come with me and bring your case,” the man said in a firm casted voice. His eyes revealed nothing as he turned away, not even leaving time for confirmation. The whole thing was turning out to be more serious than he anticipated but he knew that if this was how they handled matters around here then it was probably better he fell in line rather than against it, he was a guest after all and he didn’t want them to report his behaviour to Aizawa.

As he followed the man it came to wonder if Kirishima was having a similar experience or Jirou for that matter. If he remembered she had gone with some musically inclined hero, Mist… something or other, he couldn’t recall. He knew Kirishima’s choice was based on vigilantism, it certainly sounded exciting.

It felt like the corridors went on forever before they finally reached a door with a simple Staff Only sign plastered on the front. The man hit it back and let him walk inside ahead only to let out a stalled breath he appeared to have been holding the entire time. The area they’d arrived in was spacious and well lit which was a nice change from what he’d just been through.

“Sorry about all that kid,” the man said as he clapped him on the shoulder. “Gotta keep up appearances out there, boss demands it, says it makes us look professional,” he shrugged. His face was kind in strange contrast to his deep voice.

He almost didn’t realise it was the same man, on account of him having removed the mask and allowed a medium length of black hair to cascade down to his shoulders, held back only by a tacky multicoloured headband.

“Names Koki, but you can just call Ko, alright?” he held up a rather casual two finger salute. It was warm and welcoming. As if he’d done a complete one eighty from the stern figure that had stood in his place a minute ago.

“Um, sure. I’m Riley,” he answered and held out his hand, which the man shook with a nod. He already seemed well aware.

“Leina give you any trouble? The lady at the front,” he asked. Instead of answering he pouted under the visor as he remembered the deft attack. “Aha, I can tell just by that look she used her little pen trick, don’t worry about it she’s just messin’ with you lil man. Get’s me with it too sometimes.”

The man’s cheerfulness made him feel at ease as he began to usher him through halls of desks. As he looked around he could see they’d entered some kind of literal hero… office, what he assumed were sidekicks were whispering to each other as they passed. They weren’t rigid either, like Ko had pretended to be, it was all relaxed. Some he could undoubtedly hear speaking about him as he and
his guard passed, words like rookie and Yuuei jumped to his ears, as well as the three letters U, S and J.

“Don’t get intimidated, all these guys are ‘bout as fierce as a bed of roses I’ll tell ya,” Ko chuckled, “I’m looking after you this week between any breaks you might have, my desk is that one over there next to the bosses office,” he pointed at a wooden monsterity in the corner in the direction they were headed. Next to it was a larger black door with shadowed glass around it. “If ya ever get lost just go there,” he said as they stopped beside it.

Ko held his hand over his desk briefly before he took a booklet from underneath a pile of messed up notes scattered there, “We won’t keep the boss waiting any longer but once you’re free make sure you come back and grab this,” he held it up before putting it back down. “Your teach told me you’re a foreign student, yeah?”

He nodded, “America,” he answered.

“Sounds ‘bout right, I set up a bit of a crash course in how this stuff with the agency all works so you can wrap your head around it later, but for now best you get in there,” he pushed the door open wide as he dragged him in. “Don’t worry, boss ain’t as scary as he thinks himself,” he gave him a shove before letting the door slam shut.

It instantaneously became dark, or rather almost. The only light was from the flickering of several dozens of monitors in front of which stood a figure he didn’t recognise until he stepped a few feet closer and the man turned, it was Edgeshot himself.

An unnatural vibe hung off the man and hid itself in vain behind a pyramid of geometrically pleasing conformity enhanced by the lavish intricacy of his clothes. They were something one might associate with a modern day martial artist and suggested that the man weighed himself as a great threat that one should be able to regard at first sight. He only had one eye exposed and trained on him but he felt himself being seen through by both, discerning with a keen simplicity every detail of him and how he moved. It was almost mechanical but behind his poise was naught but raw intellect and agility.

“You are late, but I guess late is still better than never,” Edgeshot said as he walked closer. His voice was harsh and deliberate, like he didn’t want to waste a single sound of it.

“Sorry, Sir, I’m not that familiar with Hosu,” he answered. He could swear he wasn’t actually late, but if the man even cared he didn’t show it.

“No doubt you must be wondering why I nominated you,” he said as he stood at full height eye to eye with him. He nodded, he had to admit he had expected Edgeshot to taller for some reason; maybe his exposure to All Might had altered his perception of pro heroes.

“Curiosity, to be blunt,” the answer didn’t surprise him. He was sure many had the same thought after the whole affair. “Only one man uses that style of fighting and he is not too fond of sharing. How did you end up convincing that old bag to each you something like that?”

“It just sort of happened after,” he let the word drop, out of all the reasons this wasn’t one he had actually contemplated. He wasn’t sure how his poor imitation could have been tied back to Aizawa like that, not to mention he’d only used it twice during the festival at most. “I don’t really know why he did,” he finished. It wasn’t like there had been a prompt other than Nedzu for the man to do it.

The man turned back to his monitor, “If you do not know then it does not matter. I am sure on your part you only accepted due to my status and promise of expertise, in which case I have plenty a way to receive my answer. I doubt you will find it easy, we work on a set routine and I expect you to
attempt your best to take part, there won’t be much enjoyment to be had from it but you may learn something.”

“I'll do my best, Sir,” he bowed slightly. He knew that the week wouldn’t be easy, especially not after everything Kirishima had told him throughout the last. It had almost made him want to reconsider but this was really his best bet.

“Then we will begin immediately by assessing your current level of ability, follow me,” the pro hero left without so much as beckoning him but he took the cue nonetheless.

[Edgeshot Heroic Office – The Arena of Increments – 9:10 AM]

The elevator rumbled as it went down further and further, through the glass he could see was a vast area that should have been too large to exist underneath a city with any sort of legality. It might have been the size of two football fields long and just as wide if not wider, among its architecture hung three huge circular pits surrounded by a maze of ugly red and brown spires that connected them by ways of difficulty and impasse. It was like a canyon and became only more daunting as the doors finally parted in front of him.

“This is where you will spend the majority of your time when I have not relegated you to other duties. I am sure Koki made mention of himself as your guide, so while I will be here on occasion I am a busy man and you must go to him should you find yourself with any needs unmet,” the man walked almost as fast as he spoke. “The other who shall assist is over there,” he pointed without looking at a figure at the edge of one of the pits they had just entered. Whoever it was they were too far to make out any specific detail, though he felt like he’d seen them before.

Edgeshot pushed him slightly in the chest as they made it a quarter of the way through the rocky quadrant, enough to tell him to stop moving. The man soon stood somewhere over thirty feet from him with nothing but a sense of calm. His hands clenched uneasily as he watched the pro, it was enough to tell him exactly what kind of assessment was about to happen.

“Now, kill me hero,” the man tilted his head back just the tiniest increment, “That is, if you can.”

Despite not carrying the disillusion of victory he hardly needed to be told twice. He’d already begun his concentration. It took three seconds to form and another two to begin crushing the earth beneath Edgeshot to shards of debris. The man made only one step to the right to dodge it, but he had anticipated as much, it was only a blow to test the water and it was just as deep as he had come to expect.

As his mind rolled to judge the next move he noticed something was off, that was the unmistakeable sting of just the tiniest cut on his shoulder that had been made clean through the fabric. It was shallow and barely broke the skin nevertheless it was still there. He wasn’t sure how he had missed it but that meant that either he would need to throw in everything from the get go or Edgeshot would cut him down where he stood.

He then dropped impatiently into his stance, second nature as it now was. It was then he realised that was exactly what the pro wanted as he changed in a complete and incomprehensible sense to something he wasn’t a moment before. It was like he had become alert and defensive despite not having moved so much as a finger. There was something dangerous about it, like an entity made modular in its purpose.

He was wholly unsure why but it was the stance that had triggered it. There was nothing special about it as far as he knew because all it did was help him divide the new liabilities of compression
and decompression in his mind. It made focus easier and his management of the quirk faster as a result. Whatever it was about it that unnerved the man he knew he had to act fast.

He clenched the fist connected to his right gauntlet and lunged. If he had to fight the hero in close range then it would be on his own terms. Edgeshot didn’t move a muscle as thirty feet became ten and then five but it was obvious he was reading his approach as it happened and it made him realise that he would need to be smarter than what he had planned, it wasn’t by luck that his arm was already trembling with a solution to that.

He swung his left fist wildly at the pro, an attack which the man slipped by with relative ease, it didn’t matter as he’d already caught himself on his heel and swivelled his right into the direction he’d expected the man to dodge to. Bang, the gauntlet went as it emptied it’s stock into Edgeshot’s face. The pro was forced out of the way by it this time, rather than inconvenienced. It was exactly what he had been counting on.

A pull on the collar and a purposeful dive hooked the man forward in a tight embrace of ever growing weight as he poured his quirk into it. The tunic went from soft to almost the texture of rock as everything around it became heavier as well with the strengthening of his grip on it. He knew this sick method he had accidentally learned was the only way of slowing the hero down to manageable levels. Edgeshot staggered forward under the grip and he lunged for the man’s knee with his free hand, his tremor rushed out of him as fast as it had gathered up in the other hand, which now hung at the ready to drive his leg into the new weak point he had formed.

Twang, the debilitated leg struck him hard in the chest, it felt like a steel wire had whipped him. Harsh momentum came with it which flung him a dozen feet before he roughly hit the ground with naught but pain and breathlessness to show for his efforts. Before he could so much as move he felt the sharp point of a blade on his neck, only to find it was a thin hand from the man himself, flattened in such a pristine way it might have cut him by just being near it. He didn’t have to wait for the dust to settle to know the fight was over.

“I surrender,” he said. Edgeshot’s hand returned to normality, instead of being menacing it was now offered and as he grabbed it he was yanked to his feet. “Thank you, Sir,” he said as he patted the smudges of newly gathered dirt from his costume. He had known the man would do something to fight back but he had hardly expected it to be so direct.

“You will find I am not a man who likes to waste words. If there is anything you do not understand I expect you to speak up about it without hesitating, do you understand?”

“Yes, Sir,” he answered. As fast and loose as Ko had played it Edgeshot didn’t feel like someone he could feel at ease around anytime soon.

“Good, then to put it simply you are at this point in time the furthest you could possibly be from what I would consider a hero. Your form is rudimentary and problematic and I doubt you even know the true purpose of that stance you so clumsily use.”

“The furthest I could be…” that stung. Heck, it more than stung but he wasn’t sure why he was upset, that’s what these three years were for. It was better he was torn down in an easy way like this then finding out the hard way later.

“We will get along better if you do not parrot me,” Edgeshot said as if he was tired.

“Sorry, Sir,” he bit his lip.

“Then observe,” he held up his hand. It began to gradually slim down before forming in a thin rapier
after three seconds, “This was my level when I was a student at Yuuei. Now,” his hand returned to normal, “The level I am at currently,” his hand whipped and thinned instantly, a second later a schick came from it. Shhhhhh-Crack, he almost jumped as a spire more than fifty feet away came down. He hadn’t even seen the man’s hand move in the direction.

Faster… than sound, he realised. He looked down at the cut on his shoulder, Much faster, he gulped. The man had achieved that through just pure hard work, it was almost unfathomable.

“So now you see what I mean. Good, we can move on to a task suited to that regard,” Edgeshot turned away and beckoned with a single hand the woman whom had sat watching them.

She stood and then jumped in one great leap, more than half the distance toward them. Now that she was closer he could see the tight amber clips within her auburn hair that matched her eyes. They were a reflection of the fitted dress in which she obviously took great pride, made to entice and to draw in and then to ensnare like a poisonous flower. She had a practiced walk and made it look deadly, enough to kill and switch to with a step made only more intimidating by the sight of hardened metal cuffs hanging off her waist. A sneer was her default and held just shy of overconfidence, enough to shut someone up with just a snap of her teeth.

Edgeshot threw something at her that Riley saw for only an instant, a piece of paper bundled around something else, “I will be leaving it up to you for today. Do not overdo it, I know how you are,” he said before he turned and jumped. His body contorted into a thin zigzag and then he was gone in leaps and bounds that skittered across the rock like animated electric bolts.

“I hope you’re ready small fry,” Leina said with a fiendish leer as she walked up to him, like a beast that had found its prey, “When I’m done with you I think you will wish you had died in that pitiful competition.

He gulped, now he was beginning to wonder if his previous torment had been preferable to what was to come.

Leina’s warm up had almost brought him to the point of collapse. It had been a series of trials that mimicked the quirk apprehension test, albeit without the quirk part. Hence why it had been more tiring than anything; throwing, running, pull ups and everything else had been done to test the upper limit of his physical strength, which with the downtime wasn’t exactly great. Aizawa had made him faster but his strength had dwindled.

“That about does it for the mundane stuff,” she hadn’t written any scores or anything down. “Now I just need you to try a Q.S.U.M.M and we can get down to the fun, you know what that is right?”

Mhmm, he said and nodded. Though he had to admit that in light of what had happened he hadn’t actually been able to try it himself.

“This one,” she patted a small red dummy she’d set up beside her, “is calibrated to all sidekicks that have served under Edgeshot at one point or another.”

“Edgeshot isn’t included?” he asked as he made a gap between him and the machine. Compressions were still by far his strongest attack in sheer power.

Leina snorted, “Well, we could but then I doubt anyone would score higher than three percent, except maybe me and Ko.”

“Ko is that strong?” the guy had kind of reminded him of Kirishima with how buddy-buddy he acted, though he hadn’t exactly appeared empowered.
“When he wants to be, his quirk is very… specific to him. Doubt you’ll get to see it even when you go patrol,” she shrugged. “Not like he needs it anyway. Anyway enough chit-chat, get to it rookie.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” he put up his hands and began to concentrate on the machine. There was a stringent silence in the air as he did, and a further one in his mind. That much helped anyway. “Compress,” he shouted as the tremor became too much to bare.

The machine gave a harsh pang, as it’s insides caved and then bounced back like nothing had happened, “Analysis complete,” the robot said in a lower pitched voice than Yuuei’s had, “Estimated power; twenty-three percent. Estimated predictability; ninety-seven percent. Recommendation; speed and power. Updating database. Thank you for using Q.S.U.M.M sidekick.”

Leina scoffed, “I guess it looks more impressive on T.V, we usually cull any new recruits that come in under twenty-percent. You had two back to back hospitalisations, right?”

He nodded, “After the sports festival and…” he left the other hanging once more.

“Before that were you engaging in any particular workout routine?” she asked.

“Uhh…” he tried to recall, “I ran in the mornings and did some light exercise like push ups but it was mostly just working on my quirk. I used to do a set regime at my old school but it got all messed up when I moved,” to be honest, it was more out of inconvenience than anything. The months leading up to it all had been hectic. The chain of… unfortunate events that followed had only extended that hiatus. He had meant to resume it but that had yet to happen.

“I guess it makes sense then, you might seem pretty fit for someone your age but inside your body must be a mess. That’s probably taken its toll on your quirk as a whole.”

“So how do I fix it, just… work out?”

“That’d be a pretty boring approach and I reckon it’d take far too long for what that fancy school of yours has in mind. No, I think it’d be far more engaging to flatten every single bone in your body until you can’t even feel your muscles ache anymore,” she said it as if the mere thought delighted her. “Catch,” she said as she chucked something small and covered in Velcro at him.

Heavy, was his first thought as he caught it. “Weights?” he said, it couldn’t have been more than couple of kilos.

“That’s right, two for each of your limbs and one for your stomach, strip and I’ll help you put them on and then you can wear this instead of your costume,” she threw a black bag at him, it was an identical outfit to the one she had been wearing earlier at reception.

“Can’t I just put them on under this?” he wasn’t too keen on the baggy black gi, while it might have fit her to form he doubted it would let him move how he wanted.

“I mean, by all means you could, but I don’t want to have to explain to your school why your costume came back in shreds. If you’re shy or something I can wait till you put them on yourself but I think you’ll find it rather difficult the first time around.”

Hmph, he answered and submitted, soon he felt about twice as heavy as he had before despite the total weight on his body having been somewhere less than half that. “Shit,” he said as he tried to take his first step and nearly fell. Even that much made his muscles burn in hatred of the new addition. He was suddenly glad to be rid of the additional weight his gauntlets and helmet would have added, the only part he’d kept was his cleats.
“Feels good, doesn’t it?” Leina laughed, “You’ll get used to it. A month of wearing those and I doubt anyone would be able to tell you’ve ever even seen a hospital.”

“A month?” the idea sounded insane.

“No pain, no gain. If I see you without them at any point this week there’s gonna be hell to pay.”

He had to convince himself for a split second that this was really necessary, but the idea of that was enticing in its own right, “Yes Ma’am,” he answered as he almost swayed again.

“Ma’am, I’m beginning to like the sound of that,” she smirked. “I doubt you’ll act so formal with me soon enough,” the gloves on her belt were no longer clipped but covered each of her hands snugly in a ringed leather like someone had stuck five individual brass knuckles together to make them.

He backed off on instinct as she began to approach with increasing steps, there was a murder in her eyes that had presented herself with the equipment she’d put on, she was closer to the woman she had been when he had initially met her only now that she was armed it was like any semi-pleasant appeal she’d had was completely drowned. All that remained was a threat, one he knew was about to hit him without a second thought.

Her hand reared back behind her back as she wound it up like some kind of spring, “The boss went too easy on you. I’m not as soft as he is,” then she thrust, all at once.

The fist clipped his hair as he barely dropped out of the way, teal strands fell among a crash as her hand collided like an anchor with the stone behind his head. He could only catch a glimpse of it, a single punch and she had annihilated an entire spire. The weights had almost prevented him from dodging it, something told him that would have laid him out cold if he had been hit.

She was less than three inches from his face now and it had morphed into a deadly snarl, “You scared yet? Better start running,” he didn’t take a second to think about his answer to it. If Bakugou was a demon then this woman was the one who would be able to take on that kind of thing and laugh in its face.

The woman placed her right knuckle on the back of her heel before bringing it down in one overhead smash. The ground shattered to bits where he had stood and shook him as he tried to escape even further, there wasn’t a way he could fight her, his every nerve screamed at him to run despite the detriment on his bones as if a chance permanent damage would be preferable to certain death.

[Edgeshot Heroic Office – Staff Room – 12:45 PM]

Ko gave a hearty laugh as Riley collapsed into the high backed office chair with his costume case at his feet, “Man kid, you look awful,” he said.

All he could answer was a stifled groan. It was true. It was very true but he didn’t care, he hadn’t even bothered changing back as his body was too busy waging a war with itself to even consider anything that took so much energy. Bruises flecked him in yellow anguish under the thud of the weights still on his body but now the alternative of taking them off felt much more terrifying if it meant inciting that woman again.

“Get a nice workout Lei?” the man asked as she carefully put the amber clips back in her hair.

Pfft, she hid her chuckle, “I hardly broke a sweat. He’s all yours for now Ko, if I do any more today I think I’ll break him.”
“You might have already,” he had to agree, it felt like it. “Don’t worry kid, I won’t torture ya like Leina, in fact I gotcha this,” Ko threw a warm brick like package of foil in his lap and placed a tall plastic bottle on the desk between them. He could tell by a smell exactly what it was without having to tear it open, it made his mouth water.

“Well what are you waiting for? If you’re starving that much dig in,” he laughed again. “jus’ listen and if there’s somethin’ ya don’t understand just speak up.”

He took the cue and ripped the foil in one over eager motion, as he bit into the bag the sweltering of fish swept across his taste buds. It wasn’t particularly delicious or anything but he chomped down bite after bite regardless, the fact is was edible was all that mattered.

“I’m glad to see ya got an appetite, half of the people that meet Leina can’t eat for days after,” he shook his head. “So,” the man opened the booklet he’d shown him earlier and laid it out in front of him like some paperback novel, “I donno much about how it works in America but first off we receive our work from the police first an’ foremost, usually in the form of a request of heroic assistance. Sidekicks will be the ones to answer but if the threat is big Edgeshot will go himself, along with backup, not that he needs it.”

“That parts the same,” he gasped between gulps of water. He noticed now the man was the kind that used his hands vigorously while talking.

“Good, won’t need to do much on that then. Main part that applies to ya if we ever go on patrol is the restriction of quirk usage.”

“Restriction?” he knew you weren’t allowed to use your quirk here in public if you weren’t a licensed hero, only for self-defence. That part didn’t surprise him, even if it was different.

“For you in particular, unless we get in some situation where it is absolutely necessary do not harm someone with ya quirk, got it?”

He nodded, “Yes, Sir, but… in case something were to happen?”

“You act like a hero would and worry about the details after,” Ko shrugged, “but don’t cha ever think of doing so lightly. Using a quirk risks lives and ya’d be a fool to think those lives are yours to risk.”

“Leina said you don’t use yours a lot,” he remembered.

Ko nodded, “You ain’t gonna run across much more then muggers in ya day to day life when you’re a sidekick, a quirk is ya trump card, from what I saw yeh ain’t half bad at fighting close range anyhow.”

“During the festival I got lucky that my opponent relied on his quirk more than his strength, those last two fights were just flukes,” he looked down at his hand and felt it in his mind. After Monoma it had worsened and it was still doing so each day.

“Nevertheless kiddo, brawns first quirk last when you’re out there with me, unless someone’s gonna die then ya do whatcha gotta,” the man turned three pages past the one he’d been on. “Now, ima get down to the boring stuff with ya while we still got the chance and then we’ll head out for a bit, sound good?”

“Wait, we’re already patrolling today?” it was almost enough to make him miss-swallow the last bit of his meal.
“We only gotcha for this week, best make it count. That’s why Leina is doing what she’s doin,” the man indicated at the position of one of the weights below the fabric of his tunic. “Plus a little bitta fun after that can’t hurt.”

“I appreciate it, Sir,” even if he had now garnered a rational fear of the woman he knew it was necessary if he wanted to get back to where he needed to be. He hadn’t been able to participate much in the way of practical heroics classes during the time he’d had his crutch, which had been three of the four lessons they’d had after picking names.

“Good, now,” the man reached into a desk draw and struggled for a second to pull something out, then he resorted to using both his hands and managed to drag up a book that could have doubled as a blacksmith’s anvil. It shook the desk with a _bang_ strong enough to cause the half empty water bottle to fall over, “how much did ya say ya knew about heroic law?”

[Central Hosu – Alleyway – 3:31 PM]

The sewer grate slipped into place with a _shunk_; him and Ko had emerged in an gangway just off one of the main roads of Hosu but far from where they’d come. They’d taken one of many tunnels from within Edgeshot’s hideout to get here, most of which were unnavigable in more than single file despite how lithe him and the sidekick were.

“Right, I reckon just getting you out and about might do you the greatest good. Getcha some feel of the city as it were,” Ko said as he gave himself a good stretch, something which he copied.

They were both in their actual costumes now as they stepped out, however it was hard not to notice how different the man’s was to his own. It was almost as extravagant as it was loose and patterned in all manner of odd inconsistencies much like the headband that he still had pinned to hold his hair at least somewhat in position. The getup looked hard to move in, although he himself was having a similar predicament on account of the weights.

Even within a few steps he could tell Hosu had changed in a manner in which one might contrast one shade of yellow with another of green. Streets that had bustled with the urgency of commute now retaliated with that of leisurely enjoyment and the mingling of students for whom the day had just ended. It was a pleasant sight to be sure, one that explained at least in some way that the people considered themselves safe, even with men like Janus out there. His hatred of the man had been what had kept him focussed during Leina’s chase, how much he knew it was necessary if he ever wanted to accomplish his goal.

Gradually as Ko and him passed from roads to streets and from streets to shopping malls and through parks that were nestled in cleverly disguised alcoves the city became far clearer to comprehend in its layout. It wasn’t so much that the city was a maze but far more so that it was a thing that played by its own rules and if you knew those rules then getting around wasn’t so much hard as it was convenient. That was far from saying he knew it like the back of his hand, even after what felt like an incomprehensible amount of time spent just walking aimlessly, however he was sure that even if he lost the sidekick he could almost certainly make his own way back now.

Whilst some might have described Leineif as the halfway point between a suburb and a metropolis he could only think of Hosu as something that made it nothing but a small village by comparison. It was true that his school’s town was in all ways more structured but it lacked some kind of articulate raw culture that this city had in spades, like at any moment something big might happen. He found it was hard to put into words but closely enough one might describe it noire, a city wrapped in the mystery of all its inhabitants’ actions. It lived and breathed, unlike Leineif which was a heartless plastic model designed and implemented overnight to serve a need with no real identity other than its
purpose. He despised how organized it had been, how everything had its place.

It was only now that he realised in a way how much he had hated that place, maybe as he had lived through it he had convinced himself he didn’t or his friends had been enough to make it seem tolerable. Either way he was glad he was out.

“Must be daunting for you,” Ko said as they walked into a street in juxtaposition to the one that pre-empted it. Old style brickwork lined it as if in satire of some European style an engineer had pawned off without understanding quite what they were doing.

“What is? The city? A bit,” he answered.

“Nah kid, not the city as much as where ya came from. Movin’ at the snap of a finger to Japan from America musta been real tough.”

“I guess,” he shrugged, “but most of the relatives on my mom’s side live near Hosu, my uncle really helped me out with it.”

“So, ya half and half then?” Ko gave him a curious look.

He nodded, “Uh, if that’s how you want to put it,” it sounded awkward, he wasn’t a type of coffee, “People tell me I lean more toward looking like my dad,” that was how he had explained the blond anyway, the wisp that made it up was solely the fault of his mom though.

_Hmm_, the man said, “Explains a lot, I have a bit of that in me as well though I consider myself Japanese through and through.”

“So how long have you been with Edgeshot, Sir?”

“Cut it with the Sir stuff will ya? This week I’m your colleague not some superior,” the man seemed genuinely annoyed.

“Sorry, Ko,” he said. Maybe it made him feel old, he couldn’t have been further than his late twenties.

“…And use my heroic name buddy. To answer your question, a good few years now I reckon, kinda lost track of the time. Might break and make my own agency in a few more once I get more popular, tough industry though.”

The answer piqued his interest, “How do you go about that?” he’d been meaning to ask something like that but he hadn’t wanted to interrupt the man during the lesson.

“Four things are necessary if you want to be somewhat close to a real pro,” the man put up a corresponding number of fingers, “Popularity, connections, money and motivation,” he counted on of each of his digits. “Those are the basic stuff, ‘course you could always strike out on your own with just a license but unless ya do something mind blowing like take down a big villain you’re gonna be cleaning up gutter trash for the most part.”

“Make sense,” he did have great interest in the idea of being able to do his own thing but he did have those obligations first and foremost.

“You had someone on your list called Kagan, yeah? I remember from the copy they sent us,” Ko asked.

“Yeah, supposed ‘master strategist’ is what it said about him online,” it had been tempting as a
choice but he’d only written him down in case his other two choices fell through.

Ko laughed, “Master strategist my ass, that guy went to my high school round your age. Him and his wife, then girlfriend, went and did exactly what I said and struck out on their own after graduation. Last I heard he’s still breathin’, I probly got his number somewhere in our archives.”

“So possible to live but hard to live well, is that it?” maybe he should become a sidekick first and then see, Kaminari and Kirishima certainly felt it the right move for themselves.

“That ‘bout sums it up, harder for you I would reckon if ya plan to move back after you finish, doubt any rep here would net you much back home unless ya get into the top fifty heroes or summin’.”

“I haven’t really thought that far ahead,” he shook his head.

“Well ya still got time for that and luckily Edgeshot nominated you anyways, some years he ain’t nominated anyone.”

“He seemed more interested in what he could learn about Eraserhead through me than anything else.”

The man stopped as he said that, they’d reached the back of a one way street now but rather than turn back he turned to him, “If ya really think that’s the only reason Edgeshot gotchu on here then you got a wakeup call comin’ your way kid.”

“What do you mean by that?” he asked.

“Let’s just say your lil’ Yuuei school ain’t one to keep secrets from its alumni. Probly ain’t my place to say though,” Ko turned back to where they’d come from and began to retrace their steps.

He watched the man. If what he had suggested was true then he wasn’t quite what to think about the internship anymore. Was Edgeshot really interested in it? He didn’t seem like the type of man for that, though maybe less than an hour of interaction wasn’t enough to judge that.

[Edgeshot Heroic Office – Guest Wing – 7:33 PM]

His room had remained a stale affair in his absence but it felt different now, cosy almost. A great relief overcame him as he peeled off his cleats and collapsed on the bed, he still didn’t feel tired even now, at least not enough to warrant sleep, enough to for a few hours of restless turning if he was lucky. It was strain that riddled him amongst the pain his limbs were experiencing, a good kind of discomfort, he had to admit, the kind that he had only experienced before this from the result of Aizawa’s beatings but even two or three times more intense than that.

He patted himself down as he lay there to find the phone stuck somewhere in the black gi, he had relinquished his costume to Ko after he had deemed it too used to continue wearing; he would have it dry cleaned with the rest, it was getting kind of annoying having to switch so often, he had to say.

His phone reaffirmed it wasn’t late yet, there wasn’t even a point sleeping if he were to wake up two or three hours before Leina would even come in to start their session anew.

1 – Eijirou Kirishima – NEW

He was glad to see his friend had responded. He had kind of been waiting all day just to hear from both him and Jirou.

Fourth Kind's is a total hard ass but man is it cool. Didn't really do much except pick up trash and do public service s
Hbu? Doing okay? Btw check this out.

**PICTURE ATTACHED**

The picture Kirishima had sent him was simple enough; a broad view of what he could assume was Fourth Kind’s heroic office. It almost looked like a police quadrant although he doubted any sane police force mounted large swords behind their desks, let alone riot gear on the walls. Within the frame was another surprise, Tetsutetsu, Kirishima’s rival from the sports festival, they must have been nominated by the hero, he concluded. The former looked rather peeved about the other taking pictures.

It made him happy to see he wasn’t the only one having a tough time with his instructors, the bruises on Tetsutetsu’s face said as much. It was exactly the kind of thing Kirishima had said he wanted anyway out of the intern week, no doubt him and his rival would be much stronger by the time they came back. Jirou hadn’t obligated to text him back yet, perhaps the Mistress Melody agency had kept her far busier than either of them. He wasn’t sure how he’d forgotten the name considering how popular she was even in America, his sister’s adoration with the idol heroine was proof enough of that however it made him wonder if all that was a front to a more serious persona behind closed doors.

For a thought and a half he wondered what to text back, better than any few words was probably a picture or two which he had specifically taken earlier that day. One was of the underground arena snapped on the elevator ride back up and the other of the entrance garden he’d come through earlier that morning. He was reluctant to say anything about Leina but he added some about Ko and his… mental training. If he indeed became tougher from the woman beating him up all week then he would rather that it be a surprise to Kirishima and the others when he made it back.

He tossed the phone to the side as he sent the message and tried to shut his eyes. After half an hour of tossing and turning sleep still hadn’t come to take himself and he gave up in frustration. It was probably something that would get worse throughout the week since it was the prods and pushes that were keeping him from it in the first place. They were also what kept him from wanting to practice his quirk, so he sat up instead and looked toward the only real avenue left to him to vent his energy; the well differentiated bookshelf. The books were old, he judged by the decrepit state of their spines, all with the exception one which subsequently caught his interest.

A Voyage to Arcturus

The title was printed in typewriter block letters on both the side and the front as he removed it from the shelf. It was slimmer than he expected and entirely stranger for it as the cover was unlike any book he’d really ever seen. On it was a man, or it might have even been a woman he wasn’t sure, they had a bright red colour scheme interlaced with streaks of counter intuitively patterned yellow, green, blue and purple that might have fit a Picasso painting rather than the science fiction novel they belonged to.

As he opened it he thought half the pages would fall out but it was in excellent condition, it must have been a reprint. He did feel kind of reluctant to read it even if he enjoyed the type of book it probably was, however he really had nothing better to do now than burn a few hours. He parted the first page as the night gradually drove on.

Chapter End Notes
*I do not own BNHA. OC material is my own.
Lesson

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

[Edgeshot Heroic Office – The Arena of Increments – 11:45 AM Wednesday]

The land shuddered as rock became pebble and dust around him. It was as if with each attack Leina was carving away a piece of the world that he could use to hide and to run from her through a series of unlikely but deadly deliverances. Her body hurled and twisted itself in gyrates and jumps that defied what might have been a normal onslaught into one that mocked a ballet dance. It was within ten minutes that he had been reduced to dodging once more and almost two hours that he had tried to keep it up through intermittent assault. It was all he could do.

“Are you afraid to hit a woman?” Leina shouted after him, she was one who wore and bared her displeasure through both fist and word, he had learned. Frantic panting was all he could answer with, to even consider retaliation was nothing short of mad.

“If you keep running I’ll just catch you sooner or later you little chicken!” she threw a fist at a spire next to her to make her point.

“Shit,” he gasped under his breath as it fell just slightly short of crushing him, the weights felt far heavier than they had the day before.

Clang, clunk, he watched as she mashed her knuckles together, “Just wait till I corner you,” she began her chase anew.

He ducked right and the glove chunked his arm enough to inflame it, another two steps back was what he took to block the next. It was through luck he stopped the knuckle as it hit one of the weights strapped to his right arm, the sheer force of it might caused it to break.

Leina scoffed as he fell back, “Tch. Your attitude is starting to make me sick to my stomach. I hope for your sake you dodge this next one!” she said as she raised the toe of her right foot in front of her to the point it almost touched her forehead, there she held it for what appeared far too long to possibly be a normal blow.

If he could just back off enough it didn’t matter what she was about to do. As he slid his heel back he came to realise that was no longer an option, behind him was a narrow chink of the arenas real wall, a mixture of white and obsidian that had been pried from repeated blows to the rock covering it.

“Swan dive,” the woman said as she let the breath out of her chest and swung her leg down in one fluid motion from the front of her head to her back, taking her arms and then her body with it into a front flip.

Riley backed to the left as the woman moved in a pirouette through the air, like she was gathering strength from the mind bending motion. He had to dodge it. In desperation he threw himself forward under her instead, hitting the floor with his shoulder as he came into a roll underneath her.

Slam, his world slanted as the foot came down and all manner of material went in a storm as if it were trying to escape the frightening monster. Rocks and stones almost sought to impale him as the wind loosed them like a slingshot, one caught the back of his leg and serrated the calf with a gash like a knife. Although he wanted to stand and flee his leg gave out all at once, dropping him to the
floor again like some wounded animal. His bones felt punished and he could see the wound weeping, enough to stop him from trying to stand on it again.

“Giving up already?” Leina said as she stood over him, there wasn’t so much as a scrape on her that hadn’t been caused by her own actions. All he could do was grit his teeth at her, which seemed to piss her off even further. “I guess I was right about you and your idiotic school, I was a Shiketsu woman myself. The likes of you would never have made it there with such weak resolve. Get up and fight before I break every bone in your body.”

She awaited his reply, he knew, but it was virtual immobilisation like his body didn’t want to listen to him any longer even as he tried to push it up. It must have shown on him because while her face had been a constant of spiteful mockery and intent it had never sat with such contempt as it did now.

“So it is true, your little scrape with villainy has made you so submissive you can’t even muster the resolve to fight back,” she laughed.

“Shut up,” he answered. Mocking him was one thing but he wasn’t going to let her pretend she knew him after having only met two days prior, even if Edgeshot really had access to some dossier or other.

“Why should I? I don’t even need to read your face to see how broken you are, you’ve done a good enough job of showing it to me in your movements and that obnoxious way in which you present yourself, do you really think your incident makes you different? That those little cuts make you special or above the people out there?”

“No. Hell no,” he answered. He had never thought that, it’s not like he had chosen to get them.

“Why the hell do you think I would cover them up if I thought they made me special? I hate them,” it made him bitter even saying it after how many times he’d claimed the opposite.

“Real heroes don’t hide their scars you wimp, have you ever even looked at me, or Ko or anyone of thousands that have them?” she sounded irreparably angry now. Her hand struck aside her bangs and revealed a trail of marked tissue around the side of her scalp and more that carved up her leg, “Every single notch villains have made in our skin, they’re all wounds that innocent people didn’t need to suffer in our stead. Be proud of them, own them.”

“Don’t you think I know that? You aren’t the first to tell me something so obvious, but it’s not that simple,” he couldn’t explain it to the woman.

She cracked her knuckles, “Then let me make it simple for you. Consider this an ultimatum, either you get up and face me without running or if you prefer I can drag you out of here by the scruff of your neck and make sure you never set foot in another Japanese heroic agency again.”

“Why the hell would you do that?!?” he stammered as he held his leg and tried to push himself on it, only for it to leave him again.

“I have no choice, Edgeshot was wrong about this internship, you really do have nothing to fight for, how pitiful,” she grabbed him by the back of the black gi. Then she began to drag him across the dirt in front of her, one inch after another.

He punched her in the gut causing her to let him fall, “I don’t want your pity,” he spat. “I don’t want anyone’s pity,” he placed his good leg on the broken rock beneath him and leveraged himself on it, then the other which burned with effort. If he couldn’t do this, if her threat came to pass, then it would be like they won.
“Oh, did I finally strike a nerve? Then make me regret it,” she sounded so eager.

It was an ignited seize not unlike what had taken hold out of fury before, only this time it was all his own. It hurt and it was fine that it hurt. He grabbed his calf and made it lighter by only a hair, enough for it to sting and to cease the cramping of it for the time being. Every one of his muscles fought him on it but he forced himself into the stance.

He needed to do it, if he wanted his revenge. No it was more than that; it wasn’t just about revenge anymore. His motivation, he knew, had never been something to come from merely wishing it. The reason hung around his neck, it stood in words he’d said and the marks lacing his body but this wasn’t just for them, it was mostly for himself. This was what he wanted, that he now knew more than ever, the ability to look at himself and feel pride rather than miserable disgust. The kind of hero his sister could look up to and rely on.

Leina came at him. This time, however, he answered her challenge eagerly instead of shying away.

After another hour of blows, this time from both sides rather than one, had caused the arena to sink and become crushed till he was sure it could have its name changed from increments to pitfalls and be far more accurate. That was the point at which Leina had finally relent her chronic obsession with turning him into smudge on the floor, just long enough to take a break before they continued. He was slumped against a metal fold up chair, amongst the denser outcrop within which rested a poor excuse for a bunker shelter.

“Here,” she said as she put down a box beside him, it was green with a white cross on it. “You know how to dress a wound right? Better do it before it gets infected.”

Riley nodded and unclipped the metal hinge, by now he was quite the expert, “Thanks… Ma’am.” It was too hard to hide a smirk.

Leina kept her own laughter barely, “You’re welcome, Sir,” she bowed wide and fell against her chair. “I guess I should have given you more credit,” the woman rubbed her shoulder. There had been nigh a moment where he’d held back in using his compression to try and attack, unlike before and her new bruises were proof of that.

They looked painful, “Sorry,” he said. The wound he’d received had stopped bleeding by now. It had hardly been as deep as it had felt.

“Hah, why the hell are you sorry? This is exactly what I wanted,” Leina unscrewed the cap of a bottle she’d brought and generously poured half of it over her sweat lathered head. Most of it fell to the dress but within moments her body heat caused it to dry again. “Now don’t you dare lose that look in your eye again, it took too much effort to bring it out in the first place.”

“I won’t,” he answered. He wasn’t sure he’d find what it was again if he did. The futility had forced him to be honest. It was alright to want something for his own, fine to want it more than something that had been his primary goal for years now as long as he didn’t sideline it. He wasn’t sure at what point it had become that way but it felt like long before he’d ever come to study here.

“Good because you’re still too slow with it, far too slow to beat me if I really wanted to kill you.”

He knew that already, Edgeshot’s demonstration was something he could still easily recall, “All those movements you do, they’re part of your quirk right?” he hadn’t thought to ask but it seemed obvious.

“You think I twirl around for fun?” she scoffed. “If I could just sock someone with that kind of
power from the get go it’d be much simpler, no, it works more like a generator. The more I move the stronger it gets, though there is more to it than that.”

“I see,” the power of it had kind of reminded him of Midoriya though his appeared far less conditional.

“It’s pretty unusual for a quirk to work like yours does, you sure you’re the first in your family with a quirk?” Leina asked.

“Yes,” he didn’t even need to think to answer it. He had searched through his family history compulsively for evidence to the contrary. There weren’t even signs of junk quirks or anything more subtle.

“Shame, dual-emitter quirks are as difficult as they are rare. It’d be easier to learn by example,” she shook her head. He wasn’t sure about that, his quirk was more like two sides of a coin rather than complete opposites like fire and ice might be. If he tried to only use one part of it again it’d feel almost wrong. “Well, whatever. Can’t say having a unique quirk isn’t an advantage with all the copies going around.”

“Say, do you do that pen thing to everyone?” he asked.

“No,” she fiddled with her knuckles, “Do you remember what I said to you on Monday?”

“No pain, no gain?” he answered. More pain than gain, he certainly had a thorough grasp of it now.

“That too but mostly concerning the first words.”

“If I were a villain you’d be dead,” he remembered, something like that anyway.

“What you Yuuei kids don’t realise is that the sports festival doesn't just exist for agencies like ours to scout out new material. Villains watch it all too, if anything even more closely than we do.”

Hmm, he answered, it wasn’t something that he hadn’t thought about.

“Sometimes students will just… disappear without a trace. It's not uncommon. I'm sure I don't have to tell you why that might be,” she threw him a stern look.

He nodded, “I got lucky,” he said. Had he, though? Motive was still missing. No amount of thought had enlightened him on that.

“The whole concept of the Sports Festival doesn't sit right with me but coddling you and pretending like the world is a nice place would be far worse. They’ve got the right idea throwing you in head first I reckon,” she stood and stretched.

“ Doesn’t the festival also inspire new heroes though? And scare potential villains at that… I’m sure what Todoroki and Midoriya did must have changed a few minds,” the display and Uraraka’s too, it left him thinking he was playing catch up rather than standing equal.

“That’s true as well. You all still have a long way to go before your names have any real teeth, though,” she closed her eyes and breathed out, “Right, let's get back to it then, we're burning daylight,” she clamped the heavy weapons back and readied them. He stood in turn and raised his wounded hands, only to stop as he noticed a third had joined them.

“That will be enough for today Leina,” Edgeshot said. “You can continue with him tomorrow.”
“What’s the occasion?” she dropped her hands.

“A situation has arisen downtown; I would request the assistance of our intern in settling the matter.”

Assistance? he was actually going to go into a real situation?

“If that’s the case then who am I to refuse?” she tore her knuckles back off, “If he messes up just let me know, I’ll make sure he regrets it,” the threat almost made him gulp.

“Come,” Edgeshot turned and he was left trailing the man’s heel.

“Don’t forget this hotshot,” Leina yelled after him.

He caught the case as it almost nailed him in the back of the head, “Thanks, Ma’am,” he said this time without even meaning to, much to her amusement.

[Hosu – Nozachi Streets – 1:20 PM]

It had taken a train ride and far more attention than Riley could care to deal with to get to where Edgeshot desired. The man was indeed as popular as he had been made out and that attention had splashed onto him in turn, something that had made the whole trip rather uncomfortable. It was a surprise they had even taken public transport but it had given him the chance to change in one of the bathrooms and lock up the case with the gi in a compartment at the station afterward.

“I believe they are gone,” Edgeshot shook his head as he peeked around the corner.

“Do you spend a lot of your time running from your fans, Sir?” now he knew why he chose to remain so mysterious. It had been no less than seven rabid fans who had followed them.

“The curse of the job, I am afraid,” the man answered as he pushed himself off the wall and walked out of the alleyway edge they’d hidden behind. “They are used to it, if anything it only adds to my popularity when there are so few chances to catch me on the street. No doubt you saw my online presence, it is rather self propagating.”

“Yeah,” he answered. There had been more than a few websites that existed for the sole purpose of uploading snapshots, “Where are we going, Sir?” the place they were at now looked like some lower class sector similar to South-East Hosu. Rungs of buildings cluttered each other and more sat beyond them in rows made of brick and mortar.

“Our agency was tipped off to the location of a warehouse in this area involved in illegal smuggling this morning. Normally it is something I would leave to my sidekicks however it is an opportunity for you to get a more practical look at what we do, hence why I interrupted Leina and yourself after confirming the operation.”

The mere thought of getting to do something involving actual bad guys was nothing short of exciting. Patrolling with Ko had been one thing but it wasn’t like anyone was going to mug them in broad daylight. He’d almost been jealous of Kirishima getting to knock out a few thugs the day before, the guy had texted him no shortage of detail about it.

“We’re here,” the man said as they stopped after twenty minutes and a dozen more turns. The streets had been sparse here compared to a few blocks away, it probably helped that it was barely past midday. They were indeed in front of a warehouse, in all its inconspicuously locked glory.

“We aren’t going around the back or anything, Sir?” he asked.
“No,” Edgeshot looked at him like he was crazy, “we are going to walk straight on through the front, Terra, after all they were nice enough to leave us a way in,” the man said as he put his thinned finger into the lock, which opened with a *click*.

It wasn’t damp inside. The place was in fairly good condition from what he could tell. It looked like any old place one might store goods in transit, the notion it actually belonged to a gang of sorts seemed hard to accommodate. Then again, Leina had only just reminded him that appearances could be deceiving.

There were a few doors before they came upon a scene, it wasn’t some kind of villainous stage or anything that they had found but rather a bunch of workers moving boxes around. They were all dressed exceptionally; full blue jumpsuits with heavy shoes and black caps on their head, only the burly man in the centre differed as rather than moving anything around he was writing on a clipboard. In front of him were several crates filled with what looked like power cells.

“Boss, we got company,” one of the men said from the upper level before he proceeded to climb down a ladder attached to a wall. In total he counted five men, including their leader.

The man with the clipboard turned, “Might I ask why you be trespassin’ on private property?”

Edgeshot shrugged, “We’ve come to make an inspection of your cargo.”

“Is that right? I guess I missed the memo on the Hosu Import Officer’s uniform changes,” the man grinned. “Get lost,” he waved them away with one hand.

The pro’s eyes narrowed, “If you have nothing to hide you have nothing to fear from us,” his voice had taken on a deadly tone.

“Don’t do something you might regret,” the man put down the clipboard.

“Jigs up boss, lesjust leg it,” a young man with rope-like bundles of brown hair said to a few murmurs of agreement.

“Pull yourselves together piss ants, it’s just the two of them and there’s five o’ us,” the man shouted. The confidence didn’t settle the group and a man with a red coloured undershirt and two horns on his neck began to back off.

“No way man, are you an idiot or something? That’s Edgeshot, keep your money I’m out,” he said before turning to run, encouraging all but the apparent leader to do the same.

“Flèche,” Edgeshot bowed and then he was gone. The four fleeing men hit the floor like their legs had been swept and the man reappeared near their supposed exit, all of them no longer moved; they had fallen unconscious. “It is over,” he said. “Give yourself up peacefully so you may be spared further humiliation.”

“You’re pretty scary pro hero, but I got one chip in this fight you don’t,” the man pulled something from behind his back. “You might be able to defend yourself but I bet this kid can’t,” the man eyed Riley with switchblade in hand, his grip on it wasn’t tight, it was like he was drunk. The man stepped forward and tripped over his own construction boots, the knife was waving widely in his hands causing him to take a step back.

“I bet you’re pissing yourself, aren’t you? This ain’t a place for people who play dress up,” the man slurried his words. “I may not have a quirk but you ain’t shit compared to me,” he took another two steps forward, enough to almost be upon him. Edgeshot didn’t move to interfere on the man’s approach which told him enough.
“Surrender your weapon,” he said once. Even if quirks were a thing an armed man was still a dangerous man, this one seemingly insane to boot.

“I’m twice your size and you’re giving me commands, pipsqueak?” the man laughed and then brought the knife down from above like he was trying to core an apple.

He moved to the side, it was a lazy stab that didn’t even have a chance to touch him. *Your quirk is your trump card,* he remembered as he almost felt his tremor begin, he didn’t need it for this. He grabbed for the man’s wrist where the knife was and twisted it so it couldn’t move. Then he slammed the back of his gauntlet into the man’s nose, breaking it.

“Shit,” the man growled as he dropped the knife and held his face, “That fucking hurt!” now he was sure this was the first time the man had actually fought someone. He probably had never had to with the way he spoke.

“Stand down, otherwise this’ll end much worse for you,” he tried to make his voice sound intimidating and held up his hand toward him.

“You think you heroes own this town, fu-“

*Fww-crack,* an empty crate next to the man crumbled causing him to jump and yelp, “Don’t make me repeat myself,” he said, even if he wasn’t going to harm the man he knew the most terrifying quirks were those that sprung from nothing.

The man curled, he was blubbering now, a disgusting mix of snot, tears and blood, “I’m sorry. I surrender, I surrender!” he said and fell down on his stomach.

*Smack,* Edgeshot tapped the man of the back of the head, allowing him to join his subordinates.

He let all his terrible unease drain out of him in a sigh as his front of confidence disappeared. It felt like a lot of time had passed when barely any had, he wasn’t sure what he might have done had the man actually been competent.

“Satisfactory enough for your first encounter but keep in mind the man could have lied about having a quirk,” Edgeshot said as he pulled out a slim black device. He clicked its side and it began to emit a red light accompanied by a constant beep before he set it down on one of the crates.

“Yes, Sir,” that hadn’t really crossed his mind. He could have easily fallen for a trap just then. “Is that a tracking device or something?” he pointed at the instrument.

“Indeed, the police will be here shortly,” the man looked up and around, “by the looks of it they will be busy for a while with this.”

He bit his lip as he looked around, *damn this is cool.* It felt like he’d stepped right into one of those crime shows, embarrassingly enough most of his speech had been adlibbed from one. “What were they up to with these?” he reached out to one of the power cells before stopping, it was probably better not to touch them.

“Rudimentary bomb material I suspect, it does not matter much now unless more of it exists elsewhere in the city. Now,” the man pulled out a roll of tape. “Tie them up so we can we hand them over.”

*Bomb materials,* he thought as he caught the tape and began to unwind. As minor as it had been he had to admit he could get more than used to this kind of work. It actually felt like they’d made a small difference.
The underground tunnel leading out of Edgeshot's offices was still as cramped as before. However that wasn’t what was on his mind, instead it was the book he’d gotten about halfway through the night before.

It was perplexing in all its subversions. The tale followed the story of a man slowly driven to insanity by the distinction between his sensory perceptions and what rationally plays out. The actions of the characters blurred the lines between contextual good and evil; you could never be quite sure what would happen next. In that sense it was difficult to be able to gleam meaning from it, but it seemed that was the point. He couldn’t actually say he liked it, frankly, he preferred his sci-fi books less ambiguous. That didn’t mean it wasn’t hard to put down.

He banished the book from his mind as he could see the fluorescent dimming that hung on the side of the tunnel tapering off. They would soon be there, wherever there was. “Where are we headed Ko?” he asked.

Half his hope was that it’d be as exciting as what Edgeshot had done with him. After the police had arrived they had thanked them for a job well done, they hadn’t even treated him like he was just some student intern but an actual hero, at least until Edgeshot informed them of it. Merely an observational exercise, the pro had explained and that was that, the police had hung on his every word.

“Right here,” the man answered as they reached a ladder, “...And how many times I gotta tell ya to call me by my hero name when we’re out there ya dingus. It’s written on my shirt for a reason.”

“Sorry,” he apologised. It was indeed written on his shirt, or at least the first letter of the thing, a large black ‘N’.

“Anyway if ya hopin’ to take down another ring then I’m sorry to disappoint,” the man laughed. “We’re just gonna do some community service today.”

“Community service?” he was kind of disappointed but at the same time curious.

“A charity stand, getcha some practice talkin’ to regular people all heroic like,” Ko said as he undid the latch. “Bad thing we’ll be settin’ up on a street though, lookin’ like terrible weather today,” he chuckled as he climbed out.

He frowned before he followed the man, had his previous attempts to talk to civilians been that disappointing? It was probably true, he guessed, he hadn’t exactly made any new friends with how introverted he had come off on their first patrol. He wasn’t a natural people person like Ko was, even if the man had insisted it all came down to experience. As he gripped the ladder to climb up he could see the dark hurling of the sky above that ran on the coattails of a thick storm. It had just begun to roll in to greet the afternoon and it looked like it would be indeed be a long one.

Chapter End Notes

*I don't own BNHA, OC material is my own.*
Creed

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

[Central Hosu – Downtown – Thursday 6:11 PM]

The threat of rain had grown as malevolent as the day had boring but it still hung grey and cold around the cusp of the night. Riley was huddled under the tent after two hours of exhausting work; none stop interaction and fake kind of bravado he had to dole out in handfuls to those who came up to Ko and himself. He had enjoyed it for a time but it had worn him down and now he was more committed to not freezing his ass off, perhaps he should consider asking the company who made these things to sow some wool between the seams.

“You doin’ okay kid? We’ll be done soon don’t’cha worry,” Ko laughed as he noticed his shivering. “Here you go, Sir,” he said as he handed out yet another of the hundred and fifty or so odd boxes they’d made up so far, each consisting of a variety of small edibles.

“You’re doing the Lord’s work Native,” a toothy man said as he took it, he had thick eyebrows that almost fell long enough to go down to a bushy grey beard that accompanied it.

“It’s nothin’, you know that Seito,” the sidekick gave a bow.

“Too modest as always. Nice to see you got some new blood out here at least, teachin’ him a hard day’s work, eh?” Seito pointed at him,

“Internship program, you know how it is. Now ‘ave a good afternoon and stay safe out there,” Ko answered.

“Will do, will do…” the man trailed away down the street made up of similar hovels of tents to their own, the others obligated not with a giveaway but a business of sorts. Tourists mingled among those who actually qualified as their customers; those down on their luck, people whom Ko seemed to know by heart, and those with sympathy for those very people.

In that sense their own business was sort of half and half, those who could not afford to pay simply wrote down a wish in exchange, a gesture of good faith and those who could pay made a donation of whatever sum they desired. The proceeds would go to helping out local shelters for those who lost their homes to villainy Ko had told him, definitely a cause that Hosu could understand.

“You get the next one Terra, movin’ round will keep ya warm,” Ko chuckled.

He nodded and grabbed one of the boxes, this one empty. It wasn’t hard to fill as the man had given him a small pamphlet of what should be inside. What was difficult was making it look presentable enough to offer as a gift rather than an insult. A secondary effect of his terrible inadequacy at cooking was any sort of skill with this kind of decoration, his friends at Leineif had always thought that odd and he could hardly blame them; someone who could draw with apparent skill having a terrible eye for mixing and matching. He had an answer to that, you didn’t need to be coordinated to draw a portrait of someone as it was basically like taking a photo of them, the details were set in stone. At least that’s how he thought of it, not that he had drawn much since then. The last thing he had were those recollections of villains, the third of which he still could not recall.

Soon enough he closed the box and bound the thin cardboard with a thread, it kind of looked like Chinese takeout if he had to associate it with anything although it had a cute design of a turnip on the
front. He had finished just in time for a customer to approach.

“Oh my how lovely, I didn’t miss it did I?” a small well dressed woman with long black hair approached. She had a loosely parted blouse on that sat in both red and black and met a more practical thick layer of cotton fleece beneath it that almost made him jealous. Two gold plaited earrings hung above a ruby necklace, they matched well to her ensemble that was completed with layered blood red harem pants and light red flat tops.

“No Ma’am,” he did his best to smile. His tire was partly at fault of the weights as Ko had insisted it wasn’t necessary he take them off when they went out. They did feel lighter after four days at least, in a few more he might not realise he was wearing them at all. He had yet to see the benefit of them, he still looked as malnourished as before but he was determined enough to see it through after yesterday.

“Very well, I’ll make a donation then, in exchange for one of those lovely little boxes,” she nodded at him.

He slid the gift across to her and then took out the thin metallic box stowed beneath their booth, half of what was inside was cash and the other half promises. The woman obligated for neither of those options, instead choosing to write a check, which he saw was made out for nearly fifty thousand yen.

The size of the number instantly woke him up a bit, “Thank you, this is very generous Ma’am,” he gave a short bow before he locked it up tight. There was no way he wanted to lose their biggest donation of the night. Another thing he had noticed on it was her name, Yono Naemina.

“You’re very welcome, it is a nice change to meet a sidekick so well behaved, however that accent… you aren’t from around here are you?” she said as she took the box under her arm.

“No, Ma’am,” he wasn’t sure if he wanted to specify, the woman looked like she didn’t want him to.

“Let me guess,” she tapped her chin with a long thin nail, “American?” she asked, to which he nodded. “I knew it, my cousin stayed there for only a year but somehow she managed to pick up that exact same sound,” she let a self-amused giggle escape her. “I’m from Spain myself.”

Spain? he thought, she didn’t have the slightest sound of a non-fluent speaker in her vocabulary.

Yono gave a natural smirk, “I know I don’t sound it but its true,” she coughed slightly, “Stayed there a whole seven years of mychildh-”

Boom.

A rock sailed through the top of their tent taking half it with it, then more flew after it in a shower of sharp projectiles that bounced off his visor. He barely had time to hear where it had come from before it was drowned out in a sea of screams.

Thud, he looked back the woman, she’d collapsed in a slump on the floor. There was a large purple bruise forming on her forehead.

“A monster, everyone… RUN!” a man screamed in the distance, though he had caught himself so far in the sight of the wounded woman it felt like he’d been shell shocked.

He looked back at the origin of the sound from earlier. He could now see what had set off the unanimous panic now. It was still far away but its form was distinguishable with ease; a gargantuan figure with a thousand limbs, it harboured a single eye on its face which lay engrossed within an exposed brain cavity protected only by the tips of four metal plates. Strands of black goo dripped
from its shoulders onto its chitin arms before hitting the floor, turning it into arrays of potholes. Even though it was a form he’d only seen again in his dreams after that day he knew exactly that it was undeniably a Noumu.

He felt a hard hit on his back, enough to shake him from his status, “Look alive kid, can’t afford ya bein’ a bystander right now, help everyone evacuate,” Ko said before he hopped the counter of their booth. He shook himself, Ko was right, he watched as the sidekick ran down the street toward the beast that was now hurling after anything and everything it could see while creating clouds of debris and leaving piles of shattered glass in its wake. Without so much as a second thought he hopped the counter too and looked at the injured woman, she was still breathing but he needed to get her out of here and the rest of the crowd too.

“Hey you,” before he could pick her up he felt a hand on his shoulder, he turned to find a person covered from head to toe in bandages, almost like some Frankenstein’s monster. “I’ll get this woman to some paramedics, go and help out the rest of the crowd.”

He nodded at the hero, as sensible as his sentiments were she needed medical attention that he wasn’t sure how to get her fast enough, “Thanks,” he said, as he got up and ran past him. He could see Ko was in direct combat with it now but the arachnid Noumu was far from a pushover.

What the hell is it doing here? he thought as the sidekick delivered a brutal punch to its ribs and a swift kick to its malformed calves. It broke bones but did little more than to serve it an annoyance, the creatures was just as relentless as its predecessor and the dark mess that spilled from it protected it like a dark shell that burnt it’s attacker with every strike. Each wound that opened released more.

“This way,” he shouted at the few people stuck behind caught between the now mostly empty street and their own battle of fight and flight. He shook some of them as Ko had him, which took them out of the state long enough to convince them to leg it.

“Screeeeeeee,” the spider hissed in terrible torment before sweeping the sidekick away with a mess of limbs, long enough to scurry past him. It charged in Riley’s direction but not at him, its target was a man whom must have been caught up hiding behind his stall.

“Watch out!” he cried as he threw up his hand toward its outstretched claw, each arm like small tweezers that could sever bone with a touch.

Try as he might the compression wouldn’t build fast enough in his gauntlet, not in the two seconds he had to do it, “Damn it,” he cursed as the creature slid to a halt and flung its arms in a bracketed twine as if it were a wall of sharp bamboo. At this rate the man would die and become a casualty all because he was too weak.

Desperate, he gripped his gauntlet with his other hand and pushed his quirk into it as if he was trying to reload a gun that had run empty but in fact still had several bullets in the chamber. It quivered and shook his arm with terrible proximity like it would explode.

Fww-crack, the gauntlet ricocheted with a power it shouldn’t have been able to deliver, it made the bones in his arm hurt and threw him back as it hurtled alongside pieces of metal it scraped from the inside of the cartridge, like some unpredictable grape shot.

Three of the hundred limbs cracked like twigs before the cannon blast went no further, “Sssksssss,” the creature howled as it retreated and surveyed the damage only superficially before looking at him, it only took a glint in its eye to see the thing ran on instinct, not logic and now he had incited it wholly on himself. With its arms it leapt in one great coil like some kind of pogo stick, the force carried it through concrete and wood alike as it flew at him.
“Move it, kid,” Ko shouted causing him to duck in time for the sidekick to deliver a spine shattering foot to the creatures side, enough to make it stagger out of the street and tumble, taking trees and curtains and lights down with it as it went about its unbalanced frenzy. It roared as it dropped into the glass display of a small café, collapsing it into nothingness as it did.

“Screeeeeee-ssssksss,” it hissed and mauled with the concrete as it melted away from the acid on its body, allowing it to free itself.

_Thoomp_, the asphalt in front of it cracked as a thin bolt slammed down in front of the Noumu. It was Edgeshot who’d arrived and as arms littered the ground around him the creature had already lost half of its intangible arsenal. It tipped and swayed as it tried to comprehend and stabilise itself only for Edgeshot to duck low at its feet, through gaps in the acidic goo.

“Montante,” the hero said and a stinging _shing_ rocked the night air.

What remained of the Noumu halted all at once, its roar choked in its throat before it even grasped the thin line that had carved and bisected its body. As it took a step both of its halves fell apart in a mess of sinewy flesh, blood, bone and tar of which not a single drop spilt on Edgeshot.

The man stood and took in the damage around him before then turning at them, “You two,” he said, “there are more of these throughout the city, I will go on ahead. Join me as soon as you are able,” as before a reply was not counted as something he found necessary and he jumped in a zigzag through smoke and rubble toward the heart of the chaos.

Ko yanked him to his feet, “You heard the man let’s getta move on, follow me,” he ran off, to which he was left naught an option but to follow and leave the mess the Noumu had created behind for others to deal with, most of whom had only just arrived.

Minutes passed and the streets had turned into an utter hellscape. Their reprieve was a shortcut through an alleyway that Ko had suggested and with adrenaline still coursing through him he found himself not wanting to disagree with the order, upon his arm still lay his shattered gauntlet which had been stripped of metal across it. He would need to get it repaired when he got back to the school, while also figuring out how that burst had occurred exactly.

It was precarious to manoeuvre the alleyway but it hadn’t slowed their dash only made it more careful. At fault were discarded pipes and trash that littered the ground as well as the rusted metalwork that erupted from of the sides of the poorly maintained high top buildings, it was almost like the gap had been left by another building having been completely ripped out. It was as such hard to tell if the reason he couldn’t see very well was because of nights arrival or rather that the remaining light had been eclipsed by not just worsening cloud cover but also the chunked ceramic of roofs above them, it felt like someone had hit the lucid setting on a remote.

“Not bad back there kid,” Ko said as he ran beside him to his right of him, “you saved that man.”

“Thanks, Sir,” he answered, “err, Native,” he made the correction through a tinge of pride that he could feel burning stronger than the pain of breathlessness in his lungs. His usage of his quirk to do it had been admittedly reckless but it was still better than the alternative that would surely have come to pass.

The sound of fighting became louder the further they ran down the almost endless alleyway. It was far too long before a sliver of light finally appeared in the distance to answer their tandem steps. What kept in occupied during were thoughts of what had just happened, why the hell were there Noumu roaming the streets? As much as he repeated the question the only answer he could come up with was the League of Villains and as a consequence, Janus.
He almost slid as he caught a reflection of silver gleam on one of the wet pipes, it made the hairs on his neck stand on end and he turned to see what had caused it. Then, he realised, they were no longer alone. It was heavy steps that confirmed the presence, ones that had disguised themselves well in their own. Before he could utter a word he heard the distinct *flick* of something being thrown, something sharp.

“Ko!” he yelled and shoved the sidekick out of the way with his shoulder.

*Shuck*, a short sword with a hilt tapered by black tape buried itself deep in the concrete walls inches from where he’d just pushed Ko from, it had cut straight through both his costume and the flexible brace beneath it which left a shallow crimson wound behind on the top of his wrist. It might have bled a lot had it not already sat among heavy bandaging.

He didn’t have time to contemplate his next course of action; that was stunned from of him by the outline of a shadow as it slid down from the wall above him and dropped onto the swords hilt, causing him to come face to face with what perched there in all its loathsome revulsion. It was more monster than man but not a Noumu, he could tell it was in fact far worse than that by the deep hate that etched itself into its every toned muscle, like tension in a stuck spring. The top of its face was encased by hundreds of lean bone white bandages through which only a predatory set of nefarious eyes shone despite only the pale light he had to view them.

*Chunk*, the concrete moaned as the blade was ripped out of it and separated by a twist and roll that allowed the thing to escape to the other side of the passage and back into its element. The weapon did not rest in its hands any longer but rather in a perverse vice between the figures teeth.

His muscles twitched and seized harshly which he for an instant accredited solely to fear before he felt the onset of total irrefutable paralysis that caused him to trip up. It was like someone had cut the signal between his brain and his limbs causing him to hit the ground with an uneven *thud*. Some of the impact was mitigated by his visor which fled in a series of bounces into the distance as it ran out of purpose.

“You okay ya damn idiot?” Ko rushed up to his side and propped him up against the wall.

“Can’t move,” he gasped. It was even difficult to speak.

“I’ll get ya outta here, just wait,” the sidekick took a defensive position beside him as he looked around the alley.

“Being saved by a child, how pathetic for someone who dares call themselves a hero,” the deep voice echoed between the buildings.

It was a putrid figure that walked from out from dark and into sight opposite them, this time the details were far clearer. Short knives desecrated every inch of the man’s ill fitting grey top which itself was layered in a twofold succession of belts and holsters that made him look like a punk, it was emphasized by two steel tipped shoes and a gnarly black mop of hair. On his back sat two swords and at his waist a scabbard gave a *click* as he returned the short serrated blade to it, the one he’d cut him and almost impaled Ko with, the manner in which he did suggested he had gone to great lengths to practice with them.

“I’ve come to cut you down, prepare yourself pretender,” the threat was far from empty, this man wasn’t just agile but far more deadly than any one person should have had the right to be. It spoke from the way he held himself, the same way in which Edgeshot had but with far more applicable malice to its stance.
A knife whistled as the would-be assassin flung it toward Ko, the sidekick dodged the projectile with ease this time and lodged itself in the concrete behind him. It left him just enough time to avoid a large overhead slice the aggressor had launched simultaneously with the more weighted of the two swords on his back.

Ko came up and punched the man in the wrist as he struck sodden pipe work, which caused him to groan in pain. Another to the gut released his grip on the weapon that then fell to the floor with a series of reverberating bounces. *Shick*, the short sword from earlier went up diagonally as the villain pulled it out with the back of his hand, although it didn’t strike Ko across the throat like the man had tried it still caught fabric and feather which flew wildly from his midriff.

*Thunk*, the steel tipped shoe went as the sole of the heavy boot sunk it’s Ko’s stomach and sent him stumbling backward into the wall. The assassin jumped forward as he dropped his foot and caught with a grotesque curling tongue the red liquid that had liberated from a fresh wound caused by the dual toothed bite of the knife he had laid earlier and driven him into. Ko looked like he’d been shot as numbness overtook him and he shuddered backwards against the damp cement wall in much the same way he himself had.

“Damn,” Ko coughed, “He got me. Sorry, kid,” his face might have looked apologetic if he had the ability to even turn it toward him, however it wouldn’t have mattered if he had, all that knew importance now in his eyes was the large blade that hung above the sidekicks head and the dread and implication it carried with it.

“Don’t,” he tried to shout, though it left him as merely a cracked stammer. The blade arced away from Ko and down at him where it sat just shy of cutting off the tip of his nose.

“If it’s me you’re after hero killer then leave the kid alone, he’s just an idiot who doesn’t know better,” Ko said with a tough voice, the same he’d used while he hadn’t known him on Monday.

The blade fell from his face and went back to resting in a shimmer above Stain’s head before he gripped Ko tightly by the collar, “I do not care for the actions of children, its phony’s like you who shall die by my hand Native.”

Ko closed his eyes, “So be it you self-righteous cunt, as long as no harm comes to him.”

“Stop. Stop please!” he said as the blade turned to face downward and sat on the flesh of Ko’s neck, the only recognition he got for his pleading was a deep look of hatred followed by a strange pause of recognition.

“But I should kill you after all, I’m sure it would be a mercy.”

His muscles might have frozen at that had they not already been rendered unusable, “What the hell does that mean?” he said in the most aggressive tone he could manage, if only not for care of his words but to perhaps slow the descent of the man’s blade for just a few more seconds.

“It doesn’t matter,” the hero killer shook his head, “all that matters is that I cleanse the world of the ones who sully the name of hero. The bickering of mad men and their ilk has little consequence once they are silenced,” he pulled the sword up and raised it a few inches in the air.

“No!” he shouted once more, there was little change to be had; his body wouldn’t listen as the sword came down in a remorseless pierce. It dug into the flesh the to the degree of half an inch before a white mechanical shoe sent it veering off course and back around to strike whatever was trying to stop it from doing it’s job.
A man, or rather more accurately a boy as he quickly realised, had stopped the execution and now lay scattered onto the ground beside the hero killer with the helmet he’d worn bisected where it had been struck by the riposte. It wasn’t anyone random, it took not much more to tell than the blue hair and architecture of the Gundam suit that of all people that could possibly have come to their aid it was Iida who had.

“A child wearing a suit and attacking me just like that, bravery with idiocy to match,” Stain held his blade loosely forward at Iida’s throat, “You have only one chance to get out of here, best take it.”

“It’s you, I knew it. You’re the hero killer aren’t you?!” there was an unfiltered hatred in Iida’s voice, one the likes he had never heard come from him before.

“What of it? Did you come here seeking glory?” he said as the blade inched closer and stopped just shy of the tubing that made up the neck of Iida’s costume, “No… I see. Those are eyes that see vengeance.”

“I will kill you for the heroes you cut down, for my brother… the name is,” Iida back paddled away from the tip of the blade and to his feet, “the name is Ingenium you bastard! That is the name of the one who will put an end to you!”

Stain dropped Ko’s collar and let him fall, “Ingenium, huh? How does it feel to be the brother of a fake, a mockery, does it hurt to know I only let him live to spread the rumours?”

“Take that back, my brother was… is a great hero, the likes of you doesn’t even deserve to speak his name,” Iida jumped forward with a kick.

“Fool,” Stain said as he parried the attack easily and brought the blade down through Iida’s foot lodging it in concrete, “you and your brother are both blind to what a true hero is,” he jumped and hooked Iida’s shoulder with the tip of his steel pointed boot, bringing him down hard into the floor.

“Argh,” Iida groaned as the metal dug into his flesh at two points and pinned him.

“Revenge is such a selfish desire,” the hero killer wrought the blade from the floor behind him, “it is opposing to the idea of heroism, no better than to seek glory or wealth. That is why today you will die, to serve as an example to your brother’s disease and those like him,” he scanned the blades reflection until he got to the end of it, where it had been tainted red.

The words were making him as sick as the sight itself. It was like he was toying not just physically with his food but mentally and here he was slumped against a wall unable to even throw himself at the villain. Worse than that was the look in Iida’s eyes he could more feel than see, the same kind of desire that even though he had sworn secondary still did its part to drive him. It was the kind you couldn’t so easily forgive.

“My brother was a splendid hero, he gave people hope, he guided them…” Iida said before he gritted his teeth against the torturous movement of the hero killer’s boot.

Stain relinquished his view on the blade, “Did he teach you to be gripped by such petty desires then? Look around lit-tle he-ro, why didn’t you save them first?”

“Wait… wait, what are you doing here Torenagi?” Iida said as his eyes set on him.

“This ninja turtle as looking motherfucker ambushed us on the way to the main square,” he answered, he hoped his insult would serve provocation enough to help.

“Enough!” Stain growled his anger, “You can die here knowing that have received judgement
befitting of your failure,” the man finally indulged his desire and licked the blade, as he did Iida fell
to the invisible impalement just like they had, as useless as the realisation was he now knew the
cause.

“Those who brandish their powers only for their own sake must become an offering to a just world,”
the hero killer sheathed his blade and pulled out the other, their one was curved like a sabre with a
blunt tip, something one would use to deliver a quick stroke of death. The blade sang as it went in
one full motion from the end of the sheath downward.

“Shut your mouth, no matter what you say you’re just a criminal, a criminal who hurt my brother! I’ll
make you pay!” Iida screamed.

**Smash,** a blur collided with its path and the blade went wide as the hero killer curled back from a
punch to the jaw.

“Midoriya?!” Iida said, the green spray on a bed of black hair made it obvious enough he was
correct, he came to a stop with a crackle of red on his body and a relief that came from having spared
his friend from his fate.

“I came to save you Iida,” Midoriya shook his head as the red energy dissipated.

“Kid, use that speed to get these two out of here, the bastard will be satisfied with me,” Ko said but
his voice no longer sounded commanding. It was a situation where it was impossible to be in control.

“There’s no way I can leave anyone behind,” he clenched his gloves tight.

“A nice sentiment,” the hero killer put his hand on his short blade once more and bared a second
knife against his left knuckle, “I have a duty to kill these men, I won’t hesitate to cut you down if you
get in the way.”

“There’s no way to justify these actions by calling it duty,” the red surge sprang to life again, it made
Midoriya’s hair stand on end.

“The weak need to die; that is the way of the world,” Stain lunged, an attack that should have easily
connected but went far out of the way due to some crazy combination of reflex and speed. The hero
killer stopped dead in his tracks as he realised he’d missed, “Not bad,” he said as he peered down at
the blade and turned back to face him.

“Don’t let him cut you Midoriya, he can paralyse his victims somehow,” Riley said, to which he
nodded in acknowledgement. It was at least something he could help with.

“Please Midoriya, get out of here, it isn’t something you need to involve yourself in,” Iida yelled.

“He’s right, you’ll only find your own demise here,” Stain raised his blade and flicked it downward,
ridding it of the grime it had accumulated.

Midoriya shifted his foot back as he got into a more adept stance, “Even if that is true, I can’t run
away. All Might told me that one of the principal qualities of a hero is sticking your nose where it
doesn’t belong.”

“Hah,” the hero killer chuckled, “Not bad at all, let’s see if you can back up those words,” he drew
his blade forward again, this time in a slash that would cut Midoriya in half without a second glance.

Midoriya slid underneath the sword again, only this time Stain threw his sword behind him to stop
the reiterated escape. It hit concrete in time for the man to realise the fuming boy was already far
above, having swept himself up off the concrete in the instant of passing him, his fist was primed and came down in one great arc on the hero killer’s face.

“Detroit SMASH!” Midoriya yelled as the punch connected in one loud smack which forced the hero killer in a bow but did not collapse him. His classmate fell into a short roll as he caught himself in time to see the hero killer’s recovery.

“A nice effort, but it’s over,” Stain said as he licked the tiniest drop of blood from the knife on his knuckle.

“What the,” Midoriya fell in a heap.

“It’s a shame, as much as you appear to embody him your movements are simply too rigid,” he cracked the discomfort of the attack from his neck, “and the name of that attack, you are far from worthy of wielding it, if All Might had used it he could have razed the city in a single blow.”

He dragged the blade across the floor as he walked, “You are worth keeping alive, that doesn’t take away from the task at hand however…” the man raised the small knife like a boomerang, “I tire of this little game,” he threw the knife directly toward Iida’s exposed neck. Ice twisted in a torrent through the knife’s trajectory before it connected, it swept past and hit the hero killer in the chest just hard enough to force him to pull away.

“Another one?” Stain gave a displeased murmur as he looked at Todoroki at the end of the passage.

“Sorry I’m late, you didn’t give me much information to go on Midoriya,” Todoroki said as bits of ice dropped from his right hand. “Next time be clearer with your instructions,” he shook his head.

“Todoroki, you found us,” there was excitement in Midoriya’s voice, even as his paralysed body stopped him from expressing as much.

“You’re lucky I did,” the ground froze as he hammered his left foot into the floor, it rose into a ramp beneath him and the others, forcefully sliding them far down the alleyway toward him.

“You sure got some nice pals Ingenium,” the hero killer let out a deep breath that held misted in the freezing air around him.

“You’re the hero killer right?” Todoroki asked as the right side of his body lit up.

“So everyone says,” he pulled the sabre he’d dropped earlier from the floor and stuck it back in its rightful place.

“Don’t let him take your blood Todoroki, that’s how we all got taken down,” Midoriya said with a hoarseness that sounded like he was finding it hard to form the words.

As if to test the theory a knife left the hero killer’s hand, something too fast to avoid nicking Todoroki’s cheek as he tried to move out of the way, Stain had already lunged like an animal after it, like a shark that smelt the blood in the water, or rather air in this case.

Fire erupted and caused the tongue to sizzle into retreat, it turned the ice to water and then vapour as it chased the man whom retreated in a series of large hops and flips that looked easy to him. The air had become humid now and the smoke hit the hero killer’s true shape within it as the trash and clutter on the floor burnt away with noxious fume.

“Damn it you guys, just run already, there’s no way you can beat this guy!” Iida said. There was more than just hurt in it now, perhaps guilt too.
“I don’t know what’s gotten into you Iida but the Ingenium I know never made a face like that,” Todoroki sent a pillar of ice lunging forward as he spotted the emerging figure in the flames.

“What are you say-” Iida bit his tongue halfway through the sentence, something had caught it in his throat and it read as anguish on his face.

The icy pillar parted as a serrated edge tore it to shreds with blinding speed, however as it fell away there was nothing behind it but smoke, “Types like you rely far too heavily on your quirk,” the deep voice came down from above, in the form of two sharp knives that impaled themselves through both of Todoroki’s shoulders.

“Fuck,” he cursed as he pulled at the sharp implements, they didn’t come out easily. Blood soaked through the layers of his costumes fabric.

Stain was still hanging on the wall above him, dragging his sabre carefully from its sheath. He then jumped in one embellished motion like he was going to cut Todoroki in half from head to toe. The wall cracked as red lightning caught him on the way down, smashing the sword to pieces and dragging him across the concrete and through the damaged pipes which erupted into fountains.

Midoriya jumped to Todoroki as he tossed the hero killer roughly across the alleyway into a net of sharp icy spikes. His steps were light and woozy now like he was drunk, it was far more likely the toll of his quirk on his body. More importantly however he was no longer paralysed.

“I don’t know why but I’m able to move now,” he said as he steadied himself and took a defensive position between them and the hero killer whom didn’t even seem to pay mind to the heavy scalding and battery he’d received.

“It must have a time limit of some kind,” Todoroki said.

“But what determines it?” Midoriya looked at him.

“If it’s based around the consumption of blood it could be any number of things, amount of affected, blood total consumed… blood type.”

“Ding, ding, ding,” Stain answered as he threw away the hilt of the broken blade still in his hand and took out the short remaining one from his waist. “Aren’t you just clever?”

“My blood type is O,” Midoriya said.

“Same as mine,” Todoroki nodded.

“B,” Ko said.

“A,” Iida said.

AB, he thought before answering, “B,” even if he added his own truthful data it certainly wouldn’t help them now, it would also tell him something if it worked.

“I want to get these three out of here as soon as possible but he’ll cut us off before we can. The only way we’ll win is if we fight,” Todoroki stepped forward.

“Let me draw his attention and then you take him out,” Midoriya almost stumbled as his body crackled once more.

“Two against one, not such a naïve pair after all,” Stain said before he chucked the short sword at the
wall and jumped after it. It was almost like a trampoline in the way which it extended his jump and set him hurtling across the wall toward them.

The floor beneath Midoriya cracked as he pushed himself off it to meet the hero killer halfway. He must have misjudged the punch, or the villain’s agility as his fist sailed right past him. The short blade gouged the flesh of his leg deeply as Stain ran it by him causing a yelp of pain to escape.

“You’ve become slower,” he landed and indulged himself on the surface of the weapon causing Midoriya to fall like a rock once more.

“Sorry, Todoroki,” he said as he hit the floor.

“Please stop this madness, you can still save yourselves,” Iida said through weak gasps, the wound on his shoulder and leg had only worsened.

Ice burst open like a bomb, quenching the cries of Iida along with it and revealing fire beneath as the hero killer tried to rend it apart so he could descend on Todoroki once more, “You’re class rep aren’t you? Act like it,” he said with the commune of ember, ash and humid air, “Stand up and set your eyes on becoming the kind of man you want to be!”

“Shut your blathering, your words are a waste,” Stain curved between the gusts of fire as they chased him before he stabbed forward like a fencer diving the blade into the chassis of Todoroki’s armour. A bicycle kick snapped the blade in half before it could skewer him.

“Recipro-burst!” Iida shouted and cleaved the hero killer across the chest with his heel, which even as the hero killer blocked it shattered several of his ribs, “I won’t allow you two to spill anymore of your blood for me,” he spoke through heavy breaths, the engine on his leg was emitting a thick smog now. “Please Todoroki, if you can then cool my engine.”

“I’m on-” he was interrupted as the thick long blade almost impaled him, however the weapon wasn’t meant for that, it had only missed Ko’s head by a centimetre. Rather than waste words any longer ice spread like nestles across the floor and up Iida’s leg, melting as it touched and cooled it.

"Shick," a knife went as Iida caught it with his own hand, it had been aimed at Todoroki this time, “I won’t let you hurt them any longer,” he said whilst blood ran through the gap in the suit.

_You need me, don’t you, that’s why you’re afraid to even move, the sound invaded his mind, At this rate you’re going to die Riley... we’re going to die, that scares you doesn’t it?

He didn’t answer its whisper, he was well aware his muscles had regained their composure but he had prepared himself to not move them, as right as the damnable voice was it would be for nothing he went in foolishly, let alone allowed it to do so. What he did do was reach for the blade stuck between him and Ko, the man was twisted in a way that allowed him to see it but he hoped the look on his own face would be enough to dissuade him from giving him away. The hero killer was far too dampened by volleys of flame to notice the quirk flush out of him and into the blade’s sharpened surface, before he let it go once more.

Stain removed the last of his two knives from his frayed lapel, each of them dual tipped like he had used to subdue Ko, “I will free this world, your actions to stop me are futile,” he crossed the gap between him and Todoroki in three great leaps before instead pushing the knife up into Iida’s chest. He took the cut without flinching and redoubled his knee into the hero killer’s gut, causing the initial stab to lose any ability to fatally wound him. However just as fast as the blow was negated did it serve to allow Stain to use Iida as a step ladder, clearing him in one great bound.
“Native,” the hero killer said as he landed next to his lodged long sword, “Even when it is like this I will make sure the world is rid of at least one wretched phony,” however instead of grabbing his last blade the hero killer spun on his heel and caught Todoroki in the side, flinging him into Iida and toward the wall. A powerful throw of his last knives that followed nailed the pair to the concrete momentarily.

“It is inevitable that a weakling like you should fall,” he ripped the sword from the floor and brought it down on Ko’s neck without waiting. It stuck and then bent, “What?” Stain growled as bits of the blade fell apart and a mere husk of foil remained of the once powerful weapon. “You,” Stain said as he threw Riley a vicious look, “The last of my mercy is spent,” he said as he reared his metal boot back and threw it tip first in his direction.

He caught the shoe with his broken gauntlet, clipping the steel between its brittle surface, enough to allow him to grab both it and the stationary leg behind it, “Compress,” he pulled with as much of his quirk as he could. The legs weight first doubled and then doubled again to become four times as heavy and then another few times to the point where not even a crane could have lifted the hero killer from the floor. Stain struggled but his freedom had been taken, that which allowed him to move and to even turn, no amount of agility would help him now as sapped as he was.

“How,” he shouted at Iida as he allowed his grip to lapse on the villain and a terrible tremor that threatened to tear muscle and rend bone overcame him.

“Recipro-extend!” Iida ripped the knives out of his body in one great burst, allowing him to bring his foot up into the hero killer in one pulverizing blow, it send the hero killer keeling, almost tipping him on his heavy legs. Another followed it but this time in a pincer as the metal of Iida’s costume counted in a roundhouse kick to the hero killer’s jaw, in time to be met by an imploding smash in the back of the head from a newly reinvigorated Midoriya.

The hero killer swayed as the blows landed but didn’t fall, a shunt of ice erupted from the ground and dragged him the last few feet into a pipe set that made the man’s back appear to shatter, he passed out then and there on his feet against the hard concrete and metal.

All that was left in the air for a time was each of their tepid breaths and the calming of heart rate that drummed their veins and chests and minds, it was a minor distraction to him who still had within him a problem that was becoming more severe by a second, the binding of compression as it set and unset his arms and caused his teeth to chatter frantically.

“Are you okay Torenagi?” Midoriya said as he reached out a hand toward him, it was a kind gesture considering the guy was barely able to stand on his own leg.

“Don’t,” was all he could get out as he waved him away. He needed to vent the awful sensation into something and preferably not his classmate.

The weight sticking out beneath the fabric where Stain had cut him became the unlucky recipient, release coursed through his body as he touched his palm to it. Along with it came a loss of energy, he was utterly wiped, it didn’t come as a surprise considering all that had happened in less than an hour. He clipped the brittle weight from his arm as if it were wet tissue paper and chucked it down the alley where it shattered into many tiny pieces like a shitty version of a shrapnel grenade.

“Better,” he let out a shudder as he allowed Midoriya to pull him to his feet.

“Close call,” Todoroki said as he let out a hint of a sigh, “Too close.”

“It was all due to my foolishness, I’m sorry,” Iida said.
“I don’t know how to thank-” he paused as he realised what had almost slipped his mind, “Ko!”

“Don’t worry ‘bout me kid, I’ve had worse,” Ko coughed as he sat up, his immobilisation finally gone.

“Worse than having a blade rammed into your neck?” he smirked slightly as he looked over the man’s wounds, they weren’t dire but hardly shallow, a jagged cut where the throwing knife had gone in and a rapidly yellowing bruise on his stomach, as well as a skin deep slit from the dulled blade.

“Well, you’re well versed with Leina you tell me,” he chuckled.

“And you call me the idiot,” he shook his head and tore off the cap of his leg brace with his left hand while removing the remainder of his athletic tape from his holster with the other. A light wrapping of the unsoiled bandage held tight by the wind of the sticky tape stopped the bleeding for the most part, however it was obvious he needed more thorough help.

“Sorry for bein’ kinda useless there.”

He grabbed the man and hoisted him on his shoulder, it was lucky he was as light as he was, “Let’s just get you out of here, okay?”

“Couldn’t agree more, that thing from earlier really did a number on me,” he coughed again more harshly. At this point it was the burns he noticed, the ones marked by splotches of grey still stuck to Ko’s skin, it made sense now why he’d fallen for the attack so easily. He must have already been struggling after that fight.

“That should do,” Todoroki said as he finished binding the hero killer with a plastic tape that would normally have held newspaper stacks together.

“Best we find some real heroes to take him into custody for now,” Iida said with a hobble of his own, he’d found a piece of stray wood to use as a crutch in the meantime. It didn’t take them more than a few steps out of the alleyway to find someone, a white bearded old man whom recognised them in an instant, or rather one of them.

“Gran Torino,” Midoriya said before he received a flat foot to the face delivered with far more aptness than the grandpa should have been able to muster. This must have been the sole nominator that had gone for him last minute, he surmised.

“What the hell are you doing here, boy?!” Gran Torino said as he landed, before the student could answer the man raised an eyebrow at what Todoroki was dragging behind him, “Is that who I think it is?”

“No way, it’s the hero killer,” a man whom he remembered from earlier, the Frankenstein hero who had taken the wounded woman off his hands. Hopefully she was alright.

“Who cares about that right now,” Gran Torino growled, “Look at their injuries, call an ambulance you fool.”

“R-right away, Sir,” the young hero stuttered as he pulled a radio type device from behind his back. Several more heroes had joined them now, including a staunch man kind enough to take the weight of Ko from his shoulders, even his own untreated cut was beginning to bother him now as theache that had been temporarily banished returned.

“I’m glad that’s over,” he pushed a hand across his sweat covered brow before adjusting the bandages beneath his costume to more thoroughly cover his wound, he didn’t want to risk an
infection. It’d be a sad way to go considering what they’d just been through.

“Torenagi, I believe you dropped this,” Iida nugged him in the shoulder with the visor that had bounced away earlier.

“Thanks…” he said as he took it, that would have been far more annoying to lose than anything else, “Frankly I should probably be thanking all three of you,” he turned toward the trio, “if you hadn’t come when you did me and Native would have been toast. I’m sorry you got injured coming to our aid,” he gave an apologetic bow.

Iida shook his head, “Our success rests solely with Midoriya and Todoroki and also in no small part to you holding him in place for that instant.”

“Why were you and Native even in that alleyway to begin with?” Todoroki asked.

“There was a Noumu, Edgeshot told us to regroup in the main square with him but,” he frowned, “It was as if the hero killer had been waiting, he had us both down with that quirk in the blink of an eye….”

“What a terrifying grudge,” Iida bit his nail as he thought, “Still, I can’t help but feel I owe you and Native an apology in turn.”

“Huh?”

“As sick as the hero killer’s words were they were still true, my revenge blinded me of what was truly important. You can rest assured I will not let that happen again, it’s not how someone who wants to call themselves a hero should act,” Iida almost looked pained by the revelation.

“Duck!” Grand Torino yelled as he threw himself to the ground.

He barely swerved as he saw it out of the corner of his eye, the claw missed him and Iida but it didn’t hit air, instead it grabbed Midoriya by the collar and ascended with him clutched in its talons as it swooped back upward. It was another Noumu, this one more like a pterodactyl than any man.

“Damn, where the hell did that thing come from?” Gran Torino pushed himself off the floor with an air powered pounce but the creature had already ascended to a height in line with the top of the buildings. Riley raised his hand but the Noumu was pivoting far too much for him to get a clean shot, chances are he would hit Midoriya if he so much as tried.

As if it had been struck by lightning the Noumu fell, for a second he wondered if he might have compressed on accident, then he came to terms with a reality that wasn’t so simple. It cascaded up the buildings, knife in hand and caught the Noumu on the way down, before it even hit the floor the creature was dead, a fountain of blood and entrails was all that remained active in its lifeless form. Among the haze stood hunched the form of Stain; risen once more. The bloody mess dripped down his arms and onto Midoriya, whom was pinned to the floor beneath his palm.

“Disgusting creatures, I should have taken care of it when I had the chance,” the hero killer let the boy in his grasp go all at once and turned with his knife raised at their small crowd. “Listen you weak incompetent little wannabes…”

“Those who wield their powers for selfish ideals, who claim titles not rightfully earned,” he took a step forward and flicked his knife at the Noumu, “They are the targets of my purge!” his face had a bloodlust to it, embellished by the drips of the creatures fluid that had sprayed on him. It was a holistic anger, something intricate and deeply seeded in the man’s face, in his being, “All of this… all of it is for the sake of a just world.”
Fire swept in to greet the hero killer’s words but he merely brushed it aside like some bothersome fly. Riley looked to find it was not Todoroki who had flung it but Endeavor whose tall figure now loomed over them like an antagonistic vigil.

“I have finally found you hero killer,” Endeavor gave a fierce grin as he pushed his way through.

“Another phony,” the knife twisted in Stain’s hand, it was longer than his others but not quite a blade, the handle was merely strips of cloth that provided only the amount of grip that one could force upon it through discomfort. Its use was single, to remind the wielder of the weight that came with the baring of a weapon, something not to be done without a conviction. The way he held it so confidently, like he could cut them all down with something so puny was enough to pierce Riley’s heart with a harrowing fear.

The pavement almost felt as if it would shake with every step the hero killer took toward them, with the curling of his tongue and the darkness of his being, “Someone must stain themselves in the blood of the fakes, the liars.” His voice exuded in a way that was deep, like it wasn’t from this world any longer and not bound its laws, “The title of hero is sullied, the pedestal decrepit and ruined. It must be restored!”

Stain’s figure grew as he walked, becoming something demonic in its menace. Riley stumbled and fell to the pavement as the animosity gripped him tighter than any quirk might, enough to try and choke the life out of him; it was like a wave of pure evil. There was no backing away from him, not even the ability to so much as avert his eyes from its horror was afforded.

“Not one among you is allowed to cut me down, none of you are worthy,” his tongue curled itself sickeningly across his half rotten teeth, “There is only one man in this world who is allowed,” he tightened his grip on the dagger, “The only man who can end me is,” the hero killer came to a stop, “All Might!” the knife fell from the hero killer’s hand with a clank, as all movement ceased and the indomitability of his stance fell back into nothingness.

Chapter End Notes

*I don't own BNHA. OC material is my own.*
[Hosu Central Hospital – Western Ward – 9:22 AM Friday]

Sterility hung dry in the air, it was a smell that Riley had to admit he was becoming overly familiar with to the point it now inspired unease. There was some solace to it this time however as for once since his arrival he was not to be counted among those designated as seriously injured.

That which he had received had turned out to be no more than a scathe just like he’d figured. Now all that remained as physical proof of the entanglement was a white strip of gauze, even his donning of a hospital gown had been brief as it had lasted only until earlier that morning. That in of itself had only been forced on him to justify an overnight stay to make sure there were no residual effects from the hero killer’s quirk in their systems. It was almost funny honestly, not the chaos but rather that the nurse who had inspected him had been more flustered about the weights and his previous injury up until he had insisted they were pretty old news.

He was back in his normal clothes now or rather his scuffed up costume. The gauntlets were missing from it as he had removed them both just so he could roll up his sleeves to the elbow and feel a little less uncomfortable, it wasn’t even a feature he realised the costume had until he had pulled at it a bit in his rush to get it on so he could get to Ko’s room, maybe they had snuck it in during the repairs as a failsafe in case something caught them in a fight.

It wasn’t actually his first trip to the sidekick’s room but the man had been fast asleep after his treatment the night before. They hadn’t the luxury of Recovery Girl here but the doctors were quick to act nonetheless, the few quirks they had to help with that had made the process of stitching up Ko’s wounds fast and painless. He might have stayed by the man through the night had he been allowed but to his annoyance he had been forced into to reside in the ward for minors along with his classmates just because he hadn’t been officially discharged; that was all he was waiting on now.

At the very least they had allowed him into the room the moment the man had awoken and that had confirmed that he hadn’t needed to be worried about any internal injury laying undiscovered; he looked far better than when he had been admitted the day before. Even now he was acting relaxed like none of it had been a big deal in the slightest.

“Wipe that sullen look from ya face kid, broodin’ don’t suitcha with that hair,” Ko chuckled.

His face reddened, he hadn’t even remembered it, “Sorry, it’s just… I’m glad you’re alright.”

“It’ll take a lot more than that to take me down, ya did have me a lil scared there for a bit though with that trick you pulled,” he coughed, “Just another scar for the road now. You Yuuei kids are a tough lot I’ll give ya that, taking down the hero killer mighta saved hundreds of lives.”

“I’m still not sure how we did,” he answered. As Todoroki had said the hero killer should have had no trouble in keeping them immobilised indefinitely even with the lie he had told and luck taken into account. All he would have needed to do is collect their blood incrementally and reaffirm his hold, yet he didn’t.

“Don’t matter how ya did, it’s in the past now. All that matters is that you act that much wiser forrit, experiences like that tend to stick with a man.”
Mhmm, he answered. Something did feel different and not just the fact he’d almost died again. He’d been turning the thought over in the spare time he’d had, some of it had sprouted from that ill creed that Stain had proclaimed in his final moments or maybe more accurately its sick truth had set an entirely different train of thought on its way.

“Now since I can hardly stand how ‘bout you go and thank em’ kids in my stead,” Ko said.

“Are you really gonna be okay on your own?” he asked.

“No sweat, I’ll be sure to give ya a call soon as they let me outta here. Now scram, I don’t want em’ to leave before they got my gratitude,” his pointing at the door was frail at best.

He hesitated but then nodded and left. He knew the real reason Ko wanted him to go was so he wouldn’t just be moping around but the task was something he had been meaning to do anyway as his first attempt could hardly be called adequate in light of the Noumu’s interruption.

In regards to the arachnid Noumu he had actually thought about it too, the acid quirk it’d had was exactly like something he remembered with sickness. It had been different in the most definite of ways but the result had been the same, viscous black goo that melted practically anything that it touched. What had happened to the man after that incursion in the alleyway?

“You there, young man,” a female voice called from one of the rooms as he passed by it, interrupting further thought.

Considering how fast he was walking it was almost enough to startle him, instead his confused look trailed inside, within was another standard hospital room with beds enough for four, yet only one of them lay occupied. It was a woman who held it, but not just any woman either but rather the one he’d met so briefly the night before just as the chaos had broken out. She looked different on account of the thick bandage wound across her scalp as only bits of her smooth black hair fell down between its gaps though her lips remained the distinct wine coloured red she seemed to adore so much.

“Hey,” he said as he walked in.

“You’re that sidekick from Native’s booth right?” she asked.

“Yeah,” he wondered how she even had to ask but it became obvious; he wasn’t wearing his visor this time, she’d only recognised him by the design of his outfit.

“Aha I knew it, didn’t expect a student under that getup.”

He rubbed his neck, “I’m glad you’re alright Yono,” he paused. “Uhh, you are alright, right?” she seemed more eccentric than before.

“Yes, yes I’m quite alright,” she giggled, “doctor told me it was a miracle I only suffered a concussion. Now, might you indulge me by telling me your own name, since you already appear to know mine?”

“Torenagi Riley,” he answered.

“Torenagi Riley,” she repeated. “I’ll remember that name, Hōtai told me you were the reason he even managed to find me out there,” she nodded.

“Hōtai?” he hadn’t heard the name before.

“I guess he never told you his name, tall lad wrapped in bandages from head to toe, thinks himself a
real bigshot,” she put her hand up to mimic who she meant, but that wasn’t necessary to jog his memory.

“The Frankenstein guy?” if her description was accurate then it was the man who had taken Yono off his hands.

“Yes, that’s him,” she laughed, “He’ll be glad at least someone gets the look he was going for with that ridiculous Halloween getup. Anyway, you have my thanks young man.”

“I really didn’t do much,” he shook his head as he walked up to the tip of her bed.

“That’s not what matters. All that does is the thought not the size of the part played and for that you have my sincerest gratitude.”

“It was nothing,” he stammered.

“Nevertheless I insist you take this,” she held out a bone white card with stark black lettering indented on its body just the tiniest amount. It read both her name and a cell phone number. “If you ever find yourself in a bind with… unsavoury circumstances, just give me a call and I’ll see what I can do. I have quite the sway around Hosu if I may brag as much,” she nodded.

He took it, if only to spare himself the awkwardness, he wasn’t sure he would actually ever need to call it or he hoped he wouldn’t. He didn’t feel he deserved it, even if he hadn’t been acting as a hero he hoped common sense would have dictated anyone to try and help the philanthropist woman considering the state she’d been in.

“Now, I’ve probably wasted enough of your time with my frivolous banter, I’m sure you were on your way somewhere, yes? Don’t let me keep you,” she gave him an easy smile before picking up her phone in her lap and tapping on it with speed that her sharp red nails should have prevented.

He nodded before wishing her a good day and leaving. She seemed far beyond the point of interest of the meagre gesture, it was probably for the best as he really couldn’t say he was eager to stick around the estranged woman longer than he had to, even if he had been curious to see if she had come through the incident alive. It did feel nice that she had gone to all the trouble to thank him, now he felt silly for not realising that her and the bandaged hero had known each other, no doubt that was why he had been so willing to help her specifically.

Shick, he slid the door back after only a few more minutes of stroll, all three of his cohort were still inside, with smug looks on their faces no less which didn’t match the extent to which wounds remained on their body.

“Welcome back, Torenagi,” Iida said.

“Thanks,” he answered as he closed the door behind him, “You three look happy, did I interrupt something?”

“Oh, ah, no way,” Midoriya laughed nervously, now he definitely knew he had.

“If you say so,” he held his chuckle. The notion was only reinforced by the odd look Todoroki was giving him, or rather the injury on his left hand, it made him feel just a little uncomfortable as he moved to get a blue bag the nurse had stuffed under his bed.

“How is Native doing?” the freckled boy asked in an obvious ploy to change the subject.

“That’s actually why I came back,” he answered as he unzipped the bag, “He’ll be back on his feet
but probably not before a couple of days from now. He wanted me to thank you in his place since he’s a bit stuck until then,” all the weights in the bag were still where he’d left him. He wasn’t sure how he was going to explain that missing one to Leina without her ripping his head off.

“I don’t believe I deserve the thanks, the way I acted was disgraceful no matter how one cuts it,” Iida said.

He zipped the bag back up and turned to sit on the edge of his bed, “Don’t be so hard on yourself, if you hadn’t kicked the blade away Native would have died and me too most likely. That didn’t happen thanks to you even if your reasons for doing it are something you aren’t proud of.”

“If that is how you see it, I suppose it is better I humble myself and accept it, but I meant what I said,” he shook his head, “I should have acted differently.”

“How is your injury?” Todoroki asked, it looked like his agitation at its sight had finally become too much.

“It’s… fine? I already told you it wasn’t serious, I should really be asking you guys that question,” he smirked. “Either way I doubt I’ll be staying much longer, considering I only have today and tomorrow left at Edgeshot’s agency it can’t come soon enough,” he felt eager to get back to training now more than ever.

“Good to hear,” Iida nodded, “My stay will be short as well, my family insists I return home to recover.”

“Makes sense,” he frowned. He didn’t want to repeat Iida’s diagnosis as he had read it off his chart this morning but it wasn’t pretty, the knife his wrist had caught which meant he’d be living with some of the discomfort of it for a long time to come, maybe even the rest of his life. It was tragic but it wouldn’t stop him from discussing what sat on his mind.

“Mind if I ask you guys your opinion on something?” he looked up.

“Shoot,” Todoroki answered.

“Why do you think the Noumu showed in Hosu, yesterday of all days?” it had been bugging him. The hero killer and the Noumu attack, coincidences happened but…

“Honestly I have no clue, it happened so fast; me and Gran Torino were only around by chance,” Midoriya said.

Todoroki nodded, “I doubt there was a motive other than to sow chaos, villainy for the sake of villainy and maybe a bit of intimidation.”

Hmm, they were sound theories but he wasn’t convinced, “I think it was some kind of experiment, a test.”

“A test?” Iida sounded sceptical.

“One thing the Noumu all have in common is that they have multiple quirks, I’m sure anyone who fought them worked that out pretty quickly,” he said and the three nodded. “I never mentioned it back after it happened but before USJ I ran into a man with a quirk that was like Ashido’s, he had this sort of black acidic hair. It’s the kind of quirk you wouldn’t mistake if you saw it again.”

Iida gave him a concerned look, “So, I’m assuming that means you did see it again, on a Noumu no less?”
He nodded, “Yesterday, being used by the Noumu that attacked me and Native. I’m sure it was one and the same.”

“So they’re combining quirks,” Todoroki had a dour look in his eye.

“Sort of, that’s why I think it was a test. Like, figuring out what quirks work together,” he shrugged, “Consider it speculation, I just don’t know how the hero killer fits into all of it.”

“Tomura didn’t catch me as the experimenting type back at the USJ. It was more like he was a kid playing with shiny toys,” Todoroki said.

He looked up at him and the other two in turn, “I guess it makes no difference now but for what it’s worth it wasn’t Tomura who did this to me,” he raised him arm slightly. “It was a villain named Janus, the same one who attacked me at USJ. He would be that type,” he said with a bitter tone. “He even had his own Noumu with him.”

“Then the only logical conclusion is that this villain, Janus, is offering his services to Tomura to create these creatures in exchange for… data? But to what end,” Iida looked deep in thought.

“To create something that’s able to kill even someone like All Might…” Midoriya shuddered, “With a biological weapon like that, there’d be no stopping it. They already almost succeeded once at USJ.”

“I guess a recipe for a creature like that would be worth a tremendous amount, to the right buyer,” Iida frowned.

“No, that man is not after money or even power… I can tell you that for a fact,” he said it stern enough to make it clear he didn’t want to go beyond the point of stating it. He was very sure that the villain’s machinations served a purpose far more ulterior to simple desire.

“That still begs the question of how exactly he’s doing it all, you can’t just transplant quirks, even mutational ones, the host body just rejects them,” Todoroki said. “Otherwise dual mutation quirks would be common, they’d just transplant them from animals. The research on it is rather extensive.”

“That’s the exact problem I got stuck on as well, something is missing,” he answered. “Try to avoid telling anyone about what I told you. It’s a bit much to assume all of it from just… this, even if it makes sense. I don’t want to cause trouble for the school.”

“Considering today, I doubt it’s the last we’ve seen of the League of Villains handiwork,” Iida shirked his shoulders only to wince in pain at his injury. “The aftermath is in the pros hands now, I suggest we leave the matter, they will handle it,” he said just in time for the door to go shick once more.

“Oh good,” Gran Torino said as he entered the room, “The hurt locker’s all assembled. That will make this easier,” behind him were several other men, a hero, a police man and a stocky anthropomorphic dog dressed in a suit, a Beagle, he called the breed offhandedly.

“Police chief Tsuragamae?” Midoriya said to which the dog man nodded. Similar to Nedzu the only really animal looking thing was his head, he had proper hands and legs and everything else.

“I’m sure you can guess why I’m here young heroes in training. It is regarding the events of last night, specifically the paw you young ones lent in the arrest of the hero killer,” the way the man talked was as unnerving as it was silly, added to by the ways his cheeks flapped just the tiniest bit with each word.
“As it stands the hero killer suffered a great number of injuries at your hands,” he shook his head, “He still lives as of now but it falls to us to see through that consequences are doled out for such actions.”

“That’s bullshit,” Todoroki muttered, “If we hadn’t stepped in Native and our classmate would have been murdered, and for what?”

Tsuragamae shook his head, “It is only through a strict moral code set up by your predecessors that peace may be maintained in tandem between society, heroes and the police. That is why these entities exist separately, why the police are sworn not to use quirks to instigate in our line of business. Therefore those who use their quirks in ways not adhering to the guidelines put everything built into jeopardy, such recklessness must be made an example of, logic dictates an adequate punishment his handed down to you pups.”

Todoroki growled, “Heroes save people, it’s their job. Are you saying that deserves punishment you goddamned mutt?” he took several aggressive steps.

“Todoroki, stop,” Midoriya placed himself between him and the police chief.

“Let the chief finish boy,” Gran Torino frowned, there was a distinct distaste on his face. He himself wasn’t sure what to think, even if lawful it was downright cruel.

“Well, as it happens what I said is only the official stance of the police, that is if events were said to unfold as they did,” the chief seemed to say with almost a cheeky tone, “I personally don’t want to see anyone barking down your neck for this incident, not when such promising young careers are at stake.”

“So what you’re saying is it’ll be covered up?” Iida sounded just a bit offended.

“There were very few witnesses to the true events, in fact I believe there were only really two, and with just those testimonies pointing to a completely different turn of events we might bury this like a bone in the backyard,” Tsuragamae gave his nose a mischievous scratch, “That is if Native and Terra Alter are willing to vouch for this outcome, how about it?” he turned to him.

“Yes, I understand,” he answered. It was a shame the three would never receive their praise but if it meant they wouldn’t be reprimanded it was more than worth it.

“Then, if you would be so accommodating as to sign this,” the man had a piece of paper, on it which read a carefully chosen set of words and along with it an extravagant pen. The gist of it that it was Endeavor who intervened and apprehended the hero killer, the three people who had actually saved them had been dragged in as additional hostages.

He signed it begrudgingly, one big cursive ‘R’ that led into ‘Torenagi’ before rounding back as two more trails, across which he ran his thumb, drawing in the ink and making it virtually impossible to copy it without his exact quirk. It was an odd perk that he had discovered only the week before while messing around in class.

“Then with that matter settled, allow me as a man who seeks to keep the peace, offer you my sincerest thanks for your actions!” Tsuragamae bowed deeply.

They returned their gratitude, as did he for what it was worth. It was an odd position to be in, considering his quirk usage came under self-defence, but making sure his classmates weren’t thrown out or worse did show some benefit from it. He was sure back home something like this would have played out far differently.
“As supervisors,” a man in a blue spandex suit with a fish spine helmet said as he walked up to Iida, “we should probably take some responsibility, even in an outcome like this,” he whacked the boy hard on the head, while Gran Torino practically tore Midoriya’s ear off.

“Next time I say sit down, sit down!” he growled.

“Got it, Sir,” Midoriya grinned as he rubbed his ear.

“I best go then, always more crime waiting to be sniffed out in this city,” the chief nodded.

“Thank you, Sir, I’m sorry for my outburst,” Todoroki said.

“Passion is nothing to be sorry for young hero,” Tsuragamae gave a pleasant smile over his shoulder as he left.

“…Torenagi?” a tall but frightened looking nurse stood in the man’s place.

“Yeah?” he asked, though he already had a pretty good idea what she wanted.

“You’re free to go, your discharge forms came through,” she checked the chart in her hands, “There is a woman waiting in the lobby for you, Leina Krivitch, make sure you sign out.”

He nodded and the nurse whisked away, “Guess I better go or Leina is going to extend my stay by a few weeks,” he grabbed his heavy bag. He still had a bruise to remind him of the last time he’d made her wait.

“That woman’s with you huh, careful lad. She’s a fearsome one,” Gran Torino said.

“You know her, Sir?” he asked, it came as a surprise. As far as he knew sidekick was one Edgeshot rarely ever let out, even his patrol with her had been rather restricted.

“It only took a short walk through the lobby to get here to get the type she is,” he had an aimless stare, like he could recount the brief period with great detail. “Scare the kids she did.”

“That sounds like her,” he couldn’t help but laugh. “Well, I’ll see you guys next week then,” the goodbye felt kind of anticlimactic to the whole ordeal.

“Ah, allow me to escort you Torenagi, I insist,” Iida said as he gathered his proper crutch and rose to his feet.

“You should really rest Iida,” Todoroki said.

“I’ll be alright, a small stroll is not going to kill me,” he hobbled, though Riley reckoned it just might.

“You really don’t need to,” he said, there was no real need for such a gesture.

“Consider it my duty to you as class rep Torenagi,” Iida answered.

“Stubborn kid,” Iida’s instructor chuckled.

Stubborn indeed, he thought as he gave up with a shrug and headed toward the door, “Ah,” he said, “before I forget, give me your numbers, just in case anything comes up, I really owe you one.”

A few button presses later and Iida and himself were on their way, although at a much slower pace then he might have liked. It didn’t matter he supposed, it would give him time to say what had cropped up in his mind, something pertaining only to Iida in particular because there was so much
similarity between them that he only saw now.

“Quite the luggage you got there,” Iida looked at his heavy bag.

“I better put it back on before we get back to the lobby,” he knew there was a bathroom pretty much around every corner, it could wait. “Hey Iida?” he said.

“Yes Torenagi?”

“When you came to save me, that look on your face.”

“I’m not proud of it,” Iida frowned.

“You don’t still feel like *that* do you? I know what you said it’s just-”

“No, I’ve put it behind me… my brother will get his justice by the hero killer’s arrest.”

“Good,” he said, “Because not long ago I felt exactly like you did, I still kind of do. Acting cool and fine is one of the worst mistakes I constantly make, I don’t want you to end up with that kind of regret by pushing away those guys back there.”

“You are entirely correct, it was admittedly hard to reason with all the anger I had for the hero killer,” he nodded, “I know better now and I understand… your reasons must run just as personal as mine did, even though I realise my foolishness it is not my place to judge you for it after what I did.”

“If I can stop it happening to anyone else, that’ll be enough,” he shook his head, “Should that end with me crossing that guy again, it’s hard to tell what I’ll do about it but I know better than to seek him out otherwise. Like you said it’s most likely not the last we’ve seen of their work, as much hatred as I feel it’s the motives that puzzle me, it just doesn’t add up.”

“If we become great heroes I swear I’ll help you figure out exactly why the villains went after you,” the words came out of nowhere. There was a scowl on Iida’s face.

“Thanks, I’m sure you’re not the only one,” he smiled. “You and I both have better classmates than we deserve, I reckon.”

“That might be one of the very real truths that resulted from this event,” he chuckled as they reached the main lobby desk, where a single man sat at the desk with his head down. Around the room were rows of chairs filled with a few people here and there.

“I was told I had to sign some discharge papers?” he asked.

“Name?” the nurse looked up with a friendly face.

“Torenagi Riley,” he answered.

His face dropped, “Oh, you’re with her.”

“Something wrong?” this was starting to get weird.

“No, nope, nothing at all. Sign here,” he tapped a white sheet with his name nestled among several lines of personal information. He signed, after which the man took the sheet and said, “your ride is outside, please tell that woman to stay away from the hospital.”

Iida gave him a strange look, “Can she really be that bad?”
He scratched his cheek, he wasn’t sure how to answer, “Um, maybe?” he looked toward the door and swallowed, he wasn’t so sure he wanted to see what was on the other side. He went and pushed the door to the outside open and then was met with an immediate discord.

“What the hell do you mean I can’t park my car here?” Leina yelled.

“Mrs, please calm down,” a guy no older than twenty shrivelled beneath the woman’s gaze.

“Oh hell no,” she smacked her fist into the wall behind him, “if one more of you tells me to calm down then last night’s attack is going to be the least of your problems,” she might have been breathing fire at that point.

“By god,” Iida gasped.

Then, Leina noticed them and they were caught as if by search lights, “Commere you lil shit!”

“H-hey,” Riley managed to squeak as he took a step backward.

It wouldn’t have mattered how many he took, in one motion she hooked him three steps down the stairs and dragged him by the neck, “You and Ko, both you bastards couldn’t even have give me a single heads up. I’m holding you personally responsible for making me miss out on taking my shot at the hero killer.”

“And where are your weights, huh? You think you’re allowed to take them off just because you had a brush with a psychopath? Arrogant little…” she growled as he wrestled himself from her grip momentarily.

He’d forgotten, but he didn’t say that, instead he gave Iida a wave while he had the chance, “Get well, yeah?” he said before Leina promptly shoved him head first into the car, the last few glimpses he had was of the blue haired boy struggling to keep it together.

With a vroom the car was gone, and Iida was left standing by himself, well almost. Good friends indeed, he thought as he looked up toward the window at Midoriya and Todoroki who must have watched the entire spectacle.

[Edgeshot Heroic Office – The Arena of Increments – 4:40 PM]

His punch missed but his elbow met the hero’s stomach, he shifted his weight on his heel and tried to hit the same spot with his knee. It was blocked however he grabbed the arm that had been used to do so despite the pain, weighing it down and sinking the pro to the floor.

Thud, he hit the ground as his legs were swept by the heavy weight of the limb he’d just used his quirk on. He realised his mistake and raised his hand at the man who rolled to the side. Crack, the floor crumbled but Edgeshot was no longer there. He jumped to his feet with the help of momentum and one of his hands, they were unburdened now for once, so the pro could evaluate and see the progress he’d made.

“Enough,” the man said, causing him to pause and drop out of the stance he’d already readopted.

“You have improved considerably, no doubt because of Leina,” Edgeshot said, there were marks on the hero’s clothes where dust had piled and fists had hit.

“Thank you, Sir,” he answered, he knew that the pro had intentionally fought much slower just to give him the slightest chance.
“This exercise marks the end of your week,” he walked up slowly, “I am not going to shower you with some silly notion of wisdom or pep talk however there is still much more to that stance even if you do have a firmer grasp on it, do not make the mistake of growing complacent,” he nodded at the words, he understood that much from Leina but also in no small part to the hero killer, besides if he did he would never hear the end of it.

“I believe Leina wishes you to meet her out front before you leave, I am sure by now you can find your way to reception,” the man held out a hand, which he obliged. The pro had a firm grip, one that pulled him a few inches closer, “You can tell that Eraserhead to return my calls some time,” he sighed, for once with some real emotion, “he is a painful man to have teach you, is he not?”

“He did the same for you?” he was a little caught off guard, he was sure they were about the same age if anything. “Is that why-”

“Not quite, he and I were briefly entwined in a feud of sorts,” the man chuckled, “In my senior year his attempt at proving himself on equal levels with those in the hero course occurred more often than not.”

“He went around fighting people?” he’d never think of Aizawa to be so brash but maybe in his younger years that would have been the case.

“That might have been the first time I had ever considered someone a true rival of mine, though the aftermath resulted in both of us drinking each other under the table that very night. If you ever need that man to open up about something then I can assure you the way to do it is through alcohol,” it felt like the man was grinning underneath the scarf as he let his arm go. “Mention it to him for me, would you? I am sure it would be amusing.”

He almost snorted, “Sure,” he wondered if it’d really be enough to drop Aizawa’s jaw.

“Very well then, until next time Terra Alter,” the man flickered and then he was gone.

It’d been a long week but it was finally over.

[Location: ??? – 7:47 PM Sunday]

The room was porcelain, perforated in its darkness by only the glow of several interconnected monitors and the shadows of the men they cast on the wall behind them. Sound could be heard every so often, a crude snapping of a gear as it moved in a way which was unnatural to even the hand from whence it was wrought. Static projected itself onto the villain’s beak as he worked on the other sitting in the chair, his metallic implements moving rapidly between one ragged mat of wounded flesh to another. Pain did not bother his subject but still he was careful as he did not want to risk harm to this one in particular, not that he would make a mistake so amateur.

Beep. Beep. Beep, the machine’s around them went as if they were counting. It had been doing better than before. Years ago the life in his subject’s pristine body had only been fleeting but he had fixed that painstakingly and now he had recovered all except one vital function, sight.

“To think the hero killer would be captured so easily, I have to say I’m just a little disappointed,” the subject’s voice was elegant, deep and confident.

The jumping of Janus’s fingers stopped, “If you had intervened. Interfered with those magnificent… parts. This one is sure. Events would have unfolded differently.”

“It is better to grow sympathy for Tomura’s cause then to make my presence known, it would only
"steal his thunder," the man swirled a wine glass with a deep red liquor in it before bringing it to his dry lips.

“Yes, but this one would have loved to have seen it,” he said as he switched his blade for a needle instead. It was inches thick and maybe unnecessarily, so much so that it might have scared anyone except this man, he swabbed an inch of the skin above a vein with ethanol.

The man gave a sultry laugh as the needle went in, “If that’s so then perhaps you should have fixed me up sooner doctor.”

“There is only so much one, even one such as I can do. They were injuries that should not have been survived,” the thick needle in his hands fought back against the suction but gradually the coagulated black and crimson blood filled it.

“Too true my friend; still, your skill has only grown with my additions. Things may have turned out differently had you the ability to try again at that point in time,” a crack echoed as if to confirm the statement. “So what are our losses from this little incursion?”

“All the Noumu have either deceased or been detained,” Janus answered.

“A small price to pay to drive some fear into the city and draw some shadows toward Tomura,” the man tilted his head slightly, “Together we will nurture his progress and once I am gone he will fill the void I leave behind, he is warped enough to see it through.”

“It will not take much more. Soon, sooner than even you might like, something will come to pass,” he flicked the syringe once with his metal finger before laying it on a tray among several others.

“Is that a vote of confidence or an educated guess?” the man turned his head over his shoulder at him, a pointless action he knew but one that might lend of a hint of his curiosity.

“This one can already feel it in the air as he walks. The other organisations are already on the move once more. Even in this city is clear, perfectly clear, to this one that whispers are moving around. A tipping point will happen, be it from our action or enabled by our inaction.”

“So be it,” the man put down his glass, “I trust everything goes according to plan with our little experiment?”

“The run in with the hero killer. Unexpected, not unaccountable. More control is required but nothing progresses as it should not. All that is needed is a push, it is already better than the last,” Janus shook his head. “Even the last two. Our escapees.”

“Even better than them? How splendid…” the man began to tap his chair with a light rhythm, “Enjoy your transient peace while you can All Might. It’s going to come crashing down around you sooner than you think.”

Chapter End Notes

* I don't own BNHA. OC Material is my own.
Enacted metanoia

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

[Yuuei’s Campus – Riley’s Dormitory Room – 6:31 AM Monday]

His breath was slow on the rather fickle morning. The sun had risen long before he’d awoken but it still took it’s time dribbling in from behind the curtain as he sat cross legged on the floor. He’d recovered the mat on which Kirishima had slept that one time as he had found it just comfortable enough to do what Midnight had instructed him. He had engaged the meditation reluctantly but it did feel better for lack of an adequate word, it made the thing feel distant while he did it.

After a few more minutes he broke his state, one where he thought of absolutely nothing, it was still too early to go to class even for the first day back but he had to apply both the tape and the equipment. Even though his room had no bathroom in of itself he had found himself a mirror yesterday to put in the corner, after he had experienced just exactly the kind of annoyance it meant not to have Leina help him put the weights on. He stood and touched the joints as he peered at himself in the aforementioned device, it would no doubt continue to feel sore for quite some time.

Then, he pulled the draw of his dresser within which he had stashed everything that remained as a souvenir of the trip, that being only the weights, the book and the pamphlet. It was a shame he only had eight now, Leina hadn’t so much as commentated on that aspect of his run in with the hero killer. The only thing that woman had cared about was getting the last few juices out of the time they’d had left just before he’d had that final re-assessment with Edgeshot. Quite contrary to her nature she’d also taken the time to drive him back to the school, maybe just so he wouldn’t get recognised on every street corner by all the articles that had gone up. Ko hadn’t been released by the time he’d gone but he had called the man anyway to tell him he was leaving. It was a brief goodbye yet it was better than nothing. While he would miss both the sidekicks he would miss the goofy feathered one most of all.

He stopped as he examined the roll of tape and then looked to the blazer hanging on the door. The weather was still in his favour as they hadn’t yet the need to transition to summer uniforms. That wouldn’t last much longer. He looked at his arms, Real heroes don’t hide their scars, that’s what she had said and even Ko had paraphrased that sentiment in the hospital. Maybe Kirishima had meant it the same way, not referring to how they looked, more like what they represented. Even the teal strands dangling in front of his eyes told him the same. He wasn’t sure yet if he would get rid of them this afternoon, they’d almost grown on him and it did seem to draw people’s eyes elsewhere.

He dropped the tape, took out the bag of Velcro weights and slammed the drawer shut. Covering himself like that wasn’t something he needed to do anymore, he decided. In a way doing it for so long had been him admitting the very thing he had so vehemently admonished back when fighting Leina, each day he went to the effort to hide them it was like admitting the fact they’d won. That he was afraid of them, vulnerable to be struck again. He realised that as much as anything else had been scratching at the back of his mind. No more, he wouldn’t be afraid of using his ability and he damn well wouldn’t be afraid of some sadomasochistic thing hiding in the back of his head; it was his mind, his body, no one else’s, just like his quirk had been and he’d already clawed that back.

[Yuuei’s Campus – Classroom 1-A – 7:23 AM]

Riley pushed the door open to the class, he’d taken longer than he had wanted but he wasn’t late.
What had kept him was an unexpected delivery; a sizeable wooden framed box addressed to him, by Leina no less. Inside he had found a replacement weight, another set of them as well and sets of training equipment, dumbbells, bands and the like. He wasn’t sure what to say to the kindness, it had all looked very expensive if he was being honest, he would need to call her about it in the afternoon when he had more time to check it all out. The class was bustling around him as he walked to Kirishima’s desk, where the latter had rounded up Kaminari and Sero already.

“Yo,” he said and rolled his shoulder once more.

“Hey dude,” Kirishima answered.

“And here I thought you were kidding,” Sero smirked as he looked him.

“Say what you want,” he grabbed the teal fringes, “I don’t care,” he shook his head and leant on the desk beside his friends. Any small pokes he could make were hardly anything compared to Leina.

_Tch_, he shrugged, “I’m just joking man, besides looks like you got bigger concerns,” he pointed at the bump on his forearm.

“It’s nothing,” he shrugged.

“Edgeshot mess you up that bad during your week?” Kaminari asked.

“If only,” he rolled up the sleeve of his blazer to reveal one of the burdens, “Courtesy of his sidekick.”

“Weight training? Damn man that's old school, didn't think people still did that,” Kirishima said with a weird sense of awe, like he was admiring the outdated method.

“How about you guys?”

“Yeah, it was eye opening,” Kirishima bit his lip, “or maybe just a little bit insane. Fourth Kind takes his job seriously, he's a real man. Villains get up to some real nasty stuff, even Tetsu was crept out and that guys more resilient than I am.”

“You got a real thousand-yard stare going on there,” Kaminari said.

“Do I?” he snapped out of it. It was evident Kirishima had changed just a bit, it was like he'd become less naïve, or perhaps just more cynical.

“Yes, knucklehead,” Jirou shrugged.

Kirishima almost jumped, “Holy shit, where’d you come from?”

“I was already here,” she gave him a look like he was dumb, “What are you guys talking about?”

_Ahem_, Kirishima went, “Work experience week, anything interesting on your end, rockstar?” he said.

“I don't want to talk about it,” the sigh she gave was tainted by gloom.

“Oh yeah? It must have been exciting right, getting your face in the paper,” he grinned like he knew something she didn’t, the grab he’d made toward his bag made that more apparent. He took out a newspaper from inside it dropped it on his desk, “That’s you right?” he asked as he unfolded it and pointed on the page. The top of Jirou’s head was barely visible as she lugged a fog machine across the back of a strange purple stage. Riley hid a smirk with his thumb.
“I guess you should change your hero name to Stagehand or something,” Sero said, causing Kaminari to snort.

Jirou’s hand shook as she brought it up, “Jerk!” she laid Kaminari straight across the face.

“Ah, what the hell did I do?” he grasped his cheek, “Sero’s the one who said it.”

“Yeah well, screw you for laughing,” she grimaced as she looked around, like she was looking for the next target.

“Calm down, calm down, you’re not the only one who got plastered. Just look at the front page,” he turned the paper over. Yuiuei’s Class 1-A; Danger magnets or victims of fortune?! it said in blocky lettering. Below it was a picture of the hero killer and among the crowd Native, his own classmates and he himself.

Jirou paused as she looked at it and then over at him, “You can’t stay out of trouble, huh?”

“Wasn’t my fault this time, I swear,” he backed off a foot or two. He didn’t want to be the next to get smacked.

“Dude, I can’t believe you guys had a run in with the hero killer,” Sero said before she could make a move.

He looked over his shoulder at the other three involved, “We were lucky Endeavor was around.”

“You guys didn’t back down though right?” Kirishima let his curiosity claim his voice.

“It was over before I knew it, barely even saw him,” he answered.

“All four of you in the same spot at the same time, sounds like bullshit,” Jirou frowned.

“Joint training exercise,” he shrugged. “It was all a bad coincidence, really,” they had texted afterward on how to explain it to the others.

“If we didn’t have those pro heroes around it would have gone a lot different, they were quick to the rescue,” Midoriya said, stood and walked over.

“Rescue,” Todoroki shook his head, hmph, he muttered. His relationship with his dad didn’t seem to have softened even a fraction.

Hmm, Kirishima said, “There’s something different about you guys, I can feel it, ya know?”

“It was only a week,” Iida answered, “The one who is really different is Uraraka,” he looked up at the girl in question, she was doing some sort of techniques in demonstration to Hagakure, “If you look closely, it almost looks like she’s going to go super at any second,” he chuckled.

“Getting ambushed by the hero killer, pretty scary stuff, I was worried for you,” Momo said, it sounded like she was saying it almost for her own sake rather than theirs.

Kaminari grinned, “You can’t say it wasn’t kinda cool, all those swords and the way he almost went after you guys with all those injuries. I can’t believe he was a heroics student just like us.”

“Kaminari,” Midoriya said with some oomph, before nodding his head at Iida.

“Huh?” he answered with a flat expression before realising, “Shit, I’m sorry man.”
“No it is alright. He was without a doubt a man of tenacity and he had his ideals, which were by all means evil but I understand if someone would find him ‘cool’,” Iida answered with a sick glance at his hand. “He chose to act on those ideals in the most misguided way. Expressing your beliefs like that even if they had been right, I can definitely say to that end he was no more than a mere villain when he was struck down by Endeavor. I'm going to show people that vengeance and retribution aren't the answer. That is the way on which I will forge my conviction of heroism anew!” he clasped his hand tight with a strange energy.

“That's great Iida,” Midoriya patted him on the back to show his approval.

Riley looked around as their crowd bickered, he was kind of curious what the others had been up to, “…Stealth and espionage all week! It was wicked!” he heard Hagakure almost yell in Ashido’s ear, whom looked downright angry in return.

“That's so cool,” she pulled her hands up to her chest, “Both you and Uraraka had such a kickass week, mine was so boring, I didn’t even get to catch a villain,” she pouted.

“Are you alright Mineta?” Tsuyu asked beside the pair, the grape student looked frozen where he sat.

“Yo what’s wrong dude?” Kaminari said.

“He was with Mount Lady,” Mezou answered.

Mineta’s face whipped up from the table at them, “Women are demons,” he nibbled at his finger and peered at Uraraka, “They're all demons just hiding their true nature from the outset. Don’t. Trust. Them,” his face went back down to his desk like he’d seen a ghost.

“Jesus man, what did Mount Lady do to you?” Kaminari shook him by the shoulders.

“Hey, Riley,” Sero said with a massive grin on his face, pulling his attention, “Maybe I spoke to soon about your hair, I think people aren’t gonna notice it after this,” he pointed at the door, which had just opened. He turned over his shoulder at Sero’s prompt and almost doubled over at the sight, it was just so ridiculous he couldn't comprehend it.

“Holy shit are you forreal' Bakugou?!” Kirishima coiled with laughter. Bakugou looked like he’d just come straight out of a Sunday school, his hair was combed perfectly straight to the point that he looked like a life size plastic doll.

“I never thought I'd see the day someone tamed Bakugou, who's the lucky gal?” Sero teased as he tried to hold himself.

“Stop laughing fuck faces. It won't go back to normal no matter how many times I wash it,” he quivered with rage as the two continued their mockery.

“And I thought I looked ridiculous,” he said, his face must have been contorted trying to hold his amusement in.

“I swear if you don't shut up I'll fucking murder all three of you,” Bakugou flailed his arms in anger, almost comically. The hair only made it more ridiculous.

“Yeah I'd like to see you try it amazing eight-two hair lad!” Kirishima looked like he could barely stand.

“I'm fucking dying please why, I can only take so much…!” Sero clutched his stomach in pain.
Bakugou's hair went back to normal with a *thoomp*, as he grabbed Sero by his neck and began to wring him out ruthlessly. He only escaped the attempt to snatch him the same way by an inch, leaving the fuming student to grapple Kirishima instead, “I've got you now you bastards!”

“So damn noisy in here…” Tokoyami said.

“As usual,” Tsuyu answered with a smile, she didn't seem botherd by the chaos of the classroom.

“Get in your seats! Class is about to start!” Iida commanded.

Aizawa sprang up from behind the desk as if by cue. No one had even noticed him there. He was badly attempting to hide his chuckle over Bakugou's predicament.

[**Yuuei's Campus – Replica City District Playground γ – 1:16 PM**]

By the afternoon their stories had each been told numerous times, interlaced by workings and tribulations and the sharing of it. Now they stood back in their first heroic’s lesson of their return, upon a platform situated within a maze of metal complexes that made up an industrial wasteland.

It was naught but wrought iron and pipes at the bottom that threatened to trip anything down there up, among it at differing heights were platforms that spanned from cylinder to cylinder ran door to door. It wasn’t the kind of place that had ever been used for what it was intended, it was too crazy for that but it was where All Might had led them, presumably to teach them something.

“All right young heroines and heroes, let’s start off on the right foot after your work week with an exercise to demonstrate all you’ve learnt. Today we’ll be conducting a little rescue exercise and who shall you be rescuing? None other than myself of course,” the man had in his hand a white sash, with the words **Help** and **Rescue** written on them.

“Now rather than anything direr we’ll instead have ourselves a little race, first one to reach me in the centre is the winner. You may pick your starting locations but bear in mind how this’ll put you in relation to your competitors. Last of all, no needless destruction,” the man gave a less than subtle look toward Bakugou. “Now, first up…” he looked around, “Midoriya, Sero, Iida, Ashido and Ojiro.”

About ten minutes later the competitors had set themselves up, some looking more confident than the rest. They themselves had a jumbotron to watch the action, “This seems kind of unbalanced,” he said as he sat down on one of the steps of the large bleachers that had been set up.

Kirishima sat down beside him, “Yep, no way Sero can lose at this. Dude’s built for this kind of stuff,” he said.

“Yeah Sero is like a freakin’ parkour artist,” Kaminari nodded.

“Deku’s dead last, mark my words,” Bakugou folded his arms.

“I’m surprised they all split up,” Kaminari shrugged, “guess they want to have a fair race. Bad idea if you ask me,” he smirked. “At least then Midoriya would be able to sock someone straight out and come fourth, ya know?”

“My money is on Iida,” Uraraka said, “Even if he’s still injured, I feel like he’s gonna win this.”

“Even if Iida’s fast, the ground isn’t really suitable for running,” he said. Kirishima’s guess was probably the correct one as Sero’s tape was far more compatible.
“You never know what he might have learnt in a week,” she shrugged. If she was comparing the
guy to herself then that might be true. Those motions she’d been practicing in class reminded him an
awful lot of someone.

All Might’s flashed across the large screen, “Without further ado, let us begin,” he said and a red
flare was set off in the distance, presumably where they were meant to go.

Sero began the race by launching himself above the rigid sets of pipes and bearings with a swing
from a metal cylinder where he’d chosen to start. The motion was like a grappling hook, allowing
him to swing from pipe to edge to pipe again and through the ferrous jungle. It was smoother than it
had been, like he’d learnt from Spiderman himself. He made the area look small and it wasn’t long
before he’d already covered a quarter of it.

Iida’s grasp on the racecourse was much the same, although his lead on foot wasn’t quite the same as
Sero’s in the air he kept up easily nonetheless. It was a difficult thing to judge however, especially
when most of them were coming from different directions. On that note, Ashido and Ojiro were tied
for third, while the acid allowed the former to stick to each surface like some kind of insect. It was a
neat trick he had to admit. Ojiro had resorted to using his tail to bounce by slamming it into the floor,
it was decent too but looked difficult, he was struggling just to keep up with her and his tail was
becoming lined with small purple bruises as a result.

“Wow look at those moves! They’re almost like Bakugou’s!” Hagakure said and pointed. The
camera readjusted in time to show exactly what she meant, although it was just shy of a blur it was
definitely Midoriya. He had almost forgotten he was in the race, maybe he shouldn’t have
considering he was rapidly jumping past every single part of the course like it was nothing.

Tch, Bakugou scoffed. He looked downright pissed at Midoriya but more so himself, from what he’d
heard the guy’s week had gone poorly.

“He might win at this rate,” Jirou said.

“Yeah,” he said in agreement. It was rather impressive to watch even though he had seen a glimpse
before, he remembered.

Midoriya was dancing from slippery pipe to even slicker surface with ease. Even Sero looked
shocked as the guy flew past him, wearing that same cloak of red vapour he had been during Stain’s
ambush. In a way it was similar to what Kaminari did but it wasn’t like Kaminari’s version gave him
an all around attribute boost. It must have been an extension of the strength quirk Midoriya had,
being used in a way that affected his entire body at once rather than a single digit like he had shown
previously. If anything out of all them it was that guy who had changed the most. That much was
obvious now.

“Shit, he messed up,” Rikidou said as Midoriya slipped and fell, he’d only been about twenty feet
from the ladder that would have led to his victory.

Ouch, he thought as he watched gravity pull at Midoriya’s body and send him flying into a great red
water tank at an angle with a hard thunk, it might have knocked him out cold as it sent him tumbling
to the floor where Ojiro was, although the latter caught him on his way down.

“Sero wins!” All Might announced almost the moment that Ojiro helped the boy get on his feet
again. He had just been dazed by the fall but not seriously hurt, maybe that quirk gave him
endurance too.

“He was so close…” Uraraka said.
“Impressive little bugger,” Kirishima nodded.

“One week…?” he heard Bakugou say under his breath just behind him. The race appeared to have stung him deep.

He wasn’t sure himself how he would navigate it when his turn came, even without the weights under his clothes. Just like when he’d fought Edgeshot it felt like he could jump ten feet in the air without the stuff bearing down on his limbs. There was no doubt it had done a small wonder for his mobility and there was eagerness in him to try it, hopefully deciding he would wear them anytime he wasn’t sleeping or in afternoon classes would be enough not to injure him from strain.

“Next up,” the All Might on screen said, “Torenagi, Kaminari, Bakugou, Tokoyami and Todoroki. Let’s see some of the front runners from the sports festival battle it out again, shall we?” he nodded with gusto at his own words. If he wasn’t sure, he realised, he had to become sure very fast.

“Man, that’s bullshit,” Kaminari said, “Here I thought it was meant to be random,” he sighed.

“Back at it again so soon, eh?” Kirishima clapped him on the shoulder and then looked behind him at Bakugou.

*Hmph,* Bakugou answered, “I’m going to destroy you fucks,” he let a miniature explosion make his point. He ignored the taunt and stood, it made his stomach feel a bit ill but hardly enough to deter. This wasn’t a fight or anything, it was just a race.

They were soon in a disparate starting formation but unlike those who had gone before them all had opted to start relatively in the same place except Kaminari. It was because the place where he now planted his feet was positively the shortest point to the place they needed to go, which wasn’t quite the same place the previous five had been pointed toward. It might have been wise to hide where he was going to start in retrospect but in all honesty he doubted the other three above and beside him hadn’t worked that out on their own.

He loosened his muscles up with a stretch of his legs and arms and a light one-two hop like Leina had made him do every day before they had started. Without the weights on it was really almost disorientating, like the shackles tethering him to the floor had been cut. He was well aware of Todoroki’s ability to stop him from taking advantage of it, he had like himself been one to choose the ground unlike Bakugou and Tokoyami on the perch above them.

“Good luck,” Todoroki said, to which he nodded. The guy no doubt had something in mind especially considering the seven foot concrete wall in front of them. It was the perfect place for a trap. His body tensed as he awaited the signal, he had a plan in place for that already.

The red flare signalled in the distance and he dashed. In two steps he heard the distinctive *shing* of ice as it curled after him and on the third his foot hit the fan that he’d had his eyes on. The wall was only seven foot, a mere trifle to him now as he jumped at and up it, digging his hands into the concrete wall as if it were only as hard as Play dough. He and Ashido had made much the same realisation, even if they had different ways of going about it, as he plummeted over the other side of the drop he rolled just in time for Todoroki to do the same.

He could hear the cascading of explosions as they met foul air however he had already begun his stride into the metal framework. Beside him between glimpses in gaps Todoroki was sliding across the perilous ground as if it were no more than an ice rink. He made every step with careful precision but didn’t slow, the rungs on which he placed his hands as he dashed between pipe and chunk alike were only made trivial by his touch which hardened them enough to not snap beneath his now slightly higher weight.
As he reached the corner of plinth where his path met with the other next to him ice erupted from the earth coming up as a high fence to block his path, he slid to a halt as he reached it. Bastard, he thought as he glared up at Todoroki, who actually seemed to be rather enjoying himself.

“Two can play at that game,” he gritted his teeth and touched the surface with his hands. As he had hardened his footholds his arms had grown harder to keep still, this would be the chance to relieve them.

He let the quirk go in one mighty push, equalising first and then making his arms run with pins and needles after. He searched at his feet for an object and spotted a scattered pipe, it would be enough for this now. He made it heavier as he swung it like a baseball bat at the frozen wall. Its surface cracked with a chink before coming down in one ruinous crash.

He’d fallen behind because of that, he knew, as he jumped over the ice cubes and saw the three students ahead of him. As his foot hit he could see the ground had turned dirty, like a thick dusty covering of iron sat on it. It left his cleats red as he kicked it up with his heel and headed toward the gigantic red foundry that was to be their goal. The monstrosity was more of a fortress than a place of work, thick windows were covered by thicker bars set within concrete and brick and mortar that would be hard for even his quirk to punch through.

A bang fell through the air as he reached it, just in time for one of the metal window bars above him to go flying past his head. It would have been a certain concussion if it had so much as grazed him and he didn’t need to look to know what had caused it.

“Bakugou,” All Might’s voice shouted as if through loud speaker, “cool your jets or I'll be forced to disqualify you,” the student in question howled at the words.

He gripped at the loose brick and worked his way up to one of the few viable entrances, those being the barred windows themselves, on which Todoroki and the others were already working away. Even if he couldn’t bust his way in he could definitely pry them apart, he gripped the first he got to with both his hands and pulled them opposite. The bars fought him at first but then gave to the quirk, leaving a gap just big enough for him to kick his body through after shattering the thick glass with the equilibrium of what he had only just then incited.

He hit the floor hard, the drop from the window was higher than he imagined. Around him and far above spiralled crude railings and ladders that made up a treacherous scaffold of which odds and ends stuck out dangerously. Upon it was Tokoyami, already halfway up in fact. Crack, another of the windows went as Todoroki fell in behind him, evidently the window and bars had been far harder for him to break.

Both of them ran at the scaffolding but rather than deal with the ladders they jumped at the rungs of the scaffolding itself. The things were probably less than five feet apart and made for easy climbing for both him and Todoroki, who apparently hadn’t slacked on raising his physical ability either. He might have tried to sabotage the icy student had it not been for the rickety nature of the scaffolding itself, he was far too preoccupied with keeping his grip and tightening the loose rungs where he found them. There wasn’t a point anyhow, all that remained was a mad dash to the end, one which Tokoyami was the main target of if anything.

“If I can’t win then none of you will,” he heard Kaminari below him and turned back. The student was standing in the centre of the antechamber and as he saw his grip on the scaffolding with his right hand he knew exactly what the guy was about to do.

“Indiscriminate sh-”
“Blaze Assault,” bang, Kaminari flew against the wall as a branding of fire hit him in the back.

“These assholes are mine you fucking Pikachu,” Bakugou growled as he took Kaminari’s place and then shot his sight upward at them. “And where do you bastards think you’re going? That first place belongs to me!”

Him and Todoroki looked at each other and then back down. They were both getting rather close to running on empty at this point, that wall had probably taken a lot to muster in its mass. The dark shadow above them quickened its pace as it heard the cacophony of wrathful explosions begin to tear its way up the side of the scaffold. If their way of ignoring ladders had been fast then Bakugou’s own was far beyond that. He curled out of the way as the heat and smoke flew past him and stung his eyes, however he wasn’t fast enough. A kick to his ribs sent him flying onto one of the many steel platforms that lined the inside of the perilous structure. He coughed and held his side in pain, then he slammed his fist on the floor, he should have seen that coming.

If you want to win all you need to do… the voice began crackling in his mind like static.

"Shut. Up. I said I don’t need you," he said aloud. He dismissed the irony that came with effectively arguing with his own mind before he pushed himself to his feet.

Boom, the structure rattled and he barely managed to keep himself from falling out. Planks that spanned the runways crashed the thirty foot height and hit the metallic floor at the bottom, barely missing Kaminari’s unconscious body in the process. He leant out of it with one hand gripping the steel railing tightly to see what had done it, above him where ice and shadow and fire fought he could see exactly.

“Let go of me you savage,” Tokoyami yelled.

“Eat this,” Bakugou answered with a fist.

Bang, another explosion shook everything but this time it hit it’s intended target, sending Tokoyami flying hard into the metal he’d been holding on to. The shadow held him in the air for a second before it too faded with a flicker of Tokoyami’s eyes, causing him to fall. The only thing that prevented the bird student crashing from the lethal height was a single spiked bit of railing that hooked his shirt on the way down, just two floors above Riley.

Anger beset him as he watched it. The whole thing was arrogant and so typical and left him seething. How the hell could he risk Tokoyami’s life over a stupid race? Todoroki was having the same thought by the look of it, but he was now the target of Bakugou’s aggression. There wasn’t much time to do anything other than throw himself up the two steps to the fallen student’s position. The whole scaffold was tipping dangerously now, it would soon come down.

As he got up next to him Tokoyami’s collar began to rip, causing him to lunge the remainder of the distance just to catch him before he fell. He hoisted him back up beside him carefully, enough to see in earnest the singed feathers and charred beak. It made him feel a deep, familiar resentment as he let his quirk fall into the structure around him. The shaking stopped but his loathing didn’t as he navigated the rest of the course with Tokoyami slung over his shoulder.

The hatch at the top of the building opened with a clank. Despite Todoroki’s effort the white sash lay loosely in Bakugou’s hand, earning him a victory, one that he wasn’t quite ready to let go yet as he put Tokoyami down.

“What the fuck is wrong with you?” he said, “You could have killed Tokoyami and Kaminari both.”
“Like I give a fuck,” Bakugou answered.

“You know that isn’t how a hero should act and yet you do it anyway.”

“So? You gonna do something about it?” the student snarled.

“I’m not going to fight during the exercise if that’s what you’re after,” he said. His mind felt agitated even with what he had said, he needed to bre-

Bang, the fist exploded beside his head like a warning shot. It was like a flick to the temple that knocked any semblance of normal thought from it. He caught Bakugou’s wrist before he could even lower it, “I’ll just have to start with your hand again.”

Bakugou sneered, “I’d like to see you try, shithead,” he said. It was exactly what he had wanted, but it was far too late for him to stop himself. “You think I’m scared of you? First I’ll crush you and then I’ll crush whatever that is, too.”

“Break it up, both of you,” All Might pushed them both hard in the chest. He hadn’t even noticed pro watching them go at it. His anger held for a moment before he caught the teacher’s eye. The weirdest key of fear ran over his body, like the hero was going to run him through with just his hand. It’s spirit crumpled and sweat drove down his body, then he was himself again.

“Torenagi, are you alright?” Todoroki asked.

He shuddered and wiped his brow, “Yeah, I’m fine, I don’t know what came over me,” he wasn’t sure how the man had placated him with just a stare, like he had scared it off with sheer indomitability.

“As much as roughhousing is encouraged I will have to side with Torenagi on the matter of the other two students you attacked young Bakugou, you’re hereby disqualified,” All Might said as he snatched away the sash and handed it to Todoroki.

“What the fuck?!?” Bakugou answered.

“Language Bakugou, even if you succeeded in my rescue you failed to take into account the entirely new danger you created with your stunts. Heroes need to work together to solve a situation, not lay down others for glory. If you feel inclined otherwise then take some notes from Todoroki, he did not have to try and maim his opponents to slow them down.”

Tch, he answered, “Whatever.”

“Now then,” All Might picked up the microphone in his hand, “The next group to go will be Kirishima, Hagakure, Uraraka, Jirou and Rikidou, please make your way to the outskirts.”

[Yuuei’s Campus – Replica City District Playground γ Changing Rooms – 2:56 PM]

“Man, make up already you two, it was just a race,” Kirishima said.

“Shut up,” Bakugou answered.

Riley shrugged, “I’d be more obligated if I hadn’t narrowly avoided getting nailed by a six inch thick pipe,” honestly he didn’t care half as much about it now as what All Might had… inflicted on him. He had felt nothing of it during the other two races, which was a definite oddity. The man had scared it into submission, or something.
“It’s not like you fucking died Joker, so stop getting so bent out of shape,” Bakugou said.

“Oh gee but it’s the thought that counts,” he rolled his eyes. His name calling was getting no less creative.

“I think you’re making everyone else uncomfortable with your childish bickering,” Iida said. “Bakugou should have acted less rashly but it’s All Might’s place to reprimand him for that, not yours, especially after you almost attacked each other after the match.”

He paused and looked around. It was a bit awkward now, “Sorry. I’ll drop it,” he said. Maybe he’d been a bit out of line, a result of some custom he didn’t understand. He pulled off the black frayed shirt, it felt disgusting to touch the material sweat soaked as it was, he’d need to get it washed or something.

“Hey,” Kirishima laughed, “at least the score between you is even now since Bakugou can’t hold back.”

“You’re keeping score?” Kaminari asked, “What’s mine?”

“…Zero,” he smirked as the red clasps of his facemask came undone. “I can’t really say you’ve beaten anyone outright dude.”

“Fuck off,” he stomped his foot, “I beat Mineta at arm wrestling just before we went for the work week and my sports festival placements gotta count for something.”

“Alright, fine, fine. You get one pity point,” Kirishima said as he slammed the locker door shut. “So, uh, I noticed you aren’t wearing the tape anymore, Recovery Girl said it was alright?” he asked. He said it in a way which suggested he knew every bit of that had of course been a lie.

“Yeah, the risk of infection passed,” he answered, he was sure his friend understood what he meant.

“Good,” the look on his face implied he did.

“It looks sick,” Kaminari pointed at his shoulder, “wish I had some cool scars, all I got is a few spots on my fingers where I touched the wrong side of some batteries.”

He shook his head, “Well if you find a skin grafting quirk in this school I’ll happily trade with you.”

“You better make good on that if I do, I just might,” he chuckled.

Kirishima sat down on the bench behind him as Riley battled with his tie, “I really need to work on my manoeuvrability,” he said.

“I’d say do what I did,” he pointed at the weights in the locker, “but you’d need more than a few pounds to teach you how to move faster. It was mostly… that woman,” he knew why the guy was asking, he’d come a pitiable fourth in his race. It was hard to compete with Rikidou and Uraraka in that type of thing. If Bakugou hadn’t fought with Tokoyami most of the way he probably would have won quite easily too but for all the power he had he really was the kind that would cut off his own nose just to spite his face.

“What woman?” Kaminari asked.

“Never you mind, I doubt you’d live through meeting her,” he answered, “My point is even if you got physically faster it wouldn’t help much without the experience that makes it work.”
“So why don’t you teach me? You’re pretty fast now right?”

He frowned. “I don’t think that’s the best idea,” he mostly didn’t want to risk it especially considering today. He still had yet to tell Kirishima the whole story.

“Come on dude, you’ve been blowin’ me off every day I’ve asked since the sports festival. If you’re that scared we just won’t use quirks,” he almost looked upset.

“I’m not scared but maybe you’d be better off asking Midoriya,” he said as he shut the locker door and tucked away the rest of the costume in the box. It was easier to fit without the second gauntlet, it felt weird without it though, hopefully it’d be fixed soon.

Without hesitating Kirishima stood, “Well then Midoriya how about it?”

“Oh, huh, what?” he turned. He was busy being distracted by another matter entirely.

“Mineta stop that this instant,” Iida interrupted them. The student had his eye stuck up to a hole in the wall.

“No way, this is a godsend given to use from the upperclassmen, don’t you get it?” he ripped the remainder of the paper off that had kept the peeping spot a secret.

“It is a flagrant crime, not to mention the disrespect to your fell-”

“Ahhhh!” Mineta screamed, something had poked through the hole. It was an earphone jack, he knew it well enough to recognise it easily even halfway across the room. The grape student stumbled back and a cork followed shortly, sealing the spot tight and impenetrable.

“I can’t believe she would be so cruel as to send vibrations through my eye,” he yelled as he held it.

“You reap what you sow,” Rikidou laughed. “You should have listened to Iida.”

[Yuuei’s Campus – Classroom 1A – 3:10 PM]

“Edgeshot really said that about Mr. Aizawa?” Ojiro asked in a whisper as the teacher in question came in.

“You didn’t hear it from me,” Riley shrugged as he went down the aisle toward his seat, he had already figured out what to do with that information he had been given, with some luck it would come to fruition all on its own.

“I know your little newbie weeks were all very exciting but shut your traps,” Aizawa said. “As I’m sure many of you have realised there isn’t much time before the end of term and with it the summer break.”

“Oh yeeeah, thirty days of doing nothing,” Hagakure leaned back in her chair with a stretch.

“Needless to say that is exactly the kind of attitude the school is hoping to discourage, so as an extra reward to those who pass the exam there will be a summer camp. Those who do not make the cut will be stuck in remedial hell with me, instead,” he gave a smug grin.

“Summer camp…?! That means…” Mineta was basically foaming at the mouth.

“Yeah, all the usual things that such a thing implies,” Aizawa shook his head, “For your own sake do not slack, especially those who did poorly on the midterms.”
Kirishima pumped his fist in the air, “Let’s do our best everybody!” he yelled to more than a handful of cheers.

“We’ll call it quits for today, since we won’t get anything done when you’re like this,” he said before turning to leave, it was a bold statement considering they hadn’t even been going for five minutes.

He didn’t mind if he was being honest, he had been mildly aware of the exam at the end of June, the idea that there was now a reward for passing was enticing but it was made more by the immediate threat of not doing so. He’d made an honest attempt on the midterms despite his absences and he intended to do the same now, although his score had been rather shitty even if it was passable.

“I need someone to help me study,” Kaminari groaned.

“Yeah, considering how awful you did last time,” Ashido laughed.

“You did awful too!” he answered which only made her laugh harder. “Argh! This is no laughing matter, we’re in serious trouble here.”

“Come on Ashido, Kaminari, let’s do our best. That way we can go to the camp alongside everybody,” Midoriya said.

“Oh yeah you can talk mister ninety-five, you don’t understand the plight of us commoners!” Kaminari said.

“I feel like this is a problem remedied by picking up a book once in a blue moon or maybe even taking a single note in class,” Todoroki shook his head, “or even attending class for that matter.”

“Yeah man, how is your attendance rate worse than Torenagi’s when he’s been out flat for like, over three weeks of the semester easy?” Jirou said.

“Mind your words, you’re all so harsh,” Kaminari looked like he was about to burst into crocodile tears.

“What a load of bullshit,” Bakugou kicked back his desk, “Deku, I dunno if you’ve come to understand a little on how to use a quirk, but you’re really getting on my goddamn nerves. Let me tell you right now the hollow as fuck results of the Sports Festival don’t mean shit. When the end of term test comes we’ll see who the better man is. I’m going to annihilate you and leave you in the dust,” he said as he walked to the door, “You too Todoroki, and Kakihara over there, fucking dipshits,” the door slammed as he left.

Riley leant forward on his desk, “Man he’s getting a little obscure with those references,” even if their attitude toward each other was somewhere between mutual despise and tolerable he understood why, he said he didn’t care about the sports festival it probably still bothered him that he hadn’t put up a real fight, not the real him anyway.

“Classic Bakugou, maybe I shouldn’t have riled him up so much earlier,” Kirishima frowned.

“I don’t think it is you fuelling that animosity,” Tokoyami said.

“And yet I still feel responsible, how about that.”

“There you go, sticking your nose into everything again,” Jirou scowled at him.

“It’s what he does best,” he said jokingly. There was something that bothered him about it all but he let the thought go regardless. He had far more important things to worry about for now.
Chapter End Notes

*I do not own BNHA. OC Material is my own.
The threefold execution

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

[Yuuei’s Campus – Riley’s Dormitory Room – Monday 5:39 AM]

Riley awoke to find he was still himself. He feared the possibility that one day that may no longer be the case. He banished the idea to the back of his mind, it had been getting easier after all, there had been almost no need to worry about it. The rescue race had dumped all such intrusions from his mind and the uncontrollable hatred felt far away from having any grip on him. Whatever had scared it so much about All Might it did the trick, for now. There was something terrifying about that in of itself.

He lugged himself out of bed and cracked the solitary window open while rolling his neck, sleeping too little always made his neck lock up for some reason. The June air helped with that, it felt crisp as it blew into his room, bringing with it a cure to the heat the air had developed in just half a month. He wasn’t really used to it, he’d gone from extreme cold back home to something not really all that cold here and now it was almost up to what he’d consider actually hot, yet everyone else had been almost boiling in their clothes. That was hardly saying he enjoyed the heat though. Fortunately the mornings were still just the right mixture of refreshing and warm due to the creeping of the first rays of sunlight over the horizon.

As it had been proven yet again he wasn’t naturally a morning person but over the last three or so weeks he’d forced himself to be, or rather Kirishima had forced him by proxy. The crack of dawn was in that guy’s opinion the best time to get something done and since Leina had been so accommodating as to give him means to keep him busy he had to agree that he might as well give it a shot.

The dumbbells and metal platelets that rolled indentations across his floor were the result of that, it was a messy coalition of him preparing for both the practical exam and the written one. He had to admit his friend had been right about the street art thing, his room might have doubled as a crude gallery by now with all the scrunched and moulded steel, which he had found pushing into certain shapes was both good practice and even a bit fun. He promised himself he would take better care of his room after the exam, until then the only safe haven for anything really important would be the coffee table, which he had spent much of his time pouring over.

The gust that was pouring into his rooms made the cards and books on it flutter with each heartfelt breath it lent toward it, even underneath the burden of a heavy textbook that sat centrepiece. His sixteenth birthday had come and gone but with the ever closer date of the examination there had been little time to enjoy it, the test was no more than a week away, which wasn’t a lot considering it’d last three days at least just like last time. Kirishima had vowed to make it up to him afterward, although he had made no insistence that he needed to, having no one left behind from the test would be good enough.

He took the necklace from his nightstand and hung it around his neck once more, and then he looked around to his dresser and rifled to find something clean to wear. Within it were still nestled the shredded gloves, he couldn’t bring himself to throw them out or anything. He also hadn’t touched the psychedelic book since he’d stashed it there as he didn’t want to waste time reading it. He’d find an opportunity to finish it after the test; each chapter took more thought to digest than he’d initially given credit, he doubted the pro’s agency even knew it was missing.

Other objects in the first drawer were more recently acquired, a leather baseball with a signature he
didn’t recognise and a small bundle of carefully selected CDs still wrapped in a see through film had been given to him by Kirishima and Jirou respectively. His friends didn’t know much about baseball or his music tastes from the little he’d actually divulged but he appreciated the gesture. What had him more curious was how they’d found out about his birthday, let alone the exact date. He figured it had something to do with the mysterious stress ball he’d found wedged under his door a day later, it reeked of some foreign aroma that he remembered distinctly.

By the time he had finished cleaning himself up almost forty minutes had passed, he had gone down the hall to the bathroom to shower and to put at least some of his clothes in the washer they kept there, now he had his uniform on minus the blazer, he didn’t want to risk a heatstroke. He was glad once more he had made that decision.

Vrrm, his phone vibrated in his hand and he checked it, it was the exact message he’d been waiting for. He went for his book-filled bag and slung it over his shoulder, making sure he had the key card he needed to get back in before walking briskly out the door, which locked behind him with a click.

[Yuuuei’s Campus – Main Library – 2:57 PM Wednesday]

Riley flicked through the remaining material as he shared a seat opposite Kirishima on the long library table. The guy had insisted, as if sitting close could help him to siphon the information he’d learned by proxy. It wasn’t usually the place they would be at this time but Aizawa’s laziness in class had taken over in lieu of the exams. As such they had been delegated to spending the remainder of the three hour heroics class studying silently in the halls.

He split the stack in front of him and caught each slim book before it fell, pushing them from left to right into lowest and highest priority respectively. Overall there really wasn’t that much of the coursework he had left to memorize; with all that had gone on the amount of stuff they were taught had been cut down by a considerable margin.

English was the one he needed to prepare the least for, as such it found itself on the left. However the ease of that one subject was outweighed by the difficulty of the one on the right. It was a heavily labelled section named Heroics: Law, Sanction and Restitution. It stood out mostly because it was vast, a horrible monster made of case studies, exceptions and specifics. He was fortunate Ko had been so adamant about pounding it into his head, something made him sure the sidekick knew exactly how shitty it was from his own schooldays.

Even though they were supposed to studying the library was far from distraction free, it wasn’t an issue to him per se since his quirk was one that required him to filter out such crap on the regular but it definitely bothered Kirishima, whom was observing him reading his notes line by line, a copy of which he’d provided him anyway which made the action rather pointless.

Kaminari yawned loudly, “Man, I’m so freakin’ bored!” it enough to cause one of the librarians to utter a displeased shhh in his direction. The poor guy had long since given up on making progress on his work and was now twiddling his thumbs in an armchair next to their long table.

“Dude,” Jirou whispered as she poked over a textbook toward him, “How can you already be bored when you haven’t even opened a single notebook? You haven’t studied at all.”

“You’re one to talk; everyone knows you’re just reading a damn magazine behind your book you phony,” the electric student answered. It was true. It didn’t take a genius to figure out Jirou wasn’t holding back laughter and giggles because she was oh-so absorbed in statistical functions, however all she returned was a defiant hmph.
“Shut your traps both of you, I’m trying to make this shit stick and you’re not helping,” Kirishima muttered his frustration, “You’re like a freaking robot Riley,” he said, “A silent one at that.”

He wasn’t sure if to take that as a compliment, “Sorry,” he dropped his pen, blue markings of which dotted his palm from his scribbling, “I don’t think I’m a very good teacher when it comes to this kind of stuff.” It wasn’t like he hadn’t tried. There was no way he couldn’t when Kirishima had seemed so stressed out over the test.

They’d met almost every morning and some afternoons to study but despite knowing the concepts quite thoroughly he just wasn’t able to make the guy understand them, not in such a short time. It had given him a look at Kaminari’s… modest home, which he’d been dragged to by Kirishima on one occasion. It was no wonder the electric student got so little done with all the whirring electrical appliances and screens he kept around his room.

“Nah man, it’s not your fault. I’m just hard headed,” his friend frowned.

“Well you’re not the only one who’s doomed. Even Mineta beat me by a landslide in the midterms,” Ashido pouted as she collapsed face first on the pile of paper she’d accumulated.

“I don’t even know how he did it. I thought you were one of us. How are you gonna get all the girls now you nerd?” Kaminari pointed an accusing finger at Mineta, who offered a smug grin in reply.

“They’ll be all over me. Girls dig guys with a serious work ethic and being high ranked in a hero course makes me prime boyfriend material,” Mineta said with an arrogant chuckle, much to the compound of his tormentor’s misery. The grapelike student was smart when he put his tendencies aside and focussed, as Riley had discovered. The fact the trait was so deceptive made it something to be reckoned with but he would be damned if someone so perverted was going to beat him this time around.

“If you guys really need help that badly I’ll be glad to tutor you,” Momo said. She was probably getting annoyed with all the noise too.

“Really?!” Kaminari and Ashido said out in unison, which was greeted by another shhh, this one longer and drawn out.

“As vice president I would offer nothing less, just don’t ask for help on the practical portion.” Momo said. Riley knew for sure something was bothering her now, he had asked Jirou about it after the rescue race when she’d performed extremely terribly by coming in last. It must have been lament eating away at her but he didn’t really feel like the proper person to try and ask her about it.

“You’re my saviour!” Ashido spoke in a hushed but still quite loud tone as she brought her chair over to Momo’s section of the table, Kaminari and Ojiro did the same.

“The more the merrier,” Momo nodded. Soon enough the girl had a positive collection of students clamoured about her.

“Mind if I get in on that?” Jirou asked as she tossed the magazine away, nerves appeared to be getting the better of her as well despite her attempt to mask them.

“The more the merrier,” Momo nodded. Soon enough the girl had a positive collection of students clamoured about her.

“Look at that,” Kirishima nudged him.

“Huh?” he said, looking up at him in confusion. He wasn’t really interested in getting tutoring.

“You think Bakugou would ever do something so kind? Doubt it, right?” Kirishima said far too loudly to keep the conversation from spilling several tables across. There was practically a vein
popping on Bakugou’s head at the words.

Riley smirked, “Oh yeah, you’re probably right. Bakugou would blow a gasket before he’d be able to teach you anything useful.”

“What’d you say?!” Bakugou jumped from his seat and dragged it with him, “I’ll tutor the shit out of you hedgehog fuck,” he dropped his fist into the back of Riley’s head.

He grabbed it as it began to throb, “Damn,” he said. The guy had put strength into it like he’d been yearning to do that a long time.

“Hah, if that’s the case I’ll take you up on that,” Kirishima gave him a sly grin and an unspoken, “Sorry about that, I can’t believe it worked,” sort of a face.

As the pain passed he tipped back on the legs of his chair and watched as Bakugou essentially began attempting to pile drive the knowledge into Kirishima’s skull. Even though the guy had no less than sworn to crush him their interactions had remained mellow at worst, like he was saving all that brutish energy for the exam, he had to admit the atmosphere was borderline pleasant when it wasn’t constantly being interrupted by some kind of drama.

[Yuuei’s Campus – Replica City District –11:57 AM Thursday]

The remainder of the week before had passed and then it was like he’d been hit in the face with a frying pan. He’d spent the better part of the last three days before puking out all the information he’d absorbed in the form of countless passages, calculations, interpretations and worst of all essays. It had been enough to make his hand cramp up and head swim by the end of it, now he was just glad it was over.

They had now been brought to what could only be another replica city district; though this time they were outside it. It had a blue dome that shone like a beetle’s carapace and a line of trees that made it look inviting and pleasant from the outside however it was anything but, not with his teachers lined up in front. They’d arrived at the final hurdle of their exam, of sorts. He’d spent what little effort he could muster the night before spent partially in practice but mostly in contemplation, it appeared that his thought had been correct, why would all his teachers even be here if were fighting robots?

“It’s time for the practical portion of your examination. I’m sure you’ve already heard plenty about it,” Aizawa said as he let out a droning yawn. He wasn’t sure how the man could be tired since he’d spent all their examination time in his sleeping bag.

“This is gonna be eeeeasy!” Kaminari grinned.

Ashido pumped her fist, “Yup, if it’s just robots then bring it.”

The theoretical exam appeared to have gone well for not just them two but most of the class. He himself wasn’t the type to speculate on his results however, he would find out when the time came, it would do little good to pass the written portion if he failed this.

“How can you two be this naïve,” Tokoyami said.

Kaminari frowned, “What do you mean by that.”

“Look around, nothing has struck you as strange yet?”

“No clue what you me-”
Poof, Nedzu burst from Aizawa’s collar interrupting Kaminari, “Quite observant Mr. Tokoyami. Yes I’m afraid so, your examination shall have a different formula from previous years. This terrain is one hardly suitable for our intrepid mechanic monstrosities but in fact quite suitable for fighting your superiors.”

“Seriously?!” Kaminari almost choked on the word.

“You should be glad, Mr. Kaminari, you’re one of the first lucky few to get to try it out,” Nedzu smiled pleasantly. Somehow he felt they should be anything but that, the principal looked downright mischievous. “To make this simple, you’ll be split into groups and assigned a teacher. Not at random of course, that would be no fun,” he pulled out a remote from his jacket pocket and pointed it at the air in front of them.

Bzzt, a screen lit up much like the one Aizawa had projected during the quirk apprehension test. It was blank for just a second, before the first lines of white laser text began to spill down it like some kind of janky computer code, as each formed it gave a solid ping.

Todoroki and Yaoyorozu vs. Aizawa
Ojiro and Iida vs. Power Loader
Tsuyu and Tokoyami vs. Ectoplasm
Ashido, Kaminari and Torenagi vs. Nedzu

Now he definitely felt on edge, not only was he going against the most conniving of the lot but the man’s creepy attitude appeared to be almost entirely pointed in his direction. It was like the man was gauging his reaction, what made it worse was that he was with the exact two who had mocked the test as simple only a second ago.

Uraraka and Aoyama vs. Thirteen
Kirishima and Rikidou vs. Cementoss
Mineta and Sero vs. Midnight
Kouda and Jirou vs. Present Mic
Hagakure and Mezou vs. Snipe

“Last but not least,” Nedzu said as the last set of names revealed itself, it hardly even had to, as only two students and one teacher remained.

Midoriya and Bakugou vs. All Might

“Come at me wonder duo,” All Might gave a short bow.

“Deku,” Bakugou threw a glance.

“Kac-” Midoriya swallowed the word before he even finished it. His face had flushed pale from the look of disdain the other student had given him. He hardly envied them, going against Nedzu was one thing but All Might… there wasn’t a weakness there. It’d be fairer to fight five Aizawa’s that never had to blink.

“Now, I think we’ll begin with the first four teams. The rules are simple enough, either shackle your opposing teacher or make sure at least one of you reaches the end gate, that will satisfy a victorious
outcome. To keep things fair each of us shall be wearing specially designed arm weights to give you a handicap,” Nedzu jangled on his wrist what seemed like mere friendship bracelets compared to the two anvils All Might had, even those didn’t seem to faze the man.

“The rest of you may watch in the meantime, or talk over your strategy with your partners. Now, let us begin post-haste,” he jumped off Aizawa’s shoulder and began to walk into the beetle’s mandibles.

[Yuuei’s Campus – The Beetle Box – 12:20 PM]

They were already alone not fifteen minutes later and in a silence that he found hard to swallow. It wasn’t that he was nervous but rather he found himself unprepared, he’d kind of been hoping for a one on one if anything, even if that was with a teacher. There wasn’t much separating this from the last time he’d been forced to team up for a competition, only what was at stake felt much more real.

Around him was the very city he recalled from his entrance exam, only structured as if it had been rammed into squashed co-existence with the metal mess from the rescue race. High rise covered tumultuous spines of white and dashed into razor sharp backs of silver that serrated ground and air alike. It was the kind of thing that could fall apart through a touch, something he’d need to be careful with if he didn’t want it collapsing and crushing him. That, he felt, must have been intentional.

It was Nedzu’s playground, and by the distance they had walked it would be a long trek back to the exit gate, one he doubted the principal would allow them to take. He wasn’t sure where he was now; maybe the plan was already beginning to entrap them. There may have been direct contact with the rest of his teacher’s which would have allowed him to distinguish at least some of what their quirk did but Nedzu was different, he had zero idea what the man’s quirk actually was except for the obvious, intelligence beyond the norm.

“We got this. It'll be a walk in the park. Right? Right,” Ashido said as if she was trying to make herself believe the words.

“I am not going to be the only one to miss out on that trip, I’ve been preparing since Aizawa announced it. Even if it isn’t robots anymore, we gotta win,” Kaminari said.

“I think we should run,” Riley shook his head.

“No way, what’s the rodent gonna do to stop us? One or two zaps and he’ll be down for the count,” he began to make silly pew pew noises as if those in any way illustrated that he knew what he was doing.

“Do either of you guys even have any idea about where he is?” he cocked his head.

“What are you scared he’s going come out and getcha?” Ashido giggled, “Like Kaminari said, one kick in the kisser and we’ll be a shoe in for that forest lodge,” he found himself annoyed at that, they had no plan and no wits apparently.

“Then answer me, why does it feel like we’re the rats in the trap and not him?” he didn’t get a response, instead he got a quiver that wasn’t caused by him freaking out, rather it was the ground beneath him shaking.

Crash! he heard it before he saw it, just in time to hit the deck as a giant metal ball flew over their heads.

“What the ever loving fuck?” Kaminari crawled back as the dust and swathes of metal railings the
thing had tossed over them fell in chaos around them. He could feel his ears ringing like a bomb had gone off.

“That’s not fair, you can’t bring a demolition crane to a fist fight!” Ashido said before another numbing boom shook the air, causing her to squeal in fright. “Come on Kaminari, can’t you blast him?”

“Fat chance when I can’t even see the bastard,” Kaminari stumbled to his feet. There was panic on his face and in his limbs, one he could feel it in his own body too.

Boom, a cement building next to them turned into rubbish. He breathed in deep before instantly regretting it as air seeped with dust swept into his lungs, causing him to cough it back out violently. How had the bastard not succeeded in nailing them yet?

“Is he really gonna kill us?!” Ashido spoke through similar fits.

“Better hurry my sprouts, in less than ten minutes you won’t have a chance of success!” the man’s voice echoed through the arena in a sadistic twist.

He dragged himself through the dirt and under the clip of a concrete build on which the wall had caved in. The other two followed him eagerly to the brief respite where the air felt less heavily congested. He needed to think, he really needed to think. It was too goddamn loud to do that, even his heart was bouncing in his chest like it didn’t want him to concentrate and his companions weren’t helping.

“We’re gonna lose, we’re gonna lose dude, what the hell are we gonna do?” Kaminari shook him which he promptly threw off. He would have covered his ears with his hands if the visor hadn’t been in the way. Then he remembered, there was a switch on the helmet exactly made for this thing.

“Stop and let me think, he’s not going to do anything to actually kill us,” he gritted his teeth as he jammed his finger into it. His ears dampened like someone had stuffed cotton deep inside the canals, it was a blissful thing and one that let his mind stop racing at a million miles an hour due to adrenaline.

After half a minute he picked up a piece of metal and stuck it gently to the dirty floor, there was just enough light coming in through holes in the ceiling to make it out, “The only place the crane could come from is the east of the city, the escape gate is there, to the south,” he pointed at a mark he’d made in the dust among several dozen other lines of destruction.

“So what do we do?” Ashido asked. He could barely hear her despite the fact she was practically screaming.

“If he can bring the city down, so can I and then he’ll have to go after me. So that means the only chance we have…” he drew another line from where they were to the exit.

“Spit it out, my ears are bleeding,” Kaminari looked like he was on the verge of a full blown panic attack.

The folly of a smart opponent is that their mind is predictable, the simplest explanation is the one they will act on, he recalled Edgeshot’s words from the second of his three sessions with the man, at the time it had pertained to the stance.

“Well, you’re going to have to become really, really stupid Kaminari,” he grinned.
Midoriya had collapsed in a chair in the healing pavilion Recovery Girl had set up, it was the only thing he could really do since his partner had decided to be well… himself. Frustrating as that was he wasn’t the only one here and it was nice to have some company while watching the first set of students go ahead of him.

“This is giving me déjà vu,” Kirishima said as he watched the screen, “and some real goddamn nerves.”

“Yeah, it looks like all four starting groups are struggling a bit,” Rikidou nodded.

“It won’t be easy for any of them, these match ups were derived by your teacher himself. They are all designed in a specific way,” Recovery Girl said.

“The worst possible scenario for each student,” Midoriya said.

“Precisely, lad.”

“Todoroki and Momo’s are simple enough then,” Jirou said, “Aizawa can completely shut down both those quirks without any real chance for them to fight back.”

“Yeah and worse still he can easily out manoeuvre them both,” he said, “they aren’t great close range fighters like Eraserhead is,” he recalled how narrow Todoroki’s window to even fight back against the hero killer had been, close range wasn’t his forte.

“Ojiro and Iida have got it real tough too, hard to use your speed and agility when the ground starts fallin’ out beneath your feet,” Rikidou said. “Kind scares me thinkin’ ahead to our fight with Cementoss, their quirks are both good at that terraforming stuff.”

Mhmm, Kirishima answered.

“Looks like Tsuyu and Tokoyami will be the first to rise to the challenge,” the short woman pointed with her cane. Just as she did the shadow on screen flew at Ectoplasm and swiped across his chest, which he dodge and answered with a kick. No sooner had he done it had the shadow caught the limb and firmly attached one of the weights, the other was around its own arm.

“Tokoyami Fumikage and Tsuyu Asui have passed the exam, victory through arrest.”

“That was some great teamwork hiding their secret weapon in Asui and then revealing it just when Ectoplasm thought he had them both locked down,” he sat back in his seat. He wished he’d thought to bring his notebook but he could do that when he got his hands on some recordings of it.

“Wish the same was true for Riley and the clown crew, looks like Kaminari and Ashido are fighting him on every other word,” Kirishima said, “At this rate they’ll be out of time just hovelling in that rickety building.”

“The principal seems like a pretty tough opponent, I think anyone would struggle under those conditions… coordinating in a group of three is a little harder too,” frankly from the way it was looking there weren’t many routes left for them to take to even have a chance to escape.

“He realises that, I can tell by the look on his face,” Jirou said, “He had that same thing going on during his fight with Aoyama and when he was explaining that strategy to my group in the cavalry battle.”
“Nedzu is as sadistic as he is intelligent,” Recovery Girl said. “They’ll need more than a clever trick to beat him. I am sure his entire test was designed to push all of their buttons, two parts of their team is hot headed while one is third is borderline timid.”

“Timid? He doesn’t strike me as timid,” Rikidou asked.

“It is a result of that incident, as I’m sure your classmates can attest. I doubt he is even aware of it.”

“The incident with the man named Janus,” he remembered the name Torenagi had told them.

Jirou raised her brow at him, “He told you?” she asked.

He shook his head, “He mentioned the name after our run in with the hero killer. I think he thought the two were related somehow.”

_Hmm_, she answered. There was an annoyance on her face, like what he’d said perturbed her, maybe saying that last part had been a mistake.

“Suffice to say there is more to that than you and the rest of those uninvolved were told, the result is one of the aspects Nedzu surely wishes to investigate,” Recovery Girl said.

_More to it then they knew?_ the story had never quite added up to him considering the times between which Kirishima, Bakugou and Jirou had left school that day and the time that Torenagi had cited in his recounting. He didn’t think much of it at the time, it would have been insensitive to pry, but maybe it’d been covered up just like the hero killer incident had. The thought caused him to look over at Kirishima; he had a steel gaze to him now and more than a little worry.

“It’s not something that’s our place to tell you about,” Jirou frowned. She must have noticed his staring.

“Yeah, that guy already beats himself up enough without any of us reopening that crap for him,” Kirishima said.

That didn't sound right, how would his classmate get any sort of closure with that attitude? "It must hurt him to know that villain is still out there, both him and Tomura. Anything that would help them get caught would be a good thing right? If he would tell the rest of us what really happened, if he told the media then it'd bring out the pros in force to catch them, i'm sure of it."

Kirishima shook his head, “He’s already been treated like victim enough, if there’s one thing I learnt in three months it’s that giving that guy pity really bothers him. I think even Bakugou knows better than to bring it up, name calling is about as far as he goes most of the time.”

“But they’re still just villains right? The first thing should be catching them, so they don’t hurt anyone else. Then at least that way, it would be justice for what they did,” had all this been part of the reason he'd acted as he had during the festival, to prove he wasn't a victim to some villains? He'd only been able to watch it through a screen but those closeups, the anger and how he broke his body like he didn't care, it had been very adverse to how he'd acted before that. No doubt Kacchan had egged him on in some way, maybe he'd used what he knew about the events to do that.

“You gotta understand dude, it was some real gruesome shit. It’s not something that I think will solve itself even if that shitty villain ended up getting caught, I doubt a man like that would spill his motives.”

_Hmm_, he answered. _That man is not after money or even power..._ he remembered what Torenagi had said, he had thought about it here and there but a motive beyond what Todoroki had suggested
didn’t make sense with how Tomura acted. He knew better than to dig further, now all he hoped is that they would pass.

[Yuuei’s Campus – The Beetle Box – 12:35 PM]

He climbed the metal rungs until he made it to a platform that hung ten feet above the ground, it had holes on it that made the metal slippery and beside him was a rotund tank filled to the top with what he hoped was water, he’d really regret it if it wasn’t water. The trek had been one he’d made alone and he was watching his phone as he finally reached it, there wasn’t much time left. It was now or never, he could see the crane perfectly from here.

“I’m going to tear your crane in two Nedzu, with you inside it or not. So come and get me!” he yelled as loud as he could before tapping himself on the chest in some kind of pseudo-bravado type thing. His hands came up in front of him a second later, *Now I just have to back up that claim*, he thought as he concentrated on the split of earth and concrete at the crane’s base. Hopefully Ashido was already on her way to her position. No there was no hoping, she had to be and as did Kaminari.

“We both know I can’t allow you to mess with my little toy Torenagi however aren’t you a little confident in your position?”

*Shut him out*, he breathed in deeply and then out, “Compress,” he said and the earth gave a shake, a very mild spider webbing on the surface beneath the crane’s legs. Then he let it go, and concentrated elsewhere, he could already feel the retaliation coming toward him. He compressed once more and then he saw the wrecking ball as it sailed right at him.

The ball hit the tank behind him as he jumped out of the way, water spouted in bursts from the holes as the dangerous orb became lodged. In the distance he could see at first a spark, then a great torrent of electricity that danced through the streets. Not a moment later Kaminari twirled and whewed through the streets where he had committed the act. That was the signal, he knew, at the crane’s chain halted to a stillness that allowed it only to sit in the destroyed water supply.

He pushed himself off the floor that left ring-like indentations on his hand before gripping the warped metal and pulling himself up the side of the ball. It lent him one or two dust covered cuts before he rested his hands firmly on its surface, spacing them out as much as he could like he was going to give it some kind of friendly hug. He felt his quirk shake him as it pulled at the ball, making it heavier and heavier and forcing his teeth together, in his mind this was the only thing standing between them and inevitable defeat, he couldn’t let it recover. He almost slipped as he let go of the ball but caught himself with his elbow, with a haphazard jump he gripped the chain firmly. It was an entwined thing made of both plastic covered cables and metal links.

He steadied himself as he managed to get up further on it, enough to settle down on its well travelled surface with his knees. The quirk was already leaving him, flowing out of him like some current eager to ground itself on the first thing he’d touched, it brought reprieve as it made the tremor reverse, replacing it with numbness and sharp hits as if his own muscle had become stone. It lent him enough sense to stop as he felt the crane begin to shake under his body, in one last ditch effort he stood.

“Run, Ashido,” he yelled, “Now is your chance!” he slid off the edge of the surface. The girl whom had been hiding just below him jumped out and spritzed the path in front of her with acid, she would be fast enough, he hoped.

“A simple electrical issue is easy enough to fix, a poor choice to use your strongest attack
Kaminari,” Nedzu said as he reversed the crane’s direction, as it left the place it had been stuck it swung down directly at Ashido. “You’ll have to come up with something better than that if you wish to succed-”

Choonk, tchick. Snap, the chain went as it missed Ashido, who avoided it by the skin of her teeth. The chain to which it was attached severed and sent the ball flying in bounces that took several buildings with it. Just as he had thought, Nedzu’s omnipotent vision was something provided to him by cameras, not by his outpost.

“Clever. Very clever,” Nedzu tut-tutted in his ears as he made his way down the platform’s ladder in leaps rather than steps. All he could do now was support her escape; it should be easy considering the man didn’t have a weapon left to chas-

Boom, the building two doors down from him cracked in a mess of concrete and metal. Out of it first loomed what appeared to be a monster but the sight of its face was what truly sold that fact. It was an overjoyed bear at its simplest; metal in its features but in every way terrifyingly similar as the short principal in each aspect except height. It loomed over them just shy of two stories tall, a hybrid between a zero pointer and a three pointer but with a morning star in one hand and a sharp metallic blade in the other.

“I’ll concede that my first weapon may have been a little short-sighted but who said it was my only one?! Meet the Nezzu ZX1500!” Nedzu cackled, he was in a positive frenzy now compared to before.

He stood, stunned briefly just like Ashido, then he caught himself, now wasn’t the time, “Stick with the plan Ashido, I’ll slow the damn thing down,” he yelled and she nodded. He threw up his hands, even if it was downright humongous a robot was still just a robot, he would disable it like the ones from the obstacle course, head first legs second.

The monsters chassis began to rattle as he concentrated but then in one mighty thoom the machine shook itself. It was like its limbs had locked up, it felt so solid now that he wasn’t sure he could even harm it with what was available, and then it turned on him in one fell swoop.

“Don’t think I’ve forgotten about you Torenagi,” the principal bot pointed its arm at him. “The Nezzu ZX1500 was designed specifically just for you three. It’s the ultimate anti-quirk machine, insulated to shock proof, impossible to melt without a hundred years of submersion and made of the hardest steel one can find this side of the globe. It is also rather handsome if I do say so myself,” he chortled.

Thunk, a ball of vibrant green erupted from its metallic sleeve, unfurling as it swooped at him, there was no way to dodge it and it hit him in the chest, pinning him to the ground with the heavy iron cast weights attached to its ends.

“The optimal choice was always to run, it’s a shame only two of you were available to try, you might have succeeded if all of you had split up.”

He pulled at the net, tried to push his quirk into it so he could rip it but nothing would come out. It felt like his energy was just gone and several jerks later he couldn’t even raise his arm to try anymore. It was already too late he knew, he didn’t have to look up to confirm it.

“Ahhhh!” Ashido screamed as the robot missed twice and caught her on the third, pinning her to the wall with the samurai’s blade by the neck of her costume’s white frills and jacket.
“Now, I believe that takes care of the main threats. All that remains now is to pin down your little battery and by my little calculations I doubt any of you are in a state to do much in the last thirty odd seconds that remain to you.’’

The robot swung its morning star out in front of it and destroyed a building as if it were searching, “It’s a too bad really. However your classmates will probably enjoy the forest lodge with or without you while you are stuck in remedial.’’

A greater resounding beep shuddered throughout the arena, “Oh my it does look like you only have about ten seconds now, what a pity, but that is the fate of the overconfident,’’ Nedzu said followed by a distinct sharp thunk in the background. “What the?’’

“Indiscriminate shock! Five hundred thousand volts!’’

“Gaaahhhhghghhh…” Nedzu’s voice faded into indistinguishable garbage before cutting out like radio static.

“Ashido Mina, Kaminari Denki and Torenagi Riley have passed the exam, victory through arrest.’’

Effort left him and he collapsed beneath the weight of the green net, there was no way he was going to be able to move it himself. In fact the mere touch of it on his skin was beginning to make him want to hurl, whatever the hell it was made of it was some nasty stuff. He closed his eyes as he tried to think of anything but the nauseating sense of joy over victory mixed with what felt like he had just developed a debilitating sense of vertigo.

“Yo, yo, this thing still workin’? Test, test,’’ Kaminari’s voice fell over the arena, “Well am I amazing or am I amazing?’’ he could practically hear the grin.

[Yueei’s Campus – The Beetle Box Mobile Recovery Pavilion – 12:50 PM]

“Lie down,’’ Recovery Girl said as he barely managed to grip one of the white makeshift beds she’d set up in the large metallic tent, he slammed it gratefully. He still felt like he wanted to throw up his guts.

“Honestly Nedzu, I warned you about using that experimental weaponry that support girl made. Look at him. I doubt he’ll be able to stand up straight for the next two hours.’’

The principal chuckled, “I believe that just speaks to the girl’s brilliance does it not? An energy diffusion net this effective and to build it at her age, quite a prodigy. Power Loader is a lucky man to be able to pass his knowledge onto her.’’

“Prodigy or not, keep her in check.’’

“Semantics aside, I’ll leave Torenagi in your hands. There are still examinations to be had that I must oversee,’’ the principal nodded before turning away. “A decoy within a decoy. Very nicely done, you three,’’ he added as he walked out of the pavilion.

“I still can’t believe we pulled it off,’’ Ashido giggled. “Did you see us Midoriya? Super cool, right?’’

“Yeah, you guys were awesome,’’ he answered, though most of his attention was split toward the screen more than them, probably in anticipation of the next rounds start.
“You mean I was awesome,” Kaminari laughed.

“Hey don’t take all the credit taserbrain!” Ashido punched him in the arm. “Lucky enough we even scraped a plan together to begin with, you can give some credit where credits due.”

“Alright, alright, I guess the two of you were a bit useful,” Kaminari rolled his eyes.

“Either way, forest lodge here we come,” Ashido grinned at him. Riley managed to give thumbs up since he couldn’t do as much as talk right now. The idea that he would be like this for two hours felt almost unbearable.

“Open your mouth Torenagi,” Recovery Girl had a spoon with gloopy orange liquid on it. “I don’t want you throwing up all over my mobile tent,” he swallowed it although he had no real choice in the matter, it tasted like a mixture of cherry and bitterness but it did ease the churning a little, enough to allow him to form words without wanting to upchuck for the time being.

“Thanks,” he held his stomach, “Any idea who’s up next?”

“It’ll be Kirishima, if that’s what you’re curious about,” Jirou answered. She hadn’t taken notice of his predicament. Instead it looked like she was well on her way to panicking about her own match.

He switched his glance to the screen. She was right, the competitors had already lined up. Kirishima and Rikidou were staring Cementoss down, the man was smiling back at them. It was to be a battle of power versus endurance, plain and simple.

[Yuuei’s Campus – Classroom 1-A – 2:47 PM]

“The only ones… to fail the practical,” Kirishima said in a devastated tone. The shell on his hands formed and dissipated in frustrated repetition.

“Hey- hey man, if it’s any consolation, I probably failed too. Mineta carried me through,” Sero said.

“You’re only making it worse Sero,” Jirou pouted. Riley had to agree, it felt awful to say the least, he’d watched as Cementoss had slowly beat the duo into submission, all the while his own guilt had welled up. The guy really could have used a bit of help with his manoeuvrability, yet he’d been too much of a chickenshit offer it. He could only hold his tongue now, not because he was still nauseous but out of fear of making the situation worsen.

“Sorry guys,” Hagakure might have frowned if she had been visible, instead her shoulders sagged and her delightful demeanour left her.

“It’s not your fault. We have no one to blame but ourselves,” Rikidou answered. He was taking it well, or if he wasn’t he didn’t exactly show it. The sugar quirk had been formidable in powering through countless cement walls but no matter how many they destroyed it hadn’t given them more than a step forward at a time.

Kirishima groaned, “Well, maybe these remedial classes are for the best, you know?” he shrugged. “Hey, just don’t leave out anything about your stories when you get back okay? I wanna hear everything.”

“Don’t be so gloomy guys, maybe there’ll be a twist or something like last time,” Midoriya said.

“Shut up Midoriya! You’ll jinx it,” Kaminari said as he caught him hard in the ribs with his elbow, causing him to let out a pained oof.
“I’ll make sure you won’t miss out on anything vital,” Momo said. Her voice was confident, the battle with Aizawa had changed her back to the way she’d been. To him it felt like she had undergone some kind of catharsis, one that he also felt he owed Kirishima for his own cowardliness.

“I will as well, you can count on me,” Iida said.

He clenched his fist, it was best he came right out and apologised, “Kirishima,” the words caught as the door went shick.

“Siddown, if you thought of the rest of this afternoon as a free period you were wrong. I got your test results right here and I gotta say it doesn’t look good for a few of you,” Aizawa said as the class shuffled into their seats, “I’ll be blunt, three of your have failed to make the cut.”

“Kirishima, Rikidou you did not manage to satisfy any of the victory conditions of your match up,” he gave a face that had naught on it, that was until he also looked at Sero, at which point it turned into a frown, “And Sero, although your group passed you did nothing except become a hostage. That means you failed as well.”

“I figured as much,” the Cello tape student fell flat, face first on his desk.

“Now, I suppose that’ll mean you three will be taking your remedial classes with me at the forest lodge,” he shook his head, “since there were no failing marks for the written exam.”

“What?” Sero almost scraped his nose lifting his head up.

“We’re still going?” Kirishima asked. His voice was almost trembling.

“Indeed, this is what they might call the only practical outcome,” Aizawa said as he lit up the blackboard, “It would be pointless to exclude failing students; the forest lodge was originally a boot camp anyway.”

“So when you said if we failed we’d be stuck with you in remedial hell…” Ojiro slackened his tail.

“It was nothing more than a logical ruse, to drive you into a corner, of course,” Aizawa let out the tiniest guffaw, like he was pleased with himself. “Denying the worst students a chance to improve would be downright asinine, don’t you think?”

His stomach untwisted at the good news and with the clearing of Kirishima’s poisoned expression. However he didn’t feel better about what he had meant to say, now that he had seen the outcome of it that wasn’t going to leave him until he managed to say what he thought, to confess what a shitty friend he’d been.

“Tricking us once more, how heartless. That is Yuuei for you, once again,” Iida grit his teeth. He seemed displeased about having fallen for the almost identical ploy from the first day.

“I’m just glad we all get to go,” Ojiro said.

“Yeah, it wouldn’t have been the same without everyone there,” Tsuyu nodded.

“Keep in mind you three. Failing grades are still failing grades, don’t expect much free time. It will be far harder on you then it would have been had you stayed on campus,” he said as he finally managed to bring up the exam scores. Eighty-six percent, it was far better than he had expected but he’d still only ranked ninth. Momo had taken first place again, this time with a ninety-seven. At least he had beaten Mineta like he’d set out to do.
Aizawa twisted his neck, “And that thing I said about this afternoon not being a free period, forget it. I can barely feel my neck because of you two,” he glared at Momo and Todoroki.

“Sorry, Sir,” Momo bowed with a retained snicker. “Getting that stuff off was a bit harder than I thought!”

“Whatever,” he shook his head, “End of term address is tomorrow, use the weekend to prepare for the lodge,” the man said as he handed her a stack of booklets, “Pass those back, everything you need is in there. Forms need to be returned and signed to me by Wednesday morning, before you get on the bus. We’re running on a bit of a tight schedule, so don’t leave it till the last minute.”

He opened the booklet as he received it, inside was an exhaustive list of anything and everything they could possibly need. It was long, well detailed and pretty damn expensive by the looks of it. He wasn’t exactly overflowing with cash, he had insisted his uncle not worry about it so much since his need to pay for food and all that other stuff had been mitigated by his forced move. It did mean he might have to be a bit frugal when it came to spending. He could probably ask Midnight about it, maybe the school had some equipment they could lend him since it was only for a week. He would need a few more pieces of clothing too, but that much he reckoned he could afford if he shopped around.

“Man I need to buy loads of stuff,” Kaminari said as he poured over the booklet.

“Me too,” Kirishima answered.

“…Like night-vision goggles,” Mineta said.

“Are you sure that’s on the mandatory part of the list?” Jirou gave him a dirty look.

“I think the last sleeping bag I owned was back in grade school,” Uraraka said.

“I might have like a… tenth of this stuff,” Riley shook his head. It would really be a pain.

“Well if everyone’s gonna have to buy stuff anyway why don’t we make a class trip out of it?” Hagakure asked to a few blank stares, “Come on guys, it’ll be fun,” she bounced onto her feet.

“That’s a great idea. We haven’t really done anything as a class before,” Kaminari nodded like an idea had sprung into his mind, “I know the best place, too, Wookiees, that shopping mall in Kiyashi. You guys heard of it?”

“Yes. They’re the premier supplier for almost all quirk related stock these days,” Iida said. “It would be nice to have a large variety to choose from.”

“Then it’s settled, I’ll text everyone the details and we can agree on a time.”

“Yo, Bakugou. You should come too,” Kirishima said as he turned to the student already walking out the door.

“Like I could stand to go shopping with you idiots, I’ve got better things to do,” he slammed the door behind him.

“How about you Todoroki?”

He shook his head, “Sorry, I have to visit the hospital on my days off, so go without me this time.”

“Well, two down. You’re coming though, right Riley?”
“Sure, I guess,” he answered. He’d have to let his uncle know, he didn’t want any grievances. If he was lucky maybe he could do what he had set his mind to there, wronging his friend was still forefront on his mind even if he was able to go on the trip.

“That’s the attitude I like to see,” Kirishima grinned, “And since the exams over I think it’s time to make that birthday up to you, yeah?”

“I said you didn’t need to, your present was enough,” he answered.

“Don’t play coy, I saw your grin when I suggested it,” Kirishima pulled him to his feet, “Let’s find out if you’re really just an enthusiast.”

[Yuuei’s Campus – Field β – 5:44 PM]

Thunk, the baseball went down and to the side into the fence as Kaminari’s bat glanced it, causing a roar of laughter from Kirishima.

“Dude,” Riley said, “Square your shoulders and stand side on, the ball isn’t gonna maul you,” he wasn’t sure how someone so naturally confident could be so unnaturally hopeless at this. It was almost getting to borderline insanity after the fifth result, this was the first time he’d even hit the damn thing.

“Look I told you it’s easier said than done. If you’re soooooo good then you try,” Kaminari shook the bat at him like he was going to club him with it.

“Gladly,” he grabbed the bat from the guy’s inept hands. It was a sturdy aluminium one, albeit it did feel lighter than what he was used to. There was no need to change that; he could make do regardless of how flimsy it was.

He put both of his hands on the grip and then let it fall to one hand again before tapping it on his shoe, it was something he’d imitated after having watched professional players do it countless of times and had now become habit. It might have been useful had he been wearing his costume cleats but the school sneakers hardly were ones to retain clumps of mud that might have made the motion necessary.

As he brought the bat up to his shoulder he widened his stance, he’d already seen the kind of throw Kirishima could muster, straight and fast just like he’d figured. He lined up his knuckles and brought the bat behind him and gave his friend a nod. He couldn’t really remember how long since he’d played just for the sake of it.

Thwip, the ball went as it hurtled through the air, it was clean enough for him to pivot into in one swift motion. Thunk, it went as he swung through its path and sent it flying. It went high and long but still far shy of his best but it was still good considering how little time he had to devote to something like this nowadays. The answer to which was absolutely none, all of it went to his quirk instead.

Kirishima whistled as the ball fell and disappeared in the grassy mounds behind him, “That’s one hell of a swing man,” he said, “How did you get so much power into it?”

He shrugged, “It’s all technique, if you did it like that I’m sure you could get it just as far if not further.”

“Show offs,” Kaminari pouted.
“You could too, get back over here,” he beckoned him once more, which he did almost like he was shy. “Stand like this,” he repeated his stance to show him, “and look directly at the path of Kirishima’s throw, not the ball itself. Your head knows where the ball is better than you do, all you gotta do is time the swing right and follow through like this,” he swung the bat through slowly from behind his shoulder before flipping it over and handing it to Kaminari.

The guy took it and almost fell trying to get his feet right. “Shoulders like this,” Riley grabbed and straightened them out before tapping his classmates leading foot lightly, “Further apart and in line with each other,” Kaminari looked confused at the instruction but followed it nonetheless, pushing them apart a few inches. “Keep your legs firmly planted, if I can knock you down without using my shoulder it’s not firm enough, tighten your knees if you need to.”

“Like this?” Kaminari asked as he held the bat tightly.

“Almost,” he answered and pried the fingers apart slightly before pushing the knuckles together, “Your hands need to stay lined up so when you swing you’ll hit it at the right angle, you want to come up into it a little bit,” the last thing he did was push the bat far enough behind the guy’s shoulder so he’d get enough power out of it. Then he pushed Kaminari through the motion of the swing lightly as he had shown before, “Just like that, yeah? It’s that easy.”

“Ready?” Kirishima weighed the ball in his hands. His pitch wasn’t bad at all, he had to admit, and with a bit of practice it would be a force to be reckoned with.

“Remember, focus on the path of the ball not the ball itself,” he turned and grabbed the glove off the floor and took his place behind the batter, they didn’t have a faceguard but he was more than prepared in case Kaminari missed, he was almost sure he wouldn’t though, not this time. “Go for it,” he shouted and knelt down.

Thwip, the ball repeated it’s shot through the air almost identically to the first time.

Kaminari moved forward into the hit maybe a quarter of a second too early but a heavy thunk echoed through the grass regardless as he struck the baseball. It sailed and made it almost two thirds as far as his own had, no doubt a solid effort.

“Damn, that was easier than I thought,” he said like he couldn’t believe it.

“Like I told you, it’s all technique.”

Kirishima rejoined them with baseballs in hand, he seemed a bit winded from running after them, “If I knew you had that in you I would have batted first,” he panted. “How the heck did you teach him that so fast?”

He removed the glove and rubbed the back of his neck, “I used to have time to play a bit more at my old school because we had to nominate a sport there. It just grew on me I guess.”

“Ever considered trying out for the school team? Yuuei isn’t really known for that kind of thing with all the heroics stuff but I bet you’d be great.”

“Donno,” he answered, “I’m kind of always working on other stuff, like you said this school is for heroics, not pursuing an amateur baseball career. It isn’t gonna help me become a hero.”

“You shouldn’t let that stop you dude.”

Hmm, he mumbled, “I’ll think about it,” maybe he would take time to try after the trip. It would be a nice way to get a break from it all once in a while.
“My turn then! Give me the worst you got Riley,” he threw the ball at him.

He smirked as he caught it with one hand, “Oh you’re going to regret that,” even though batting was his strong suit he threw a mean curveball.

Chapter End Notes

*I do not own BNHA. OC material is my own.*
[Yuuei's Campus – Midnight's Office – 9:27 AM Saturday]

“How are you Torenagi, better, worse?” Midnight said.

“Better, definitely better,” he answered. Though he’d be a lot better if he wasn’t stuck here, he had to admit. The teacher’s ‘conversations’ as she liked to call them did not seem to be dissuaded by the fact it was now summer break.

“You have no fatigue, or perhaps feelings of being overwhelmed?”

“Not really, like I said it kind of went away again after the rescue race and end of semester exam. The exercises helped,” maybe mentioning that would ease her wariness. It was probably what she wanted to hear.

“That’s good,” she filled in the box on her clipboard, No remission, visible signs of lower stress; Torenagi continues without the tape as of now, hair colour change still the same, no sudden outbursts since last month. “And your family, have you been keeping up regular contact?”

“With my uncle, sure.”

“How about your mother?”

“What would there be to say?” he looked at her and wiped his brow, he was already melting in the room after only a few minutes, they really needed a better AC. “Oh here is how I nearly died this week. No, I think I’ll spare her that.”

“It doesn’t have to always be about the dramatic things Torenagi, other aspects like say your friends or your classes. That would probably calm her down a bit.”

He almost snorted, “Then you don’t know her very well.”

“Oh I think I do, by now,” she answered with a stern expression.

His eyes narrowed, “You talked to her?”

She leaned back with a pleasant smile, “Naturally, since you wish to preserve your ability to attend there is obligation for me to help you make that possible. Part of that is talking to parents, as reluctant as they may be.”

“You shouldn’t go behind my back like that…” he frowned. Even if her intentions were good it was downright conniving.

“Sorry,” she nodded but it sounded insincere, “Still, you should speak with her and with your sister too. Do you think your sister understands your promise?”

“She would have been too young,” he shrugged. There wasn’t much need for her to understand.

“Then that is even more reason, it must be tough on her growing up with her brother at a distance.”
“She is not that naïve, I would bet she’s far faster at learning then I am,” his sister had a knack for more practical thinking, as young as she was. She wasn't likely to repeat the same mistake twice.

“Have you asked her about the incident then?” Midnight wrote on her clipboard once again, **Familial issues; ongoing.**

“No, it’s difficult,” he answered. The last time he’d seen her was probably four months now, and that had only been for the brief period where he’d stayed at home. Specifically his grandparent’s home, he had no desire to put up with his dad for a week let alone a month and it was closer to Leineif considering it was in Illinois like they were. The kind of questions Midnight instigated wasn’t something he would raise with her, besides it always made Elle happy to watch him practice and he could hardly do that comfortably around that man.

“If you truly feel responsible like you told me then you need to resolve those feelings of guilt, it might help with those nightmares.”

“I don’t think I need to do anything,” he paused, “But I’ll think about it,” he added as he stood. “May I go? I have plans…”

“You may, as for your requests to borrow equipment consider them granted,” she nodded, “We’ll meet again after the forest lodge.”

“Thank you, Ma’am,” he nodded and went for the door, now he could finally get out of this uniform.

[**Kiyashi – Wookiees Shopping Mall – 11:17 AM**]

The doors parted into an entrance hall through which their little group trailed. It was a grandiose spectacle, every bit of the malls lounge was modern, sleek and bleached white and the mere existence of an entrance lounge within a mall was already pretty outlandish. There were maps lining the walls, train timetables, shopping hours, all with some helpful staff accompanying them.

“She’s still making you go during the break huh? That’s rough,” Kirishima said.

“It sucks but I guess I don’t mind,” he answered. “She means well and like you said it’s probably for the best,” Midnight was probably the reason he hadn’t caught more flak, from what she’d said.

“Well you got more patience then I do,” he said as they caught up to the much larger main entrance door of the mall behind the others. About ten of them had made it, some who hadn’t even said they’d go like Mezou but had shown up anyway.

Through the door what met them was in the simplest terms elaborate. A conglomerate of accommodation shops built not for mere facilitation of moving wares but dedicated to the adaptation around an ever changing market. Its ceiling didn’t exist; instead it was a roofless dome with palm trees lining it supported by at least three stories. Not to mention it was packed, even for a Saturday. It was kind of unsurprisingly so due to the advent of summer break, which had unleashed masses of pent up students for some well earned freedom.

“Damn, this place is huge!” Kirishima said.

“Yep, told ya. Best place in all of Hosu for this kind of stuff,” Kaminari nodded.

“I guess they use the size of their stock to make up for the differences in quirks, fascinating,” Midoriya said as he watched Iida immediately get assaulted by several shop keepers whom no doubt wanted to offer him exactly that. “They even harbour to all demographics from children to teens and...
adults, six arms, four legs, they really have everything…”

“Stop that rambling, you’ll frighten the children,” Tokoyami shook his head.

“I don’t even know where to start,” Hagakure peered down at a long list she’d uploaded to her phone.

“I really want some wrist and body weights like Torenagi got from his internship, the one’s I have at home aren’t really doing it anymore,” Uraraka said. “Any recommendations?”

“Just make sure they don’t chafe,” he answered, “the one’s I got are Velcro padded and the weight inside is adjustable.”

“Sounds expensive,” she frowned.

“Maybe, I don’t know where my instructor got them from,” he shrugged. It wasn’t like he’d gotten a receipt. “I have a second set if you want to borrow them.”

“That’s alright. I’ll just have a look around.”

“All I really need for now is a big carrying bag,” Jirou said.

“In that case, I’ll help you take a look,” Momo said.

“Ooh, I wanna come too! All I got is my school bag, that isn’t really big enough,” Hagakure said.

“Hey it’s you! You’re those Yuuei kids from the festival right? The freshmen!” The voice of someone not too far from their group caused the adherence of several of their glances. It was a man among a crowd of five others. “Awesome work, I was rooting for you spiky hair! You better win next time, ya hear?” he wore a grin as he addressed Kirishima. “Don’t let those emitter quirks get you down!”

“You got it!” he answered with thumbs-up and a toothy grin as the crowd dispersed just as fast.

“Man, popular as usual. Too bad it’s only with guys,” Kaminari chuckled.

Hmph, Kirishima shrugged his shoulders, “At least I got fans.”

“Yeah, yeah, I bet that wouldn’t be the case if you had fought me,” the electric student smirked.

“We can still find out if you like.”

“You guys can’t keep still for two minutes,” Jirou rolled her eyes.

“Even after all this time people still approach us over the festival, that’s Yuuei for you I suppose,” Midoriya had look that suggested he was giving more thought than the situation warranted.

“So where are we headed first?” Ashido asked.

“Well the most logical step would be to group items by ease of acquisition and move as a tight knit group” Iida had his hand on his chin, he’d broken free of the shopkeeper’s ailing him.

“Riiiiight, I think we should all just split up since we’re gonna need different things,” Kirishima began pulling Riley and Kaminari by one arm each away from the control freak.
“Hey-hey, I can walk on my own,” he stumbled on his feet as he wrested away from the red head’s grip, he’d been dragged what felt like half the mall.

“I don’t know man, I’m not so sure. You looked pretty out of it after that fight with Nedzu,” Kaminari said as he peered into the display window of a summer sports store, around them were what felt like an almost identical dozen of them all prettied up with the same goofy lettering and sale that were meant to make them enticing. They weren’t exactly doing a great job at that, at least in his eyes but they had evidently captured Kaminari, or perhaps he just enjoyed shopping more than he himself did as he promptly led them inside.

“Be glad you got the easy job,” he answered. The inside of the store was even more offensive, stained in a whitened powder that could barely classify as a ceiling, it looked unnatural like it would make you sick if you stayed too long.

“You shoulda have seen the look on Nedzu’s face when I got up that escape hatch, he didn’t have a clue with the way Ashido took out the cameras and shit.”

Hmm, he answered, “Honestly the guy still went easy on us, I’m pretty sure he could have worked out you were faking, we’re all kind of terrible actors I reckon.”

“You guys should be glad you even had a chance to escape, I’d like to see you two try and punch through several kilometres of cement,” Kirishima’s head dropped a tiny bit and not just due to the sight of the terrible purple and yellow shorts Kaminari appeared to be interested in.

He still had to make good on what he’d said, he remembered, “Hey, mind if I talk to you alo-”

“This store is terrible,” Kaminari interrupted him as he dropped the shorts much to the displeasure of nearby staff, “there’s gotta be at least one good place around here,” he said before his face lit up. “Look at that one, let’s go there,” he pointed across the malls makeshift street at a rather uninhabited looking dark abode. He frowned as he followed, he wouldn’t get his chance with Kaminari around.

As they entered the specialty store the guy had pointed out he found it rather badly lit, however inside were none other than Mezou and Tokoyami.

“Yo,” Kirishima said, “This place any good?”

Tokoyami nodded, “If you need camping specifics, this is the place for it,” he and his companion already had several bags crammed full with everything from pocket knives to multi-purpose watches. He found himself somehow impressed by their speed, it had barely been twenty minutes and they’d already gotten almost everything needed.

“Daaaaamn these things are expensive!” Kirishima said as he peered at the price tag of some tech-y looking night vision goggles.

“Yes, well, all of the gear is of highest quality. In this mall it’s second to none,” the beaked student said. “I dare say you’d be a sucker to go anywhere else.”

“That almost sounds like a sales pitch dude, trying to impress us or something?” Kaminari said as he looked over what appeared to be a Swiss army compass, doubling with both the ability to find direction and light a campfire.

“It’s because his uncle owns this store,” Mezou answered. He was actually the one holding all the bags for the both of them, with just one of his cloned arms.

“Wait, seriously?” Kaminari dropped what looked like a bag of beads.
Hmph, Tokoyami looked away, the feathers hid a blush but his embarrassment was still easily discernible, “Even then, what I said remains completely true.”

Kaminari pulled Tokoyami by the shoulder, “You gotta get me a deal man, everything on this stupid list is so pricey I’m gonna go broke!” he was practically dragging him across the show floor.

“Impossible. This store has a reputation to uphold,” Tokoyami answered.

“Come on man, I can't believe you won't even give your own classmate a bit of a discount, I thought we were buds!” he said like he was completely heartbroken.

Tch, he shook his head, “Fine. Show me what you need and I’ll see what I can do,” his tone was fed up as he said it. It gave himself enough time to avert his gaze and notice the one who had secluded himself to the end of the shop, behind tall racks of gear sequestered among useless junk that no one but a sycophant of outdoor activities might buy.

“Here, let me help you,” he said as he walked up to Kirishima.

“Already finished your own shopping?” he asked to which he nodded, not much had interested him in the store except for exactly this. “Thanks then,” he piled a bunch of peculiar objects into his arms, including the night vision goggles from earlier.

“You go on many trips back at your old school, Riley?” he asked as he whisked through the shelves some more.

“Not really, they became kinda taboo after my second year,” he put the stuff Kirishima had given him in a basket someone had left on the floor.

“Oh, what gives?”

“A few people got their hands on some of the staff’s booze during one of the trips out of state, turns out that the only thing that teacher hadn’t expected in a school of kids with quirks is for someone who could pick an actual lock with just a paper clip and a hair pin,” he chuckled.

“That’s some crafty shit,” Kirishima laughed, “All the trips at my middle school were boring, museums, tv stations that kinda stuff. Must have turned out pretty ugly for those who got caught, I imagine.”

“Well, luckily they didn’t catch us,” he shrugged. “Turns out it’s pretty hard to get buzzed with just a bottle of shit wine.”

Heh, Kirishima said as he rubbed his nose, “That’s a pretty unheroic thing to do ya know.”

“Well, I guess you’re right, still I figured out the next day that hangovers make me one hundred percent useless at using my quirk, that was kind of punishment enough. Don’t tell anyone I told you that,” he smirked.

“Secrets safe with me,” he smiled back at him as he finished with the shelf, “I think I’m pretty much done here, so let me pay up and we’ll find some stores with stuff you need instead of just me and Kaminari.”

“Actually,” he paused, “There is something I wanted to talk to you about… privately,” he looked over at where the others were, they seemed to still be keeping at their haggling.

“Sure thing,” his friend paused and sat down on the bench made to measure foot size rather than take
a break. “Hit me with whatever it is, I’m all ears.”

He obliged and sat down next to him and rubbed his finger, the one he’d scrubbed the flesh off of during their fight. The skin had healed back but the surface was smooth and featureless, the tiny amount of hair on the knuckle had disappeared along with the follicles in the skin, “I’m sorry,” he said as he put his hands behind him and leaned back into the wall.

“Huh?” Kirishima gave him a confused look and a surprised tone to match, “Sorry for what, exactly?”

“During the sports festival when I fought you, didn’t you notice anything weird about me?” he didn’t turn to look.

“I mean, you were a bit ferocious but not really,” he mimicked his leaning. “I figured after watching that fight with Midoriya you were just pumped up, I know I was.”

“I was, at first. I don’t know how to describe it but what you saw, fought, out there wasn’t me, that thing that wouldn’t go down no matter how hard you hit it. The worst part is I wanted to do it, to maim anything I could get my hands on. I couldn’t control myself. That’s why I hurt myself during the semi-final, so it would stop.”

“That villain… he still has some kind of grip on me that I don’t understand, even after you removed that quirk on the night you rescued me. All those times you asked for my help and I just made up an excuse… I was scared, really scared that it would happen again after that rescue race where Bakugou and I almost attacked each other,” he could feel it in his neck, in his head, there was just a hint of it beginning to come back from its fearful rest, it wouldn’t last much longer.

“Riley…”

“Just let me finish, alright?” he didn’t want to stop yet, it was hard enough not to jitter in his speech. Kirishima nodded to him out of the corner of his eye. His bones felt almost as set as when he used his quirk, “I don’t want think I want revenge or anything, not anymore. It’s just, when you failed the exam… I felt like such a fucking coward, I let you fail just so I didn’t have to deal with it. I feel like I owe you more than that, even if you don’t ask for anything. It just gets worse and worse.”

“Even now, I’m making it sound like it’s your fault. Fuck,” he swore and sat up. “Must seem pretty unmanly when I tell you all this shit,” he hadn’t meant to get so emotional. Maybe it would be better he left. It would be understandable if his friend didn’t want to talk after that freight train of a confession.

“So that’s why you’ve been acting that way,” Kirishima let out a long sigh, “And here I thought you knew me better than that.”

“What?” he turned at him.

“Look, as thick as I am there is no way I didn’t think you had a good reason,” he scratched the back of his head. “If you think there’s something wrong with you still, something that makes you uncertain then I understand that and I don’t want you to feel guilty man, not for me at least. I’ll get over the problem one way or another, I always do. You make sure you’re okay and be honest about it, I’m not gonna blow up at you like Bakugou or some crap.”

“Thanks,” he answered. He now regretted having left the confession for so long and letting it swell to such size that he’d lost sight of how small it could have been had he just done this sooner.

“Just tell me, what are you planning to do about it?”
“About the thing from the festival?”

“Yeah,” he nodded and put a hand on his shoulder. “That’s the only thing I want to know. If you need me to stop you or something then say it, I’ll do that but if you don’t have a plan I don’t wanna have to go out on a limb and end up doing something stupid, or watch you do something stupid.”

“I don’t really have a plan, it just feels like it happens randomly,” he looked down at the floor.

_Hmm_, Kirishima answered, “I doubt it’s random, is there really nothing you can think of?”

“Anger or desperation, I guess,” it didn’t feel so shallow. It was like it had a will of its own, really. His friend smacked his fist into his own hand, “Easy then, what makes you more desperate then a good fight? It’d be probly make you decently angry too if you’re about to lose.”

“Going out of my way to trigger it on purpose seems like a bad idea.”

“Trust me on this,” he shook his head, “the only way you’re going to stop falling for it is if you just confront it head on. I don’t need to rifle through a comic book to tell you that. Its common sense, what was it you said before, ‘submission by overdose’? It’s the same thing really.”

“I don’t know,” he shrugged. It wasn’t something he felt was wise to confront, wasn’t that exactly why that man had done it to him, so he would go crazy?

“Fine, then put that guilt you feel toward me to good use and consider it as repaying a debt instead, you teach me how to fight with some more speed and I’ll help you out with whatever is happening to you, yeah?”

He thought about it then nodded, “Alright,” he could do that. It would be worth a try, “when?” he asked.

“Well, I guess we got the lodge coming up but I think we should try before then, just to be sure we can use one of the Yuuei fields, chances are someone will come running if it does get out of control. A simple hand to hand fight without quirks might be a good place to start. I’ll ask Mr. Aizawa about it, he’ll probly be keen since I doubt he wants us blowing each other’s brains out before the trip,” it felt like he’d thought a lot about it, probably because this had been kind of what he wanted even if not under these circumstances.

“Sorry, I’m such an idiot when it comes to this stuff,” he gave half a laugh, just a quick chortle to confirm the absurdity of it.

“Yep, you sure are,” Kirishima grinned and hit him on the back. “Now help me get this crap to the count-”

_Vreeeeeeeeeeeem_, a high pitched alarm screeched throughout the room and the mall itself, it sounded like a fire alarm, _“Alert! Alert! Villain threat detected. Please vacate Wookiees in a calm and orderly fashion. Thank you for your patronage, please come again!”_ a woman’s voice said with disproportionate cheer.

“What the hell, a villain threat?” Kaminari shouted across the room as he covered his ears.

“Riley, let’s go find the others,” Kirishima jumped to his feet and set off. It was all he could think of to follow.
They made it back to the grand entrance with a speed that might have impressed most athletes, all the while trying to dodge the stampede of panicked shoppers. What they found there was Midoriya and Uraraka, surrounded by police whom were helping people to evacuate. The green haired boy looked beyond shaken, a light sweat was glistening on his face and it looked like he'd just been deprived of oxygen for two minutes. It was no doubt them who had called the police, the phone in Uraraka’s hands said as much; she’d also been the one to let Kirishima know.

“Midoriyaaaa what happened?!” Ashido yelled.

“Yes, are you alright?” Iida looked almost more shocked than she did.

“I’m okay,” he answered. He appeared to have mostly recovered, “I don’t think the villain wanted to risk causing a scene in a crowded mall like this.”

Kaminari put a hand on his hip, “Man you are one unlucky dude Midoriya, jumping from one villain to the next. It’s like you’re a goddamn magnet.”

“Any idea who the villain was? I can’t believe one would just walk up to you like that,” Kirishima shook his head.

“It was the same villain from USJ, the one with the hands. Tomura Shigaraki,” he said with factual sureness. The name turned Riley's blood cold at its mention, for someone to show up here, of all places. That meant that Janus couldn't be far behind, he concluded with a shudder.

“That’s so scary! I would have broken down right then and there,” Hagakure was grabbing her shoulders as if she was shuddering from the cold.

“I’m glad you’re alright, it could have turned out much worse,” Iida said. “What did he want from you exactly?”

“He wanted to ask me things about All Might but he didn’t exactly get far,” Midoriya said after a small pause.

“Man, are villains going to come after us every time we got out now?” Kaminari said as he kicked a can in annoyance.

“Right before the trip too, I bet Aizawa's gonna give us shit again,” Ashido groaned.

“Young man. You were the one attacked by the villain correct?” A police officer asked as he approached Midoriya from behind, who nodded, “And you… Uraraka Ochako, we have some questions for you regarding the attack, please come with me. As for the rest of you if there is anything you know don’t hesitate to tell us, otherwise I insist you leave the mall for your own safety.”

The two were ushered off and they were forced to leave not long after, with a sense of dread. He doubted they would be able to catch neither the villain nor his accompaniment if he was here. What bothered him once again was the age old question of why, had Tomura really only come here to intimidate and ask a few questions? Maybe he had hoped to take Midoriya with him… it was a possibility despite how ill thought out it was. The villain was an ill man too, after all.

[Yuuei’s Campus – Practice Field λ – 2:49 PM Monday]

The dry clearing heaved as wind blew through it in some inept way that spoke of its old age. The ground felt hardened and stood well apart from the lavish concrete arenas that surrounded it. It was
simple dirt; the kind on which pockmarks of previous battles were kept as distinguished trophies. It was something he found little time to appreciate as he looked at his opponent, one who was hammering his fists together like he was eager to begin. There were only two others around, namely Aizawa himself and Jirou, who had heard about their little match up.

“Hurry it up, I haven’t got all day,” the teacher said. He’d come bearing his weapon, it was a surprise he’d even come at all however he knew why, they weren’t allowed to have their fight without supervision, not after what had been dubbed the ‘hero incident’, that and another reason less distinct but adjunct to the former.

“Yo, you ready?! I won’t go easy on you so hit me with all you got,” Kirishima asked.

A glance down at his arm was all he took before curling his right into a fist and holding the left back. Muscle memory had given way to training and made his stance more confident. Then he took a breath, he wasn’t sure if he was ready but it was time to find out. His own sign of readiness was answered by raised hands, ready to guard and attack as needed.

Kirishima kicked up dirt as his heel snapped forward heavily from the ground. The distance between them was closed in almost no time at all, despite himself not having moved. He ducked to the side before his friend even threw his arm, it missed him easily, it had been faster without the armour on it but he had grown far faster still. He grabbed the arm that had come for him by the elbow and pulled it down harshly, before hammering on the joint with his forearm to which Kirishima gave a minor utterance of pain. It was cruel but necessary. To do any less than to take full advantage meant to shy away.

*Kuh,* he gasped as Kirishima retaliated by ramming not only his other hand into his stomach but his entire body like a battering ram. Then the world twisted as his arm was lugged forward over his shoulder, throwing him hard into the dirt. “Gotchu,” the face he looked up at was grinning. “You and Midoriya ain’t the only ones who can imitate a move or two, show me something new man.”

He stumbled to his feet and pushed back a few steps, then he bounced on his heel twice before settling back into the stance, “You were paying that much attention, huh? I should have guessed,” he rolled his neck at the pain. “I won’t be much more than a poor imitation of Leina but I’ll try to make it a bit tough for you,” he gritted his teeth and pulled his foot slightly further back, that’s where the woman got her power. She was relentless and it was his turn to try it. If anything would draw it out then it would be that.

He did not hesitate to throw himself forward this time, slamming his foot directly down on Kirishima’s, pinning it, “I hope you dodge this,” he brought his right arm back into an overhead swing, then slammed it forward and down. Kirishima brought his arms up but he had already stopped his fist, instead he grabbed at the guard, letting his foot go as he brought his knee into the guy’s stomach, causing him to falter a step in pain, long enough for him not to stop or stand back in preparation but to follow up with a push kick in the same place using Kirishima’s own arms to give it momentum and keeling him over. Off balance as he was all it took was a punch to the jaw to floor him, payback for earlier. Now he did allow his friend a breather, he didn’t want to injure him seriously.

“You really did get faster,” Kirishima gasped from the floor, as he stood and corrected himself. There was a small trail of blood from a scuff on his cheek, which he wiped away with the back of his hand. “I do have one advantage on you,” he said, “Even without my quirk.”

He dodged sideways as Kirishima jumped at him and pushed his elbow into the guy’s ribs, only this time for him to not so much as flinch, instead turning at him with a fierce look, “Hit me all you like, I’m gonna be the one left standing,” he gave a sharp grin. A kick in his friends right calf confirmed
the fact as he completely ignored it and grabbed him foot first.

_Thump_, he hit the ground back first as Kirishima flung him upward. He barely rolled out of the way as the fist dug into the floor where his face had been. He swept his leg sideways only to find it was like hitting bone on bone, causing him to recoil in blunt pain. It was like he was kicking a brick wall, it was hard to believe it was still just quirkless flesh. He crawled back and flung himself to his feet, with his hand like he’d practiced. What hell had Fourth Kind put him through that he could shrug all this shit off?

“Maybe I should have been looking to you to make me tougher, goddamn,” he panted. “Speed doesn’t do me much good against that,” he let his arm fall back to his side. Then again, there was no need to be able to punch through a wall barehanded when he had his quirk.

Kirishima came forward in an uppercut, designed to finish it. It went wide as it reached him, allowing him to sock him in the face with a quick jab, however just as before he didn’t even get dazed by it. Instead Kirishima grabbed him by both forearms and began to push down hard, like he was going to collapse on him. It was like an anchor falttering his arms; he couldn’t even pull away from it with his back arched beneath the force. From this position there wasn’t much he could do to fight back despite his fervent wish to do so. An inch was followed by a foot, and then he was pinned to the floor with Kirishima's elbow weighing down on his throat, like he was going to choke him out. It was only bearable for a few seconds before he felt he might go unconscious.

“Okay,” he gasped, “I give. Get off me,” the forced grip instantly fell away, letting him hit the floor properly. He coughed once or twice before looking up, “I guess I can’t beat you in a fist fight yet,” he said as he breathed in and out deeply.

“Mighta turned out different if we’d been using quirks,” Kirishima laughed before offering him his hand.

He took it, “Maybe, but I doubt it, I just haven’t got the raw strength like you do to keep it going, using my quirk would only make it harder.”

“Then I guess we both got something to teach, speaking of which… feel anything like what you mentioned?”

“No, nothing,” he answered, “I wouldn’t say that felt desperate. I guess it’s different than before since I know we’re just sparring,” that didn’t mean he didn’t need it though, the idea that he could at least do this much without it rearing its head was comforting.

“Whatever you think All Might did, I guess it’s still working for now,” Kirishima shook his head, “I suppose we can tell Mr. Aizawa we’re done for now,” he turned to look at the man only to be met with surprise.

“Fat chance, he bailed already the moment you put him in that choke,” Jirou said as she walked up to them, “He knew it was over.”

“I’d say that was rude if not typical,” Riley smirked. He didn’t really want Aizawa watching anyway, he knew why the man had come in reality, to judge him if he did succumb. He was glad he hadn’t, it might have lent the teacher some trust in him.

“So, all good?” Jirou asked with a low undertone.

“All good,” he answered, knowingly.

“If anything happens, just lemme know, yeah?” Kirishima said. “And after the lodge I’ll work you to
“Hell so you can last longer in a fight.”

“...Thanks,” he actually felt a little more confident that he could beat it now.

“Let’s get out of here, this place is giving me the creeps,” Jirou turned away. Even though they were alone the place they’d been fighting was still deep in Yuuei’s Campus which meant that the possible lack of privacy made any attempt at casual conversation uncomfortable.

“Yeah, I’m starviiiiing, let’s meet up with Kaminari and Sero and head out somewhere, we haven’t been to that noodle place in a while,” Kirishima said as he followed her.

That sounded great, he hadn’t been there in over a month. He took a step to follow them and then an estranged feeling hit him, like he’d lost his sense of balance. The ground might have met him, had he not been caught by the collar just before he toppled.

“Something wrong?” Kirishima asked as he pulled him back up, worry was streaked across his face.

“I’m just a bit dizzy,” it was like someone had clapped him on the ear and nothing more, there was no anger or voice accompanying it. “Maybe I overdid it a bit.”

“Let’s stop by Recovery Girl,” Jirou said.

“We don’t need to, really. It’ll clear up if I eat something,” he answered. The feeling had already passed. It was probably just dehydration, he hadn’t been sticking to his diet much and replacing water with pop and red bull just to help him study for the exam had probably been bad idea. He could blame Kaminari for that one.

“Oh yeah, I’ve heard that before,” she shrugged. “I’ll make Kirishima carry you there if you try and refuse.”

“I’ll do it ya know,” he chuckled, “Better safe than sorry dude.”

“Fine,” he knew they only wanted to do it because of what he’d told them, he could hardly blame them for being paranoid but he wasn’t about to start closing up again like he knew he always did. Reluctantly he rolled his shoulder and then began to follow behind.

[Yuuei's Campus – Parking Lot – Wednesday 7:10 AM]

The morning of the trip hit him in the face with a dastardly heat. It was probably not even the height of it, the fact he was feeling it now may suggest he’d acclimated to it more than he had thought in only a short time. It was a shame they’d still be stuck wearing their uniforms, at least until they actually arrived at the lodge.

The last day before the trip had been kind of redundant, since they’d failed to actually buy any gear like they’d planned on the Saturday due to the evacuation of the mall. The task had been easier accomplished with just a few people and now he had everything he needed stuffed into the same bag he’d used to stay at Edgeshot’s, he also had his normal bag over his shoulder; a leather pouch type deal that his uncle had bought for him since his old bag had been kind of inappropriate for a Japanese school. He kind of wished he still had a locker, carrying everything was a pain even if he could walk from class to his dorm in about twenty minutes.

After the match Recovery Girl had told them nothing was wrong with him. On the contrary he was almost back in a healthy weight range. As good as the news was he wondered if that would still be the case after this week, the little the man had told them about the trip, especially now that the
situation had changed with much paranoia and some question raising.

“As I said, in light of the latest attack you idiots got involved in the location of the boot camp has been reconsidered to prevent another USJ Incident,” he tore up the lodge book he had in his hand. “Now forms you brats, anyone without one will be spending their week handcuffed to the principal’s desk instead,” the man scowled.

“Mr. Aizawa sure is on edge,” Kirishima said.

“Can you blame him?” Jirou asked.

“Man, I already cleared it all with my parents and everything,” Sero sighed, “guess I should give them a call…”

“It is preferable you do not,” Momo shook her head, “as much as it pains to say it is probably better the location remains under wraps,” she was leaned against the same wall the rest of them were, with a bag full of dry snacks rather than gear and in front of two well placed busses beside which their sister class had also assembled.

“So. Many. To. Choose. From,” Mineta breathed heavily as he looked around, much to Kaminari’s approval.

“You have some serious issues,” Kirishima furrowed his brow at him as he watched the small student salivate all over his own arm, the shock therapy he’d received from Mt. Lady had faded.

“So did Aizawa tell you what he has in store for you three?” Riley asked.

Rikidou’s head drooped, “Nope, he wouldn’t even give us a hint.”

“Yeah, can’t be good,” Sero said.

“If it’s anything like what he did for me then all I can do is pray for you,” he smirked, “I’m sure Hagakure can agree.”

“Yep! You guys are doomed!” the girl answered, she was spending her time waiting for the rest of them to get here by walking on the stone wall itself, behind their backs.

Kirishima rolled his head back and gave a long sigh, “Man, I know you’re just fucking with me but I can’t help but feel there’s some truth to it.”

“Ohohoho,” a voice behind them cackled, “One A needs supplementary lessons? That must mean somebody failed the exam,” his face was overzealous as Riley looked sideways over Kouda’s shoulder at him, his hands were wide and upturned like he was trying to put on a show. “Weren’t you meant to be the superior heroics class? I guess you’re not as great as everyone thinks!” he continued his inelegant waltz, arrogance seeping from every pore.

The three in question turned their gazes away, making himself feel livid, in one step he leapt up the low wall so he was sat upon it, “Wanna say that again?” he curled his fist toward him. Monoma jumped at the threat of physical violence, by the looks of it he hadn’t seen him behind the taller Kouda, even despite how much he’d shot up there was still enough disparage in height there to hide him easily. The student might have calmed and regained his arrogance had it not been for a swift chop to the neck he received the second after.

“Didn’t I tell you to stop that?” Kendou said as she caught the slumped tormentor, “You can’t really talk since you failed too, really…” she looked toward them, “Sorry ‘bout that. I keep telling him
we're not competing but he just doesn’t get it.”

“It is fine,” Iida gave her a small nod. “Our class bares no grudge toward you, I hope that is the mutual feeling. It very optimal we act on goo-”

Riley turned away from Iida’s speech as Kirishima nudged him, “Thanks for that,” he’d gone from slumping back to normal.

“Well, you did the same for me,” he said just in time to be tapped again, this time by one of the students from 1-B.

“You are…” she paused, “Torenagi, correct?” the girl had two horns on her head and reserved look to match. She looked like a unicorn or maybe a mix between that and a triceratops, some kind of uni-rhino, the makeshift name kind of amused him.

“Yeah,” he nodded, making sure not to make his thought obvious, “Need something?”

“Um…” she pointed at herself like she wasn’t sure what to do say, “Tsunotori Pony, from America.”

“America?” then he realised what she was probably getting at, “You’re from America too?” he asked in English, it felt like he hadn’t spoken it in a while.

She nodded with delight, “Nice to meet you, I’m still struggling a bit with the language,” she giggled, “You’re a foreign student too, right? I’m a bit jealous of how easy you make it look.”

“Well, my mom's side is Japanese, so I guess I have a bit of an advantage but yeah, I'm from Indiana,” he said, to which she nodded like she already knew.

“Kendou kind of tipped me off, I didn't even know until the sports festival,” she smiled, "What school?"

“Leineif Heroic Prep Institute, I transferred in.”

“Leineif, I swear I've heard that name before.”

“It's getting a bit notorious these days,” he answered. It would have been impossible for it not to considering how high the success rate for its... services, were. “Did you transfer in too?”

“Ah, oh no, not exactly. My old school serves as a gateway to all the heroic schools around the world. That meant I kind of just applied, got thrown in and did the exam. Even with all that backing me up it still took some work to get in.”

“That gateway school, it’s probably the one in Phoenix, right?”

She nodded, “Educated guess?”

“Obsession,” he answered. “Too bad it was so many states over, not to mention it's pretty expensive. Didn't think I would end up running into someone else from America after I left Leineif, though, funny how that happens,” he shrugged, “So did you need something in particular or…” he knew it was almost time for them to leave.

“It’s all still a bit of a culture shock to me and I don’t really know anyone outside my class, so I guess what I’m asking for is your number if it’s not too much to request. I really need someone else to ask for help who isn’t Monoma.”

“Monoma?” he looked back at the student, who had only just recovered from Kendou’s strike. He
was already back to being smug by the looks of it.

“Oh, sorry I didn’t mean anything by it. I know you two don’t really get along.”

He scowled, “More like he doesn’t get along with anyone from my class, the little roach.”

“He really isn’t such a bad guy, he’s been teaching me a bit of Japanese here and there and he helps me out with the class work so.”

He gave her a strange look, there’d been rumours of a fowl mouthed 1-B student going around lately, somehow he had a feeling it wasn’t just a coincidence, “I’ll help you out,” he let the look drop and took out his phone.

“Thanks,” she said as she collected the number off his screen and sent him her own via a text, “I’ll be in touch,” there was almost a curtsy to her step as she shied back to her own class.

“What was that about?” Kaminari asked, “Getting in with the one B girls aye?”

He rolled his eyes, “Not everything has to be like that, you know.”

“Considering how little I can understand her there isn’t much more I can do than that,” he smirked, “and you know what they say about foreign girls.”

“Mineta might have issues but you’re just as bad,” Jirou said, “And you can’t really fault her for not knowing Japanese when your English is one step below absolutely fucking abysmal.”

“Man, I swear all you do is rag on me Jirou,” he raised his brow, “If I didn’t know better I’d say you had a crush on me or something.”

Riley snorted, “You’re going to regret that, dude.”

Jirou cracked her knuckles, “Yes. Yes he is.”

“C-come on Jirou, I was just joking around!”

Just as Kaminari began to back off he bumped into Iida, “One A’s bus is ready, everyone line up in seating order! Hurry up!” the class rep motioned frantically as he pushed the electric student toward it.

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[Yuuei’s Field Trip Bus – Unknown Location – 8:25 AM]

“Here,” he handed Kaminari one of the earphones, the other he’d given to Kirishima.

“Good, right?” he asked, the track he’d chosen was notched in thick letters across his phone, **Bignic – Lessons.**

“Yeah, definitely,” Kaminari’s head bobbed along to the rhythm of the song, “and here I thought you just didn’t listen to anything,” he smirked.

“Usually it’s stuff without lyrics but yeah,” he shrugged. Before the visor that had been the primary way of blocking out anything that broke his concentration, it had helped him learn how to do without eventually.

“Here, try this one,” Kaminari handed the earphone back and took out his own, swiping twice on his phone and handing one over. It took about two seconds to get what he was listening to and a third to
“Cool,” he said. It wasn’t the kind of thing he liked, more along the lines of his uncle's tastes. He knew Jirou was into this type of stuff too although honestly he doubted there was any kind of music she couldn’t stand.

“Here,” Kirishima tossed the earphone back over the back of the chair, which he caught, “Hope we’re at a rest stop soon, I’m starting to cramp up.”

“Same,” Sero said, he was the one Iida had stuffed him next to, really one of the only pairings that the bus had stuck to within the course of about five minutes. Two seats behind them were Midoriya and Iida, and directly behind him an uncomfortable Jirou and far more uncomfortable Bakugou.

As if on cue Aizawa stood, “We’ll be stopping in about ten minutes and then we’ll continue the rest of the way, so don’t get restless,” the man had given up trying to tame the chaos of the bus, he doubted it would have been possible to yell over Iida anyway; the class rep was louder than half the bus combined.

“Convenient,” Kirishima said.

“Yeah, now Jirou can stop scowling for five minutes,” Kaminari snickered.

“I thought they were becoming good friends,” Sero laughed.

“I guess this is what they’d call summer bonding, right?” Riley turned over his shoulder at them.

Jirou sneered, “I don’t think we’re quite there yet, maybe another fifty trips or so,” she returned a look that told him she didn’t actually mind that much, at least while she still had working wifi.

“Shut up you fucks, and you too Soundwave,” Bakugou snarled at her.

“Yep, definitely bonding.”

“As soon as we get off this bus I’m going to knock the colour out of your hair,” he ground his teeth.

“Cool it McSplody, I’m sure you’ll get plenty of chances once we’re actually there ya know,” Kirishima chuckled, as he did the bus came to an abrupt stop upon a large cliff. “Finally,” he jumped to his feet, “my back is killing me,” he said before hopping off the bus in just over two steps, not even enough time for Aizawa to bid him to do so.

“As eager as always,” the teacher grumbled as he and the rest of them followed.

“Wooooah, look at that view!” Ashido said as she joined Kirishima at the railing of it.

“No kidding,” he whistled. The cliff at which they had arrived was as perilous as it was scenic, it was a chunk of rock and terrain that served as a veranda to the massive forest below and the junction of mountains looming in the distance, it was the kind of view you’d pay to get a glimpse of.

“Hey, Eraaaaser! Long time no see!” a female voice said as it rolled out from behind the bus, quite literally in a tucked fur ball. The man in question paid little attention to it, instead rolling his neck away from the woman who emerged with as much indignation as possible. She had black hair stuck in what was almost a Hime cut, just a tad bouncier.

“Who’s she?” Kaminari asked, he was as puzzled as he was beguiled.

“You’re late,” Aizawa said.
“We’re never late!” a second fur ball came in behind the first, this one almost bowling over the first woman as it uncurled, revealing a girl who could almost be considered short but not quite. She had an energised, fearsome look on her face. “With sparkling eyes and only the cutest of demeanours we have arrived, the wild pussycats!” she bounced into a cat like stance on the floor, while the black haired woman bared her own claws above. The sentence was topped off by a burst of pink smoke that smelled of sugar and a distinct cat call.

“I’d like to introduce the professional hero team, the pussycats,” their teacher said. He looked unimpressed by the entrance. Behind the two women was a boy with horns on his head, he was unsure if they were part of him or rather an accessory of his hat, either way he wore a mean scowl for someone so young.

“The pussycats? They’re one of the four hero teams who founded the union affairs office, amazing!” Midoriya said. “They’re one of the best rescue and apprehension teams around with more than twelve years of experience under their belt.”

“I’ve got eighteen years in my heart!” the blonde white cat lady pushed her soft glove into Midoriya’s face, caused his voice to be muffled.

“Where’s class B…?” he heard Uraraka murmur behind him. It struck him as odd too, now that she mentioned it.

“Now then, introductions can wait. Behind us you can see pretty much the entirety of our domain, quite impressive isn’t it?” the dark haired woman pointed a clawed finger. Now that he was closer he could make out the black lines under her eyes, they reminded him a bit of Ko’s costume, though maybe the mechanical ears threw that off a bit.

“I have a bad feeling about this…” Sero said.

Uraraka nodded, “Yeah, we’re only halfway there at best.”

“Don’t tell me…” Rikidou’s voice trailed off as he realised, he himself had too now. There was a very particular reason why this part of the cliff looked so unnatural and the black haired woman’s grin didn’t make it seem like she needed to hide it.

“Mr. Aizawa,” Momo gave the man a concerned look.

“I’m sorry, this is for you own good,” he answered with a voice that suggested he wasn’t very sorry at all, now he knew they were screwed.

“It’s about eighty-thirty right now, you might be able to get there around noon if you kick it into high gear,” the black haired woman flashed a cruel grin.

Kirishima pushed him in the chest and then rushed past his shoulder, “Back to the bus everyone, back to the bus!” he shouted. Though he knew there was no point, the ground had already begun to shake beneath them.

“Those who don’t make it by then won’t be eating, that seems like a fitting punishment,” she laughed and the floor ruptured.

The ground he was so firmly planted on exploded as it flung him forward in a scattered disarray of students and gravel. It felt like he was flying for just a split second, however no two seconds later did gravity catch up to him and he fell back into what was now a landslide, one that was dragging each and every one of them with it into the abyss below.
Chapter End Notes

*I don't own BNHA. OC material is my own.
Cave of Despondence – The Forest of Beasts – 8:46 AM Wednesday

Riley hit the dirt feet first and as his slide ended he landed in muddy sod that left him entrenched up to his ankles. There was only a decorum of light falling on him now from the lip of the basin that had caught him, he was alone if only for a breath or two, before four other students fell in the same way, scattering grime far and wide as they caught themselves in crude disarray.

Yeugh, Sero spat as he wiped his now muddied uniform pants, “What in the world is this place?”

“It look like some kind of intricate cave network beneath the forest,” Momo answered; her descent had been aided by a pair of sturdy hiking boots that he wasn’t sure how she had found the time to make. The fall into the cave had happened without much warning, he was lucky to even have landed on his feet.

“I can’t believe something like this would just be hiding under some trees, that’s pretty awesome,” Ojiro said with wide eyed expression as he looked around.

“Aren’t you more worried about getting stuck down here and dying?” Ribbit, Tsuyu said beside him.

“Dying? That’s a bit morbid don’t you think?” the student broke his amazement and switched it for a nervous laughter.

“Well it is a concern, I do not think we’re going back the way we came in,” Momo shook her head as she looked back up. The way they’d come in was perilous, lined with vines and trees and razor wire stone. It was a surprise that none of them had hit a rock or three on the way down, it was almost as if the hole had covered itself more thoroughly once they’d passed through it, though that thought sounded ridiculous.

“Guess the only way we’re going is forward,” Riley turned back. He had to admit, the sight really was quite amazing as Ojiro had pointed out.

It wasn’t just a cave but rather a derelict tunnel with pillars that spanned its height from years of stalagmite formation. The air was damp and yet fresh, whereas the walls were lined with symbols that were as old as they were mysterious and covering almost everything in a narrow fashion. It had an almost mystical feeling, like it had been wrought from its earthen confines after eons of neglect. Moss that had a peculiar blue hue clung to the walls and covered every inch to light to the path ahead.

He almost gave himself a heart attack as he rounded one of the smooth pillared surfaces, which had brought him face to face with what was to be most exactly called a life-like statue made of the same stone as the cave itself, it was half buried in several feet of soil and easily four times as big as he was. There were more of them in different sizes and in similar state the further away he looked, it was difficult to see them all with only the bioluminescent sheen of the moss. Their forms were chimerasque with scales running along their length and the head of a lion cut to accompany the sleeker feline curvature. It looked almost too real, like it'd been forged from exact casts of the monster it was intended to mimic. He gave the jewel on its forehead a gentle touch and realised that something was very wrong. The cave was strange but he was damn well sure rocks weren’t meant to growl.
He jumped backward as its paw curled, “Get back, they’re not statues!” he shouted behind him, although he didn’t have to; the others had reached similar realisations. The beast hadn’t yet freed itself fully and even as it did its walk was an amble rather than a dangerous leap. They were disparate from their slumber which meant whoever was controlling them seemed to want to start them easy.

“Stick together,” Momo said as a newly formed buckler melded from the skin on her hand, “Don’t let them catch you one by one.”

He pushed himself back a few feet and threw up his hand, concentration beset him as the creature walked but the chimera wasn’t fast enough to stop him, yet, “Compress,” he said and shut his hand. It shook as it’s joints felt the constriction pulling it’s body inward, it caused pause and held it immobilised but even as he let his hand fall again there wasn’t so much as a crack on its shell. It was too dense for him to do any real damage.

“These things are tough as iron,” Ojiro said, he hadn’t had much luck tail-whipping his own creature. “Got a plan in mind class rep?”

“We need to weaken their armour or run further down the cave,” the girl answered as the creatures walked ever closer. It was like a pack of wolves, or lions or something eyeing up their dinner.

Weaken? he could weaken, he’d almost forgotten in the surge of his own unexpected excitement, “Follow my lead,” he said in a low tone. Having an enemy that was entirely immune to an aspect of his quirk wasn’t something he’d had much experience to fight, he hadn’t been so much as able to touch Nedzu’s robot. It was the perfect playground to try out everything surrounding that.

He dodged as the beast he’d aggravated pulled forward and stamped a paw down where he’d been, as it swiped it’s claw again he pushed his foot down like he had with Aoyama, sliding him through the soft sod and beside the creature’s tough underbelly while the strike went wide. The beast wasn’t nearly as fearsome as Leina, its slow swipes were easy to avoid and she had taught him better than to back off while they still had the advantage. As he streaked his hand across the side of its body, along the joint connecting it’s front leg and it’s stomach, which lightened in reflex. He kicked his leg off its body as he rose, pushing him away, he was really glad he’d left those weights behind in his bags now.

“Sero,” he looked but he hardly had to, tape had already forced itself in a tight bind preventing the beast from pursuing him. Ojiro swung his tail as he saw the opening, pushing its tip into the weak point and making it shatter with a crack. The makeshift sledgehammer caused its leg fell apart, making it fall maw first into the floor. It was far from dead but it wouldn’t be getting up anytime soon.

“Now that’s more like it,” Sero said as he threw his quirk toward another two of the five that had initially been instilled on them.

He found himself charging again, adrenaline was already there and with every trudge of movement and every heavy glop of dirt he kicked up and onto his clothes it made him more eager, more alive. The two new targets fell the same as the first, the one the left to his own quirk, finished by a strike like a hole-punch from Tsuyu’s tongue and the other to Momo on her own, delivered to the gem on its forehead via a piston powered mechanical machine arm that she had made, which made her look like she was imitating some futuristic knight. Her attack was more effective than their own, shattering its body to pieces.

“As I thought,” she said, “the gem is the quirk’s structural focus, bring those down and the rest of the monster goes with it.”
He adjusted his attack, as he brought it upon what Momo had suggested. The more that fell the greater his satisfaction became, it was a fight he didn't have to worry about for once and thus just like the creature’s flesh made brittle his frustration sank away in inklings and clumps.

It was a couple of hours before the fatigue set in and a few more after that before it dawned on them just how expansive the trek they’d been set upon was. He panted heavily as he felt the last spark of second wind, or quite possibly fifth wind, burn out. His hand was shaking not with compression or the opposite but precise spasms that came from the pain of switching equilibrium in and out what must have been hundreds of times. If they hadn’t taken each fight in bouts and used cohesive teamwork then he doubted he would have lasted; now all he could do was pray that this place actually ended somewhere. The only reprieves of forest they’d had came as glimpses of sunlight from holes that peaked above them in the ever widening passages of the place. The distance between them and the ceiling hadn’t lessened however.

“This part of the cave looks different. I think we’re almost there,” Momo said with an exhausted tone. The gauntlet on her arm was busted again, this had been the fourth or fifth she’d made along with other gadgets she’d found necessary. It was taking its toll.

“Whaddaya mean, every freakin' wall and cavern looks the goddamn same!” Sero said, he’d found a collapsed clay pillar to sit on. The tape from his quirk had begun coming out in shreds rather than bands.

“Maybe we should have tried to climb out after all,” Ojiro said as he pointed upward at the gaps in with his tail.

“Even with safety harnesses the chances of us not breaking our necks are slim to nil, not to mention even if we did make it out there would undoubtedly be nothing better up top. In fact we may even walk into a trap,” she sighed in annoyance, the humidity of the cave was getting to her.

“This isn’t the time to turn on each other. Can’t you see that in the distance?” Tsuyu pointed with a webbed finger. Unlike Momo the damp cave didn’t seem to bother her at all.

He turned to see where she was pointing as he himself had collapsed on the floor just to take a breather. It was faint but probably fifty feet from them was a sliver in the dark that cut from around a corner. It was sunlight, he realised, just like what was above them. He clenched his fist to stop his trembling and then pushed himself up one knee at a time on the wall beside him, just one last push and they’d be done, he hoped.

“I don’t have a good feeling about this,” Sero said as they reached the opening. He could see why, if he hadn’t thought it a bit too convenient he might have called the space beyond the exit an arena. It was made of clay and curved in the way that resembled a melted candle. Atop it should have been what felt like a dome but that was missing completely as if it’d been cut in half. Anterior to it all was a series of step-like ridges that led up and out of the area. It was suspicious, all too suspicious that it was completely empty. The symbols that had chased them on the walls remained, which meant this was still part of their domain.

“Stay on guard,” Momo said as they moved in almost a huddle through the centre, from one end to the other couldn’t have been more than a two hundred feet across but with how heavily fermented the air had become it felt much larger. The afternoon was still burning bright above their heads so there was no chance of anything hiding, yet he saw nothing and felt nothing.

“Uhh, guys,” Ojiro pulled at his foot which he barely managed to remove without the mud swallowing his shoe.
“Shit, we walked right into it,” he cursed as he realised. The only place he hadn’t thought to look was down. There beneath them they’d been walking on a smooth surface that hid just beneath grime and refuse. It was a yellow gem. He felt his feet begin to sink.

A hand erupted first, massive and covered in hard scales, on the ends of which sharp nailed fingers resided, caught Sero on the leg and then with it his entire body as the rest of its visage emerged. It was hardening as it grew, its form pushed into what might have been a snake from the waist down with a human’s body on top and slender, strong arms hewn straight from the terrain it had be born from. It was almost a woman or at least its face was cut to resemble one, patterned ridges smartly dressed a motherly kindness that didn’t suit the rest of its monstrous body. The yellow gem they’d stood on had been adorned to its shoulders and a much brighter opal sat as the only non-browned surface on its forehead. Last of all emerged its weapon, held in a single grip in the middle, it was a double edged sabre that was more blunt than sharp but far denser than the rest of its towering body.

“Shit, guys help!” Sero yelled, he must have been four or five stories above them at this point.

“We need a plan, and fast,” he said. It was hard to think as his mental fatigue fought him and any ideas, he’d put too much into eliminating its subordinates.

“Our first priority should be to free Sero,” Momo said, she was already moulding an object from her skin. He recognised this one, it was the ballista cannon she’d used in the quirk test only blown up the full size of a cast-iron cannon. “All you have to do is get me a clear shot of that shoulder and we’ll have him free in no time.”

“I’m not much use against something like this,” Ojiro shook his head, “So I’ll act as a distraction while you guys take it down,” there were flecks and bruises on his tail but he boosted himself forward on it once more, like a spring. He was almost hit by the Lamia’s blade; it swung like a scythe that hurtled in a semi-circular carving toward him no sooner than he had touched the clay pit. It scarred the arena as it failed to connect with a rumbling crash.

Nrraaawrgh, the Lamia howled. A second hit came at him and then a third, the serpent-lady was keen with the weapon, each swing bisected and dissected a little more of the ground Ojiro had to stand on. It was difficult to believe the demonic being was made of something as basic as earth. They needed to act quickly before their classmate found themselves out of options to dodge.

Riley looked back at Momo and Tsuyu, “I gotta be able to touch the shoulder if you want me to make it vulnerable, I don’t think we’re going to get through it with just a cannon.”

“I’m on it,” Tsuyu nodded and he watched as she threw herself into the air with a one two hop, first up the Lamia’s tail and then up its chest. As she threw her tongue out he was already well aware what would happen next, it was something he’d forced to become used to over the course of the day. The tongue struck his stomach and curled around him, his stomach’s content flipped and shifted as she pulled him with her, narrowly avoiding a torrent of distracted blades aimed not at him but at Ojiro. The final strike of the blade went wide as he himself landed just at the cusp of its upper arm, stilling the surface that was now lodged deep in the embankment, it was the pause he needed.

He struggled up the slippery arm and held onto the bits of fake cloth that merged onto the Lamia’s body; with the help of Tsuyu’s hand he made it to the flat of the shoulder, it turned to look at them but with both its hands occupied there was little it could do to swath them off like flies. He hit his quirk into the surface first, forming better handholds and then again more thoroughly once he managed to bury his arms in it, he felt it fall into the clay beneath the shoulder through the puncture wounds he’d created, just long enough for the Lamia to realise it could release the blade to strike them with its palm instead.
He didn’t have time to jump, instead he felt himself pulled again and barely fast enough to avoid the *smack* as the Lamia brought her hand down. It would have flattened him and probably knocked him out but instead he landed in soft clay below, normally that narrow of a risk wasn’t something he could have taken but he knew Tsuyu would be able to pull it off, he’d learnt her capability in the six hours he’d spent with her. He’d learnt of all their capabilities, the blaring *fwe-boom* of cannon fire that followed only made that clearer.

*Graaaaaah,* the Lamia howled once more as its arm sundered, causing her to drop Sero and clutch the wound. It was now ash laden, grey smog and pieces of metal tapered through her shoulder, there was no way she would be able to use it. The shattered gem that sat there now confirmed as much, its surface released its pale glow and the bits of dirt it was holding together fell away like a broken spell.

Sero dropped into rough heap at his feet although most of his fall was mitigated by the nature of the arena’s terrain. He grabbed him on the shoulder and pulled him to his feet before the remainder of the Lamia’s arm could fall and hurt him, from the looks of it the grip of the monstrosity hadn’t done any harm on its own.

“Thanks,” he said, “I thought I was gonner when it grabbed me.”

*Raaaaaaargh,* he turned to see the creature fall into a rage at the loss of its hostage. *Screeee,* it went loud enough to try and rupture ear drums before it wrenched the blade from the wall and hit it into Ojiro like a club, flinging him hard into one of the back walls, he was pulled away by Tsuyu’s tongue as the Lamia shoved the blade after him in hopes of ending his annoyance. When it missed it twisted and turned in disarray like it still hadn’t fully comprehended its arm being shattered. It held the blade up before bringing it down roughly on a rock, causing it to snap in two with a *thunk.* Its tail grabbed the broken half and raised it, beginning to rattle like a cobras. One blade had become two.

Sero gasped, “That isn’t even fair,” he said.

“Man, we shouldn't have made it mad,” Ojiro held his rib as he got over the shock of the blow he'd received. It didn't seem like he'd broken anything however, instead merely receiving a severe bruising. “How are we going to beat it now? I can barely move, I won’t do much good as a diversion now.”

“The gem,” he and Momo both said, if it had not been in the heat of the moment it might have been almost comedic. “If we can just hit that gem hard enough we can probably escape,” he explained to which the girl nodded.

“So hit it all at once, is that the plan here?” Sero asked.

“I and Momo will bring her down. Then Tsuyu and Ojiro can attack the head. If you serve as a distraction this time we might be able to pull it off,” he answered.

“Got it, got it, payback time,” Sero stood. Before he turned he slapped his face with both his hands, like he was trying to psych himself up. Then one long piece of tape erupted from the tape as his arm followed his body, hitting the Lamia in the face as he ran at her, in one swing he was under its arm and between both its weapons. Rrrrrrrrrrrr, the Lamia wailed and sliced at him. It was lucky the rest of them were out of the its reach, for all the good it did the mud that she had emerged from was what kept her tethered to her location; perhaps it was more so she would guard the exit rather than let anyone sneak past.

“I’ve got one good attack left but it’s only going to put her off balance,” he said as he sat down and faced the raging monster. He was already past the point of pushing himself now but he wasn’t about to be the first one to give up.
“That’ll be enough,” Momo realigned her cannon, this time she filled it not with grapeshot but with a heavy cloth bag that she struggled to funnel into its nozzle.

He closed his eyes and imagined the dirt beneath the Lamia, the hollow cavern from which it must have been formed, the loose collection of soil, topsoil and damp clay. Then he pushed it on a large point, a glob of his compression as if she were that building he had sunk on his second day. It took much longer to feel the tough nagging of his tremor this time around, it was harder to build and tore through the dirt with much less power as it compressed. The secret of his one and only high area move had always been starting from far beneath and working up, that’s what allowed it to do what it did and why he had named it not a compression yet something else.

“Unilateral subduction,” he closed his fists, that almost wouldn’t obey the command. The last thick layer of uncompressed dirt came together in a dirty grinding mash as everything he had dug away beneath it made way.

The Lamia keeled like not a building but a toppling tower, the glue that was her miasma pulled her with it as the shifting mud distorted beneath. Raaaaaargh! it howled once more, spinning around in a whirlwind with its armed tail flailing uselessly. Screeeee, the piercing shriek came again but he maintained his trance, just long enough for another louder bang beside him. A besiegement of iron and lead had erupted from Momo’s cannon, five sets of two balls each connected by heavy chains, hit the Lamia in the chest and flung her backward as if she’d been shunted. She toppled and her rave came to an end as she hit the ground hard, sending mud and clay flying in all directions.

Tape curled across her body like streamers before becoming tight, nailing her there as she struggled against it. He looked to his right as he saw it but Ojiro and Tsuyu were already gone from beside him, instead both of them were far above the Lamia in the air from the ledge they used to jump from. At the highest point Tsuyu twirled and her tongue came with it, flinging Ojiro straight down at the Lamia’s forehead. The tail sped up as he was spun too and then with a final overhead flip came down as if it were a cudgel designed to be used to smash rock in two. Crack-tchink, the controlling opal went as it splintered.

Screeeee, the Lamia threw everything from its body, the tape and the three students. Then it tore itself from the hole beneath it, scales paled as it moved and threw and thrashed at anything it could reach. The dome shook but it was no more than a tantrum, he realised. It slowed and its remaining arm fell off, the opal had gone dull, the luxurious nature of the quirk that had inhabited it was gone now. Crack, it went again, this time pushing the lines into all parts of its surface. It stopped attempting to move as grey spread across it from the tail, robbing it of its life-like appearance, it shook its chest and head as if it would stop the effect but with each inch it crawled the heaving became less until it reached the opal. Clink, the opal echoed across the bowl and the remainder of the Lamia’s screams ceased as the opulent shard exploded into a million pieces, scattering gem dust everywhere.

His body shuddered, it was over. He let the quirks poison drain from his body into the floor one final time.

[Forest Lodge – The Forest of Beasts – 5:18 PM]

Riley grasped at the trunk of a tree as what he could only think was the lodge finally came into view. It was a concrete thing, dry, drab and foreboding yet for him now the most welcome of sights. It sat nested at the back among trees, with a large area out front that had been cleared, upon the entrance of which were situated half a dozen benches. It was there that concrete turned to short cut grass next to which also sat what he could see were equipment sheds and a dining hall, which made three main
buildings in total. The way it had been built kind of made it look like it was fighting with the landscape itself to stop it from reclaiming the little modern comfort that had been rended from it.

At the height of the main building was a dragon weathervane; they had come in from the east and with what must have been either impeccable timing or precise calculation they weren’t the only ones. It was without much count he could see everyone else had arrived, all from different cardinal directions.

“Damn dude you look like you’re about to die,” Kirishima walked up to him where he’d perched. The guy had very little actual scratches on him, but the weight of the task expressed itself in the sheen of sweat and pieces of cracked skin. “I guess maybe I should have given you that endurance training before the lodge, not after,” he grinned.

He answered with a degenerated sigh and instead checked his phone. No reception, not that he’d expected any, with some luck he would at least be able to charge it. He would probably need it to help him train. The device told him the time, “I can’t believe we were out there almost nine hours,” he said.

“Yeah, I think our teacher might be crazy,” Kaminari said. He had a white bandage around two of his fingers and his hair looked like it was about to burst into flame, his attempts to smooth it out were much in vain. "Please tell me we weren't the only group who had to fight a giant turtle."

“A turtle? We had a bird made of clay,” Kirishima said. They must have all had different creatures.

“Man, you guys got lucky, we had a half snake lady that almost took my head off,” Sero said as he came up behind Riley and patted him on the shoulder. “If there had been more after that I don’t think we would have made it,” he shook his head.

“Well, at least none of us fell behind,” he said, if anything all he wanted now was something to eat and just a bit of time to rest, no doubt Ojiro wanted that too after the stunt he’d pulled with bruised ribs and all.

“Noon my ass,” Bakugou said with a snarl, he was standing in front of the same black haired woman as earlier as well as her blonde companion, in the distance was that boy as well.

“Well, that’s by our standards. I guess I shouldn’t have exaggerated,” she laughed, “My name is Mandalay,” she nodded.

“And I’m Pixie-Bob!” the blonde one jumped forward at them. “Here I thought you’d take longer, the other class aren’t on the horizon yet!” she giggled, “To destroy my earth beasts that quickly, I can’t wait to see what happens with all of you in only a few years,” she might have jumped Bakugou down just then if Mandalay hadn’t gripped her by the collar.

“Take it down a notch Pixie-Bob,” she said.

“But I wanna call dibs right now!” she was practically salivating.

“I see she hasn’t changed, if anything she’s gotten worse,” Aizawa said. The man had come out of the large building, to instruct them presumably.

Mandalay pushed Pixie-Bob back further, enough to stop her ravaging, “She’s in a bit of a rush, something about her time running out with marriage proposals,” she shrugged. “She’s always been a bit eager to have kids, as you can see.”

“Speaking of kids… that boy-” Midoriya said only to have his face muffled by a white glove, Pixie-
Bob had taken her chance to roll under Mandalay’s arm at him.

“No speaking! Don’t ruin the moment my little hero-ling, I need to take you all in while I have the chance,” she tried to transition from a slap to a hug in the most awkward fashion imaginable.

Midoriya barely pushed the woman away, “-is one of you that child’s mother?” he pointed past her at the horn headed boy.

“Oh no, that’s my nephew, Kouta,” Mandalay said as she beckoned to him, “Come say hi and wipe that look off your face you brat, they’re staying here for a whole week so get used to it.”

When Kouta didn’t approach Midoriya did it for him, “Um, my name’s Midoriya, I’m studying to be a hero at Yuuei. Nice to meet you,” he said as he stuck out his hand. With a swing that he bet even Edgeshot couldn't have seen coming Kouta planted his fist firmly in Midoriya's crotch, keeling him over in a manner so savage it made himself and those around him wince in discomfort.

“Brutaaaaaal,” Kaminari said as Midoriya fell over in a slumped KO, Iida caught him but he was long gone.

“Going for the family jewels is just foul man!” Iida said with his lifeless friend in his arms.

“I'm not going to fuck around with a bunch of losers who want to be corny as heroes, fucking grow up,” Kouta stomped away. There was no hint of remorse there, which made him glad he hadn’t taken the initiative and tried to talk to the kid. He hadn’t seen someone with such distaste for heroes in a while, not one so childish anyway.

The last time he’d encountered that had been Stain, but it wasn’t a fair comparison. He doubted Kouta’s anger was born from their simple existence; rather it was more deeply seated than that. He didn’t have a particular interest in finding out the real reason if that was going to be the consequence though. It reminded him of the attitude an old timey lecturer at Leineif had kept, as if they were sick for even attempting to become heroes.

“Kid thinks he's an adult,” Bakugou smirked.

“Reminds me of someone I know,” Todoroki answered with a facetious tone.

The student growled, “He's nothing like me you fuck. At least I don't hide my emotions like a certain someone.”

He stepped back, “Just a joke, relax.”

“I don’t know where you find the energy to even get angry after that,” Kaminari shook his head.

“Enough chitchat, get your luggage and settle in, you have a long day ahead of you tomorrow and I’m not giving you time to mess around. Tonight will be your only chance to relax,” Aizawa pointed behind him to a building that read **Dormitory** on it. “That’s where you’ll be staying.”

He didn’t waste much time to debate the words and instead pulled his bags from the bottom of the bus, there was still a tangible metal to his bones combined with an effervescent zap, he was eager to get settled in because if almost destroying them was Aizawa’s idea of a good start to a trip then he knew he needed to recover to even stand a chance tomorrow.

An hour later he found himself at a bench, one of three, in front of a veritable buffet. It was good, great even, an array of everything varying from rice through to mutton and corn cooked on some
kind of open fire earthenware that lent it a well rounded smoked flavour however as his mind had
settled so had his stomach, he hadn’t eaten much more than what he considered his normal fill.
Rather than stuffing his maw like most of the others he had resorted to nursing a cup of some strange
liquid that was orange in colour, probably some type of soda. It could have been because of how
tired he was, he supposed.

Class one B had joined them after some time, an hour to be precise. Kuroiro had been there, as it
would have been weird for him not to be, strangely he wasn’t really hurting at all although the two
glimpses he got as he was promptly ignored by the guy didn’t tell him if that was actually the case. It
was probably for the best, his pride must have still been hurting after Shinsou had humiliated him in
the bathroom. Tsunotori had been friendly enough instead. Since she couldn’t text without service
she’d made a point to greet him as she passed by the table, much to Monoma’s displeasure.

He had caught glimpses of that boy again too, Kouta, though like before he had no desire to enter
that minefield. The boy was almost a handmaiden to the pussycats, carrying crates of food and plates
alike whenever asked. Unimportantly watching had let him determine that the horns were just an
accessory, like he had suspected, rather than a quirk. It had been revealed when Bakugou had
backhanded it off his head by accident in the middle of yelling at Midoriya. That incident wasn’t
really what mattered in that, what was important was that Midoriya also seemed to share the same
curiosity he had with Kouta, although something told him the green haired boy was much more
willing to tame the mystery of his vitriol after having already suffered the worst it probably had to
offer.

“Yeah, yeah, I’m on it don’t’chu worry,” Kirishima answered Jirou. Riley might have known the
question had he not been caught in his own thoughts.

“Something up?” he asked.

She shrugged, “Don’t worry about it.”

“…Right,” he hated when they did that. He still had no clue what they’d meant by it the first time,
back on the first day after his recovery. It had happened multiple times since then. There wasn’t
much time to think on it, not with Sero and Momo making so much noise just to the right of him.

“Every time I watch you eat it makes me want to vomit, how do you even stay so thin when you
chomp down on thousands of calories on a daily basis?” Sero asked. He had a disgusted look on his
face, though the way in which Momo ignored the snide comment implied she didn’t particularly care.

“You’re just jealous you don’t have a quirk like that man, it’s like a free pass to eat whatever she
likes,” Kaminari said, “Anyway it’s hardly like you’re eating healthy either Mr. Pan Fried Fish, those
things must be like two thousand calories a pop,” he chuckled before going back to his rice.

Hmph, Sero grumbled, the look on his face suggested he was actually reconsidering eating that last
baked fish before he swallowed it, there probably wasn’t much difference between five or six, “It still
can’t be good for you.”

“Like I told you before,” Momo said as she wiped down her lips with a napkin, “it doesn’t matter
how much I eat. My quirk relies on converting food to fat and then into objects, the more I eat the
more I can create.”

Sero’s grin widened, “I get it, like poop.”

Momo’s face fell open in shock, enough to make her drop the napkin. Then she promptly turned
over the bench and bent down, like she was embarrassed at the realisation.
“You…” Jirou glowered. Smack, she hit him hard across the jaw, “Dumbass!” Sero didn’t reply to that on account of being unable to, she’d clocked him hard enough to make his head spin. “You okay Momo?” she asked the still hunched girl.

“My quirk is not like that,” she was red all over.

“Yeah, it’s more like a factory,” Kaminari said, “Raw materials in one end and out the oth.”

Smack, another casualty hit the bench, “Idiots,” she said. “Anyone else got any smart alec comments they’d like a response to?”

“Nope, no, I think we get it,” Kirishima said, there was almost a fear in his voice.

“Y-yep,” Riley said and nodded his head twice. Dangerous, he thought.

“Thanks Jirou,” Momo said as she rubbed her nose, she did look just a bit upset about it.

“Hey aren’t we scheduled for the baths in like, less than twenty minutes?” Ojiro asked as he wiped his wrist across his mouth, clearing it of the last bit of a red tempura sauce.

“Indeed. It'll be nice to relax,” Iida answered as he folded the napkin he’d been using to stop his food spilling. “I expect everyone to be on their best behaviour,” he eyed a certain bauble headed someone over the table across and in reply only got a cheeky grin.

It was only a short while before everyone finished eating, at least with the exception of Kirishima. It almost felt like his stomach was endless, so much so that he almost regretted waiting for the guy. It was just when he was about to abandon him that he snapped the chopsticks he had together and placed them on his plate, finishing it off with a gross burp, by then they were practically alone with only Pixie-Bob, who was too busy stacking plates to even take note of them.

“Nasty,” he said in regards to the burp, “You done? I think we’re running behind.”

“I am. Here,” Kirishima shoved a bowl in his direction. It was full to the brim with sweet and sour noodles.

Hmm? he murmured as he looked at it. “There’s no way I’m cleaning up your leftovers for you, let’s just go and you can finish them in the morning if you’re full.”

“No man, that’s not it. Did you think I wouldn’t notice? I’m letting you leave till I watch you eat something. Even with what Recovery Girl said, almost healthy weight doesn’t mean anything close to actually healthy and you’re barely more than skin and bones, so get to it.”

“I’m not gonna force myself to eat,” he shook his head and tried to get up only to have Kirishima grab his arm and pull him back down.

“Then I’ll be the one forcing you, consider it part of me helping you out and you helping me out, as far as I’m concerned diet is as much part of my endurance training as running or using your quirk and it’s time you changed yours. My training means my rules, you agreed to it, right?”

Hmph, he murmured as he looked at Kirishima and then down at the bowl that he’d put in front of him, he knew the guy meant well and it wasn’t as if he weren’t right, he’d barely come in at forty-nine kilos, he’d weighed more than that a year ago. Begrudgingly he raised a hand at the spoon, took it and lifted the bowl, pushing it all down his gullet while barely chewing it. He was sure it would make him feel sick but rather once he put it down he actually felt content, like his stomach had been lying to him about his own sense of hunger.
“See? That wasn’t so hard was it?” his friend hit him on the back, “Now we can go, I don’t wanna be the last one at the springs either.”

He wiped his mouth and then as he got up he also finished that drink he had, he could feel his fatigue clearing up a tad. It kind of made him wish he wasn’t always so lacking in common sense; it would have been weird if he hadn’t been starved after a nine hour battle hike. Maybe that stubbornness came from his dad’s side, it would hardly be surprising if it did, that man was perfectly fine with acting irrationally. He dismissed the trifling thought and followed to the dorm room, he refused to compare himself to that man.

The air around the spring to which they’d been designated was unnaturally cold; a fact that did not align as soon as he’d actually entered the water which was by comparison alarmingly hot. It made the dull rocks around it hot too, enough to relieve tension as if it had been done by a masseuse. He’d combed the stickiness from his hair and the tarnish of grime from his body in a short time and now he just sat in it for the sake of it, it was important he got all that his quirk did to him out of his system or he’d have those nightmares again. It always felt like it got worse when he overdid it.

“Your natural hair colour is black? I can’t even tell,” Riley frowned. Even with Kirishima’s hair wet he almost looked completely different, like someone had ripped the spikes from them and left behind someone who wanted to look as moody as possible. His normal style was definitely more on point to his personality.

“Yep, having to re-dye it every so often kinda sucks but it’s worth it,” he said, most of his time had been spent paddling, asking him questions and trying to decide when there’d actually be a gap in the schedule to give him that mobility help he’d promised.

“Maybe taking you to visit Meina wouldn’t be such a bad idea,” he pointed at his own teal strands, “Never washes out, I thought it’d fade after a while but it doesn’t even do that. I think it’s actually growing from the roots in teal, too.”

“A permanent hair colour change? Sounds like a useful quirk,” he didn’t sound all that impressed.

“That’s what I said, how do you think it ended up like this?” he sighed. Meina had given him a bottle of something that smelt like a mixture of ammonia and turpentine, he assumed to wash it out if he wanted.

Kirishima laughed, “But you didn’t end up getting rid of it, so I guess that must mean it wasn’t a bad thing.”

“Maybe that woman is just too dangerous to risk her going anywhere near my skull again. I wouldn’t underestimate a colour quirk like that,” he chuckled. “Now, you wanted to see something cool, right?”

“Yeah, of course,” his friend grinned. It made Kaminari pause too, to watch.

He floated his hand ever so slightly beneath the surface of the water and concentrated. Slowly but surely the water ebbed into the centre of his palm like it had been magnetically compiled there, forming a small hill of liquid. He brought his other hand over it and quenched the mound, letting his compression go as he did the opposite and pushed on it instead. A gigantic puff of steam emerged and fogged up a few feet of the cold air above the bath, turning it warm for a second or two.

“Awesome,” Kirishima said, “Emitter quirks are so versatile compared to morphing ones.”

“If only that was actually useful, I can't really bring anyone down with a cloud of vapour. The only
thing it's really good for is a parlour trick,” he sat back and wiped his hand against the rock, causing the numbness to disappear. It was a trick he’d discovered on accident when a microwave in his dorm broke while heating cup noodles, so it did have one use he supposed.

“I’ve got a parlour trick as well if you guys wanna see,” Kaminari said.

“No, no way,” he answered, “I don’t want to get electrocuted sitting in a chest high pool of water.”

“Yeah, he’s right, the minute I see you sparking I’m out of here,” Kirishima nodded.

“You’re missing out on the most amazing thing ever, suit yourselves,” he shrugged.

“Can the most amazing trick be done in a situation where it might not certainly kill me?” he frowned.

“That’s half the fun, it’s like electric Russian roulette–” Kaminari paused as the noise behind him got just a bit too loud.

“What do you think you’re doing Mineta?!” Iida shouted as he frantically waved his hands at the student, who appeared to be listening against the tall wooden wall of the springs, the ones that separated the genders. “Stop disrespecting the school's rules with your ill behaviour.”

Pfft, Mineta scoffed, “Friggin' prude. This is what all guys live for, the chance of a life time,” he said as he pulled one of the purple quirk clumps from his hair. They were disgusting little things, impossible to get off without metal pincers as he had learnt.

“Come back here this instant,” Iida missed his grab as Mineta flung himself up the wall like a cockroach. The speed of his ascension was matched only by the appearance of lust on his face.

This can only end badly, he thought as he watched. The wall was a tall thing but what was dangerous about it lay on the other side, which was Jirou, this time she would kill him if he succeeded, although he had to admit the attempt was kind of funny to watch.

“I bet he's gonna fall,” Sero said fast as he watched the grape get further up. It was a fool's wager with how fast the guy was travelling.

“I'll take you up on that bet, if there's one thing no one can beat it's Mineta at perving,” Kaminari answered. It only took a few more seconds for Mineta to reach the top, but as he grasped at it another head popped out. This time it was Kouta, ready and standing with a small aluminium bat.

“If you're gonna be a shitty hero at least act with some morality!” Kouta yelled before whacking him straight in the gut with a thunk. The student was stunned and then he toppled, with all the grace of a bag of sand, back toward the earth. “Serves you right,” he said after him, before he turned. “Holy crap–” he gasped and stumbled, catching the edge of the ledge with his foot.

“Shit! He's gonna fall!” Rikidou shouted, his hand was outstretched but it wouldn't do much good with or without a burst of sugary speed from his quirk. There was no need anyhow, because less than halfway down a red buzzing threw water in all directions and in the blink of an eye Kouta was no longer falling but instead in Midoriya’s hands. It was better than Mineta’s collision, who'd landed ass first in Iida’s face.

“Close one,” Kirishima said as Midoriya put the boy down.

“Is he unconscious? Damn, that must have been some sight. Lucky kid,” Kaminari had left the water and was now holding his chin, like he hadn’t almost just seen someone die.
“Looks like you owe me Kaminari,” Sero grinned.

“Wha- oh shit, goddammit Mineta,” he recalled his foolish words seconds ago, “First you disappoint me in the exams and now this. You're losing your touch pervert-lord,” he gave the grape headed student an irritated prod in the forehead.

“I thought I was going to die man, it would have all worked out so great if not for that twerp. Why is everyone always getting in the way of my glory!” Mineta said with a sullen voice. His grasp was still outstretched toward the paradise he’d lost beyond the wall, before he gave it up and resigned himself to collecting the towel he’d dropped instead.

“Imbeciles,” Tokoyami said with an annoyed pinch on his forehead. Kouda beside him wore a bemused smirk.

“He probably just passed out from the vertigo,” Todoroki said, a splash of cold water had done little to try and wake the wall guard.

“I'll take him to Mandalay,” Midoriya said as he picked Kouta back up.

“That's probably for the best,” Iida said between bouts of vigorous washing of his face brought about by Mineta landing on him in the worst way possible.

“Where were we?” Kirishima said as Midoriya left and he turned back. “Oh right, parlour tricks. I got one, wanna see?” he held up his hand.

“Hit me,” Riley answered and watched as the hardening slowly began to cover it in a filamentous fashion like a straw or perhaps a capillary, which his friend subsequently held at the surface of the water. Liquid travelled up the tube along his arm, beside his neck before squirting out of his face like it had been shot from a water pistol.

“Gross dude,” he laughed while sending a much larger splash in retaliation.

[Apartment 87G – Downtown Hosu – 10:53 PM]

Toshiniro Yagi sat at his desk with his head bowed in deep thought, “Where are you hiding All for One?” he said to no one in particular before taking a long gulp of water soured by the taste of a diluted lime cordial. He'd given up liquor a long time ago along with his injury and the tame drink was better than nothing. Keeping his head on straight was another benefit he supposed.

Strings stretched themselves across the wall and tethered disparate facts, faces, locations and names into a webbed puzzle. It was something he'd seen Naomasa doing once at the police station, and subsequently adopted for himself. He wasn't sure if the technique actually helped him but he was willing to try anything to keep the details of the riddle in check. Besides, it made him feel like a detective from one of those old timey noire movies, which was satisfying in its own way.

He pulled at some of the tensed cords and they gave out a reverberating twang as they twitched from side to side. The ones he’d touched connected the few known members of the villain alliance and were thus a dull grey colour. A deep metallic red thread connected All for One to his own picture and subsequently a fine blue thread connected himself to Izuku Midoriya and to his previous successor Nana Shiamura.

He averted his gaze to the open window that still blew light cold into his lofty apartment. He pushed his chair back gently as he stood and approached it. For a moment he wondered what Nana might feel if she were to see him right now. Would she think him a failure for not yet having defeated the
enemy that had been her downfall?

No, he guessed. She wasn't the kind of person to place blame on others. Maybe she would have scolded him for his recklessness though, all while wearing that overwhelming smile that he always did his best to imitate. Even now he felt like he should be doing more; he was the Symbol of Peace after all. It was when he was All Might that he felt he could save everyone, that not one person was out of the reach of his saving grasp. Yet he knew that was impossible, there was always someone he couldn't save.

What would become of him when the quirk eventually faded? Deep down he could feel the light of One for All dimming with every step Midoriya took forward in replacing him. He didn't feel regret in having passed on the mantle to someone who deserved it, but perhaps he felt shame for not fully explaining the cursed nature of the cloak itself.

Naturally he would go on to mentor Midoriya as best as he could. The world needed its Symbol of Peace and he would foster the fire in that boy until he was ready to become the world's light, the All Might for a new generation. In a way it was cathartic but sad that he knew Midoriya would also one day face these same feelings, to pass on the torch to one he deemed worthy; no doubt a quirkless kid with a heart to match his own.

He knew it'd be alright, the boy had friends and classmates that he knew were trustworthy and undoubtedly would become great heroes someday. He would protect Midoriya and them until he couldn't anymore. He wouldn't allow a single one of them to fall into the enemy's clutches again if he could so help it. He'd already seen what the villain alliance was capable of and it had turned his stomach, at least what was left of it. It wasn't something anyone should have to suffer through. There was still a lingering regret there, one that yearned for a juvenile sense of revenge that he knew he couldn't act on. Instead it was marked by a black thread. The villain Aizawa had described deserved as much designation with how mysterious he was, not to mention downright cruel.

He leaned onto the windowsill gently. The villain alliances grasp was spreading in this city. He could feel its effect in the crimes he apprehended every day. They were just a little more organized, just a little more concentrated and just a little more deadly, worst of all they were getting bigger. It was an enigma he intended to resolve before his time as the number one hero came to an end. He would stop All for One, even if it cost him his life.

The window made a solid thunk as he shut it and barred away the city. It was a chilling night, far too chilling for the trip his students were on. He could kick himself for agreeing to stay behind, even if he could see the principal's point. There was no way they should be in danger though. He'd made so sure himself that the location was not known to anyone except a select few. It was beyond top secret.

Even as he resigned himself to sleep, he couldn't shake the feeling of unease.

Chapter End Notes

*I don't own BNHA. OC material is my own.
He awoke to the pain of someone stepping on his arm, “Fuck,” he yelped as he went from a state of intense rest to immediate agitation. “Son of a-”

“Sorry, dude,” Kirishima scratched his head, “Not really the way I intended to wake you, my bad. I guess it works better than shaking though, you’re a pretty heavy sleeper ya know.”

He didn’t reply, instead he shut his eyes tight, causing a quelling sound in his skull, before reopening them, it was bright, too bright for his poor sleepless eyes, “Use a bucket of water next time,” he groaned as he fell back down onto the pile of munted pillows, sleeping bags and bed mats. It wasn’t a nightmare to blame for it for once; rather it was that he’d spent far too long actually awake last night. They all had with the exception of Iida.

He wiped his brow and then pulled at his hair and groaned once more before finally shaking himself out of it. It was almost worth it, watching Mineta hustle Bakugou for five thousand Yen in less than ten minutes of playing cards had been some feat, even more so when the guy had launched the small student halfway across the room after finding the cards he’d been hiding behind his back with that slimy hair of his. That had been just a small portion of the night, unwise and fun as it had been.

“Well, I guess you’re up now. You got like twenty minutes or you won’t be getting breakfast, almost everyone else is already downstairs ‘cept for you guys.”

“Yeah, yeah I got it,” he sighed and crooked his neck. He looked around for his bag and his eyes tripped over Kaminari and Mineta, still passed out. Twenty minutes was plenty of time to get ready but maybe not for those two. Something told him if he didn’t eat breakfast he’d be choking down a double dose courtesy of his friend later. He discarded his shorts and found a set of his gym clothes to pull on, then almost tripped up on his feet getting down the stairs. The hall was filled, the same as it had been the day before, this time with boxes of cereal strewn between plates of toast and a few savoury soups, beans and meats.

“Morning sleepyhead,” Jirou said as he sat down, “Here I thought you had become an early riser.”

He yawned, “Shit happens,” he’d get more rest the next night. Then he reached for one of the crumpled pieces of toast, before reconsidering and grabbing two. They had long since gone cold but he didn’t particularly care as he streaked them with butter and some strange jam substance.

“By the looks of it I have like two hours in the afternoon at best,” Kirishima said as he looked at the paper sheet he’d been given, it took only a peek to reveal the horror of what remedial classes actually entitled him to.

“So he’s taking the remedial class time out of your sleep, I guess that makes sense,” he shrugged. The guy would be lucky to get five hours a night for the next six days.

His friend crushed the paper in his hand, “No way am I letting this go to waste, I gotta get myself up to a whole new level this week.”

“Well if there’s anyone with the determination to do it,” Jirou said before she stood, “Either way
hurry it up, Aizawa wants us out in the field in ten,” she said as she turned and left through the large door connecting them to the outside.

He ripped the two pieces of toast apart and began tossing back what he could get his hands on, probably two or three times what he would normally. Once he was done he went for a glass of water, stopping halfway through it as it was almost unusually quiet now. He knew why as he looked to his right, Kirishima hadn’t said so much as a word in three minutes while he’d been eating, not even to tell him to eat more.

His friend was glowering and his voice left him quieter than usual, “Only five people out of our combined forty-one failed, I barely even scraped by on my written test scores,” he shook his head. “I really am falling behind, aren’t I?”

He paused and put his glass down, “Hey,” he said with as much annoyance as he could muster, causing the red head to look at him. “What would Crimson Riot think if he saw a pitiful man like you trying to live up to his name? I doubt he’d be very happy,” the last thing he was going to let him do was lose his motivation like he himself had.

Kirishima perked up, “Yeah, you’re right. I can’t afford to get caught up in doubt,” he nodded. “Don’t flake on me for those two hours, you got it? I need that training.”

“I already have something in mind,” he answered. There was a reason why his bag had been so heavy to carry.

“Great. I don’t wanna waste time then, especially when I have something to look forward to,” his friend got up and jumped from the bench. It was a bit amazing how quickly he’d gotten over his low spirits, or he was just good at hiding it.

“Right, Aizawa is going to put me in remedial too if we’re late,” he shook his head, “Let’s go,” he said before a hand grabbed him on the collar, stopping him from doing so.

“Stay. I need to talk to you,” he recognised the voice but a look confirmed it as Kuroiro.

“You’re that guy,” Kirishima said, walking up to the 1-B student, “Back off, man.”

“This is none of your business knuckle dragger,” the charcoal student answered. It looked like he was about two seconds from being punched into the floor by the way his friend was fuming from the comment.

“Its fine, go ahead without me,” he said, he could talk, talking was better than punching.

“You sure?” he said, looking at him like he was uncertain, to which he nodded. It was enough to make him shrug and begin walking away, albeit warily like he was still keeping his eye on him. Kuroiro let go of him and sat down, the most prominent feature of his face was always his teeth, he had noticed, they glared white against the mutational quirk the 1-B student possessed.

“So, here to fuck with me again or just my friend this time?” he asked. As sly as his impression had been it had annoyed him, ‘knuckle dragger,’ like he had any right to judge Kirishima. It wasn’t the first such utterance. He would let him speak first, though.

Kuroiro groaned, “Shut up and listen,” he shifted in his seat before looking at him just a bit, “Consider this my apology, it’s all you’re gonna get.”

He wasn’t sure if he’d heard correctly, “You’re sorry?”
“Yes, don’t make me repeat myself.”

“Why the change of heart?” it was unexpected, to say the least.

“At first I really hated you for what you did to me,” he raised his hand.

“Like I said, I wasn’t myself, I meant it,” he didn’t want to elaborate further, he’d be breaking Nedzu’s account of events. He’d already kind of tip-toed after the incident with the hero killer.

“It wasn’t that you broke my hand, it’s that I had to wear that cast. Recovery Girl said it was risky to heal with her quirk, too risky, she’d never seen anything like it. I’ve never really had a big scare like that, the chance I’d never be able to use my hand the same just from half a second of touching someone.”

“It did cross my mind, the fact you hadn’t gotten it healed,” his mouth felt a bit numb, the zap he’d given Kuroiro had been decompression; something he could only intuitively realise in retrospect. “I’m sorry, it must have been a really shitty feeling. You had every right to be mad at me, but just so you know there’s no way I would use my quirk to hurt someone from my own programme for fun.”

“Yeah, well, I realised that too after you stood up to Monoma, I doubt you could lethally hurt a fly with that quirk unless it burnt your house down. It was him who convinced me you had done it intentionally; I was pretty much ready to chop you down to just being an asshole like that Bakugou guy.”

“The only thing Monoma is good at is spreading lies. I can guarantee you what he told you about me is nothing but bullshit,” now he had another reason to despise that guy.

Kuroiro scoffed, “Hardly takes a genius to figure that out, but considering my injury I wanted to believe it.”

“I get it,” he answered. “I probably would have done something similar.”

“Then that’s that, I’ll see you around,” he pushed himself back to stand before pausing, “And don’t think me apologising means I give a crap about what happens to you, I am not your friend or your buddy or some petty shit like that but consider us even, villain kid, for now anyway.”

That nickname, he thought, hopefully it wouldn’t stick, “That’s fine by me,” he shrugged, “I just want to say one thing before you go, for your benefit.”

“What?” the student asked, he’d already dissociated himself from the bench.

He pushed away the plate as he stood and stepped over, coming up to the Kuroiro's eye level, Kirishima didn't deserve any insults even if the guy was sorry, “I don’t care if you call me names or hit me to take your anger out or whatever but if I see or hear you do it to a friend of mine again then you’re going to spend the rest of this lodge with your feet nailed to the floor,” Kuroiro didn’t answer, he just looked a bit surprised as he patted him on the shoulder, “Have a good trip,” he said before leaving him there.

The place they’d gathered at wasn’t too far from their lodging. It was about two hundred feet through the trees and amounted to what was the side of a cliff face, beneath which was the only place not riddled with tree albeit still surrounded by them at all sides. There were flat spires of earth next to it that looked unnatural and he could guess what had made them, as there atop one sat none other than the heroine who’d introduced herself as Pixie-Bob.
“That guy still giving you a hard time?” Kirishima asked as Riley walked up beside him. A crowd had formed that he was the only of his class to not have joined yet but from the looks of it Aizawa had not noticed his absence yet. Even Kaminari and Mineta had made it, although they were falling asleep on their feet by the looks of it.

“No, I guess it’s all settled really,” they were back to square one as far as he saw it, just acquaintances, it had gone better than he could have hoped. That last bit too, as petty as an insult was it wasn’t something he felt he could let slide, perhaps Leina had rubbed off on him more than he realised.

“Glad to hear it, that guy gives me the creeps.”

“Do you think you have time to be jabbering back there remedial?” Aizawa said with an annoyed glare. He was standing in front of a box, filled with what looked like scripts and measuring objects.

“Sorry, Sir,” Kirishima winced.

“Whatever,” the teacher dropped his expression and instead pulled out a softball from the box as well as one of the devices, they were identical to those they had used during the quirk apprehension test. “Bakugou, if I remember your best event was the softball throw,” he threw the ball at him. “Go ahead.”

Bakugou caught it and wasted no time in reading what Aizawa wanted, he pulled his arm back like a slingshot and loosed it, “Drop dead!” he shouted as the ball left his hand with a smoking boom. The ball missed the trees as it went up and over before coming down somewhere between the greenery half a mile away. He hadn’t even waited for the rest of them to give him space.

“Only seven hundred and nine meters but that’s about what I expected,” Aizawa held the machine toward them face first.

“That was almost disappointing,” Ashido said. “Kind of expected it to go like five kilometres compared to last time.”

Tch, Bakugou scoffed. He looked displeased with his own score too.

“Your experience and technique have improved yet your actual quirk has wilted by comparison, that’s what you’ll be improving on and that goes for the lot of you. The week you’re spending at the lodge here will be an attempt to make up that weakness and several others which I have accounted for in these booklets,” he pointed at the box. “The end goal of this training will be to get you ready to earn your temporary hero licenses.”

“Temporary licenses?!” Midoriya almost visibly hopped at the words.

“So that means we’ll be able to intervene and everything in emergencies,” Iida nodded.

“Yes, it’s an important step in your learning however to that end you must push beyond your current pathetic limits, it’ll be hell in its purest form,” he smirked, “So try not to kick the bucket on me.”

The dossier rested in his hands a little time after he’d received it, flicking through it provided him half with what he already knew and the remainder what had not been so obvious. He was mostly waiting now for a specific means to accomplish just what it said and that Pixie-Bob was preparing for him. Around the area chaos has already begun to spring up, basaltic ice fields smoked among discharges of deadly electricity atop a spire which beneath rock cracked and tongues whipped. Rolls of tape struck rock haphazardly before being spliced by the advent of lasers striking across them, crumbling to rue among objects created one second and discarded the next. It was all a result of a flame Aizawa
had lit, one of self-loathing that each of them wanted to quench.

“Hey,” a distinctly English speaking voice said.

“Hey,” he answered Tsunotori, the rest of her class had only just arrived.

“Crazy display your class has going on here,” she said as she sat down beside him. She too had a dossier, though this one had Blood King written across it rather than Eraserhead. He hadn’t seen the 1-B teacher much in his time at the school.

“Yeah, you got that right,” he held one hand up to the back of his neck.

“Are you going to join in?” she asked.

“Trust me I want to,” he answered and then looked over his shoulder at Pixie-Bob, she was still hard at work. There was no way for her to rush it by the looks of it. “What about you?” it wasn’t like she had joined in yet either.

“Aha, I want to but I’m still trying to build up the courage to walk up to that big cat guy,” she pointed in the direction of the trees. He knew who she meant as it was the only man in the pussycat’s troupe, the one who was currently beating the ever living shit out of Midoriya, Tiger.

“He is pretty scary I guess,” he looked over at her, “How does your quirk work anyway?”

“Oh, it’s kind of a variation between mutational and strengthening,” she pointed at the various appendages she had, horns, tail, hooves and all. “The further I charge the stronger the impact.”

“Sounds pretty strong,” he said, “Maybe you should try bashing that guy a bit,” he pointed at Kirishima, who was still focussing all his efforts on having Ojiro sock him in the face as hard as possible with his tail. “Toughest guy I know.”

“His quirk is like Tetsu’s right?”

“Yeah, I’m sure you saw it during the festival, it’s like they’re long lost brothers or something.”

“Guess I’ll try that until Mr. Tiger isn’t busy,” she shrugged.

“Toooooreenaaagii,” Pixie-Bob yelled behind him, causing him to turn, “It’s all ready, go nuts,” she pointed over her shoulder at what she had created, which as nothing but a thick dome from the outside, a sort of cage if he had to compare it to something.

“Thanks, Ma’am,” he said and then nodded at Tsunotori, “Guess I better get to it.”

“Me too,” she smiled.

He put down the dossier, stood and walked up to the creation, then into it. It felt more massive on the inside and was probably the size of a squash ball court. The only light that made its way through was via holes that had been poked into it as if it were a colander. It was something his quirk could hit for days with a chance of breaking and that was exactly what Aizawa had instructed him to do. His limit was in simplest terms inconsistent, although his teacher hadn’t said it in such tame words; he needed to be able to last far longer than he had during the festival, doing so would inevitably boost his close range capabilities too.

As he sat down the woman’s face peeked in once more, “I’ll release my grip in exactly thirty seconds, try not to get crushed!” Pixie-Bob looked gleeful at the prospect. He nodded at her and
watched as the wall closed back up, he was well aware of what she was about to do. Aizawa’s plan to force him to push him wasn’t just limited to trying to compress her quirk but it was far more sadistic, rather he would need to try and stop it all from collapsing on him and if he failed he would end up with nothing short of a tapestry of nasty bruises. It was what the man had referred to as “motivation.”

He grabbed the headphones from around his neck and put them on. They were sturdier than his phones earphones, something Jirou had lent him when he’d mentioned what Aizawa had instructed him of, it was a good thing too with all the noise that came from the outside. **Ten seconds,** he thought as he switched to a playlist of songs without lyrics and set the volume to just a decibel or three below harmful.

Then as the sound flooded in and flushed everything else out he raised his hands. They ebbed first, then zapped and felt thick as they always did at the start of the quirk. There was nothing in particular to focus his quirk on this time, he would have to try and use it on everything as equally as he could so it wouldn’t fall. An inherent problem came with that, as much practice as he had the idea of using his compression on two different places at once was nothing short of a pipe dream. It was the kind of feat that was the equivalent of watching and counting the number of cars passing on two separate high speed motorways, unpredictable and headache inducing and foolish.

His arms tightened as he felt Pixie-Bob’s quirk shake, clumps of dirt were already raining on him. He locked them up more, they needed to be more rigid even as the trembling set in or else he’d lose his concentration. It helped him for a second but brought little relief, with each part of the great dome he compressed another became loose. If one could muster such a ridiculous feat as building a castle from nothing but dry desert sand then this must have been what it would have been like, the quirk equivalent of trying to herd cats.

His arms sweltered by the first minute of it and were at the point where he had to take a risk and slam his hands into the floor for a fraction of a second, enough to relieve the pain they’d built up. He pushed it all as deliberately as he could into only the immediate area surrounding him, what that gave him was panting and pain and a rock almost hitting him square in the head. He looked up and then didn’t pause to re-raise his hand. Ten percent of the thing had already been lost through its instability and his inability.

Another minute passed. He gritted his teeth and closed his eyes; his arms felt like they were on fire trying to keep it all in place, eighty five percent must have remained at best. This time he didn’t lower his hands to the floor but kept them poised, there was no gap to do so, he could feel it in the floor and ceiling as he tried to push it together over and over.

Three more minutes passed. There was pain in not just his hands now but across his body and in his head, a pounding oscillation scathing his every nerve and promising him with each second that he pursued that he might be getting closer to having nothing short of an aneurysm. The sound in his ears was a mixture of his own shaking and the sound from his phone, it was building and touching and clawing its way up to something that only served to enrage the tremor further. He was bowed now, no longer cross legged, almost leaning forward as he tried to stop everything from collapsing on his head. It felt like it might fall at any second, he’d cramped his elbows onto his legs just to keep them up, they were digging in hard now and trembling relentlessly.

Then it hit him like a rough scratch from his right ear down his chest and through his left leg, like he’d been cut with a knife. The quirks reverberation was strong and stunning and almost shattered his rib as it charged through his body against his will. He had not allowed his hands to touch the floor but it had taken matters into its own hands, siphoning into the dirt like a ground current. He could only hold the revolting feeling as it happened, its touch wilted grass and flowers that became
the equivalent of springs, the floor beneath twisted into shapes that a basketball court might take on after a severe flood, it didn’t crack but warped and shuddered as the quirk mutated it and then travelled through to the dome itself.

*Thoom,* the dome took the hit with nothing short of pride. It did not let itself be changed in shape but instead just collapsed all at once like that was somehow the better result. *Crash,* it went as it snapped apart in ruinous chunks and then came to a stop all at once as his great cage became nothing more than rubble.

The last of it left him and he fell to the floor and rolled onto his back, the heat of the sun was upon him now mixed with the twitching of his muscles as they recovered from the strain he’d put on them. He was only left sitting there for thirty seconds before the heard the setting of steps sinking into the dirt beside him.

“Holy… shit…” he said between laboured breaths.

“That was fun,” Pixie-Bob said, “Now let’s do that again like twenty more times!” she giggled.

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**[Forest Lodge – Dining Hall – 5:49 PM]**

Riley glanced at his hands as they jittered, they hadn’t stopped since an hour ago when they’d finally ceased training to take a break to make dinner, he’d been periodically weaning the sensation into a glob of earth Pixie-Bob had given him but the action had helped little. At this rate he was sure the woman would kill him before this week was over through sheer exhaustion.

“Give me that,” Jirou said as she dropped the bag of potatoes on his bench and proceeded to snatch the knife from his hands, “You’re going to hurt someone like that.”

“Sorry, I can’t help it,” he touched the rock again, bringing more reduction. He didn’t even want to think about what he had right after this, it would surely make it worse again. There would definitely be nightmares tonight unlike the previous.

“Doesn’t matter, just sit down, from the looks of it you’re an abysmal cook,” she shook her head and cleaned up the mess he’d made of what was to be their dinner.

“Maybe I shoulda asked Bakugou to do it,” he chuckled as he left her to it. It had come as a surprise to be honest but he’d been by far the most skilled cook out of the lot of them. Maybe his parents had taught him, surely it would have been only someone as monstrous as he himself was to pull it off, it wasn’t really an answer to the question as no one, not even Kirishima, had been anywhere near the hot headed student’s neighbourhood let alone his house. Perhaps it was a sign that even Bakugou had something he found embarrassing, the thought was kind of funny.

He rolled his shoulder as he sat down at one of the benches, he’d decided to change his tact of wearing the weights for the duration of the camp, rather than wear them while training he would wear them whenever he wasn’t. He knew there were other activities scheduled over the next few days and that way he would at least be able to throw his all into the training without accidentally mutilating one of the things while still getting some of their benefit. Leina had made it very clear after their short conversation that if he broke these ones she would break him.

“Aizawa’s giving me looks dude,” Kirishima said as he trotted down beside him after what had felt like twenty minutes. “I think he’s going to enjoy these remedial classes a little too much.”

“I’m sure all of us will be giving you our thoughts, you know, while we’re asleep,” he smirked.
“Ass,” he laughed, “Just for that I’m going to beat you twice as bloody next time we fight.”

“I’d like to see you try,” he grinned back.

“Speaking of which, we’re going to head straight out there after, right? With all that extra sleep you’re getting it should be no problem for you to keep going a bit today, yeah?”

“I’m not backing out if that’s what you’re suggesting,” he tightened his still pulsing hand on the rock once more, this time it didn’t withstand the decompression and crumbled to bits, “Damn it,” he sighed.

“Man, that’s some downside you got there,” his friend shook his head.

“It’s usually not that bad but after that she-devil forced me to do it over and over like that it’s taking a while to stop,” he knew Kirishima had watched him at one point between breaks, he was sure the guy had seen him get exactly zero of his own.

“Well, considering what your file said it’s probably exactly what you need,” he shrugged. “I can’t believe there is a seventy two percent discrepancy in your quirks stamina dude, that’s really unreliable.”

“Yeah…” he answered. It had been a rather daunting number, Kirishima’s had been twelve percent and Jirou’s only three percent, his own had been three times bigger than the average. He hadn’t figured out why it was so huge but he had his speculation, though he kind of wanted to ask Aizawa about it directly before he came to any conclusions. The man had a far better eye for detail than he did and he’d written the dossier anyway; surely he knew the exact reason.

“So, get any more of those urges again?” Kirishima asked.

“No,” he answered. It had moved closer, about the equivalent of one step on a staircase but no further. It was definitely linked with his mental state somehow, that much was becoming clearer with each passing day and just like he’d thought anger and desperation were more like catalysts rather than causes like he’d told him.

“Bakugou!” Sero yelled across the lodge ground, “I said light the fire not blow up our dishware.”

“Fuck you, it’s finished cooking anyway numb nuts,” Bakugou answered with a snarl.

Kirishima chuckled beside him, “Time to chow down, come on,” he said as he pulled him to his feet.

Not twenty five minutes later the two of them had found a spot outside, around the back of the dorm building, they had about an hour and ten minutes to kill before Kirishima was going to be doomed for the rest of the night. His hands had stopped shaking for now, after he’d gone through several more clumps of dirt he’d had to ask for, the whole thing was kind of beginning to get embarrassing because it showed exactly how much practice he needed with it. He’d definitely need to work on it after he helped Kirishima.

“Put these on,” he said as he dropped a heavy bag at his friends feet, it was a smaller one that had been within his own, the hospital bag with the weights in it. Good thing he’d kept it.

“Your weights?” Kirishima said as he took one out of the bag, “Holy shit these are heavy, you wear these all the time?”

“No,” that would have been ridiculous. “I double packed them because you’re like one and a half
weight classes up from me. They’d feel like a minor inconvenience at best if I didn’t.”

“Makes sense,” he said as he slipped them on. He looked well versed in equipping the things, or maybe it was because the gym clothes weren’t annoyingly strict like his uniform always was. In less than a minute he had all nine of them on. “So what’s the plan?” he stumbled around a bit as he got used to it.

“All you’re going to do is dodge, don’t bother using your quirk,” he answered.

“What?” his friend blinked.

“You heard me. All you need to do it dodge me, don’t try to fight back or knock my teeth out, just dodge.”

“Sounds easy enough,” his friend nodded. “Kinda thought we’d be trying to lay each other out, ya know?”

“Well I figured this would help both of us, me with my quirks endurance and you with your manoeuvrability… and I don’t think we should be breaking bones here.”

“Sounds reasona-” he cut himself off, “Wait you get to use your quirk but I don’t?” he asked.

Mhmm, he answered. “Every time you let me touch you I’m going to make that part of your body heavier. You probably won’t notice it at first but it’ll add up quickly. Should be a sure-fire way to make you faster without you even realising it since you’ll need to compensate to keep dodging.”

“Is this what you did when you fought Edgeshot?”

“I wouldn’t call what me and Edgeshot did much of a fight, more like a one sided ass beating,” he shook his head.

“Must have been awesome though, fighting a top five pro, Fourth Kind told us that heroes shouldn’t fight each other period. Fists are made to put villains behind bars, not put bruises on your colleagues,” Kirishima shrugged.

He smirked, “It’s probably a bit hard to imagine but the first thing Edgeshot said to me when we fought was,” he deepened his voice as much as he could, “Come kill me hero, if you can.”

“What a badass.”

“I was far more scared of his sidekick by the end of it honestly.”

“I can’t imagine a sidekick being scarier than a pro,” Kirishima scratched his head.

He looked to his right and then raised his voice before saying, “Well, think of Bakugou right? But a hundred times cooler, just a smidgen more aggressive and with way more experience.”

“That bad, huh? I didn’t think it was possible to be more aggressive than McSplody,” he gave a hearty laugh.

“I’m right here you fuckwits,” Bakugou jumped out from behind the corner he’d evidently been leaning against and listening from.

“Oh, so you were watching,” Kirishima said with a chuckle, “And here I thought you said you weren’t interested.”
Bakugou almost growled like a dog at the comment.

“See now, Leina wouldn’t have growled, she would have just clocked you one instead of wasting that kind of effort.”

_Bang_, his hand exploded, “You want me to? I’ll gladly fucking clock you right now you two-face as motherfucker.”

He furrowed his brow and tilted his head, “Now you’re just scraping the bottom of the barrel,” two-face didn’t even have the same type of scars, “Anyway, I don’t care if you want to watch or not. Let’s just get to it Kirishima.”

A defiant _hmph_ was all Bakugou replied with, before this time taking a seat in a plain view.

“You got it, Sir,” Kirishima grinned.

“Yeah, don’t do that,” he shook his head, now he knew how Ko felt. After he let Kirishima retreat a few steps he dropped into his stance, this he knew, he had to work on as well. He tapped the ground with the back of his heel and then lunged.

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**[Forest Lodge – Boy’s Dormitory – ??? AM Friday]**

Riley awoke in an uncomfortable squirm of dizziness and sweat, images drained away from his mind as vivid as they had been and faded into nothing more than the thought of a field and his walking of it. He sat up and could hear the intermingled breathing and snoring of the others around him as they slept, it must still have been early into the night. He didn’t want to wake anyone but the feeling of dizziness was quickly diverting into one of anxiety and claustrophobia that he wasn’t used to.

The reason he’d awoken was precise as it was blatant, he’d used his quirk too much plain and simple. It had been an irresponsible decision to practice compression and decompression until bed but a necessary one; he needed to make it take less energy and less effort. This week was all about that like Aizawa had said. He hadn’t used much teaching Kirishima anyway, it only took five or six touches to make the guy unable to move each time, the exerted effort had been more physical than quirk-related. Even having said that, the nightmares hadn’t been dissuaded. Maybe he really should try to call his sister.

He shook away the suggestion and lugged himself to his feet. He needed to get out for a bit, to breathe and let the sickness drain from him as he knew it would. With as much subtlety as he could he disentangled himself from the mess of sleeping students while trying not to step on anyone. Eventually he made it to the door, from which beside he reached into his bag for a thick woollen shirt, a blue hooded sweatshirt that’d he bought and the multicoloured book he’d almost thought twice about bringing.

He slid the door shut behind him and made his way down the steps, it was lucky that they had such a big dorm, combined with the girls’ one across the hall it meant that the teachers weren’t particularly keen on sharing a building with them, as such he didn’t have to worry about running into one as he made his way downstairs and out of the mess hall. He released a warm breath and took in a cold one as he stepped from frigid concrete to toe numbing grass covered soil. It pricked his lungs as it settled and worsened as he walked through the trees to a place he’d seen earlier that day. It was a part of the cliff face but rather distant from where he’d started; on the opposite side of where they’d been training and a five minute walk to get up to.

Battling against frostbite had almost made it too much but he found the spot, a collapsed tree trunk
that edged against the drop off the cliff. It was fortunate tonight wasn’t cloudy as the bright moonlight let him almost see everything within a few miles clear as day and meant he wouldn’t have to resort to his makeshift flashlight. He realised as he plopped down on the trunk that he was clutching the book harder than he’d been meaning to, that could have been due to a sense of unease.

It wasn’t that he was afraid of the darkness swaying in the trees around him, not at all, but rather that he found the book unnerving. It had thus far had proven as much in its storytelling; each page had been a disparate weave of detail that made no continual sense until one came closer to the ending. It felt like with every page he turned he was edging nearer to something he mightn’t actually want to read. It made each page harder to turn, harder to understand and harder to interpret but he needed to finish it. He needed to know what would happen.

The forest, he realised now, probably wasn’t helping his languid apprehension. He could see over the edge easily even the few feet away he was, in the swirling void of trees, leaves and gnarled roots sitting about fifty feet down. Cold night air poked through underneath the hem of his shorts and the edge of his sleeves, he really should have packed long trousers or at least worn socks and shoes.

The best distraction from it was probably just to do what he’d come up here to do, and so he flipped the page open to where there was a bookmark in the shape of a porcelain dog, mounted in a two dimensional laminated square. It was something Momo had made for him after she’d seen him flipping the corners of his textbooks, in total he had five which was far more than he needed and so one found itself pinned in his strange affliction.

Chapter 20 – Barey; he read the title and then what came after, a minute passed and then forty more.

Thwick, the book went as he shut it. He tossed it aside and scratched his head as it reeled with words. He wasn’t sure if he felt more ill now or less, however confusion had definitely cropped up. It wasn’t even like he knew why, in truth the main character, who was someone he didn’t care all too much about, had perished. It wasn’t the fact that the character had died that had made him feel sick to his stomach.

It was the idea that did it, to realise in a moment that you aren’t you at all, to disappear like you hadn’t existed or to take on the identity of another thing entirely was terrifying and all too coincidental. Why had he even picked that book in the first place? It had been peculiar sure but it hadn’t been the only one.

Thinking about it made his head swim; it made it flood with paranoia. He clutched at his skull and felt his hair was damp, damper then it should have been. A fine misty spray began to fall from the sky from distant clouds that didn’t exist and he felt it on his skin and within each of his senses like it was overpowering him. He could hear gushing of streams that weren’t there and the clicking of gears at the edge of his mind.

He heard it in one tone, one long drawn out whisper that hit his mind like a pebble thrown in a lake. It had been something about his thoughts that had brought it but there wasn’t time to think about that, he had to calm down, he had to calm down right now.

“Wandering around alone isn’t a good idea you know, a villain might come and getcha!” he jumped as he felt a hand on his shoulder and his heart skipped a beat. The fright hit all the retention out of his body and everything set itself straight, like nothing had happened. It was Mandalay who had done it, who had pulled him back from that.
She laughed as she saw his face, “Did I spook you? Sorry kid, I thought you must have heard me from a mile away,” the black haired heroine was wearing a thick nightgown rather than a costume and she looked like she was chilled same as him, “Got big plans out here? Goddamn freezing in this forest, if I were you I'd have stayed in bed.”

“Couldn’t sleep,” he answered though it only came out as a tiny bit better than a whisper. His breathing felt short and heavy, like water was still clogging up his lungs.

“And here I thought all you little heroes in training would be out cold after a long day,” she said as she sat down beside him. “Mind if I…?” there was a cigarette pronged between her fingers that she’d pulled from god knows where. He shook his head, he didn’t mind. Plenty of people in his family smoked, his father and uncle among them, although Alo had given up that trait recently.

“Thanks,” the tobacco's tip began to glow distinctive orange as she lit it, “Takes the edge off. Don't let that old hag Aizawa know, told him I quit years ago.”

“How'd you find me?” he was sure he hadn't been that obvious, as glad as he was that she had.

“You have Ragdoll to thank for that, her quirks perfect for monitoring all of you at once. We can't have you guys walking around unsupervised around here after all. At first we thought you were just taking a leak, until you spent almost an hour out here,” the smoke trailed in lazy spirals from her hand as she nudged at the cigarettes stem, it had an annoyingly sweet smell to it.

“Ah,” he answered. He had almost regained his composure now, though the feeling of what had happened still lingered. He definitely hadn’t imagined it.

She sat forward, “Figured I’d come and check up on you, make sure you hadn't really died out here in the cold,” her eyes flicked at the book he’d thrown, which she picked up and thumbed through, “I didn't think they printed this anymore. Strange book, I'm not really a fan of science fiction.”

“Someone gave it to me as a gift,” he lied.

“I wouldn't waste my time with something so vague. You can barely tell what's even really happening half the time,” she shrugged.

“I'm surprised you're not with the remedial students,” he said.

“Remedial?” she looked at him like she didn’t know what he was talking about.

“From class one A and B, the guys who failed the exam,” he answered. There was something strange about the woman but he wasn’t sure what. It was like she was hyperactive or something compared to when he’d met her.

Her eyes lit up, “Ah, right,” she chuckled, “Aizawa didn’t give us that detail. Anyway if you want I can lend you a quality book or two while you're here. Something with a bit of violence and gore really gets my blood pumping.”

“I'll think about it,” maybe she was right. After all he supposed the book was in of itself only as relevant to his own situation as he allowed it to be. He shouldn't have lost himself in the moment.

“Seriously though kid, time to get back to bed before I lose an appendage out here,” she stomped out her cigarette and slipped it in her breast pocket before standing.

He stood and followed her with ice in his limbs, she was right, he only allowed himself only one more glance at the sight of the night and the moon over the horizon, lined and accompanied by the
chirping of crickets before he followed her down the slim path back to the lodge.

Chapter End Notes

*I don't own BNHA. OC material is my own.
Take two

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

[Forest Lodge – Foyer – 6:23 AM Friday]

The morning after had little change from the first, it was the dawn of the third day and with that another settlement of pre-training briefing had arrived just outside their lodgings. This time his vegetative state came not from a lack of sleeping too late but rather from the outing that had interrupted it. Regardless, he must have felt miles above what Kirishima, Rikidou and Sero had to experience, that much was plain on their faces.

“Is it true that Aizawa had Kaminari giving you guy’s shock therapy during your remedial classes?” Ashido whispered.

“No. Who the heck told you that?” Sero answered with a look of confusion.

“Tsunotori,” she laughed, “I think she might have overheard it from Monoma.”

“You have too much energy, you know that?” Kirishima sighed. “You all do.”

“She might, I don’t, you guys make too much freakin’ noise in that boys’ dorm,” Jirou yawned, “Especially you,” she gave a smirk before she looked at Bakugou and said, “McSplody.”

“Shove it up your ass shoelace ears,” he grimaced. It looked like he was almost acceptant of the name now, although his loathing of it was clear.

“Jeez, I never really thought of that kind of downside to the quirk, you must pick up all sorts of things without meaning too,” Uraraka said.

“Normally I tune it out, but it’s hard to tune out explosions,” she shrugged, “Whoever was moving around like a wrecking ball at two in the morning is also to blame.”

“Yeah, that might have been us…” Rikidou answered, “Sorry.”

“Its fine, I don’t hold a grudge.”

“Bullllllshit,” Kaminari sneered.

“Calling you on your stupidity isn’t holding a grudge,” Jirou said.

“This wouldn’t happen if you all followed proper guidelines as instructed,” Iida shook his head.

“Guidelines,” Kaminari scoffed, “If you want I can give you some guidelines to living a little.”

“Living a little? I have plenty of reasonable and respectful enjoyment. Isn’t that right Midoriya?”

“Ah well, yep, you sure do,” Midoriya answered in a slightly raised zone before it diverged into almost a whisper, “Though you could be a little less stringent.”

“Stringent?!!”

“See? Even Midoriya agrees,” Kaminari said and folded his arms. His face was one of victory.
“Enough,” Aizawa finally stood to affront them. The man looked like he was having a small migraine, “Let’s keep this short since you guys can’t sit still. You all know the drill now, work on your quirk, try not to blow yourselves to pieces etcetera, get to it,” he waved at them dismissively. Their group disassembled in haste, though this time more a trail than a clump as each went to different sections of the forest, though he himself stayed behind.

“Sir,” he said once the others were out of ear shot.

“What?” the man turned back from whatever he’d been doing before he had so briefly commanded them.

“Can I talk to you about something?” he asked.

“About your file, I’m guessing?”

“…Kind of,” he answered. It was only half-so.

The teacher looked up in brief annoyance, then around before he stood, “Come,” he said, apparently realising this was no real place to talk. He began toward the crude cement of the main building, covered in all its weatherworn glory.

It was one that he hadn’t been in much for all intents and purposes, for he had little need. He knew on the inside it differed none from any other exercise building, if only smaller in size, it had two lecturing rooms encompassed at each side by a break room, a bathroom and a staircase which presumably led to the elusive instructor’s quarters that overviewed the whole grounds. The doors that Aizawa opened were ones that would shut automatically behind, except for the third which was plain, thick and wooden and held inside rows of desks and a blackboard upon which he could see diagrams and drawings that he could only determine to be his classmates, Sero and Rikidou, they weren’t pretty but had very intricate notes scribbled beside them. He took a seat as the man beckoned him to it.

“Go ahead and spit it out,” Aizawa said, his attitude was almost as uncouth as the room itself, a cramped and windowless as it was. Not that he wasn’t used to it.

He thought about how to start but there wasn’t much point beating around the bush, “The number for stamina discrepancy, mine was…”

“Seventy-two percent, borderline unusable, in terms of heroism,” the man finished his sentence, “I’m sure you’ve thought about why that might be, but simply it is that secondary function you so recently discovered and the other symptoms around it,” the man removed a small sheet from his pocket and unfolded it, then he turned to the blackboard and drew a zigzagged graph of several tens of points.

“So that’s how you determined the number?” he asked as he watched. It was a chaotic mismatch, ranging from the smallest of simmering peaks to the highest of spires, unvalued but named by letters, events as it were, that had transpired.

“So that’s how you determined the number?” he asked as he watched. It was a chaotic mismatch, ranging from the smallest of simmering peaks to the highest of spires, unvalued but named by letters, events as it were, that had transpired.

“It’s a sum of all exercise and training, informal or otherwise,” he turned to him, “And yes, that includes all instances where that occurred, as well. That is one of the reasons it is so very high, however that is not a reason to disregard it.”

“Because it’s still a physical function,” he answered, it made sense. Even if it wasn’t him in control all the things he had done, involuntary or not were still a result of him. He didn’t want anything to do with imitating its bone-breaking, perplexing fighting style.

“If I adjusted your score it’d still be around twenty-nine, ten above even the highest student next to
yours, Todoroki. That is far too high for an emitter quirk.”

“Well, it’s not like I’m holding back, Sir,” he shook his head.

“I am aware, hence why I noted the phenomenon in the first place.”

“Then what’s wrong with me?”

“There is no way of knowing. The creature related to the villain’s quirk was the only clue, however thanks to Bakugou’s trigger finger not much more than a burn mark remains. The only thing we know now is that it was somehow symbiotic.”

Hmm, he answered, “So what do I do?”

“Nothing,” the man shrugged.

“Nothing?”

“There is no solution until we know more. You’ll just have to bare the trepidation that comes with not knowing.”

He wasn’t sure what to think of it, “That sounds,” was it really fine to be doing what he was doing? Poking and prodding at it as he’d resolved?

Aizawa’s plain expression became a frown, “Your approach to the situation is adequate, if that’s what you’re wondering. If the villain’s quirk is symbiotic it can only help to build resistance.”

“Yeah, that’s what Kirishima said…” his head drooped a bit, “What do those villains want with me, really?”

“It doesn’t matter as long as they don’t get it. And, they won’t be getting it.”

“Thanks, Sir,” he answered and dismissed the question, the man was right. He should do his part of it by not getting caught up in anxiety and making sure next time he wouldn’t be the one getting laid low. If and when that villain showed up he would be ready.

“Now in regards to progress of actually using your quirk, Pixie-Bob’s work is really only half of what you should do. Try working on manipulation too, if you had as much experience with decompressions as you did with compressions it would likely lower the discrepancy significantly.”

“I’ll do that,” it was what he had been doing between bits of spare time. Maybe he should try get in with Tiger too, to get some of the man’s close combat experience.

“Then get to it, and continue those sessions with Midnight once the trip is over. As much as I hate to say it that woman has a knack for insight.”

“Yes, Sir,” he stood and gave a stern nod, then left through the stark door.

[Forest Lodge – Front Entrance – 12:03 PM]

A chunk of metal rested between his fingertips, although calling it a chunk now might almost be generous as it served a purpose no sturdier than a piece of clay might have. He had twisted it over the course of the morning into peculiar shapes and many others alongside it as he had practiced his quirk. They had become nothing too particular, the shapes, simple things that he’d chosen at random; a tree, the lodge building, a skyscraper and even the face of a person with no name. It was all varying
degrees of difficult but he found it to be exactly the kind of fine-tuning Aizawa had suggested to him.

It hadn’t been his plan to pace away the morning at it, softening and melding as he had but his schedule with Pixie-Bob had fallen through on account of one particularly explosive student and a high amount of demand for things he could exert his volatility on. Hence he had been left on his own for the most part, or rather with whoever was deciding to be taking their break at the same bench as he was practicing. At this point in time that happened to be a pair, namely Ojiro and Kaminari, of all people. It was well deserved as the two had been blowing themselves to smithereens.

“Feels like my tail is going to fall off at this rate, and we’re only on the third day,” Ojiro said. He had a tired expression, one that made his face akin to that of an old man. Riley had been observing his fighting style and his attempts to use momentum to boost his power had reminded him of that woman, however he was by all means timid, not monstrous.

“You think it’d grow back if it did?” Kaminari asked with some weird case of genuine curiosity. It was like he was still a bit goofy from having used his quirk too much.

“…I don’t think it works like that.”

“That’d be cool as hell though.”

“Sounds like it would be painful, not cool.”

“What do you think Riley? He could change his name to Skinkman or something.”

He put the metal down and gave him a serious look, “I think Skinkman already exists in America,” he turned to Ojiro, “Something like Salaman or Kung-fu Komodo might be more original.”

“Hey, hey, stop it both of you. This isn’t a brain storming session, what if I started suggesting you change your name to something stupid like Tablet Press?”

“Well,” he put his hand to his chin, “It would be very unusual, I’m sure it’d be popular, everyone knows Tablet Presses are extremely valuable pieces of technology.”

“Are you actually considering this?!” Ojiro gave him a mismatched expression.

“No, I’m just fucking with you,” he laughed and went back to bending the metal. He’d almost managed to make a car this time, a small Honda civic like one of his aunt’s drove.

“What are you doing anyway? You’ve been fiddling with that junk all morning,” Kaminari asked.

“It’s not junk,” he frowned. He thought he was actually getting pretty good at it, “Trying to figure out how to more efficiently use my quirk since I have nothing better to do.”

“I thought it was just a give and take kinda deal.”

“It is, right now anyway. It kind of works like your electricity or even Aoyama’s laser, but Aizawa thinks I can do better. If I can control it on a level that Todoroki can control his ice and fire it’d probably be a great step forward, don’t you think?”

Hmm, Ojiro mumbled as he watched him, “You have that one move don’t you though? The one that takes you forever to use, what did you call it?”

“Unilateral subduction,” he answered as he squashed an edge of the metal like an origami fold, forming the cars bonnet. One advantage of metal over paper was that by making it heavier again it
would become set like Paper Mache. “I wouldn’t exactly call it similar to this…”

“Well, how does it work exactly? Maybe you can do the same thing just on a smaller scale,” he shrugged.

He put the metal down again and then looked at Ojiro and Kaminari in turn. He wasn’t sure why the two were so curious, “I have to work backwards, slowly, to do that. It’s like working from the inside out until the entire integrity beneath whatever I’m targeting is gone. Doesn’t really work if the stuff I’m compressing is too hard.”

“I mean, it sounds to me like you could just be applying the same theory to what you’re doing now,” Kaminari said.

“Yeah, that’s what I was thinking,” Ojiro nodded.

“How do you figure?” he was the curious one now. All his progress had mostly been in making it easier, making it takes less energy to do, to lower that upper value.

“Just do lots of tiny decompressions on the metal, that’s all it should take, right?” Ojiro said with a distinct simplicity.

“You make it sound easy. It’s insanely hard if I don’t have a clear picture. Even when I did it during the festival I damn near broke my hand, it was lucky the arena had a dirt floor.”

Kaminari smirked, “Have you never eaten one of those aero chocolate bars? The ones with the air bubbles inside?”

“Aero bars? What are you getting at?”

“Well it’s exactly the same thing as what you’re trying to do. Momo taught us about density and all that crap for the written exam, and I’m pretty sure as long as you ruin a metal’s structural integrity it would be easy as hell to bend or break. So just make the metal into an aero bar, make it full of pockets with your quirk.”

He scratched his head and picked up the metal. Then he pushed on it with his thumbs while bracing it with his fingers, however rather than decompressing all at once he ushered it several times in a rapid succession, what felt like probably twenty or thirty times in five seconds. It was a difficult thing to mimic his subduction but it did feel doable. After he’d reached a count of forty he let the quirk go and pressed down on the centre of the plate with his thumbs. It wasn’t as easy as before but it did go, he got the slim plate to about thirty degrees before it snapped with a hard *twang*.

“Huh,” he said. It had taken so much less energy for practically the same result. “I never thought about it like that, that’s actually pretty clever,” he raised his brow, “What did you do with the real Kaminari?” he chuckled.

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Well, you know.”

“Hey screw you,” Kaminari threw up his hands, “Don’t make me zap you.”

“You came up with something like that metaphor, yet you can’t score higher than fifty on a test. That’s somehow amazing,” Ojiro said.

“Hey shuddup. I’m a genius, you just don’t know it.”
Ojiro grimaced slightly, “I’ll remember that next time Mr. Aizawa chews you out. What did it say on your sheet again? Limited foresight and poor judgement skills?”

“Oh you’re going to get it now Kangaroo boy,” Kaminari jumped to his feet with his fingers arcing. He laughed, “Okay, okay I’m sorry. You’re a real Einstein.”

_Hmph,_ Kaminari dissipated some of the static in the table before sitting, “You better not forget it.”

He might have minded their quarrel had Kaminari’s suggestion not spurred an extension of the idea. It was a stupid metaphor, the aero bar thing, but it had raised a memory. Particularly the one about his gauntlet and how he’d wholly and certainly smashed it by using both parts of his quirk simultaneously, it was something he had almost forgotten considering all the shit that had happened after.

He grabbed the last of the fresh chunks of metal from the wooden box in which they had been aligned like taco wafers and took it back into both his hands, though his left he rested on top and allowed the other to support it beneath. He began by pulling gradually from the bottom with his quirk, and felt the thing get heavier as it should have. He imagined this like the example as well, bubbles. Then as it had doubled in weight he tried the opposite effect on the other side of the surface, like chunks of the metal were being sucked out through the top and pushed in through the bottom. The image worked, just for a split second, and he felt as the quirk intertwined the effect in an odd sensation.

Then it hit him as a zap, a powerful arm curling thing like he’d been stabbed in his left hand and had his right crushed by an iron. It chunked his teeth together as it hit into and through him not unlike his quirk the previous day, although far less severe to his surroundings. It made him dizzy and unbalanced, the same imbalance that he had attributed to something else not long ago. The metal dropped to the table with a _clang._

“Fuck,” he said as he wrung out both his hands like he’d just burnt them. The pain was nothing short of that, though he received it for only a second.

“You okay man?” Kaminari asked.

“Yeah, I’m fine, I’m fine,” he wasn’t sure what had just happened there. It hadn’t been like that when he’d done it out of desperation to save that man. It was like he’d been the one overloaded, not the gauntlet. Maybe his body was too weak to handle it, or he just lacked the skill for such intricate manipulation, he’d need to practice more.

“Don’t overdo it, there’s no Recovery Girl to heal you up out here,” Ojiro said.

“Nothing serious happened, it was just weird,” his quirk rarely hurt him, or at least with actual painful sensations. The tremors were painful but only due to side effect, he attributed the pain to them and described them as such but the pain of them mainly came from how they interacted with other parts of his body. It was strange, very strange.

“Tooooorenagi!” a shrill voice interrupted his thought. He didn’t need to turn to know it was Pixie-Bob but he did so anyway in fear she might strangle him, “So this is where you’ve been hiding.”

“I wasn’t hiding.”

“You were so hiding dude,” Kaminari said with a devilish grin, “He was totally hiding from you Miss.”
“Hey, shut up,” he growled back.

She hooked him around the neck, as he had feared, and off the bench, “Time to break that sweet little quirk of yours in two, gotta make up for lost time.”

“This is your just desserts for talking shit, see ya later!” Kaminari gave a mock wave, to which Ojiro snickered.

“Bastard,” he gasped under the hold as she pulled him away from the table and toward a promise of bruises and threats of concussion.

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[Forest of Beasts – Anterior Field – 7:30 PM]

Kirishima hit the ground with a thud as Riley gave him one final forceful prod in the shoulder, his clothes were caked in dirt now and exhaustion lay as complete as the immobilisation that now wracked his body. It had been less eventful than the previous day, his friend had apparently gotten slower, though he supposed he understood why.

“Aizawa is really putting you guys through the ringer, huh?” he said as he reached down and undid it all in a brief touch, his control of it had become slightly more precise but not by much.

“It’s not just Aizawa,” Kirishima groaned as he sat up, “Blood King is some monster too. I don’t know where they get the energy considering they sleep just as little as we do.”

“Maybe all that sleeping Aizawa did throughout the semester was just so he could stay awake longer now and inflict misery on your three,” he chuckled.

“Very funny,” he said, “Anyway I think that’s enough for tonight, at this rate I won’t be able to feel my arms anymore. That quirk of yours makes my body feel really numb.”

“Yeah well your quirk would make me feel intense crippling pain, so,” he said as he helped him to his feet.

“You two already done?” Sero shouted, he was the second to have come to watch them this time, although Bakugou was absent, evidently he’d had his fill.

“Yeah, yeah, we’re done,” Kirishima answered as they walked over.

“Finally, watching you two do this is such a drag,” Kaminari said and adjusted his seating, “Uncomfortable as hell too.”

“Then why are you watching us?” he asked, it wasn’t like they’d told him to.

“Nothin’ better to do, Mandalay is on high alert after Mineta tried to sneak into the girls dorm last night,” he said with a sorrowful expression, “She made him scrub dishes until his hands bled, why do you think he wasn’t in our morning meet up? He passed out in the kitchen by four in the morning. Damn woman wouldn’t even take her eye off him.”

“Serves him right,” Sero shook his head.

“No man deserves that,” there was gloom on Kaminari’s face as he thought of it.

He sat down beside Kaminari, then took out a shoddy metal plate from his pocket and began turning it in his hand with his quirk as he had done when he’d been able to escape Pixie-Bob. His progress
in making the dome stable had been steady but cumbersome; the jitters had taken about five minutes less to stop this time, a small improvement, but an improvement nonetheless. The ache in his bones that came from physical exhaustion meant nothing now. He was growing used to the feeling since every person who’d instructed him so far had pursued the same philosophy of ramming training down his throat in whatever crude fashion worked. That was how you taught stubborn people, he supposed.

“Wonder where McSplody went,” Kirishima asked.

“Well, if you concentrate your senses real hard I’m sure you can hear it,” Sero answered.

Kaminari laughed, “Concentrate? Dude, Jirou wouldn’t shut up about it during dinner.”

“Maybe watching us set him off or something,” his friend looked at him.

He shrugged, “Doubt it, it was probably something Midoriya did, you saw his face during their test with All Might,” he had been aware of the distinct explosive sound throughout the night, the guy hadn’t even stopped to eat in the hall, he’d grabbed it and gone back to work right away.

“Yeah, I suppose you’re right. I think he lightened up just a bit after that, though. As quick-tempered as he is, I’m sure if he had a problem with us he’d have no problem trying to blow a limb or two off, he’s a real man like that, tells it how it is.”

“You two have that in common,” Sero said.

“You reckon?” Kirishima answered.

“If Bakugou is a bomb then you’re a bulldozer, remember how you two reacted during USJ? The rest of us kinda just froze when that mist villain came but you two had zero hesitation tryina bring him down. It was like you were reading each other’s minds or something.”

Hmm, the guy scratched his head, “And here I thought I’d become more rational since my middle school days.”

“Hah,” Kaminari grinned, “According to Ashido all you’ve done is become more hot-headed.”

“Wait, she’s been gossiping about me?” Kirishima’s expression was shocked.

“Hagakure can get anything out of anyone, didn’t take much with Ashido,” Riley said, “Is it true you used to keep a fridge in your room just for meat?” he was sure that one was a lie, as funny as it was.

His friend blushed, “…Maybe.”

“Wait, seriously?” he almost snapped the plate on accident, “I guess I should have figured,” he laughed.

“It’s manly!” he threw up his hands, “Besides, my mom was getting sick of keeping it all in the kitchen,” he smirked. He didn’t actually look very embarrassed. “If you’re jealous I can get you one for your room, then it wouldn’t look so barren.”

“No thanks, I’m good,” he wasn’t yet so subscribed to Kirishima’s generous food regime. Maybe he should have been as eating extra had helped with the constant use of energy. He was sure his gums would wear out before he did.

“Man, you should really be eating healthy food, not just anything you can get your hands on,” Sero
said with a sour expression.

“It worked for me, it’ll work for him. Don’t fix what isn’t broken-” Kirishima paused as the cry of a whistle interrupted him from beyond where they were sitting.

“Everyone get over here, we’re going to begin out evening activities!” A strong voice yelled, Tigers, if he had to guess. A few seconds later there was rustling followed by another yell, “You’re going to miss out on all the fun if you’re late!”

“And here I was having plenty of fun already,” he said as he put the plate back, wiped away the nails in his hand on the stone wall and got up. A small bit of it remained, but not enough to bother him.

[Forest of Beasts – The Dirt Trail – 7:50 PM]

“Alright, now that we’re all here let’s get started. Tonight’s extra-curricular activity is going to be the test of bravery!” Mandalay said, before making some silly noises, as if she was trying to spook them.

“Trek through the forest in which your sister class has placed devious traps!”

Iida clasped his chin lightly before he said, “A test of bravery? That sounds very childish for a heroics class…”

“Non-sense,” Ragdoll laughed, “You are still children after all, enjoy your youth while you can!”

“Yeah come on Iida, live a little,” Kaminari said in an almost mocking tone compared to how he’d said it that morning.

“I told you, I am perfectly fine at that,” he waved his hand in wild fashion, “Very well, I accept your challenge Mandalay, a test of bravery it shall be.”

“Perfect, I knew you’d come around. Now let me split you into groups,” the dark haired woman nodded as she began to shove between them.

The delegations came as shoves of two, and one of three and in a way that didn’t make sense. There wasn’t a need for a group of three rather. They were an even number on account of the remedial students having been hauled off by the scruff of their necks. He’d ended up with Tokoyami and Mezou, whilst Midoriya of all people had been bunkered up with Kouta. A few pairs had already gone ahead, yet he had not raised his concern with the woman.

“Mandalay?” he said as he walked up to her. It was probably his last chance.

“You sure it’s okay sending off Midoriya with just Kouta?” he asked. “I mean, we’re a group of three anyway over here, I can split and go with them.”

“No, no, you go with those two!” she said as she leaned in, “I think he and Kouta are really bonding, he might be able to get through to him.”

“Get through to him?” he repeated. It sounded like a dumb reason. She hadn’t seemed like the type to push such an agenda last night. “I mean, I know it’s just a fun exercise but…’’ he doubted Kouta could bring Midoriya back alone if he somehow got injured especially with how hollow and lightless the forest was. Accidents did happen, in this class more than any other.

“Its fine, Torenagi,” Tokoyami nodded, “You shall go with us, it is a debt I must repay regardless.”

“Debt?” he recalled no debt between them.
“Come,” the beaked boy gave an almost growling command, to which he looked at Mezou, who revealed nothing behind the webbed mask he wore over half his face.

“Better do as he says when he’s like this.”

He frowned in response to that, “I guess it’s whatever,” he said and began trotting behind into the narrow wind of wicker that had a frail marriage to the ground. It was a steep thing to begin and one that was perilous to ones surroundings, obscuring any chance at sight greatly. It swallowed the three of them and sound fell away with each step into the dark abode.

Within twenty minutes they were deep in, mostly with nerve still intact. Students from their sister class had hidden themselves along the path, and they were now at the fifth stop of twenty, around the halfway point between the beginning and end of the test of bravery, not that he could really call it as such. It was more like a sightseeing tour now.

“Do you think Mandalay was acting a bit weird?” he asked after a time.

“I’m not sure, I haven’t known her long enough,” Mezou answered as he stood beside him.

“I guess it was just me,” he shrugged. She was a strange woman, perhaps he was just getting paranoid. That still didn’t excuse the fact she’d practically forced Midoriya to go with Kouta. Not to mention she had not made a single mention of last night’s excursion. Maybe mentioning the book would elicit some reaction.

“Are you halfwits even trying?!?” Tokoyami growled with a deep undertone as he watched the display the students had assembled in front of him. It was a ridiculous array of cheap hand puppetry floating beneath trees, intended to scare the three of them and doing a piss poor job at it.

“You should take advice from that quicksand student,” Riley said, the name escaped him but the show hadn’t. That had been truly scary, her face sinking beneath the floor as it screamed in terror like a corpse being dragged into the earth. He shouldn't have expected anything less from Kendou, who'd taken much amusement in his brief terror.

“I guess this would be ironic considering Reiko’s quirk,” Mezou said. It was true enough, considering it was supposedly something with ghosts.

“You guys just caught us off guard that’s all!” Kousei said from behind a bush, “Stupid one A wannabe…” he grumbled to himself.

“Let’s go, this is a sickening waste of our time. You two would do better to hide your faces in shame then to attempt this petty attempt at a scare again, lest my dark shadow shows you what true terror means,” in a display of his annoyance the beast on his back gave an ear rending screeee that almost paralyzed the two 1-B students on the spot, then he fluttered his quirk like a cape and walked right past.

“I wasn’t really expecting much from a test of bravery regardless,” he said as they went far enough away from the two students, if only to avoid inciting their grudge.

“These people would not know a good scare if it were to bite them in the behind,” it was followed by a huff. He could see agitation in the shadow as Tokoyami spoke.

The guy had been awfully on edge, not calm and rational like usual. Mezou had let him know quietly why that was and why he should refrain from talking about it. Dark shadow was a hard quirk to control, more so than probably of anyone else’s at night. It probably didn’t help that the large multi limbed student had gone ahead and accidentally crushed their only torch. They had only umbra and
moonlight to guide them. He might have had his phone for a flashlight but that thing was about five percent from running empty.

“We’ll be done soon, so just try to keep it under control until then,” Mezou said after a few more minutes of Tokoyami’s fuming. The rotten mood was beginning to get uncomfortable, he had to admit.

"I know, I will not lose my temper," Tokoyami looked back over his shoulder and over him at Mezou. The trees sat pretty closely on either side of their walkway, so much so that it had become hard to walk side by side with the three of them. The trifile lasted only a bit, they were met by what was a rest stop after pushing through a brush of foliage. The path itself was truly designed to trick their mind. It was all part of the trial and no doubt Pixie-Bob's personal bit of fun. In regards to that he'd also spotted statues that were of her making too, to scare them when they turned off the path.

"Allow me a moment," the bird beaked boy said.

"However long you need, dude," Riley answered and found a less than comfortable rock to lean on.

The place they'd entered wasn't some great clearing, just an alcove that sat at the two third point of the course. It was known as The Widow's Peak, as Mandalay had so aptly named it. If he recalled it had been named not after the genetic trait but rather after the spirit of a demonic spider that had been said to reside there, with the amount of webs he'd walked into on the way it might not be so far from the truth. After around a minute of looking around and finding solace in the boredom he heard a loud scream in the distance, from where they'd already been. It sounded like the quicksand that Juuzou was so adept with was working on almost everyone. He recalled the name now, after thinking back on it.

“Sounds like someone is getting a scare at least,” he said. Another one came. This one was louder, far louder. A third erupted not soon after, this one was cut short. “Weird,” he remarked and looked at Mezou, who’d already flicked his webbed appendages into ears. It only took a yell now, a boyish scream pushed to high octaves, to make his eyes go wide. This wasn’t normal.

One of the ears became a mouth, “Something is going on,” it said, “There are too many people in this forest, at least six or seven more than there should be.”

His mind narrowed in response, the woods around them grew ominous with just that turn of a phrase. Six or seven, even repeating it belted dread into him as if injected in heavy dose from a syringe. Yet all his thought was drawn back to Mandalay, how she had acted, then how she had changed, then had swung back. The smell of smoke in the air, the lack of it. It was something that should have stuck, and with that thought it hit him.

“We need to go back, we need to go and tell Aizawa right now,” he tried to say without showing his onset of what was now a pure mixture of realisation and fear. There was no way he could have thought of it without the clarity of terror, Mineta and Mandalay, the detail now sat obvious. It all contradicted itself. Despite the folly of it he removed his phone and checked, there was still no signal. Then, he made the decision and turned back. He didn’t get to take a step, not with what he saw there, standing in the cover from where they had come. They were no longer alone.

“Going so soon?” a deep voice accompanied a nest of crow black hair that emerged from a burrow within the forest’s innards, it was nuanced by a figure covered in stitches and matted, ragged, burned flesh. His grasp was not empty and within it he held a straight dip of blond hair, belonging to none other than Aoyama. His finger glowed like an ember as it sat at the boy’s neck, a burning hot cinder that sat deathly and with anticipation, not qualmed in the slightest by his hostages frightful quivering.
“And here, I thought, we could get to know each other a little better,” he said with a worn smirk, that of a deadly jester from whom the laughter had been robbed.

Chapter End Notes

*I don't own BNHA. OC material is my own.
The Amateur's Guide to Villainy

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

[Forest of Beasts – The Widow’s Peak – 8:25 PM Friday]

“A-oyama?” Riley stammered. The scene of it all stood still that there could be no mistake. The man, the villain, had him. There was a yellowed bruise glazing on the side of his forehead from where he must have struggled.

“Now don’t make any stupid moves or your buddy here get’s it, capiche?” his tone was that of a man who dealt in sarcastic hands but this was one he had infected with threat too strong to take lightly. There wasn’t argument in it, nor room for negotiation and even less for accommodation.

“Relinquish your hostage,” Tokoyami said and his shadow growled as it surrounded him like a puppeteer pulling on strings, ready to pounce.

“Do as I say and we’ll all walk out of here in one piece and without a scratch,” the villain tilted his head, “Otherwise all that’ll be left to recognise you are the outline of a charred crow.”

“Let. Him. Go,” he stepped forward himself, his eyes had gone dry from lack of blinking. Disbelief had charged them with no such stray action.

“Ah, ah, now what did I just say?” a curl of orange flew past the front of Aoyama’s face, like the tip of a sparkler and his hair singed at the touch filling the air with an unpleasant sting.

“What do you want?” Mezou asked. He had fists now, not ears, they had been replaced.

The man cast a finger at Riley, “An exchange,” the words made his body freeze, “My blond wimp for yours.”

“You have lost your mind if you think we’ll allow you to take another hostage,” Tokoyami said as his shadow crawled another inch over his shoulder and sank toward the floor.

The villain sighed, “Why did I even bother calling it an exchange?” he gripped Aoyama’s neck tighter. “How about this, if you aren’t hoveled at my feet in the next three seconds Riley, then your classmate is going to turn into French toast,” he chuckled. It was entirely humourless.

“You can’t,” he reached out his hand.

“One,” the man cocked his finger like a gun and the syllable made him tense. It came with frustration of thought. His mind gave him thirty seconds for every half a pause yet there was no answer, no time to act, to save Aoyama without…

“Two,” the tip of the finger began to glow again, “I don’t enjoy killing kids Riley,” he shook his head, “Your clock is ticking. Don’t you want to save him?”

Tokoyami and Mezou were almost upon the man now. He didn’t shy or care in any capacity, only a nefarious look fell from him. It lacked any empathy and said only one thing; Aoyama wasn’t the only one in danger, all three of them would die and the man would still get what he wanted if it came to that.
“And here I thought you were pretending to be a hero, what a pity,” the man’s fingers became an inferno and pressure cascaded like a wave as the third and final word slipped from his tongue, “Three.”

Two students lunged, fire enveloped, there was no cruel grin but satisfaction sat on the villain’s face, a desire to kill beneath the surface. Shadow became tangible claw, ready to tear flesh. Six fists aligned in decision as they flew in tandem. A foot, an inch and a bit and he opened his mouth.

“Bang,” fire sprung from the finger like a hungry wisp toward Aoyama’s head.

“Stop!” he yelled and the world did, Tokoyami, Mezou and the man too as the fire flew past the collar and took only skin with it, not a limb or a head. “Stop,” he repeated. He didn’t want to do it but he had no choice. It felt wrong but he wouldn’t let Aoyama, or anyone for that matter, any one of his classmates, die for him, “I’ll go with you.”

“I’m glad you’ve decided on a bit of rationality. Now this doesn’t have to turn into a barbecue,” his weapon had lost its fuse. Tears were rolling down Aoyama’s face.

He took a step and almost tripped, enough to make the man smirk, “Come on then, I haven’t got all night. There are still heroes in this forest to kill.”

“I am, just let him go,” he took another two. His classmates had gone utterly silent. It was as if with each foot he paced it took fifty times the effort it should have. It made him wonder if this forest would be the last thing he would ever see.

“Once you’re in my grasp he’s as good as free,” he was not the type of villain to fall victim to such an easy trap. There was mind sitting behind the marks, the kind that acted to make plans, to carry them out and to ruin those that others made to stop him.

“Torenagi,” Tokoyami glared at him as he passed, “Stop being such a fool, you’re walking right into his hands.”

“I’m sorry,” he said without turning to look at him. There wasn’t another way out of it that he saw, not without risking something that was not his to risk. Ko had taught him that.

“Back off bird brain, and you too Jeepers Creepers,” the villain held up his hand at them like he was going to blast them.

“Do as he says,” he said in heavy voice. They hesitated and then did, he felt sick of putting them through this.

No sooner had he stepped within three feet before the man yanked Aoyama by the neck, threw him at Mezou and lunged in less time than it took to blink, rough fingers curled around his own throat, then set him to tumble forward and turn, a hand on his wrist gave notion that he should not so much as try to move now. The French student was caught before he hit the ground next to Mezou, within one of his many arms. There had been rope around his wrists that he saw now, however the villain seemed less inclined to repeat the process on him.

“See? I’m a reasonable man,” he pulled him closer and held him like a shield, a shield held firm by a noose. He whispered in his ear, “I doubt restraining you will do much good like that brat but I don’t think I need to tell you that if you try to escape you’ll be crawling away with one less leg than you started with, we do not need you whole. A limb is replaceable, after all.”

“Merci,” Aoyama said with a cough, though he could not so much as nod to acknowledge it now, the heated grip told him as much.
And don’t think about following us,” the man said as he began to push him onto some unseen path in the bushes, “Moonfish might have a little problem with it if you do.”

The tree shook then and surrounded him, the last part of his safety was gone with the terrible cry of a beast that cascaded from all directions, all it’s malice directed at his classmates. It was characterized by the gnawing of teeth, the crunching of bone, the cutting of flesh and the craze of blood.

[Forest Lodge – Remedial Classroom – 8:37 PM]

Kirishima allowed himself to fall in the seat from yesterday with a groan, it had become no less uncomfortable in his absence, and the annoyance of the two 1-B students behind him weren’t helping. That dumbass Monoma and that guy who was always picking on Riley, it was just his luck that this would happen.

“Quite the grim face you got going on there,” Sero whispered. Their teachers hadn’t arrived yet but he doubted that’d be the case much longer. Aizawa enjoyed this part of the day the most, from what he’d seen yesterday.

“Can you blame me?” he sighed.

“No, I guess not, not with these two mumbling behind us,” he smirked back.

“What was that bucktooth?” Kuroiro scowled.

Sero turned as if he’d been punched, “Bucktooth? Fuck you dude. There aren’t a lot of people I want to punch but you’re a real asshole, you know?”

“You say that like it matters what you think…” the boy turned his head.

“Better not let that temper get the better of you,” Monoma scoffed, “I doubt Eraserhead would overlook that from one of the oh-so gifted one A students. You might even get kicked out.”

Sero snarled and turned back, things were beginning to get heated between them. That was something he could sympathise with. One thing he was sure of, even if Monoma were to stay in remedial forever it wouldn’t fix his shit attitude.

“What a pain,” Rikidou said, “Give it a rest would you?”

“Ordering us around now? Typical,” the blond boy frowned. “Always giving us flack.”

“Maybe all the flack you get comes from stuff you instigate. Maybe you should learn to shut your mouth.”

“Whatever,” Kuroiro answered for Monoma, “Freakin’ idi-”

The door banged opened, “This isn’t the time for banter,” Aizawa said, behind him a mildly pissed looking Blood King walked in. “We’re getting right to it, where we left off yesterday, we didn’t cover as much ground as I would have liked. I hope you’re ready for hell again.”

He wasn’t, but he needed to be. The work him and Riley were doing could only make up part of what he needed to do, the other stuff was all mental, all experience and tactics and the kind of thinking he hated to do during a fight. That’s how good heroes fought though and he kind of found himself wishing he could make up plans on the fly like some of his classmates. His plan was always ‘punch hard’, if the guy doesn’t go down, ‘punch harder.’ That wasn’t going to cut it forever, it
hadn’t in the tournament. He’d barely beaten Tetsu and despite how adamant Riley was about his circumstances that didn’t mean he should have been able to win, either. It was all shortcomings, he wanted this remedial.

His comrades had found similar problems. Sero was wrestling with those problems that had tripped him up twice now. That was the narrow lethality of his quirk as the Cello tape wasn’t exactly great at preventing his opponent from acting as they pleased with the right quirk. Aizawa was helping him with that just like Rikidou was being helped out by Blood King. It was pretty amazing what the one B teacher could think of when it came to the uses of physical quirks like theirs. He didn’t care much for Monoma’s and Kuroiro’s progress, though the one thing he had found intimidating was Kuroiro’s quirk, peculiar as it was.

There was a twinge in his neck all of a sudden. He could see the others were feeling something similar, This is Mandalay. It said, We have spotted multiple villains who’ve invaded the area. Those who are capable of please head for the main building quickly. Do not engage the enemy under any circumstances! the voice quieted as it finished the announcement. It took the settling of a moment for it to really kick in.

“Villains?! How did they find this place? Oh god, what if they find us here?” Monoma cried in panic.

“Blood,” Aizawa said as he put his goggles on slowly, “I’m going to go and rescue the students still out there, you look after anyone that comes back,” any disagreement the man might have had with the notion was dispelled as he watched him leave through the door.

“You heard him, stay in your seats and don’t move,” Blood King nodded as he stood by the door.

“Sir, what about the others? We gotta go help!” he said.

“That doesn’t matter, you won’t be any use out there as you are now,” the man shook his head. The words made him clench his fists, it made him feel terrible. There was something awful about what they heard next. It was a bang, a big explosive fiery thing that lit up the windows a bright orange. Something had happened outside.

It faded and they waited, heart and lung in throat. A shadow at the door flitted past, Aizawa? he thought, but that couldn’t be. He had no reason to come back. That could only mean one thing. A hand tapped the glass with a heavy, arrhythmic thump-tink-thump. Blood King didn’t wait for whatever it was to open it, he threw it back and the quirk slipped from his hands, overtaking in an instant whatever was there. All he saw was black hair and a face covered in stitches over the man’s shoulders as he pinned the villain to the wall.

“That’s not a nice welcome, you know,” the black haired man said. There was no resistance in his body against the red liquid, not that it would have made a difference.

“Eraserhead!” Blood King shouted down the hall, “You still breathing?” There wasn’t a response to the query and that left the man with a heavy set brow as he turned back his head toward his captive.

“What a careless administration, repeatedly allowing itself to be attacked. Letting students get snatched away not once but twice, you’d think something so prestigious would already be careful of losing something that had already been lost before,” the villain said, before shaking his head, “Well, you know what they say, be wary of the few with the ambition of the many, for they will run you into the ground.”

“Does that mean Bakugou… and…” he didn’t finish the sentence but he thought the second name
long enough that he knew he had to do something. He refused to be useless.

“Enough out of you,” Blood King smashed his fist into and through the head of the villain, clearly not expecting the little resistance it gave. It fell apart in oily goo and settled on the floor. The man turned back at them, “You will stay here while I go and back up Eraserhead, anyone not here when I get back will be facing a consequence harsher than expulsion,” he shut the door as he turned down the dark hallway. Kirishima growled under his breath and looked around. He didn’t care about consequences right now.

“Getting antsy?” Kuroiro asked behind him. “Your friends are out there and you want to go no matter what, is that it?” he didn’t answer but instead nodded, of course he wanted to go out there.

“This is a one off then, you go for the window back there,” he tipped his head over the back of his shoulder toward the back of the room, “If Blood King and Eraserhead come back I’ll give’em some excuse. Just don’t do something stupid.”

“Why would you...?” he looked at the dull boy.

“As much shit as I was giving you we’re still in the same course, impeding villains comes first. Besides, anyone who earns Tetsu’s respect can’t be a total dumbass,” Kuroiro said as he walked up to the class’s main door and held the handle, as if to sense if someone was coming.

Kirishima-” Sero said but he ignored it, he had no time to argue. He took a step backward toward the wall at the back of the room, he heaved the window open, and then he was gone, sliding down a muddy slope. He would not let it happen again, he’d promised that, he would not let villains get either of them.

[Forest of Beasts – ? – 8:50 PM]

“Stop dragging behind Hagakure, we have to get back right now,” Jirou said. “You heard it, those screams and what Mandalay said, this isn’t a drill.”

“Y-yeah, I’m sorry! It’s just, I’m worried about the others,” what sat on her face was not an emotion that Jirou could read but the trembling in her voice and the jitter in her heartbeat let her know exactly how sincere her panic was.

“It’ll be alright, yeah? All we need to do is find the pro heroes. You know how Iida is, I’m sure he’s already gone ahead and forced everyone to roundup like the control freak he is so let’s not be the only ones left behind.”

“R-right,” Hagakure gulped. “You’re right,” she clenched her fists, “We’re heroes, not bystanders.”

Jirou nodded, One less thing to worry about, she thought. Now if only they weren’t in the middle of nowhere, that would have helped a great deal in figuring out exactly which way the lodge was. They’d opted to abandon the trail path since it was far too obvious but that meant adjusting their path to get back considerably, hopefully in a way that avoided whatever was encroaching on them now. Noise made it clear enough where not to go, although she wanted to it wasn’t her place to try and play saviour, it was none of their places really but she doubted that would stop some of them.

She pushed another frond aside, parting the foliage into an equally secluded place. Having said what she said if it did come to it, if they did see someone, she wouldn’t hesitate. Hopefully it wouldn’t come to that, surely they were all rational enough to realise that the first time they’d taken on villains it was only through luck that no one had died, Riley had been proof enough of that. He never did
Thwick, a twig snapped. “Did you hear that?” Hagakure asked.

Shh, Jirou answered, something she also couldn’t risk doing too loudly. The sound had been close; it had been close and had not been theirs. Another sound came, this one the stringent placement of line, pulled tight into a lace like a backpack or a corset, or maybe a leather mask.

She bent her back into one of the tree trunks and took a peek; her guess had not been far off at all. There was someone, a kid to be precise, a middle schooler. He was wearing a gas mask and a heavily decorated coat that looked big enough on him that one might think he stole his granddad’s old military outfit, medals and all. She fell back as the boy turned, she wasn’t sure he hadn’t seen her.

“Come out; come out wherever you are pitiful heroes. I know you’re hiding but there isn’t a point, really,” his voice was one of disdain; of tortured enjoyment but worse still as young as she had figured, he really was just a middle schooler. That made him no less a villain. She let down her jack; it was luck alone that she had brought her costume shoes, whoever this was would go down before he knew what hit him.

“What is this stuff,” Hagakure said with a harsh, choking cough.

“Shut it,” she stopped mid sentence as she saw it too, all around them, a hazy purple fog floating within the moonlight from the floor high into the sky. It was gas, a noxious gas. “Fuck,” she cursed and the next breath she was forced to let slip set her lungs on fire. Someone had shoved lava down her throat, into the cavities of her chest. She turned on Hagakure, “We need to get out of here,” she said.

The girl swayed, “Right with you,” Thud, she hit the floor in a slump

“Hagakure,” she reached out but her vision became washed into three different images.

“I told you it was no use hiding. Yuuei students really are lacking in awareness, that’s what happens when you’re coddled I guess,” the villain said. He was closer now, almost next to them, or perhaps far away. The images made it all a mess of perception.

“Bastard,” she said in one last bit of futile resistance as her legs gave out and she collapsed to her knees. It was too much; even as she looked up she could feel her consciousness fading.

“The name is Mustard, not bastard. Now, enjoy your eternal rest. Your friends will join you soon enough…” the voice trailed away as everything became purple, then panned into colourless abyss.

[Forest of Beasts – The Widow’s Peak, Groves – 8:55 PM]

Riley’s feet were sore by the time him and his captor had trudged the better part of a mile. It was in part due to the entangling cobweb of roots below them, a thing that had only groan worse and harsher the further they had walked, and also because he had made his own footsteps clumsy. It was a pathetic and futile thing but also his only method of resistance, a move he had resorted since hearing that message, a message that he knew was foolish to listen to, Mandalay’s message, Do not panic, Torenagi, Ragdoll and I are on our way, whatever you do, do not give the villain a reason to harm you. He remembered the words clearly, it had settled him though it should not have with what he knew and after twenty minutes of unease had gnawed at him he had returned to his senses in the end. Doubt, that was what he could call what he felt now, certainty that the Mandalay he knew was
actually a villain, the one that had betrayed the location of the camp and them with it. To that end what made him eager to slow his gait was not the possibility of rescue but to throw a wrench in whatever plan that evil woman had made for him.

He took another purposeful misstep and almost fell this time; the man caught him by the back of his hair, and a painful tug that reminded him he was not in control, not at all. He had a strong grip, one that threatened to burn him and offer zero possibility of respite. There was experience in it.

“People who annoy me are liable to begin losing parts of their body, so stop fidgeting,” he said. His voice came out like smoke, quiet and distasteful like he had burnt his vocal chords to add menace.

“What would your boss say to that?” he asked in turn.

_Hmph_, the villain huffed, “I have no boss, you could say I’m following these orders from the kindness of my very own heart,” he gave a quick chuckle.

If he could not slow him with physical impairment then he would try with words, he decided and said, “You’re with the league aren’t you? I think if you had been allowed to hurt me you would have already, so I wouldn’t be able to use my quirk,” the thought of doing so had also been an eager one, but the way the man was holding him it was evident he knew exactly what his capabilities were.

“If you’re so bright as to come to that conclusion then make it easier on both of us and stop trying to break your ankles, it won’t help you, no one even knows you’re missing except those twerps back there and they are probably long devoured.”

“You’re underestimating them,” he answered. There’s no way Tokoyami would lose to some noumu, not if he had Mezou and Aoyama backing him up. He hoped it was just a noumu.

“It doesn’t matter if I underestimate them or not, now stand up straight and I might even tell you who you have the displeasure of being in the presence of.”

He stopped and considered it, and then straightened up, “Fine,” he answered. There really wasn’t much point if the man knew and spraining something would only hurt his chances of escape. Not to mention that piece of info was a worthwhile trade, so that he could pin the face and keep it in his mind. Anyone related to Janus would be treated the same.

“Dabi.”

“So what do you want with me, Dabi?” he frowned as they began to walk again.

“I want nothing. However some of us aren’t so keen on lost property being allowed to roam free.”

“I am no one’s property you bastard.”

“How very misguided you are, but don’t worry, you’re not alone. You’re one of us whether you like it or not, sooner or later you’ll figure that out. Then we’ll be waiting with open arms.”

“You’re wrong.”

“I don’t think you know that for sure, does that scare you?”

“Shut up,” he almost shouted. He did not belong to that man. He was not his masterpiece.

“Come on now, watch your temper little Ri-ley, doesn’t that school teach you any manners?” the man grinned, “You don’t want to show your poor attitude in front of him, do you?”
“Who?” he snapped.

“Do I really need to say his name?” the captor clicked his tongue.

He didn’t need to, there wasn’t any doubt from the start but that only confirmed it with hard evidence. He felt the tinge in his neck from it, the sudden humidity as it attacked his body and the convulsing sting in his shoulder as they proceeded with each step.

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**[Forest of Beasts – Entrance to the Dirt Trail – 9:00 PM]**

Mandalay felt her breath heavy and perforated by unrest. This wasn’t good, how could things have turned to shit so quickly? Ragdoll was down, Tiger had his hands full, she had zero idea where Kouta was and worse still someone was messing with her quirk; she had been unable to reach all of the students. On top of that she couldn’t afford to leave; the villains had found her and the students before she had found them.

*One step at a time,* she thought as she raised her light cuffs with their magnificent silvery white claws on them, sharp as any knife. *Tchink,* the blade went as it hit them and came away with scratches. The green scaled, bandaged face that had swung it and hid behind it was a crude kind of ugly and determined to put her down.

*Spinner,* she felt the draw of her quirk as she protruded the thought, *This is an order, fall back at once!* she sent it forward into the villain’s head, causing him to draw back and shake his head.

“What’s done is done, worry about the rest of you now,” she answered. The green haired kid was an annoyance, having run off like he’d gone ballistic the moment she had made clear what she wanted of them. However there wasn’t time to worry about it now.

“Yes, I understand Mrs,” he said, “You heard her,” he shouted at the half dozen other students, “We proceed to the lodge, do not stray.”

*A problem out of the way,* she thought as she watched them leave. Now she just had to make sure no one could follow. A blade flying over her head almost jeopardised that, she dodged it and kicked it as it went, sending it flying into the ground with an impaling thunk. The lizard man was adept with it and fast to boot. She’d need to resort to something else if she wanted to beat him. That part of her quirk was degrading but she was not above its use.

“What about Midoriya?” Iida asked.

“What’s done is done, worry about the rest of you now,” she answered. The green haired kid was an annoyance, having run off like he’d gone ballistic the moment she had made clear what she wanted of them. However there wasn’t time to worry about it now.

“Yes, I understand Mrs,” he said, “You heard her,” he shouted at the half dozen other students, “We proceed to the lodge, do not stray.”

She held the quirk’s barrage, the thought of it, just until the villain had hunched into a committed motion, then she pushed it like a needle into his head, *Spinner is such a cool villain, so popular and hunky, he’ll be the next Stain for sure!*

“What?!” Spinner stumbled on his feet and the blade went wide. She brought her claw up as it did and sliced across his thick segmented skin and into the flesh beneath, spilling drops of cold, blue
blood through precise yet messy cuts on his chest.

“Fuck you,” he said as his arm fell loose behind him, enough to almost rob him of the strength to wield the thing.

“Something the matter, hun?” Mandalay said with a sly grin, before drowning her fist in the defenceless villain’s stomach. “You are no match for real heroes, so stop trying to pick on our kids,” she whispered.

As she jumped back she could see him slightly out of it, not broken but disorientated like he knew he had underestimated them. She would need to be careful as a foe that could see his flaws was one that could potentially adapt. Her thought of strategy was interrupted by an odd sensation, like she was gaining momentum. That was exactly what appeared to be happening, it was pulling her backwards as if her body had been caught by a magnet. It took only her lifting her leg off the ground to resist to have it send her flying backward in full blown attraction.

“Come here little pussycat,” a deep voice said in a mocking tone.

Her launch wouldn’t cease as she flew toward the villain in the same way Ragdoll had, she felt like a fool for having not seen the villain re-emerge from the bushes. Now she was flying head first toward the same metal bar weapon that would take her out in one hit with how lethal it was. Her flailing provided no reprieve, there wasn’t a way for her to fight such an odd quirk, the one who wielded it, Magne, must have known that since his face was as wide as it was cruel.

_Smack_, the villain dropped his bar as a steel paw threw him sideways and ruined his concentration. The quirk failed and Mandalay fell to the floor, just before she would have collided.

“That same trick won’t work twice Magne, now let me put you back in your place,” Tiger said.

“I’d like to see you try kitty,” Magne growled back as he swung his weapon from the ground by kicking it with his foot into his hands, then he twirled it around to hold it like a spear under his arm.

“Mandalay, get Ragdoll out of here once you finish off that Stain wannabe,” Tiger said as he put up his hands like a boxer.

“Got it,” she answered. She had regained her balance, however as she looked around he did not see Ragdoll, he in fact saw no one except Spinner.

“Looking for someone?” Spinner gave a filthy cackle and pointed to the trees behind his back.

She looked but couldn’t believe it. The image that stood gave her the sense of looking in a mirror. There she knelt, a perfect copy of herself, from the tip of black hair to the fangled colour of her knees bracers. The only difference she could see was with the person rested in her arms. Ragdoll, still unconscious.

“Ragdoll,” she shouted, “Let her go!” it was odd to yell the words at herself.

The fake Mandalay didn’t laugh but it’s face curled up into a frightful caricature, unnaturally high at each edge, “Look how beautiful she is,” she droned on in perversity along with a lick of her slanted lips, “So much blood,” she put a cat’s claw on her face and ran it down slowly, liberating more trickles, “It’s all mine,” she said and lifted her.

An attempt to jump after her stopped the instant it had started, not by the blade of Spinner but by a wall of thought, images, gruesome photos and memorabilia of hundreds upon hundreds of drained corpses. Disgust and terror overwhelmed her senses, gore and blood and murals of the victims the
villain had sacrificed to her crazed art, innocent lives.

It took moments before she could open her eyes again, but it was too late, Ragdoll and the Mandalay were gone, “My own quirk,” she gasped. It had been a copycat, a perfect one, with a frightful quirk like that against them it all began to make sense.

[Forest of Beasts – Mountainous Peak, Secret Hideaway – 9:06 PM]

“If you don’t know the location of your classmates then I guess there isn’t much point in keeping you alive, boy,” the villain said as he stood poised over Midoriya.

He could feel the muscles in his hand twitching under the strain of One for All as he looked up at the gigantic man. He threw it against better judgement, it hit the man’s arm yet did nothing but give him recoil, just like all punches before it. He must have thrown dozens and those dozens must have felt like thousands. He caught himself on his left foot and looked over at Kouta, he had to persist or this would be the end for both of them. His phone wasn’t on him any longer, it lay shattered on a rock in the chasm beneath the narrow stone walkway atop which he had found the villain and the boy, however even if he still had it in working condition there wasn’t any reception out here, there was no help to get or any coming.

Smash, his arms collided again in a gust filled punch, causing his joints to cry and sear, the villain caught it and laughed, “Is this really a quirk that is meant to enhance your punches and kicks? It has some decent speed,” he reared his enormous bicep back and sinewy flesh laced itself in gross encasing across the villain’s arm, while he watched him try to escape the grip, “But it doesn’t have much punch!” his arm careered and rock faltered with an intense thwoom, pain graced his cheek as splinters of sharp stone flew off him and off the cliffside which he landed beside. The punch had been meant to toy with him, yet it had almost KO’d him. It stung and caused his shield to waver, his body wasn’t nearly as used to Full Cowl as he had been given credit by All Might and Gran Torino, he could feel it sapping him and draining with every second he held it over his body.

“Why fight? You’re not going to win with such an inferior quirk against someone like me.”

Midoriya clenched his fist and stretched his calf to relieve the pain, “I will save him, no matter what,” he shouted. The display meant little as his arms were already broken in several spots on the left and almost similarly on the right. Still, he had to try, he had to.

“No matter what, huh? Those words, they are the words of the desperate. The words of someone who has already lost, who has admitted they’ve lost. You know you’re broken, bloody, yet you say those pitiful little words, ‘no matter what.’ Don’t you think it’s a bit cruel to put those naive thoughts in a child’s head?” he shook his scowl from side to side, “Don’t you realise how pathetic you look squirming in front of me?” the villain roared.

“It doesn’t matter,” he almost puked as he pushed his tired legs up, “It doesn’t matter what you say, “I will save him. I’ll save everyone,” it hurt to say it, it felt like his lungs had been punctured. However he said it because he knew exactly who this villain was, not first or second hand or even close to that but rather by reputation. He was Muscular, the villain who had murdered the Water Horse duo in cold-blood, Kouta’s parents. He had to put him down, for their and Kouta’s sake. There was no way he would allow their son to meet the same fate, he wouldn’t let Kouta die to the man who had done so much to him already.

He pulled his hands up as the villains arms twined and became thick, enhanced by his quirk. The blow swung back and then stopped, he had One for All on but he wasn’t ready, not yet, it would have annihilated him. A rock had stopped it; a dumb rock had given him more time as it struck the
man in the head.

“Did you torment my mom and dad like this too before you killed them?!” Kouta shouted, tears were dripping down his cheeks in unrelenting torrent and another rock rested between his fingers which trembled so much he would never have been able to throw it.

Muscular looked confused at Kouta’s anger, like he was uncertain, “Killed who? You’re going to have to be more specific kid.”

“The Water Horse duo you bastard,” Kouta sobbed the words.

The villain’s fist dropped, “Seriously?” he said, “You’re the kid of those heroes?” he paused, and then gave a long, awful laugh. “This must be fate,” he touched his hand to his forehead as his cackle subsided, “Your parents are the ones who gave me this eye,” he pointed at the peeled flesh, the pocket that had scarred over and been dug out several times, “No, they did so much more for me, they made the name Muscular infamous and well known. I couldn’t be happier that they’re dead.”

“Fuck you! It’s all your fault, people like you, bastard villains, you’re the reasons things always turn out like this,” he screamed and threw his arms just short of tantrum.

“Punks like you are always quick to pass the blame, it’s pathetic. You think I care about this eye? That I killed them out of a grudge? No, I wanted to kill them because they dared to get in my way, they dared to challenge me and I enjoyed every second that they spent quivering as they bled to death.” The villains muscles pulled together again as he raised his arm once more, “They got what was coming to them, you have no say in it, not someone who has no capability to do anything yet tries anyway.”

Midoriya’s body spurted red and he felt the electricity of it across his body as the energy he’d gathered released itself in one burst, his legs almost broke and as he launched, he came face to face with the man in an instant, it was his only clear shot.

“People like you, isn’t that right you little punching bag?” Muscular turned his fist not on Kouta but instead on him and his opportunity closed, the emboldened fist came.

He turned his wrist and his body, he fell over it and his arm dug through the distributed flesh of Muscular’s arm like a spear, anchoring him to the man. He pushed his foot on it and pulled back his other arm, he put all his effort, all his strain, all the humiliation and hatred he held into it and filled his lungs with air as to enable a shout.

“What the?!” Muscular said with a gasp as the heated fist that parted air in its travel came forward and down against his face and then his body, rending and parting his skin like a blunt knife.

“One hundred percent smash!” his fist almost hung as it travelled through the man, yet it parted so easily and charged so vigorously as if it were unstoppable, a damaging comet hitting a frail human being.

The mountain exploded as Muscular flew back into it, through it and was buried, nothing was spared, his limbs all broke what little they had left and he fell as everything was showered in debris. His body hadn’t stopped, his adrenaline hadn’t given up his enhanced perception as he landed and tilted so he could catch Kouta with his teeth, just inches before he would have fallen over the edge. There wasn’t a thought of the victory on his mind, the one he knew he had, instead he knew of names people they wanted, he had to warn them.
“What the hell are we gonna do Ashido?” Kaminari kept his whisper down to a choke.

“Calm down, dude,” she answered. There was barely time for what he was doing, freaking out, they needed to make a decision instead of hiding.

“How am I supposed to calm down? You saw that guy, he was absolutely massive and then there’s that cloud,” he pointed at the purple dome of gas not a hundred metres from them. “Oh man, I bet they’re all already captured or worse and we’re next.”

“Not helping,” his loss of composure was starting to unnerve as well as annoy her, “Seriously didn’t you pick up anything from the exam? I thought you learnt something about being cool from that, you certainly had Torenagi convinced.”

“You think they got Riley too?” he trembled, “I mean, he’s like who they’re after right? Him and Bakugou, maybe they’ll gap it after they have them.”

*Smack.*

“What the fuck Ashido?” he held his cheek.

“Are you even listening to yourself? I thought you guys were friends, what kind of friend says that?”

Kaminari’s face shone with shame at the comment, then unkempt nerve that settled into shock, annoyance followed it and then he scrunched it all at once. Dishevelled as he was he followed it up with a wipe of the back of his arm across his brow and a short groan and a change of his face to one of remorse.

“They are my friends,” he said in a stern tone, “I shouldn’t have said that, maybe I am a coward,” he grinded his teeth, “Sorry.”

“Well, pay them back by doing something useful, let’s go out there and find them and bring them back,” she nodded.

“Yeah,” he said in agreement, “That’s what Kirishima would do; I bet any of them would, even that plank face Sero.”

“That’s the spirit,” she gave a quiet chuckle. There was always this side to Kaminari, the one that took a little coaxing, it was one she had hoped for during the festival but hadn’t gotten. She was glad to have it on her side now.

“Ugh, this stuff is too strange doc, it smells like vomit! I’m going to do what I want from now on...” she heard a voice say from just beyond the trees, upon a nearby path. She peeked through, Mandalay. There was a yellow vial in her hand, drained and almost empty accompanied by another that was. In the other a red one, a strange capsule like thing that was easy enough to identify as blood.

“It’s Mandalay, we’re saved!” Kaminari yelped as he saw.

“No don’t you id-” he leapt out before she could stop him. The woman turned, and presented a friendly smile, “Idiot,” she finished the sentence with a sigh, and stood.

“There you are, I’ve been looking everywhere for you two,” Mandalay said as she tossed away the empty vial she’d been holding and put the other two in her pocket. “Everyone else is already back at
the lodge, it’s just you two out here,” she laughed, “You guys didn’t get scared did you? Not of some small time villains looking for a cheap thrill.”

“No, of course not,” Kaminari brushed aside his hair, “I would never be scared of some villains.”

“Then let’s go back together, my brave little hero,” she placed her hand around his shoulder, causing Ashido’s eyes to narrow.

“Kaminari, get away from her,” she said. Now she knew she wasn’t just being paranoid.

“What’s the deal Ashido, it’s fine!” he chuckled and looked up at Mandalay, “It’s fine, yeah?”

“Yeah,” Mandalay answered and then her hand shot up and down in zigzag.

“Kaminari!” Ashido jumped forward to push him, but it was too late.

Shick, the needle went as it hit skin, and then dove into the vein at Kaminari’s neck, blood travelled up into it as if by vacuum cleaner.

Kaminari screamed as the blood drained, “Let go of me, let go!” he yelled and his body zapped with electricity as a defence, but it didn’t matter, the woman took it in bursts and as she did her face began to melt, her whole body began to melt but the needle didn’t move, not until the lightning ceased and Kaminari dropped into unconsciousness. There was blood all over him, running down his neck generously onto his clothes and splattered across his face. He hit the floor hard as the woman, the fake Mandalay, dropped him. Then she walked backward away from him and turned all the while touching the tip of the needle gently.

“You destroyed my disguise, party pooper,” a face frowned beneath the gunk as it dripped off her frame, it was a high school girl beneath, probably around the same age as herself. “Well, this’ll be way more fun than being that old bag,” she held up the syringe through which she had stuck into Kaminari, it held a sizeable amount of blood in it, more than a sachet but less than a bag. She tore the clasp at the back of it, and then poured it straight down her throat.

“What the fuck,” Ashido said as she reached for the unconscious Kaminari and held his neck to stem the flow. She watched as the skin melded around the girl, the villain, in front of her and then there stood another, a second Kaminari.

“Yo, yo,” he said, “Now I’m liking this, I wonder if that stuff the doc gave me has any juice left in it,” the villain raised his fingers and small zaps of yellow arced from it. “Oh ho, now I’m gonna have some fun with this quirk,” he grinned and then looked down at her, almost in surprise.

“You’re not going anywhere,” Ashido stood and assumed a position with her arms crossed, one from which she could more easily launch her acid.

“Are you sure you want to do that Ashiiiiido,” the fake Kaminari said in a taunting voice, “If you waste your time here then I’m, or rather he, is going to die you know. Covered in blood like that, it’d be a beautiful way to die, so I guess I can’t blame you.”

Ashido looked back down at the student, he was so injured. He really would die at this rate. She looked back, she could take Kaminari, copycat or not. She had done it before, and then there would be one less villain to worry about and no potential for this person to cause more trouble, to get more of what she clearly needed to make her quirk work. It was a tempting line of thought, not one she could see herself ever indulging, but tempting nonetheless.

“You’re worried about him aren’t you? I can see it on your face, we could really be friends you and
I, you know? I think we’re a lot alike.”

Ashido didn’t answer that, instead she took Kaminari off the floor and threw her acid, in all directions except on her classmate, and then she was already gone, upon her slide, with his heavy body in her arms. Saving a life was more important to her than the glory of felling a villain.

[Forest of Beasts – The Heart of the Widow’s Peak – 9:19 PM]

Riley hit the dirt as he was tossed forward from a split in the trees, to which was revealed the moonlight drenched meadow that sat beyond it. They had walked far and this was what he was sure was their destination, a place he did not know but felt familiar in resemblance to a place he had once been. Thick chunks of trees lined the edges, like a great circular beam had razed a perfect centre. The ground was a wild an untamed thing by comparison, housing froths of thick grass that looked damp despite having not seen water in days, between every other tip of it an ashen flower peeked out whose tips were grey, thin and numerous like feelers, or the thin webs that might travel between the inner circles of a spider web.

Dabi’s hand grabbed him roughly by the neck and dragged him with his step to the halfway point, where he dropped him once more and kept walking. There wasn’t much point in resisting it nor, he knew, running away, not until the man was far enough from him that he wouldn’t be incinerated. That point didn’t come because Dabi stopped about a quarter of the way from the nearest lining of trees, only twenty or so feet rested between them. It was dark and solemn beyond him, darker, it felt, than it had been from where they had come.

A funk hit his ears, or rather his mind, like someone was speaking into it via a radio or walkie-talkie however what they were saying was completely muddled and utterly concentration rending, To—na-gi, if yo- c- he- m th-?!

the voice yelled as it settled between high and even higher tone, he almost wanted to cover his ears to block it out. Then it ceased, and faded like the phone call had died.

“We’ve gone far enough now that no one will be coming to save you,” Dabi said as he read his pained expression, “I didn’t think it would go so smoothly, goes to show what consequence something as simple as donating your blood can have, I suppose. It was so easy it was almost boring,” he began to pace around the left edge of the rim.

“I don’t care,” he said and raised his hand, even if he might get injured at this range from the villain’s quirk one squeeze would be enough to stop him from pursuing.

“I know what you’re going to try and do but it’s pointless, even if you take me out you won’t be able to leave,” Dabi stopped and looked to the left, “Isn’t that right, doctor? I know you’re hiding out there.”

His concentration broke at that, and his hand fell. It became drawn wholly to what Dabi was looking at, something he had not seen in three months and characterised by the sound it made, the snapping as it hit the air first and then his ear.

Creak.

The atmosphere developed into noxious mire in one step as the beak reared first. The sight of its peak in the pale light carved fear back into the old wounds. It burned his skin and ached his injuries as he watched it stepped, watched it wind like a gear and then stop in ghastly indifference. It was one thing knowing of his presence but another to see it in its entirety, the man known to him only by that single noun; Janus.
“Excellent. Yes, so very excellent,” the voice left the villain in a gust that trailed unnerving excitement and seemed to shove the wind aside as it pierced him. The gaze of the mask, its glassy eyes through which he knew not even the colour of his eyes, those terrified him most of all. They always came first in his dreams, his nightmares. He wanted to run but his limbs were paralysed.

Dabi walked up to Janus slowly, as if he did not register the man as threatening, “So what are going to do with him?” he asked.

Janus whined as it observed him. The blue sheen on his mask made him seem illuminated as it dripped down onto his ugly, grimy coat. He was almost ethereal in the night, a spectre that shouldn’t have been allowed to exist. “Your presence is no longer required. It is… your co-operation was most appreciated,” there was no betrayal of his intent as he spoke, yet he felt the indescribable yearning the man held. How long he had been waiting.

Dabi’s face turned into a scowl, “I went through all this trouble and you’re shutting me do-” the last word did not fully leave his lips, it was cut from the world by a sickening shuck as Janus drove his hand through his stomach without so much as a glance.

“Harsh,” the word dribbled from the villain as black ooze melted from the wound and then overtook him, melting him into the floor. Then he was already gone.

Janus wiped his hand on his apron, one, two, three strokes that were meticulous enough they were probably counted in his head, “It is time. A long time it has been, for both of us. Yes, I am sorry for making you wait. But now is the time we continue, Riley.”

The man began a slow walk through the knee high grass, one that overtook his attempt to scramble away from it even as he tried to push himself to his feet. Every detail of his body was grotesque, things he only recalled in memory, that he had convinced himself were embellishments, now made themselves truer threefold as he viewed them through a lens unperturbed by time.

Janus reached out a gloved hand, “There is no need for fear, Riley. This one will make it. Almost make it painless. If the subject would just come willingly,” it was like he was calling out to an injured hound, a master to his dog.

He turned and pushed his heel into the dirt, heat mingled with anguish as he ran and pushed and drew every bit of energy he had toward getting to the tree line to escape the man. The sound of gears did not quiet, they did not falter as he made it to the edge, almost like they were laughing at his feeble attempts. He almost touched the trunk of a tree before he tripped not on his own feet but on what felt like a log. He braced on his shoulder as he collapsed with a hard thunk against the wood that should have protected him, within the grass he could see what were hundreds if not thousands of tightly wound pieces of steel wire that brought back only terrible fear.

He watched as he struggled with his pain, he kicked himself back against the tree useless as he was and watched as the man tread closer with casual step. How did he think he could face this man? How had he thought he might be ready? After all this time he wasn’t any closer to being able to look at him let alone protect himself from him. There was not an inkling of the courage he had so constantly reassured himself he would summon when the time came. He was just a kid, a frightened kid, facing something far more evil than he could imagine. He averted his eyes as the man pushed forward one metallic hand and stretched it toward his arm, in a few seconds he would have him. He felt so alone, he didn’t want to go back. He didn’t want to go back there.

I guess everything they said about you isn’t true. Villain kid.

He huddled as he heard the voice but he didn’t want it in his mind. Not the representation of
everything that had been done to him.


His eyes went wide as it drilled into his mind. Something about the words, about its desperation, struck him. It was scared, just as scared as he was, of this man. He raised his hand, he wasn’t sure if it was the effect of compromise or compliance, then he brought it together like he was crushing a stone to dust. “Compress,” he spat.

Janus’s hand stopped an inch from his face, the silver tools unburdened by the weight of a glove were stuck in front of his face, sharp and threatening like they would rend him if he failed to hold the metal in place. He felt his quirk strengthen as nothing but the villain took picture in his mind, everything about him, his frail human structure and the organs inside his body, like he had done to himself only applied with all the hatred he had come to bare and needed to release. Loathing poisoned him with every ounce he piled on, it was a consequence of the voice’s interference but this time his power was all his own, the voice had simply provoked him to use it.

Janus’s hand shuddered as the quirk worked, then his body keeled and stooped as his ability to breathe was crushed out of his body with each passing second. The glass of his mask cracked and the dirty coat scrunched in odd places like he was being pulled inside out. He could feel the bones breaking as he applied it, the force to crush a building many times over. It tore as it touched and it wasn’t delicate, his quirk was a dangerous quirk, it had no delicacy when it came to this.

It was forever before he let it go, not because his fervour had ceased but because his own body was seizing and trembling like it would give out on him and kill him if he didn’t stop. It ended as a snap on both their ends, one as he fell to the floor and the surge of his quirk drained in massive shock into the dirt and two as Janus did, lifeless. His body was mangled, not unlike the atrocities he called the noumu, his costume had been shredded alongside him and it almost seemed to writhe as it lay dead.

He had killed a man but he felt free. He felt no remorse even as he pulled himself back against the trunk, as his scars burned and his hands continued to tremble. He sat and stared it the man longer than he should have, to make sure he really was dead. There was nothing in him, not that there had ever been anything to begin with. A shudder left him as he stood, he could barely afford to do so as he had put everything he could muster into crushing the villain. It had been worth it, no matter what consequence he might face because of it.

He felt another tingle in his mind as he stepped past the man, determined never to look at him again. He recognised now what it was, by the voice on the other end, *This is Mandalay. The real Mandalay. Torenagi if you can hear this please make your way back to the lodge as soon as possible. Combat restrictions have been lifted, please take caution and return safely.* He understood, he had no doubt it really was her this time, with what Dabi had said and the perfect clarity he had obtained he put two and two together.

The forest was quiet and he knew within it were still more villains, however now he felt no matter what he found on his way back it would pose no threat to him. Janus was dead; he had made sure the man was gone for good. He began to walk through the beds of grass and the home of the grey ashen flowers, toward where Dabi had brought him from, he was safe. Now he needed to make sure the others were. He reached it in a matter of steps, the wire which had lined the edge now laid loose and he stepped over it carefully as to not tangle himself up to it.

He took a breath as he reached the edge of the alcove him and his kidnapper had come through, it was a deep breath that he used to allow himself one more look. One more look to confirm that he wasn’t dreaming; that he had truly undone it all.
Nothing had changed as he look, nothing except one tiny outline that bent the stalks of the bed in half as it travelled through them and toward him like an optical illusion. It was a wire, one that ended wrapped around the very lightest part of his ankle.

*Tchink,* the wire went as he looked back. There within the edge of the meadow he found not one mask, but several dozen. They lined every section of the clearing and stepped forward in unison. “There is no use. Riley,” a metallic voice said, “There is no point in struggling. You are already ours.”

He pulled back against the wire in shock but to his horror it tightened. This time he saw exactly where it led, to the devastated body on the floor, only it was no longer as devastated as he remembered it. It jerked and twitched before throwing it’s limbs sideways, up and about, propping them up on the ground and pushing itself to its feet. Beneath the costume, the surgeon’s outfit where the fabric had shredded he could see the regeneration at work, wire twirling itself through flesh and pulling it back together, bone mending itself as it was painfully absorbed back into his skin. The only thing that had remained intact from the quirk had been the mask, however even that had a lens missing and its lining set in a way that it might fall apart at any minute. Where the lens had fallen out he could see an eye, the rings beneath it and the veins that popped in its pupil, there was no anger to speak of and no life, just a strong, shining hazelnut brown. The iris had been cut, altered that made it look like a cracked mirror, one that moved and danced as the eye did.

He took two steps back against the wire, “How? How the hell are you alive?!” he yelled the question. His sickness had spread itself across his body, sweat and disbelief resulted from it.

“Quirks, are magnificent, are they not?” the man waved his hands up and about at the many identical versions of him, “Even a quirk as feeble as this, it can be enhanced to these levels with a little work. It is a step, an exhibition. The noumu, they are truly blessed, are they not?!”

Run, his mind shouted at him, Run away, it said again when his legs didn’t move, not that it would have achieved anything with the wire. He couldn’t muster the concentration to snap it, nor the energy.

Janus’s words tumbled out in fast collections of syllable, a frenzied torrent, “The perfect life form Riley. The noumu are the perfect life form. But even perfection, it is only a state of this one’s perception. It can become more. You, can become more. It can be achieved, come and embrace us, let me make you better!” from his wrists fell wires, hundreds of them that one could not have seen if it were not for the contrast of light against the ground.

“Ma-ri-o-net-te,” he said and flung his arm forward, from which the wires sprung like they had a life of their own, “Entwine,” the word left his lip and then so did too his clones raise their hands and mimic the motion, a thick array flew through the night air, aiming to snatch him away.

His first step dodged the wire almost out of instinct however the second wasn’t so lucky, he hadn’t taken the time to free himself from the wire or rather he had not been allowed it. It snagged him and then the rest did, wrapping around his arms and then his legs and tripping him to the floor, soon he was covered in a thick wrapping like a cocoon. It choked him as it covered his mouth and crushed the air from his body, leaving him breathless and his mind hazy as his sight and his hearing left him as well. There was no point in using his quirk but he let it flow in excess of what he had left, the wires it shed from his body were not enough to free him let alone offer respite. Through the thick coat the world felt drowned, cut off and senseless, he might have felt deprived of all stimuli had it not been for the pain of being wrapped tighter and tighter. It was over, he knew as his sight began to fade, *Useless,* it muttered in disgust as his limbs went numb and his lungs burnt out of cry for oxygen.
The bindings in front of his eyes were illuminated by a thick white, like a lighthouse scanning over his blanked vision, before they fell away undone around his body allowing him to gasp for air.

“Are you alive, Monsieur?” he heard the voice before he felt the hand pull him up, the face that greeted him, had saved him, was Aoyama’s. Beyond him the forest looked like it had undergone a burning renovation that had sliced the trees around in half and had left oily blackness staining the earth where many of the Janus had stood.

“Thank you... Thank you. He almost, I would have...” he stammered, shuddered and then coughed. He was almost at the point where he could have embraced the student out of sheer gratitude, however it was only short lived, because as clear as the forest had been there were more faces stepping out of the darkness, replacements for their fallen comrades.

“A dazzling attack should be finished off by a far more dazzling retreat, don’t you think?” Aoyama said with a smile that hid only the nausea of strain from using his quirk and the fear as he too realised how surrounded they still were.

“There is no esca-a-a-pe. There is no. No hope. I will not. Never stop. It is pointless. Resistance. Is. Pointless! Trivial!” Janus shouted, he could no longer tell who the real one was, however the stitches of his burnt face as they tied it back together gave it away.

Yo_u can’t escape, so j ust let me, allow m_e to save us both, the voice was almost pleading him in a very unusual. “I can’t-” he said but his mind cut him off, Yo_u ha_ve no _choice, it droned with incredible, insatiable effort. “Get away,” he shouted as he felt his body give, using the last bit of effort he could muster to push Aoyama from him. It allowed him that, then he let go, he was too much in agreement of its will now to even deny its want. His neck stung, his head hurt, his scars burned and all of it lead back to his mind, he felt its anger at the man. It went through his arms, along his spine, he lived the tremor as it raised his hands in fury, took them for itself, doused him in a surge of its wrath and a curse of its power before snatching away control through what little resistance he had kept to stop it from residing in his mind.

It laughed, it laughed as it hit his fists into the floor and the quirk drained from him in septic blur, melding into the soft dirt and bestowing it warped twists, it was the madness of victory he felt, its victory, and its ability to now do what it desired. His body felt sharp and painful as his arms came back up in arthritic slur, each filled with the equivalent of a set of kitchen knives. Sight gave him malice, the sight of the masked vigils that sought to bar him from escape, “Die,” he spat and his body stepped into the quirk with his hands clasped together and feet firmly planted on the crumbled floor. It came with such intensity that he was sure his body would pop and split itself into pieces.

The air around the clones furled and crackled as the quirk erupted near them, around them, in many small pockets that he could not count if he tried and that should not have been possible to imagine. It struck the trees that snapped like twigs and ate the floor that sat too close to its power. The first Janus that it touched was minced and ripped apart through the sound of crunching bone and snapping metal, which collapsed then into sooty oil. Many more fell next, each the same way and with just as little mercy, it wanted no mercy for them, he wanted no mercy for them either. In three seconds, or what felt like three, all the Janus had disappeared except for one, and the forest had formed an interim of destroyed branch and wood, the sight at which his quirk began to relent and his focus turned to him and him alone.

“You will come with me. I will take you in pieces if I must,” the Janus said as the wire on his hands lengthened like silk and he began to walk slowly, “Marionette,” he threw his hands in the air, “Waltz,” it began to twirl it like deadly garotte wire as his walk turned into a run. It decimated all it
touched, ashen flowers and grass, as he rushed toward him. “You are my masterpiece. Mine. You belong to me!”

Even through his thick pelt he was tinged by fear, however his loathing overwhelmed it, “I won’t let you, I refuse to let you,” he said, the words were his own. The movements that accompanied them were not. At the cusp of the motion he, it, saw in every detail how the wires swung and leapt forward and pushed his left hand into the thick knot of it. They sliced the skin of his hand for the briefest of instances before coming apart with a *snap*, he landed his right fist in the doctor’s stomach in the same motion like some perverse pincer. Decompression loosened the man’s stomach, stunning him and giving him time to ram his whole body into what felt like a cast iron wall, even despite what he had done it was heavier than anything he had ever tried to lift.

He landed on the man with a knee which damn near shattered his knee cap. He weighed down the man’s defences and his arms and then laid him across the face with his left hand. That did this time serve enough to break something, the fingers cracked in several places as they came away. He pushed his remaining hand into the man’s neck and weighed him down enough to crush the trachea of any normal human, something that he did not even react to; the effect reversed as he touched the face and felt the rotten silk that was his hair, the withered skin that made up his body. He would destroy that damn mask. He wanted to see his face. He wanted to see it as he ended it in one punch. He reared his fist back and tightened it. His thought only lay in ending all the misery the man had brought him, both of them.

His hand struck, and then it sank. The face was gone, what was there now was worse by what he knew of it. It was a black pool that reached at him and pulled at his limbs like quicksand. It was mulch that he couldn’t escape, he was already up to his legs and his arms would soon go with them. His rage left him in one fell swoop, all the pain came with it as he tried to free himself from the vapour but nothing came of it.

The closer his face got to the sludge the clearer he could make out the words, “You. Belong. To. Me. Riley Torenagi, you will never be anything but mine,” it was pulling him in, something on the other side was pulling at him. He reached his right hand at something, anything in an attempt to pull himself out but there was neither branch nor stump to grasp. “The target must be captured. We must proceed to the next stage,” panic flooded him. He couldn’t be captured now, not so pitifully.

He felt a grasp on his forearm, Aoyama’s hand, he pulled back in desperation to get out but it did at best stall, whatever was on the other side was too strong for two kids to resist. *BzzzzzzT T T zztT*, the laser crackled into the darkness as it flew past his face, it was a dangerous shot that almost took off his arm before it buzzed and disappeared.

Then, he was free in one great throw, he almost flew out as resistance ceased, whatever had been there had been hit. Momentum flung him hard down onto his back but he didn’t care, it was, it had been so much that there weren’t enough thoughts to articulate what had happened, just numbness and relief. All at once sound had pulled away like it had all been sucked out with the portal, like an area of space, a vacuum.

Then it came back as crickets and buzzing, the feeling of wet dirt and dry grass on his skin, the cold air in his lungs in contrast to the heat of sweat on his body. He laid and kept still as his breath shut itself down, it probably could have lasted thirty minutes before he moved again but he didn’t feel pain. The wound of his left hand still suckled on the sweet adrenaline as if to prolong the onset just a little longer, to let him enjoy a single aspect of peace after a desperate fight. The night sky sat above him, it trickled with stars from one side of the horizon to the other, right then and there it felt like the best sight he’d ever laid eyes upon, one he knew couldn’t last.
He hadn't killed the man but he had forced his retreat and escaped, barely. That was enough. Now he needed to make sure the others escaped too.

Chapter End Notes

*I don't own BNHA. OC material is my own.
Duplicity

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

[Forest of Beasts – The Widow’s Peak – 9:30 PM Friday]

A fierce echoing pain shot through his hand as he ducked under each branch and passed every trunk. The bliss had only lasted until he’d begun to move and now he was back to paying the full price of his transgression. His hand felt completely shattered from the punch he’d landed and the palm was serrated to boot. He’d stemmed the flow of the wound at least, with a makeshift bandage he’d ripped from the sleeve of his sodden shirt. It was painful but not painful enough to stop him from doing what he’d decided. He needed to save the one Mandalay had named and had spurred him to begin running as fast as he could. That being Bakugou, regardless if he only had one working arm.

He wasn’t sure why they wanted him of all people. It must have been a recent interest considering they could have done it at USJ or right after like they had with him. The only thing he could think of was his quirk, because of what Dabi had said, “You’re not alone.” Whatever the exact reason he was not going to allow it to happen. He was not going to let that sick villain get what he wanted. That notion was what had stolen his thought away from thinking about what had happened. How he had cooperated with that voice in his head, he knew if he stopped he would think about it. He didn’t want to let that happen yet.

He skidded to a stop as he reached the edge of the familiar dirt trail, the one where he’d been kidnapped. He turned back over his shoulder at Aoyama, “What happened after me and the villain left?” he asked.

“Another villain arrived,” he answered. His face betrayed that he didn’t want to say much about it.

“Did Tokoyami and Mezou escape?” he needed to know, even if the guy was scared.

“No idea,” Aoyama shook his head, “They led him away to allow me to follow, a noble sacrifice.”

“I see,” he looked down and around. The ground has not as much foliage or rock as before, like someone had cut it all up with some rectangular blade. “We need to find Bakugou.”

“Non merci,” he said as he grabbed him by the shoulder, “We must return to the lodge.”

He retaliated by shrugging his shoulder, “I’m not going back to the lodge while the villains are still out there. Are you coming with me or not?” he looked at the boy, it was a non-question; the kind that no one should have shaken their head at. Yet, Aoyama did, or he did the equal of that by answering with silence. “I see,” he said and turned on his heel. He wasn’t going to force him to come. There wasn’t time for it and the guy had already done more than enough for him.

He set down the right path and then curved off the ridge toward the edge of the purple miasma cloud. It was a massive thing and also what had let him find his way back as fast as he had. He felt an awful sense of apprehension as he slid down the ledge toward it. Perhaps Bakugou had done the smart thing and already found his way safely back to the lodge. Somehow he doubted that.

[Forest of Beasts – The Dirt Trail – 9:32 PM]

A beast was behind them, swimming in its rage and bathing in the darkness of its body. Midoriya
could feel it pursuing them, catching up to them as it pulled trees from the ground like toothpicks and threw them as javelins. It had the beak of a bird, like Tokoyami. Yet now that it had enveloped him it was the one in control. It dwarfed the slim student in the alcove in which he was stuck. There was struggle on his face as he fought it but the attempt was futile, nothing could stop its terrible fury. If Mezou let it catch them it'd be all over.

His concern was twofold. He needed to find Bakugou and fast but the means for him to do that had left him. His body was a wreck; it was only because Kouta had dragged him back that they had found Mezou who was now carrying him. He couldn’t feel his arms, or the rest of his body, that wasn’t a good sign. Pain should have come by now. That either meant he could no longer feel it or that he was still sitting on the same battle high. He bit his lip to hide it, there was too much at stake for that to matter right now. That wasn’t even taking into account the fact they weren’t only after Kacchan. They wanted Torenagi, or they already had him by what Mezou had said. He hoped Aoyama had succeeded, that he alone was enough, though that felt like a foolish thing to think. They weren't dealing with amateurs like at USJ. No, these were all powerful villains and he couldn't even be sure how many there were. He had only survived out of luck, he knew that.

“We need to find some light or fire, that is the only way to stop him now,” Mezou said as he dodged between trees only to have them cascade around his ears seconds later.

“Right, but where do we get that? The only place is the lodge,” he answered.

“Or we can find Bakugou,” he said. “It is your choice, fight here, run to the lodge or find a quirk that can help us. If you can still move I will distract dark shadow while you make a run for it.”

He thought about it for a second then answered, “That won’t work. It’s too dangerous Shouji.”

“I know it’s dangerous but heroes have to take risks and that’s my choice to make. So what path are you going to choose?”

“Quiet Dark Shadow!” he heard Tokoyami call as he raised his own voice.

There was only one solution and not one that would be satisfactory without taking a risk. He knew that well enough. They needed to find someone to help and that meant only one thing. “I'm not leaving anyone behind,” he answered and slackened his grip. Then he turned on the ribbed back and held onto the wings with the strength he had left. It was enough to raise his voice and yell, “Dark Shadow! Come and get us!”

The beast replied with a terrible resounding screee in answer that chased them down through the woods.

The cloud rumbled as Riley made it close, then he held his arm and looked left. There was a trembling in the gas, like it was recoiling into itself and twisting back into the centre of its being. He wasn't sure if he was imagining it but he could swear it had been doing the opposite before. He wasn't sure if that meant someone had subdued the cause or not but if they had it was a good sign.

He knew he was somewhere near the centre of the trail now, though closer to the bottom of the path than the top. He'd been following what were an assembly of avian cries as well as deafening crashes. If Tokoyami was still fighting that villain, Moonfish as Dabi had called him, then some help couldn't hurt. He knew he wouldn't be able to do much as he was but he had to do something. Anything that would lead him back and closer to Bakugou, if he had yet to be captured.

He flipped his phone from his pocket and it failed to light up, he'd completely drained it as a light
source. Some part of him was still optimistic for a signal not that it would help much. He put the phone back and veered in the direction he was looking. The terrible howl of a beast as it rolled across the landscape encouraged his steps from halt to run once more.

Trees shattered behind him as if the bow of a ship had hit them. Instead what had was far worse, the tip of a razor sharp beak which had missed them by an inch. It would have ripped them apart like cheap bird feed

“Go right!” Midoriya yelled to the boy beneath him, he obliged in a second by swinging his entire body. It had come just in time to avoid the rake of a gigantic palm as it sliced the trees into stumps. The landscape bled from the attacks and the howling did the same to his ears.

Scrawwww, the monster screeched as it hurtled and followed them like he wanted. If they could get it to the great cliff on the far side of the track they might be able to subdue it long enough to get some help. It was their only choice now.

“Straight ahead then left,” he said as he held on for dear life. Shouji’s arms were spindles now, falling apart under his strain. It was exhaustion that was only natural, especially after his fight with that toothed monstrosity. Tokoyami’s rage had dealt with that villain as if he had been a mere model for target practice. The image of that alone as he remembered it made him afraid to engage it.

Mezou’s foot slid as it caught the edge of a rock. He maintained his balance but still fell down the hill right behind it which led down into a small basin. It was one the purple mist had left behind and it couldn’t have been more fortunate if it had tried. Immature dark claw struck inches above his head as they descended into it at manic pace.

“Brace, Midoriya!” Mezou spoke over his back, fast enough for him to push his head into his classmate’s back. They collided with a tree and almost took the sharp point of the rock that the beast had thrown down behind them. His carrier groaned as they came to a stop and slits of blood trailed down his side where the splintered wood had cut him.

“You want to try and escape? There may still be a chance I can distract it.”

“No,” he answered, “I said I won’t leave anyone, I meant it,” he tried to tug at his arm to back up his makeshift bravery but it wouldn’t come. There was nothing left in it; All for One had broken his body several times over this time. He couldn’t regret that now, not after it had lent him the strength to subdue Muscular.

He heard the noise again, closer now and turned and watched as the dark creature hurtled down behind them. It landed and roared, then stomped its fists down as the eyes narrowed and focussed on them. As it charged the earth did too, each terrible claw uprooting anything it could. This was it, they were trapped.

“Dark Shadow stop! You must stop,” he heard Tokoyami’s tired voice through the mist of rage, but he could no longer see him. He had been eaten, merged with his quirk. It wasn’t his fault, what was about to happen as it reached with darkness outstretched.

Bang.

Fire caved the maw in two from both sides and thick smog covered the area in an instant, curling between the trees. The gathered blackness dissipated in all directions as it was overtaken. Then as the ash parted nothing remained, the quirk lay serrated apart.
It had sounded like fireworks going off in Riley’s ears, just over the tree cusps and if he didn’t know better he knew exactly who that sound had been from. It was the unmistakable sound of explosions and fiery temperament felling a similarly hazardous beast.

Fireworks had gone off in Riley's ears. It was close enough to know it couldn’t be further than ten yards away from him, beyond a cusp of trees. The sound had been familiar and unfamiliar at the same time. The merged sound of an explosion and liquid flame, used to fell a hazardous beast. He couldn't be sure it was who he thought but the fiery temperament meant he had to find out.

He stepped the last bits with haste. His earlier triage had made jumping across the roots and keeping his step a mindless trifle now. He did need to be careful in case it was a villain and not Bakugou; the wound was making his quirk weaker by the second. It mightn't be something he could handle himself and getting captured again was the last thing he wanted.

He slid down a small trove of dirt as it gave away into a bowl. The sound has been nearer to the haze than he had been although that could have been his imagination. His step fell to a stop as he hit the edge of a frond, one behind which he could hear indistinct voices. Instead of allowing his dread to spread he swallowed it and pushed the plants away. He had already overcome far worse anxiety tonight.

It came apart with an easy push and he almost regretted it as he stumbled in face first only to jump backward. It was the sight of Mezou's masked jaw and sunken eyes that had done it, to which scabs and cuts aligned themselves. He made sure to hold his gasp and instead uttered a small but sturdy, “Holy shit,” as he tempered in relief. As shocking as it had been it was preferable to the alternative.

“Torenagi,” Mezou said to which the passenger on his back peeked over and ended the sentence.

“Torenagi?! You’re alright,” Midoriya looked as if he had just witnessed a miracle.

“What are you two doing here?” he managed to ask the pair. Their bodies were gruesome sights even if he ignored Mezou's face. Midoriya was by far the worse of the two, every limb on his body lay tarnished by splots of purple bloodied tissue. Bones stuck spiked with shocks of yellow and pointed ways they shouldn't have like backfired shock absorbers. It made Mezou's hardened dashes look trivial by comparison.

“I feel as if that’s our place to ask, you managed to escape the villain?” Mezou asked.

He nodded, “Yeah,” he answered as he looked down at his arm. “I escaped thanks to Aoyama,” he turned to look behind him but the boy really had stuck to his decision and gone back to the lodge. Not that he’d given him a real answer.

“Then we should get back to the lodge, after we retrieve Tokoyami,” Midoriya said. “And Kacchan.”

“Bakugou,” he said before following Mezou’s gaze. The ridge through which the two must have come looked like someone had shot through it with a laser before chucking the rest around with a hurricane. “What happened?”

“Tokoyami went berserk, we were almost goners but… something stopped him.”

A villain? he thought but then dismissed it. The sound has been too distinctive, nothing like the quirk that Dabi had. He’d heard the explosions enough times to be sure and the villains would only encourage destruction rather than stop it. A rustle in the leaves pushed the thought away as hand combed them apart like wild green hair.
“Yo,” Todoroki said as he stepped through with a burden of black feathered body on his shoulder. Behind him stood Bakugou with fuming hands and a grimace cold enough to stop a raging elephant.

“Todoroki?” Midoriya said as he shuffled around in his uncomfortable seat.

He raised an eyebrow in answer, “Expecting someone else?”

“No way, I couldn’t be more relieved after that.”

“What the fuck are you doing here Deku?” Bakugou said as his face soured.

“Bakugou!!” Midoriya answered. The seat hadn’t given him enough view to even see the student.

“Todoroki let me-” Mezou reached his hand out to grab the boy only for Tokoyami to raise his hand in a flit that pushed it out of its path. “I am fine,” he said with a cough that he wiped away. Then he pushed his legs firmer and stood up off the shoulder he’d been leaning on. “I can at least… handle this much,” he said as he rested a hand on his side where a distinct burn mark had torn through the clothing.

“Well at least you’re doing better than him,” Riley looked back at Midoriya.

“If you hadn’t worked together to stop Dark Shadow that might have not been the case,” he shook his head. “I couldn’t see straight after that run in with the villain, it consumed me and… I couldn’t control it. I am sorry.”

“There is no need to apologise, without your quirk we would have been in deep trouble after the ambush. Aoyama succeeded,” Mezou nodded toward him.

Tokoyami looked over at him, “I’m glad it wasn’t in vain,” he answered.

“We don’t have time for idle chit-chat,” Todoroki said. “We have all the people the villains are after; we should head back right now.”

“You’re right, we can’t risk sticking around,” Midoriya nodded. “With a team like this no one’s gonna get their hands on Kacchan or Torenagi either.”

Bakugou snarled almost like an animal at the words. “The fuck makes you think I want your help Deku? I can handle my problems on my own,” he said. “I don’t want some shithead like you to blather my name all over with that stupid telepathic quirk either.”

“Let’s cut straight through the forest back to the lodge. There’ll be less chance of villains catching our escort that way,” Todoroki said. “With Mezou’s quirk no one should get the drop on us and with Dark Shadow at our disposal as well, it should be the easiest way.”

“And we have your ice and fire too, and bunch of other offensive quirks, anyone that gets in our way we can blast down. There’s no way anyone will be able to lay a finger on them,” Midoriya nodded.

“I don’t think I’m much use as I am,” Riley said as he pointed at his left arm. Even his right was far from perfect shape, there was still a gash where he had caught the man’s wire-y weapon. Concentrating well enough to do more than hinder something would take significant effort. He wasn't able to fight.

“It’s fine. You two just walk in the middle and let us worry about it,” Mezou said. Almost as if by accident they had already done exactly that. That was, they had surrounded them on all sides with Tokoyami at their back and Mezou at their front.
“There’s no way I want you asses protecting me. You can shove your stupid chivalry on someone else for all I care,” Bakugou said. He himself offered no words, only a look of agreement. Even if their plan was good in theory it only took one villain powerful enough to change all that. There was still far more than one in this forest.

“Look, with this line up we have nothing to be afraid of, so settle down and let us get you back safely.”

“Bite me.”

“I’m not giving you a choice,” Todoroki shook his head. “If the only other way to force you to come back is to freeze you into a statue then I will.”

Bakugou growled in response but didn’t continue his agitation. Instead he pushed his hands in his pockets and gave a defiant scowl follow by a short look at him. He met his gaze but wasn’t sure what to make of it, it was as if he wanted to see if he was as annoyed with it as he himself was. A shrug was all he could offer. The scowl dropped into a frown but not quite a pout as Bakugou gave up trying to escape. Seeing the creature quietened Todoroki turned away, and then they began to walk as one.

Their group did not proceed with great speed. It would have been impossible to do so with how careful they were being or rather those surrounding him. Trees masked their presence like a cage of spears that both threatened to attack and defend them. His foot would get caught here and there on hazy wire branch lining the ground. He knew that he could blame that on the knee he had rammed into the man’s stomach. Luckily unlike his hand it was still intact.

The fight was still fresh on his mind and his resignation after having found who he was looking for had given way to it. In the twenty minutes they had already walked together he had gone over it several times. Part of that had been in hopes of distracting himself from the pain that had begun pulsing up his arm. It came as tiny stabs that rattled by quirkish tremors and tinctured by dabs of stress. He felt tired and hollow but his mind more so over what he had done.

He had crushed Janus to pieces without remorse. He had not, could not, have justified it yet he had done it anyway. It hadn’t been because that thing had urged him on. It was because he had wanted to, that much was simple to figure out. He had told himself he was over revenge. He had told Iida that, he had told Midnight, Kirishima and Jirou that. Now he wasn’t so sure, the thought itself made him sick.

He should have, like any rational person, tried to immobilise the villain rather than kill him. He didn’t need a heriocics class to teach him that murdering someone, even him, was far from good and righteous. If he had done it that way then maybe he could have gotten answers instead of those last few phrases the man had said. He had banished them from his mind for now, he would think of them later. It wasn’t something he could manage in his current position.

The forest had grown anything but quiet. He could still hear the sounds of something in the distance. It may have been that of conflict, he wasn’t sure, but it didn't sit right as he listened to it. It had him worried not as much for himself as it did for Kirishima and Jirou and all the rest of his classmates. Yet all he could do was trudge and he wasn't even sure why. Where had all his bravado gone? He shook his head to rid it of the feeling; it wasn’t a good idea to fall into that pit of thought again. Midnight had made him keenly aware of how prone he was to doing so. Most of him wanted the night to be over already, it felt like a long shot that it would be anytime soon.

As if to reinforce that idea he heard a quiet but audible snap behind him. It was distinct. So distinct
that he'd almost mistook it for one of his guards had they not spread out as the path had. This sound was too close, far too close. He stopped and looked but saw nothing in the dark tunnel that they had left behind. There were spikes of light falling through it but nothing that showed him a shadow or an outline of cause. He looked longer, a few seconds and then he dismissed it before turning back to those ahead of him. It must have been his imagination. *Snap*, the sound repeated. This time he wasn’t the only one who stopped but Tokoyami as well and Bakugou beside him.

“What was that?” Tokoyami asked as he looked where he had. His own vision travelled above his classmates.

“I don’t know,” he answered before his eyes went wide. There was something there, just above Tokoyami’s head in the treetops. That was why he hadn’t seen it, he’d looked straight back and not up and around. He had not been aware enough to see the masked figure gingerly perched in the height of the forest.

“What the fu-” Bakugou said as he saw it as well but it was too little too late. Unlike its step its fall from a height was silent and instant.

He turned back but only got halfway through the motion of opening his mouth to yell at those ahead of them. He felt a tap on his shoulder and the weird sensation that followed it. It was weird because he knew it as a compression. Though not a lethal or painful one but rather as if he was being pushed together into a tight space. It immobilised him like a thousand kilos had fallen on his body. He couldn’t even turn to look at the other two but he was sure they shared his struggle right now. All he could do was watch as Midoriya and the others trailed further and further away.

“So the good doctor failed,” an eccentric voice crawled into his ear. "It doesn't matter. It is the magician's job to make sure the performance is smooth. Don't worry. You'll be in better hands soon my misguided little birds."

He tried to choke something, anything from his throat but nothing came. Instead his vision cut and rendered him blind before everything popped. The feeling of pressure ceased all at once and left him with nothing. No senses except those he could conjure from his own mind and no body to act out the movement.

Kirishima’s run through the forest was more of a skip than a dash but it had still left him breathless. He had no idea where he was going if he was being honest, all that had led him was the sound of ice chunking through wood. *Fwwwwsh*, he heard the sound again. It was closer this time. If he was keener he might have been able to tell exactly where it had come from by the trails of icy cold within the trees. Instead he changed his direction toward them and hoped it was the right way. As he was about to push his hand through another thick winding plant he stopped, something was on the other side. He could hear the footsteps of two figures and the sound of voices he didn’t recognise.

“Things don’t always go to plan, huh?” a sultry, husked tone floated between the bushes. It was the same one that fire villain had. He leant his back in the tree beside it and slid down to hear what they were saying.

“You can say that again. Nothing went as planned, all according to plan,” a different voice answered. Its inflection was odd, like the two parts were being said by different people but he was sure that wasn’t the case.

“Well, that is why we have the emergency protocol I suppose. Mr. Compress is on his way with the
targets. All that remains now is to meet up and leave.”

Kirishima felt his heart pound for a half second between each word. If what the man was saying was true he was too late. He’d wasted too much time searching. His fist clenched but he resisted the slight urge to jump out and attack the two men. Instead a peek through a parting in the leaves revealed exactly what he had thought. The first man was the same one that had attacked them at the lodge. The second he had not seen, a man with a full black skin suit and completely white eyes.

“We still have some of the doctor’s juice?”

The masked man shook his head, “I gave half to that girl. She took all I had left! Rest went the doctors amazing plan, it was a shitty plan if I ever saw one.”

“Shame, a few more of me would have made this easier.”

“It was a gift after all, from Shigaraki and the doctor themselves made to my specifications. It’d be a shame to lose it to some busted up heroes turned high school teachers.”

*Shigaraki and the doctor*; they could only mean Janus, he knew. He was the only damnable one of the league he could associate with that. His neck pricked and he turned his head away so the villains wouldn’t accidentally spot him. If what they were saying was true then one of those things from the USJ attack was also here. Last time they’d needed All Might to take it down, not even Mr. Aizawa had stood a chance. This wasn’t good, he needed to move.

*Fwwwwweeeesh*, the sound went as if on cue. It wasn’t far from him now. He stepped away from the tree with quiet care and left the two villains to their devices.

Ice curled with froze branches solid ahead of them. Not a single digit helped to hinder the tall, bony man as he stepped with elegance from one branch to the next with ease. He was getting away from them faster than they could up, at this rate it would be too late.

“I won’t let you take them, give them back!” Midoriya yelled. “Kacchan and Tokoyami and Torenagi too!”

“They don’t belong to anyone you brave little fool,” the man spoke over his shoulder as he danced through foliage. It was almost like he was enjoying himself. “I’m just bringing them over to the right side, you must understand. We won’t allow anyone with such rigid values to continue to impose their corrupted view on things. It’s only fair don’t you think?”

“You bastard, you can’t just take whatever you like!” he wanted to charge after the man, more than his body wanted to stop him out of pain. Maybe if he pushed it one more time at full force he could muster something but not at this distance.

“To miss an opportunity like this would be a waste. I simply want to show them the truth about things and to fix the mistakes of my comrades. It’s almost a poetic situation really,” the man gave a chuckle that resounded through the air. Then like a spring he made one more great leap and landed on a branch that should not even have held his weight.

“Come back here!” he shouted.

“Sorry! This is all I’m good for, deceiving and running away!” he laughed again and then fell
backward off the branch out of view.

“We won’t catch up to him like this, we need a better plan,” Todoroki said as he stopped dead in his tracks.

He knew that already, he had thought of a solution too. A dumb one inspired by the Sports Festival. “The only chance is if Uraraka launches us forward with her gravity,” he looked back at her. Finding her had been a blessing and a curse. If they hadn’t been distracted they might have noticed what had happened sooner. He stopped the blame in its track, that wouldn’t help now.

“Like a human rocket, it could work but…” Mezou said.

“Are you sure Deku? With those injuries… you should really stay back,” Uraraka said as she looked him up and down. She looked distressed at the sight.

“Right now,” he pushed himself up as much as he could from Mezou’s back, “I can’t feel pain and I can’t let him get away. I need to save them; I’ll do anything, at any cost.”

“He’s right,” Todoroki said and pulled himself up beside him in one tug onto Mezou’s back.

“You never learn Deku,” she shuddered at the words then gave two heavy lidded breaths, “Alright. I understand. We have to act fast, don’t we?” she nodded before giving a strong smile, “Tsuyu.”

“I’m on it. Ribbit,” the girl answered before unrolling her slimy tongue around them.

“I won’t be able to hold it long. So make it count,” Uraraka pushed her hands together after streaking her hand across their bodies once each. “Please, save them,” she said as she closed her eyes and strain pushed herself across her body.

“I will,” he answered as Tsuyu’s tongue surrounded them.

“Now.”

They were gone in an instant like they had launched from a slingshot. They went up and through the trees at an angle that let them see everything and was almost too fast. A speed that had him wondering exactly how they would come to a stop. Wind seared his broken body as he held onto the sharp ridges of Mezou’s wings alongside Todoroki.

“There,” Mezou shouted against the wind and pointed. Among the trees below them he saw the man, jumping at incredible speed. Before he could utter a command he felt the gravity come back to his body. They careened down at an angle toward the villain and barely avoided the tree. Ice met them and acted as a slide that propelled them right beside the airborne villain.

“Persistent brats…!” he said before hunching down like he was going to jump again. This time he didn’t get the chance. Fronds of ice snuck around him and latched him to the tree. Then a powerful wingtip struck him in the side and sent him shooting to the ground below. They followed as well and crashed down on top of the villain. When the dust of collision settled he had an arm between his hands, one he was pinning to the floor. His companions had the rest of his body, they were finally in control.

“Where are they?!” he shouted the question.

The villain gave a cough pressured by the knee in his back, “A magician doesn’t reveal his secrets.”

“If you won’t answer then I’ll make you,” Todoroki said as a flame lit up the right side of his body.
“Is that right?” the man looked up at him.

“Mister Compress,” a husked voice said. “Please dodge this.”

Searing heat washed over them as the words echoed. He kicked his leg back to evade it, an action that sparked One for All for a mere second out of the danger and panic of it. It shocked him back like he’d blown a fuse, his cowl was impossible to maintain for more than a flicker. The price for that was a lashing tongue of fire almost burning his shoulder as he fell to the floor. The rest of the heat slid away over his head.

He watched as the man they had trapped stood and dusted himself off, “I must thank you. It appears my performance didn’t go as smoothly as I’d hoped,” he said. Then he walked to the other villain’s side, one with black hair and horrible scathed tissue.

“They went to all this effort and they couldn’t save their little friends, how pitiful. Let’s get out of here,” the man said, behind him was a dark maw, a black pit that they knew all too well.

“I won’t let you,” he tried to wrestle himself to his feet but instead of lunging he was forced to fall to the side. The point of a knife flashed past his head with deadly glint.

“Hey Izuku,” the one who’d swung it said, the tip of the blond hair carved through by a black spark was what leant it surprise.

“Kaminari?” he yelped as he crawled backward through the dirt at the sight.

He had a maddened glare in his eyes, “You look so cool right now, I’m so jealous, ya know? Now let me see just a little more of your blood,” he said as he raised the knife again. Before Kaminari could bring it down a curtain of fire hit his side. It melted the skin in a ghoulish manner as it engulfed him and swept past. What it left behind was a girl just a tad shorter than the boy she had pretended to be moments before.

“Incinerating your own classmate?” the girl looked at Todoroki who still held the coat of fire thick on his outstretched palm.

“The classmate I know would never do something like that, there’s no reason to hesitate,” he shook his head.

The girl giggled, “Oh I like you, ruthless people who are willing to get a little blood on them… but I don’t want to die.” She turned her head back to him, “My names Toga alright? You better not forget. I’ll make sure to come see you soon my little Izuku.” He didn’t answer but she gave him a nasty curled smile before turning in a girlish twist. Then she skipped into the dark portal and disappeared.

“I don’t want to waste more time, let’s make an exit,” the crow nested man said. He turned back to the magician, “You got the two of them right, Bakugou especially?”

“Not just the two, the three of them. You can thank me later Dabi,” he pushed his hand into his pocket and rummaged. After a few seconds of patting around a few more times he returned it empty.

“Looking for these?” Mezou said as he unfurled his hand, it was hard to see the three round pebbles in it through the moonlight. “You were hiding these in your pocket. These are our friends, right Mister Entertainer?”

“Oh ho, you’re quite adept at groping around six arms,” he chuckled, “And it’s Mister Compress, not entertainer. Don’t besmirch a great magician’s name so clumsily.”
“You idiot,” Dabi growled and flung his hands back. Tips of orange came out from the space between each finger, like deadly webbing. “After all the pain my clones went through, you let them get away with our prizes.”

**Thwomp,** a small bar like cane smacked Dabi’s hands down before the fire could unfurl. It had appeared out of the magician’s hands from nothing, “Now now, let’s not get ahead of ourselves. You shouldn’t roast these misguided schoolchildren, now should you?”

“I’m sick of your games already Compress,” he clenched his fiery hands and the flames died.

“A true performer is not known for just cheap parlour tricks. Alas the only reason to flaunt is when you have something greater to hide,” a *pang* bounced through the air as Mister Compress pushed his fingers together. The pebbles in Mezou’s hands erupted into gigantic bricks, logs and boulders that flung him backward with the force of cannon fire. “I’m afraid you’ve made a dire mistake,” he put his hand to his mask and pulled it back. Beneath it were three dime sized coins on his snake-like tongue. Each of them bared etchings that were unmistakeable in their likenesses. “Looking for these?”

“This isn’t, I won’t let you-” he shouted and kicked his legs. All it did was serve to send him crashing to the floor metres from the men, pathetic as he was.

“It’s been fun. Let’s do this again some time,” Mister Compress gave a sharp laugh as his companion sank away behind him. He paced back one step at a time to do the same, all while watching them and rolling those coins on his tongue.

**Fwwwwsh,** ice hit the floor turning it into a rink but it was too slow. The man’s head was already half submerged by the time it passed on the floor beside him. They were going to get away. They were going to get away with Kacchan and all of th-

**Thoom.**

Light pierced through the back of the vale and through the villains shoulder with a violent splatter of fabric and blood. It shot up through his mask and fractured it into a thousand pieces. The man’s body curled as another hand reached back through the darkness at his body. However the round pieces on his tongue loosened in their spot and fell out of his mouth and forward.

“Gah!” Mister Compress yelled as he held his face and the coins erupted in the same manner as before. Todoroki’s ice had already caught Tokoyami and sent him sliding in a paralyzed haze toward them. Torenagi behind them landed on his feet, an action he couldn’t control causing him to slip hard into the dirt inches in front of the portal. The third never hit the ground as Mister Compress had grabbed angrily in front of him at the one closest. The one he had succeeded in grabbing was Kacchan.

*I have to,* the thought cut short as One for All pressed into the dirt. It might have broken his toes had they not broken long before. He flew forward a metre, two. For a second he felt he would make it but then it shut down. He collapsed again hand outstretched as the villain pulled Kacchan backward with him.

“Get away… Deku!” Bakugou shouted before his face disappeared.

“No!” he yelled as the portal wavered. All he was left to do was desperately grasp at the dirt as he tried to push his body to do what he wanted to no avail. His classmate was gone. Kacchan was gone. “Damn it!” he pounded the ground with his fist.
Ssshhhttttetet the portal went as it closed. It did, for a second. Then wavered in its entirety before it grew stringent like it had been poised up by a metal beam. What pried it back apart were two hands, though they were anything but what a human might have. The fabric of the gloves they wore was ripped and beneath them metal threads fell through. They were trailing heavy across the floor like the prongs of a rake.

A face followed. A disgusting beak that barely held itself together through cracks in the panes of its eyes. The bottom jaw of it had been crushed and beneath it he could see something moving. There wasn’t a face visible, not entirely anyway, instead there were crevices of decrepit flesh. They served as caves and hobbles for something that he could not completely make out. The longer the moment held the more he could see. A greyed jaw, dead necrotised skin and teeth ripped from seats. Bits of grungy hair were at the back that looked synthetic, inhuman.

One hand pushed him away. It flung him out of its path as it clawed for what it really wanted, “My-y-y-y masterpiece… I will have it. I will take what is rightfully mine. What is ours! I will not rest-t-t-t,” the voice screeched and cracked as if to mimic the sound of a broken music box. He saw only bits of it happen as he pushed his shattered body back toward it from where he had fallen. The disturbance of a smile now hung on its disgusting jaw as it reached out. It seized its hand on Torenagi, who could only look back at it in horror as paralysis had yet to wear off. It was obsession on its face, single minded and dangerous.

There was terror and pain on his classmates own as the wires erupted from the gaps in the glove. They strapped themselves around his arm. He looked around at them in search of what could only have been help, yet there was none to give. He couldn’t act, not even Todoroki could act with how much he had pushed himself and how far away he was. There was only one outcome they could watch. The wires caused pain on the cut up arm as the villain began to pull. This time it was not slow but fast and unconcerned. His classmate scratched at the wire but it did nothing except carve bloody indentations into his fingertips.

“This. Is how it is meant. To be, you will do, you will serve. You are mine,” the jaw snapped open and closed as it began to sink back and take Torenagi with it. It was as if they were sinking into the earth itself.

**Crack!** a rocky fist broke the rest of the mask and slackened the grip all at once.

“I’ve had enough of you, you bastard,” Kirishima said with a look of deepest grim. It was an engrossed hatred of the sight of the unmasked villain. The rotting gums and decaying bone were jokes now in comparison to the sight of the hidden creatures. There must have been dozens, if not hundreds of tiny little worm-like things. Silver wires anchored them to the villain’s skull. They mimicked maggots almost too much in all aspects except colour. Each patterned in sickly green and the red of blood they had taken into their bodies. Janus grasped his face with his other hand in retaliation, like he wanted no one to see. Then he disappeared all at once, along with the great maw of darkness that had eaten one of them. It had come and it had taken and now the connection was gone, they had gotten what they had wanted, at least part of it.

All he felt was pain as his limbs gave out. His body gave a great yell almost against his own will that hurt his lungs and pushed through the entire forest. Humiliation resided in him, humiliation and utter defeat.
*I do not own BNHA. OC material is my own.
“Riley?” a familiar voice shook him. He didn’t answer but instead held his look back at the portal through which the villain had disappeared. He’d been so close to him, seen so much of his horror. It still hadn’t quite registered in his mind how he had almost been taken, how he had even ended up where he was right now. Everything was still so blurred from the nothingness he’d been in moments before. “Riley!” Kirishima redoubled his effort but his eyes were preoccupied with the silver bits of wire still tangled around his arm. They were so fine, so strong and more like silk than metal.

Smack, a firm palm touched him across the back of his head. The pain was enough to make him snap out of it. “W-what?” was the first thing he said. He hadn’t taken in anything around him, none of the carnage, his mind was still too busy. He looked at Kirishima, then at Midoriya and then it came back to him. “Bakugou. He’s gone,” he stated it as a fact. A fact that brought hopelessness. He’d failed to do anything useful, he’d only gotten in the way. It was his fault they’d succeeded. “I should have-have, ha-” he began only to stutter.

“You better not blame yourself. It’s no one’s fault except those shitty villains,” Kirishima answered. The words sounded like something Bakugou would say, not him. Before he could say something back to that his friend pulled him to his feet by his forearm, to avoid touching his broken hand and his bloodied fingers.

The vertigo and dizziness didn’t stop his speech long, “Bakugou is with that man.”

“You’re right,” Mezou nodded and picked up the unconscious boy. “We’ll only be at risk staying out here.”

Kirishima shook his arm before slinging it over his shoulder, “Come on, we gotta get you back too,” he said.

“I’m okay. I can walk on my own,” he answered but he wasn’t sure. All he could keep seeing was that face. It had faded with time but now the worst version of it, the broken mess of miscreation, sat even when he had his eyes wide open.

“You’re not okay,” he began pulling him forward with him. He didn’t bother resisting, Kirishima was right. All his actions, they had been exactly what Janus desired, they had all led to this point. If he hadn’t decked him it would have been over. They had only walked two feet together before a soft voice came from up ahead. It was Uraraka and behind her three more, Tsuyu, Tiger and Mandalay.

“Deku!” she yelled as she came up to them.

Todoroki shook his head in response, “He’s out cold.”
“Deku,” she mumbled with slivers of worry. She had every right to be.

“Where did the villains go?” Tiger asked. The man had purple welts all over his body, as if he had been beaten by a baseball bat without mercy. Even as nasty as they looked he didn’t seem to notice them.

“Gone,” Mezou said. “They used a warp quirk to escape.”

Mandalay rubbed her palm across her forehead, the claw of her costume was no longer attached to it, “What a mess. We’ve only been able to account for about half of you, at the very least you six are okay.”

“Merci, however…” Aoyama said.

Before he could finish there was a groan, from Mezou’s back where Midoriya had passed out. “Mrs, p-please. They took Kacchan. They took him right out from under us. We need to save him,” he said and then collapsed once more into unconsciousness.

“We will,” she said. It was pointless though, he couldn’t have heard her answer. Her face had grown still and sad, “Paramedics are on their way, some have already arrived at the lodge. Getting all the remaining students back there is our priority now.”

Hmm, Todoroki answered, “I’m uninjured. I’ll head out and search with you.”

“We’ll go too. Ribbit.” Tsuyu croaked and Uraraka nodded.

“As shall I,” Aoyama said.

Kirishima shrugged with him on his shoulder, “I’ll bring Riley back to the lodge and see who else I can recruit to help look.”

“That’s the best plan we’ve got for now then, get to it,” Mandalay said. “I won’t let any kids die on my watch,” she shook her head before setting off from where the six of them had come, back toward the lingering tils of purple. Those she had recruited followed her and soon they were alone again, four without the addition of Todoroki.

The walk was slow but it wasn’t far. In fact it was almost a joke how close they had been to the forest lodge, how close they had been to safety. As the lodge began to peek through the trees his anxiety drained away but dread still lingered. It felt like someone had run him through with a spear, his mind kept going back to what they had done to him. What Janus had done to him and what he was going to do to Bakugou. The idea of it became too much to bare as they finally reached the grove of cleared wood in which the building lay.

“The villains, they attacked because of me and Bakugou, didn’t they?”

His friend waited a second before nodding, “Yeah. It looks that way.”

“Do… do you think the reason they targeted him is because of what happened in the Sports Festival?” he asked. It was too coincidental, the fact they’d gone after the one who had shut him down, who was equal to that thing.

“I don’t know.”

“That’s what Dabi said, not in those words but.”
Kirishima’s pace slowed as he said it, “Dabi?” he asked.

“The villain with the black hair and the fire quirk,” he answered. Had Kirishima been too late to even see him? His friends walk stopped completely now, Mezou who hadn’t said a word kept going ahead of them.

“Listen, we’re going to get you help. All this, it can wait until everyone’s fixed up yeah? Speculation isn’t going to help us right now.”

He looked at Kirishima. There was more than upset now but anger, lots of it. “Sorry,” he said. He hadn’t meant to do that. Their walk began again.

Kirishima gave a short breath then his face turned back to normal, “Its fine. I’m not angry at you, it’s myself I’m angry at,” he said as he pushed the door leading into the mess hall open. Inside the chairs and benches had all retreated against the wall and in the center canvases had spread wide. A temporary abode flooded with bodies.

“Kirishima, Torenagi,” Pixie-Bob said as she spotted them, Blood King was next to her. Behind them on the ground was Kaminari, who was asleep with a large gauze on his neck. “That makes two more accounted for and one missing completely,” she said as they walked up.

“Mrs, is there any bandages or any-”

Thwip, Blood Kings fist went as he cuffed Kirishima in the side of the head. “Idiot,” he said. “What gave you the idea to run off on your own like that?”

Kirishima rubbed the wound, he looked remorseful but more so like he’d expected it, “Sorry Sir. It’s just-”

“Disobeying was a stupid thing to do but,” the teacher’s face softened. “Can’t say I’m not glad you did after what Mandalay told us.”

“They got Bakugou.”

“We know, there isn’t much we can do until backup gets here. The matter is out of our hands right now.”

“But Sir.”

“No arguments. I’m cutting you slack for what you did and that’s it. The next part is the job of the pros, not yours,” the man shook his head.

Kirishima looked down at his feet before looking to the right at him, “Right. Sorry Sir.”

“Now, let’s get those hands looked at,” Pixie-Bob said and pointed to one of the chairs at the side. Next to it were boxes, dozens of them pilfered of medical supplies. “After that kid over there I’m glad your wounds aren’t as serious,” she looked over in the corner where the only two paramedics that had arrived were fussing over one student, Midoriya. Iida stood next to him, stone-like in his expression. The few others that had escaped harm were also crowded and otherwise shellshocked.

Kirishima put him down in the chair and he felt the relief in his knee, “I should have done more,” he said.

“You got away without dying. That’s what matters, yeah?” Kirishima said. “I’m going to head back out there, there’s still people in the forest.”
“I’ll go too,” Blood King said, “Eraserhead is busy dealing with the police, but I’m sure he can handle it. There’s more help arriving soon to get everyone to a real hospital. We can’t do much here.”

“Mr. Aizawa,” Kirishima repeated with almost alarm, as if he’d forgotten about the man completely.

“He’s fine, a few scrapes and burns. He’s seen worse.”

“There we go,” Pixie-Bob said and cut the bandage. She’d wrapped his left arm up to the elbow and his right across the palm. There wasn’t much she could do for the knee. “Sit tight until we can get you to Recovery Girl, okay?”

“Yeah,” he answered. Not like he had much choice, he thought as he watched her go back to the other more dire students. Most of them were pale and lifeless but the pin that made it worst of all was the shallow breathing of Jirou. Momo was sitting over her with a respirator that she must have made herself. He should have done more, yet all he’d done was pursue his revenge.

“I’ll meet you outside in five minutes and then we’ll head off,” Blood King said as he turned away.

“Got it, Sir,” Kirishima answered and looked down at him. “Don’t do anything stupid while I’m gone.”

“I want to help,” he said and tried to stand, though crippled as he was it didn’t looked very impressive.

“You’re in shock, so listen to Pixie-Bob and sit still, man.”

“I don’t want to be protected. All I could do was watch. He was right there and I didn’t help at all,” he spat and clenched his hands on his knee, only his right allowed him to, the other offered only pain. “Janus,” he said the name but didn’t finish the thought, instead all he could do was grimace.

His friend frowned and then fell back down in the chair next to his, “What exactly happened between you and him in the forest?”

“I killed him,” he answered.

“You killed him?”

“It doesn’t sound very convincing does it? I crushed him with everything I had, he just… came back. Like those Noumu.”

He leaned forward, “Then what happened?”

“He had me. He pushed me into a corner… I let that thing happen again. I let it take over and,” he paused.

“And?”

“I shouldn’t have done it. I shouldn’t have, I think it’s exactly what he wanted. Everything I did played straight into his hands…”

_Hmm_, Kirishima answered.

He looked up, “If you hadn’t come and if Aoyama hadn’t come…” he gave his broken fingers a frail touch as he spoke. “He would have gotten me again. It’s that easy. I really… am just his plaything. I’d rather he took me instead of Bakugou, then at least-”
Thwack, the hand drew across his face, causing a drop of blood in his mouth as the fingers struck tooth to lip. He drew his hand to the stinging flesh and held it in pain as he looked at Kirishima. The anger on his face was palpable.

“Don’t,” he said. “Don’t you ever say that again.”

He stopped and gave his friend a blank stare. Then he dropped his fingers as he realized what he was doing. Pitying himself, trying to be some kind of shitty martyr. That wasn’t helping and he knew he was being stupid and childish and downplaying what Bakugou had already done for him. “Sorry,” he said as he spat the tiny bit of blood away. What they needed were words of action, not regret. “I can’t let Janus do whatever he wants. We need to find a way to bring Bakugou back. I refuse to let the same thing happen to him.”

“Well,” Kirishima said, “We’re heroes aren’t we?” he asked in a tone that downturned any challenge.

“Yeah,” he answered.

“Then we’ll do whatever it takes. No matter how dumb,” his answer was almost a chuckle. “It’s that simple, so for now count on the rest of us for a change, alright man?”

“Yeah,” he repeated and sat up straight. His reassurance was enough, he could rely on him and the others to find everyone else. They were all capable, far more capable than he was in his current state.

“Thanks,” he added and rubbed his lip again. It felt raw and made him feel more awake.

“I think you’re the only guy who’d thank me for punching him,” Kirishima gave a cheeky grin.

He allowed himself a bittersweet smile at that. There was no way he was letting history repeat itself. As he watched Kirishima leave he stood and walked over to Jirou, at the very least he could keep Momo and her company until help arrived.

[**Kuwasanga Southern Hospital – Room 8G – 8:27 AM Saturday**]

“You don’t have to treat me, it can wait,” he said as the woman caused him to wince with each touch. She had insisted on looking at them now, no matter his protest and despite someone far more injured laying less than six feet from him.

“If your arm heals back the wrong way you’ll be living with it for the rest of your life you stupid boy. Now hold still,” Recovery Girl said as she flattened the fingers out and tugged them into the form she wanted them to take.

“But,” he said but stopped himself as he looked over at Midoriya. He’d been twisting and turning in fever all night.

She frowned as she noticed his glances, “I’ve done all I can for him and for the others, you’re actually the last one I came to.”

“I am?” he asked, then he realised, he might have sooner had he looked closer. Her lips sat cracked and how her form hung tired. Even her voice came out ragged. She must have been at it all night bringing other students back from the brink of death. It could only have been that way, considering he’d caught her rushing in and out of his room during flits of sleep that he was unsure how he had gotten.

The woman didn’t answer, instead she pressed her quirk into his hand. It gave a glint and then
shimmered as the bones of his fingers twisted into place. Then the skin reformed on his forearm and his right hand along with two of the nails that had split down the centre. Last of all he felt the strain in his knee disappear.

He held up the hand, the process still surprised him. It was foolish of him to try and reject such a simple solution to his injuries, he supposed. Still, it had left Recovery Girl only more strained, if she didn’t rest soon then she might be the one who’d die.

“Thanks,” he said. After they had gotten in the ambulance the night before his shock had left him. Kirishima and the others had succeeded in their endeavour but there had been no trace of Bakugou or any of the villains, they had all gone up in smoke.

“That boy,” Recovery Girl walked over to Midoriya’s bed. “He is lucky he even made it to the hospital. I’ve never seen anything like it, how could he be so reckless? To play with his mother’s heart like that, that’s not something I can stand seeing.”

“Yeah…” Midoriya’s mom had been the first here, though he had only seen her and not spoken. She had been removed from the room now so that Recovery Girl could work in peace but that had only been after a good hour of crying, through which he had remained silent and pretended to sleep. It made him feel dreadful, his own mom must have gone through something similar.

Midoriya hadn’t been the only one in such dire condition. Jirou and Hagakure had caught the worst of the gas attack. Kaminari had lost significant amounts of blood but luckily he’d already awoken. In total around twenty of them remained admitted. Many remained critical and three in intensive service. The one who had been the cause of the gas attacks had been apprehended. That had been godsend, though it unnerved him to find out the culprit had been no more than a middle schooler. Nevertheless it had given the doctors a means to an antidote, something that had stopped the worst of the symptoms. He was going to visit Jirou as soon as he was released and that 1-B student too, Tsunotori. She hadn’t gotten off light either, one of the villains named Spinner, had stabbed her. It was lucky her quirk made her sturdier than any normal person.

There had been no talk of Bakugou or if there was he hadn’t been allowed to hear it except from Kirishima. Wherever their classmate was they didn’t know. It made his mind reel to think about but he wasn’t going to let to let that stop him. He knew one foolproof way to get Janus’s attention, they would get Bakugou back. Kirishima was already on his way here to discuss exactly that, but he was hardly going to do that in front of Recovery Girl. One question kept creeping into his mind. If he had been able to actually kill Janus would that have prevented Bakugou’s capture? Perhaps, he mused, perhaps not, he concluded. That possibility still didn’t make it right, even if it did keep floating back to him throughout.

“I’m releasing you,” Recovery Girl said as she finished looking over Midoriya.

“Really?” he answered. It didn’t seem like her.

“With the gas attack we don’t have the resources to spare. I’m glad at least some of you weren’t caught in it. Don’t do any rigorous activities for a few days and you should be relatively back to normal. If anything feels off then come back. Let the receptionist know when you leave, I’m sure you know the drill by now, boy.”

“Got it. Thanks Ma’am,” he said. That solves one problem, he thought. She left in a weird hurry then, though considering how many rooms they were spread across it wasn’t unexpected. Now he could go and see Jirou and the rest. It’d be easier to talk with Kirishima too without the interruption by someone entering the room.
He pulled the curtain around and dressed himself as fast as he could. He hadn’t been the one to retrieve his bags from the lodge but it had ended up in his room nonetheless. He was grateful for that, inside it he had something he wanted to give Jirou. He’d brought it by accident, thinking it was his mother’s necklace. Turns out he’d already been wearing that and had mistaken the gift for that instead. Considering how close he’d come to being captured maybe it did bring some semblance of protection, though it wasn’t like he actually believed that.

He stood and slung the two bags over his shoulder. They were heavy on him as the fatigue of recovery wore on him twice-so due to the woman’s help. He adjusted the heavier one to sit across his shoulder and down his chest and dropped the one with the weights to his right, before he headed toward the door. He still felt covered in grime and dirt from the night before. If he hadn’t been it might have felt like it had happened an eon ago. It was still hard to believe it had, though it shouldn’t have been.

He went for the door after wiping his face down with a cloth that had been on his bedside. Next to it had been a card, presumably from Momo. Midoriya had the same and he was sure every student holed up here did too. Before he could drag the room open he saw someone else on the other side, in time for them to enter on him instead. It was Midoriya’s mom again, it might have been less awkward if he had known her name.

“S-sorry,” she mumbled and stood aside to let him pass. Her eyes were red and swollen by grief.

“Ah, no it was my fault,” he answered. It wasn’t but he wasn’t sure what to say. After he went through he paused and looked after her as she walked up to her son. She must have noticed because she turned back to him and opened her mouth, closed it slightly then opened it again to ask what was on her mind.

“Did Recovery Girl say anything about Izuku’s condition?” she was doing her best not to break out into tears again.

“No,” he answered. “When he wakes up is all up to him now.”

“Oh, oh I see,” she eyed Midoriya again. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to stop you.”

“It’s not a problem,” he pulled himself back into the frame of the door. Now it felt wrong to leave it at that, “I’m sure he’ll wake up soon. He’s a tough guy, the toughest in our class,” he tried to put on a brave smile.

“My Izuku?” she looked surprised. Then the look vanished, like she already knew that. “Yes. You’re right,” she smiled back before dropping any hint of attention on him and putting it back on her son. He shut the door as he left, even saying goodbye would have been rude. He was sure Midoriya would pull through, not by any real reasoning but by feeling alone.

He walked through the halls complacent in all but purpose. It was a good feeling being able to stand again, to be able to use his hand, to not have bleeding reminders of that villain. All he had once more were his old scars, nothing he could not live with now. He passed from the south of the hospital wing to the corner of the east, looking into each room along the way. Most were empty now which was a good sign, even Tsunotori’s. He should text her, to make sure.

He pushed the buttons in and pressed send as he reached Jirou’s door, the one she shared with Hagakure. It was different than the others as it housed only two instead of four. Midoriya’s and his own room had been a similar affair, though it was probably because they needed space. He hesitated but then pushed the door open. It scratched on the frame like it didn’t fit. Spots of rust sat at the hinges.
Light split the room in two blinding him for a brief instance. The first thing he noticed was Momo, sitting near the curtains drawn open. It was warm inside and the beep of machines overtook the sound of Jirou and Hagakure’s breathing. Both were still unconscious, it was a painful sight, just as painful as it had been yesterday when he had stood over her until paramedics had arrived. Momo and him had only shared gazes then, not words and now the air strained in the same way.

“Hey…” she said without enthusiasm. She had a tired look like she had aged ten years in a single night. He doubted she had slept.

“Hey,” he answered in turn as he stepped beside Jirou’s bed and took a seat of his own.

“I’m glad you didn’t get hurt,” he shook his head. She muttered in response, maybe out of thanks but it was so quiet it might as well not have existed. He didn’t mind, he understood. Jirou was filling him with regret every second he looked at her, it was… his fault too. Everyone that had gotten hurt had gotten hurt because they wanted him and Bakugou.

He swallowed the dry soot in his throat as he thought about the aftermath. The media were probably having a field day with it all. Another kidnapping not even five months after the first. That would make the school look bad, it could be bad enough to shut it down. He had wanted to talk to Aizawa but that luxury hadn’t been his as he had been scooted away first chance the police and paramedics got. It must have been horrible for them too, to be so powerless to stop a villainous attack on a bunch of children. His questioning had been brief and dual, an officer had asked him every detail and he had given what sparse details sprung to mind. Mandalay had gotten to him after that, that had confirmed what he had already worked out. The idea of a clone quirk made him uneasy even now, a little paranoid.

Momo gave an uncomfortable squirm next to him, causing him to realise his stare must have been burning a hole in Jirou’s bed. “Sorry,” he said and shook his head and looked at her. “Did the doctors say when she would wake up?”

“No but she’s not in critical condition,” the girl answered. “It could be a day, it could be a week, I don’t know. Okay?” the look she gave him was accusing and her tone defensive.

He nodded fast, he hadn’t expected her to snap at him like that, “I’m not going to blame myself. She would kick my ass for that but,” he clenched his fists. “I feel nothing short of useless. There’s nothing we can do for her, for anyone,” he resisted the urge to punch his knee in annoyance.

She gave a drawn out breath then she answered, “It’s… it’s better we just let the pros handle it all now. They’ll know what to do.”

“She didn’t hesitate to come rescue me on that day. I owe her for that,” he said as he looked down at the scars, as if only to get it off his chest. “Bakugou did the same, not being able to do anything for him when I know exactly what he must be going through is awful. I hate it. I hate the feeling of it, the idea of it. If there was anything I could do I would do it in a heartbeat. But there’s really nothing, is there?” he looked at her again.

Momo didn’t answer, she sat in silence as seconds turned into minutes. Then she fumbled and got up and almost dropped her bag doing so. “I need to be somewhere,” she stuttered away from her calm and polite tone. “I’m sorry,” she turned and left without even giving him a chance to say something.

“Oh,” was all he uttered as the door shut. Then Jirou and him were alone, except for Hagakure. He didn’t mind, it was kind of what he had been hoping for. “I must look pretty pathetic right now. Sorry,” he said down to her. There was no change at the words, to expect something would have been silly. He pulled at his pocket where he had stashed the necklace he had bought. It was intended
for a birthday that was still a month away. The emblem was a music note like Meina’s. She had in fact told him where to get it. It was small and plated in fake silver. It was the kind of thing you could wear around your neck or on your wrist or even use as a room decoration.

“I’ll think of something,” he said as he rubbed the back of his head and stood. Then he put the necklace down on the nightstand. She wouldn’t want him hanging around for nothing like this. The irony that she had done that for him was staggering but he would allow her that. It was the least he could do, he thought, as he turned to leave as well. It took him a bit to do so, he wasn’t sure why, Jirou would be fine with or without him there.

The door shut and now he had no obligation to stay in the hospital. Though he guessed that wasn’t wholly true, Kirishima wanted to meet him in the lobby in less than an hour. He should have texted him to tell him to come sooner but he hadn’t expected to be released. He wasn’t even sure what was going to happen next, especially with what he had in mind. Maybe he should go and see Kaminari while he had the chance.

He decided to do just that and turned back down the hall from which he had come. As he reached the corridor that bared his room again he took a sharp turn down a staircase. He trudged the steps and passed one or two people on the way. A female doctor who looked like she hadn’t slept a wink and a man with a tray of vials following behind her. The hospital was still in chaos, one that was winding down but in a slow depressing manner. It made him feel weird that he wasn’t still in a panic like everyone he went by seemed to be. There was a dull lack of feeling in his chest.

“Hey!” a voice called as he took the final step down the staircase. He realised it was directed at him. “Talk about convenient timing,” Kirishima said.

“Yo,” he answered as Kirishima made it to him and slammed his palm into his, pulling him in for half a second before letting him go. He wasn’t alone; behind him was Todoroki of all people.

“You look good as new man,” his friend looked at his arm and then at his knee. “I was beginning to think you enjoyed staying in hospitals.”

“Hardly,” he smirked. “I didn’t even want to stay but Recovery Girl insisted.”

“Does that mean Jirou’s all good too? And Midoriya?”

He shook his head, “They’re stable but still unconscious. It could take a couple of days for her and Hagakure since they collapsed right in the centre of the cloud. As for Midoriya, I have no idea.”

“Damn,” his friend answered.

“Didn’t think you were bringing company,” he looked back at Todoroki, who hadn’t said a word.

“Ah, right,” he said and turned over his shoulder. “I kinda ran into him by accident… and sorta spilled everything you told me,” he rubbed the back of his head with an apologetic grin. “Sorry.”

He groaned, typical. That was why Todoroki had been so quiet, he was determining exactly how much of an idiot he was for contemplating the idea. “So, you know everything?” he asked.

“Yes,” Todoroki said. “And I want in.”

“Huh?”

“I want in, on your plan to get Bakugou back. But I would like to suggest some changes too.”
“Hmm, he bit his lip. There wasn’t much choice in it. This was for the best anyhow as he’d rather have Todoroki on his side than ratting him out. “What changes?”

“Instead of going at it alone we get the police involved directly. A trap like you proposed isn’t going to be possible without some help. This way there’ll also be less chance of something going wrong.”

“I see,” he answered and folded his arms. “I think convincing the police to help us would be pretty difficult.”

“It’s not that I want to but we have no means of tracking down the villains on our own. If that means using you as bait then there is no room for error.”

Riley looked at him then shrugged, it did seem more plausible than his own plan. However, who would they approach? They didn’t know any policemen and it wasn’t like they could just chat one up.

“How are you so sure Janus will attempt to capture you anyway? It seems a bit foolish of them to come out of hiding again for that after they’ve already succeeded.”

“He will, I know he will,” he answered. “The first time… he let me go on purpose, back then. His attack in the forest was different, like he was desperate. You saw it too, didn’t you?”

“Not a very promising train of thought,” Todoroki scoffed.

“Well it’s the only chance we have to get him back,” Kirishima said. “I’m not gonna say it isn’t a dumb plan because it is but…”

“I refuse to leave him with that man,” he finished the sentence for his friend. He was sure the reason for hesitation was because he remembered exactly what happened last time.

Todoroki nodded without much of a pause, “Like I said, I’m in, stupid plan or not. Let’s think of a way to propose it to someone who can actually act on it.”

“Sounds good to me,” Kirishima nodded. “Where were you headed anyway dude?”

“Kaminari’s room.”

“Well, that’s as good as a place as any. We can talk on the way,” he said and walked past him down the hall. Todoroki and him followed, though for a bit none of them said anything.

“Too bad you don’t have your old phone,” Kirishima said as they hit a corner at the far end.

“Huh, why?” he answered.

“It had all those messages on it. If you replied to one then wouldn’t it get their attention? It’d be the perfect way to set a trap.”

He shook his head, “I doubt it. Even if I had it why would they have kept the phone they used to send it? That kinda stuff could lead people right too them.”

Kirishima shrugged, “I guess, it was just a thought.”

“Messages?” Todoroki said.

“Shit,” he thought then dismissed it. It was hard to keep track of exactly what the rest of the class had been told about the incident in light of the time. “I was being blackmailed by the league of villains
before USJ,” he said. There was no point backtracking now.

“I see,” Todoroki’s face stayed neutral but it might have been one step away from a scowl. It was always hard to tell with him.

He shook his head. “I should have done more, I realise that. It was just, at the time—”

“There is no need to justify your actions. The villains would have made their move on All Might with or without that opportunity.”

“Right,” he was right. Same as Midnight. He had discarded his guilt for the most part, responsible he felt but guilt only served to slow him down.

“Maybe at this point it would be better if our entire class knew the real story,” Kirishima said before he rested his hands behind his head. “The league is out to get us all now, the incident’s proof of that. The more they know about the kinda lengths the villains would go to the better it would be, right?”

“That’s up to Nedzu,” he had given that thought a few turnovers but considering what Nedzu had sworn them not to say it was difficult.

“Yeah, you’re right it’s ju-” he stopped his reasoning midway and dropped his hands to his sides. A familiar voice was leaving the room ahead of them to which the door was a tad open. It was All Might’s voice and what he said enough to cause them all caution and curiosity as they huddled toward the door in their three to eavesdrop.

“This. This, young Yaoyorozu, is incredible work.”

“It’ll work with this device,” she held up a remote like thing that Riley could see through the glazed glass window. “If you wanted to track the villains back to where they headed then you could and then you could—” Her words trailed off into a murmur. “Please.”

The hero touched the girl on the shoulder, “Thank you Yaoyorozu, you’ve really outdone yourself this time. Those feelings you have, hold onto them. They are a sign of a true hero. Leave the rest to me.”

“Move it,” Kirishima nudged him as they heard footsteps in the room, heading toward the door. They scattered fast as they had come and him with his mind on one facet of what they had heard.

“A tracking device. If we had that then,” he said.

“Then we could find Bakugou ourselves,” Kirishima said. “It’s perfect.”

“If we had it, that’s a big if,” Todoroki said.

He nodded, “Yeah, we won’t get far trying to coax her into making us a copy without a good explanation.”

“Then why not give her the truth?” Kirishima said.

“The truth?”

“If we’re sincere about it she’ll have to agree, right?”

“I suppose.” He had his doubts they would even be entertained.

“He is right,” Todoroki said. “Being upfront about it is our best chance.”
“Sounds like a plan to me,” Kirishima grinned.

“Tomorrow then, we won’t have much chance to get to her when All Might is around. It’ll be the best time since our entire class is coming to the hospital.”

“Why do it when they’re all there?” he asked.

“Because she’ll be there and because if there’s anyone I want to ask, it’s Midoriya. This entire thing is about Bakugou and getting him back, nothing else matters but I think he, well, he definitely cares more about him than anyone.”

He nodded, “Tomorrow it is.” He could feel an inkling of hope growing then, washing away the helplessness that had taken residence in his bones. There was still a chance.

[Kuwasagawa Southern Hospital – Room 8G – 1:17 PM – Sunday]

Almost everyone had gathered in the small hospital room that was now Midoriya’s alone. He had awoken, that was a stroke of luck for them and one sign that Riley figured meant Todoroki wasn’t wrong. They would go and rescue Bakugou, and it would happen tonight. The sooner the better.

“We all caused you a lot of trouble, did we not, Midoriya,” Tokoyami said.

“I should be the one saying that. After all I knew what was going to happen before anyone else,” he looked meek lying in the hospital bed with his body wrapped from tip to toe and casts on his arms. “Is everyone from our class here?” he asked.

“No, Momo and a few others are still checked into their rooms due to injuries and Hagakure and Jirou they, are still—” Iida paused.

Riley tightened his fist. “Unconscious, they haven’t woken up from the gas attack.” He’d been trying to avoid thinking of it. They would wake up, he was sure but if he gave it thought all it brought was anger. This needed subtlety, restraint, not anger.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to.”

“It’s fine,” he shook his head. “I would have asked too in your position.”

“Still, that makes just sixteen of us. Since, um,” Uraraka said before looking down and away from Midoriya’s face.

“Since the villain’s took Bakugou,” Todoroki finished the sentence with a bitter tone.

Midoriya’s face lay cut at the words, “Because I wasn’t there in time, I wasn’t able to reach him. I failed. We lost him because my quirk backfired and I couldn’t do anything. I couldn't move my body at all.” There were tears on his face, trailing down between bandages and pain.

Kirishima stepped forward and grabbed the edge of Midoriya’s bed. “Then this time, let’s save him,” he said. It was more of a proclamation than a suggestion.

“What?” Midoriya choked.

“The truth is I was sick of sitting around at home. Todoroki and me came here yesterday to visit everyone and on the way to check up on Riley. Well, as it happens we overheard All Might talking to Yaoyorozu. She put a tracker on one of the villains, if we had access to a device like that we could
find Bakugou and save him.”

“A tracking device,” Iida repeated the words but he didn’t seem to believe what he was hearing. “Don’t you understand this isn’t a situation for us student to be meddling around?! We need to leave this to the professionals.”

Kirishima turned on him, “Damn it I know that already man. But still! I couldn’t do anything,” he clasped the collar of his shirt, “Nothing at all. I was too late.” He dropped his hand and unclenched his jaw, “We all heard it didn’t we? I was so close when it happened, yet I didn’t stop it. If I don’t do something now how can I call myself a hero or a man? How can I look him in the eyes again if I didn’t do everything in my power to get him back from those bastards and they fuck him up just like Riley?!”

Riley stifled the sick feeling in his stomach as Kaminari pushed between them to speak, “Kirishima, calm down dude. I know you’re upset but this is still a hospital.”

He grabbed Kaminari by the shoulder. “He’s not the only one who feels that way. I was completely useless, all I did was cause more trouble by being captured again. If I hadn’t panicked, if I had just pushed a little harder then maybe.”

“This is wrong, you’re all acting irrationally,” Uraraka almost shouted.

“You’re right, Iida is right too damn it,” Kirishima shook his head. “But I just can’t accept it, don’t you see Midoriya? Your hands can still reach him!” the look caused Midoriya to peer down at the casts in silent contemplation.

“I can’t believe you’re seriously considering this, at a time when things are hardest for Yuuei. You and I both know who will shoulder the responsibility for your mistake,” Iida said as he stepped closer.

“I understand Kirishima and Torenagi,” Mezou said from the back of the crowd. “But this isn’t a decision you can just make based on feelings. It’s not enough and it isn’t fair on the rest of us.”

“Yes, Monsieurs. This matter is something best left to the heroes. We’ve already done all we can, have we not?”

“I agree with Aoyama,” Tokoyami said before giving a sigh. “I know I can’t say anything after having to be saved over and over but that’s how I feel.”

“I know you’re still in shock Kirishima,” Tsuyu croaked. “But be level-headed. If you engage in battle aren’t you breaking the rules? Then your actions would be no different to those of the villains.”

The words numbed him a bit but not enough to sway what they had decided. He wouldn’t sink to Janus’s level again, he wouldn’t be coaxed into doing exactly what that man desired. It didn’t mean they were justified in their actions. However, he knew if he didn’t follow through he would feel ten times worse if something did happen to Bakugou. Like Kirishima had said, they wouldn't allow what happened to him to repeat once more.

Thunk, thunk, the door behind them went and a middle aged doctor stood there. A worn coat hung from his frame and the splotches on it suggested it had seen many an all-nighter and extended shift over the years. “I’m sorry for interrupting you all but I need to do Midoriya’s check up, so if you could, please vacate the room,” he said.

“Yes, Sir,” Iida answered and shuffled out. Many followed, until it was only Midoriya, Kirishima and him who still stood by the bedside.
Kirishima leaned in to whisper, “Look Midoriya. I know that with your injuries you might not be able to move but the real reason we’re inviting you is because out of all of us you’re probably the most frustrated of all.”

“We already spoke to Momo but we didn’t get an answer,” he said as his friend moved from the bedside. “It’s really the only chance we’ve got. I’ve already made up my mind.”

“We both have,” Kirishima nodded. “If you feel the same way then I want you to know Momo is giving us her answer in front of the hospital tonight.”

Midoriya didn’t answer them as the doctor gave them one final ushering out of the room. As he left he could swear he saw the flicker of Iida’s trembling body leaving down the corner of the hallway. He doubted it had been his imagination.

[Kuwasagawa Southern Hospital – Courtyard – 6:55 PM]

A meagre darkness cloaked the three of them as they stood outside the hospital’s entrance. They had been waiting for thirty minutes already which had been enough time for the last of the sun to sink beyond the scope of the hospital. Dull street lamps were now the only vigils shedding parts of the night away with pale light. They did not aid in dispelling the beset cold that had come with it. It was in part because of the slow drizzle of rain upon their heads but also the feeling of anticipation that had built about what they were going to do.

“You think she’ll come?” Kirishima asked.

“Yeah,” he said as he beat away numbness by tapping his heel on concrete. “At the very least she’ll tell us in person.”

“Well, no matter what we do it is all up to her,” Todoroki shook his head. There was frustration on his face, a sentiment he could share.

“Right,” he nodded.

Clack, the hospital doors went as if on cue and the pounding of footsteps on pavement followed. “Oh, she came,” Kirishima said as he watched Momo approach them. She had her hand on her arm and a box in her hand, at her side hung a bag with long straps.

“And Midoriya too,” Todoroki watched as the boy walked out from behind the taller girl. He had his casts off but to say he looked any less broken would be a lie. Thick bandages tapered his arms and his brow and he walked with less speed than he should have. There was no way he was in a condition to be moving, let alone this.

“So, what’s your answer Momo?” Kirishima said, he sounded nervous.

She stepped forward a few more paces. It was enough to cast a shadow from the light of the hospital entrance onto the floor in front of them. “Todoroki, Kirishima, Torenagi,” she said as she stopped. “I—”

“Stop!” a voice yelled behind her, enough to make his limbs freeze. Iida stood there, with quivering rage in his body and in his fists. It was unkind, threatening, like when they had met stain.

“Why... why of all people, Todoroki and Midoriya, why you two?” he asked, his voice trembled. “Why are you making the same mistake I made before, pursuing the same recklessness that had me reprimanded. How can you do this? It’s too much, we’re still under the schools jurisdiction!”
Kirishima stepped forward, “What are you talking about man?” he asked. Riley remembered then that he could not have known and even though he did the whole thing wasn’t directed at him. He had all reason to question their actions, far more than anyone else.

Todoroki placed his hand on Kirishima’s shoulder to silence him, only for Midoriya to take his place to speak, “Iida you’ve got it all wrong. It’s like it’s okay for us to break-” Smack, Iida’s fist collided with Midoriya’s jaw, sending him down and to the left. It was almost enough to collapse his injured body.

“Don’t you see I’m frustrated too?! I’m worried, I’m terrified, who wouldn’t be? I’m the class president and it’s not just Bakugou, it’s all of you.” He had lost control of his tone, each word came out shrill and harsh and filled with sorrow. “Seeing your injuries while you were laying in that bed, do you know how much you reminded me of my brother? How do you think I fucking feel,” tears had begun taking the place of rage now, though he tried to hide them through shut eyes. “He can never go back to the way he was and by using the same rashness and putting yourself in the same situation you could end up the same way. If I let you go something were to happen to you, to any of you, I wouldn’t be able to live with myself. Do my concerns mean nothing to you?!”

“Iida,” Todoroki said. “I understand but you’ve got it all wrong. We’re not going to confront the villains head on, not at all.”

“What?”

“We’re going to rescue Bakugou without combat. It’ll be a covert mission where no one has to break the rules,” Kirishima answered.

“Yeah,” he nodded as well. “This is the only way we can make sure the school doesn’t get into any more trouble because of us.” It had been the only way to even have Momo consider what they’d offered.

“What they say is true,” Momo said. “That’s why I wanted to come, although I believe Todoroki. I’m acting as a fail safe to prevent combat by any means necessary.”

“Even you agree with this Yaoyorozu?” Iida looked at her.

“I know it’s foolish, beyond foolish. But with what is at stake, with what we know about the villains how can I refuse the chance to get our classmate back?”

Iida was growing more desperate now, it was like he had hit a wall in his reasoning. One he hated and one he couldn’t pass, enough to cause him to turn on him as well. “You were there Torenagi, you saw what my revenge made me do and exactly what the consequences were,” Iida looked down at his hands. “I couldn’t even save you, I was too fixated.”

“I have to do this, I,” he answered before pausing. They deserved to know. “I can admit I hate these villains more than anyone but this isn’t about revenge. You guys were never told this but what happened on that night where they got to me.”

“You don’t have to Riley,” Kirishima said.

“I do,” he shook his head. If Iida was sincere then he should be as well, no matter what Nedzu had told them. “It was never as simple as the three of them finding me in my apartment. The whole thing was a trap for the villains to test what they had done to me. I couldn’t act or think on my own, I attacked Kirishima, Bakugou, Jirou and Mr. Aizawa as if I wanted to kill them. I would have killed them if I had been given the chance.” He didn’t let his gaze travel as he spoke but there was only
silence except for him, “All of them stopped me. They stopped the villains quirk and saved me from going with him. That’s why I have to do this, I need to help Bakugou, I can’t stand around and let the same thing happen to him. If I do then I have no right to try and become a hero.”

Iida shook his head in disbelief. “Torenagi.”

“Yeah, I feel the same way,” Kirishima grabbed him around the shoulder. “There’s no way I can let them have him knowing what they are capable of.”

“I don’t understand it, or have as strong a reason but I’ve known Kacchan almost my whole life,” Midoriya said. “Even with he way he is, with how he acts and all the things he does to me and to everyone it’s not something I can watch. After having been told I can still reach him, that there is a chance to get him back from the villains then I have to take it. I can’t help but feel the need to save him.”

Iida’s head hung longer after that. Eventually he let out a sigh, one laced with defeat and resignation, he righted himself one step at a time. “So you all have parallels to the situation, I see. In that case take me with you,” he said as he wiped his hand behind his glasses before straightening them.

“Huh?” Kirishima blurted out, he had been close to doing the same. “Wait, are you sure?”

“I am. It is as Yaoyorozu said, this is the only way to save Bakugou and maintain our current position,” he crossed his arms.

“I guess the Bakugou Rescue Squads all assembled then!” Kirishima nudged Iida in the side, causing him to blush a bit.

“Then let’s not waste any more time, the signal has stopped moving.” Momo said as she held up the device. There was a red blinking dot on it in a very detailed map, sitting far away from their current location. Yokohama City, that’s where Bakugou was.

He rubbed his neck and felt the necklace he’d worn throughout the lodge trip. The silver pendant his mom had entrusted him. It fought any nerves he had as he began to walk into the darkness of the night which was eager to embrace them. They would save Bakugou no matter what.
The train felt strange to him, just as he remembered it back when he'd taken it to Edgeshot's heroic office. It was because it did not bump or shake or remind him in any way whatsoever of the trains in Illinois where his grandparents lived. Those things were rough monstrosities, old and built to do the work they were designed for and nothing more than that.

He was staring out of the window as it went, high above the last fetches of Hosu as it faded into the distance. It would level out eventually but not for now, he wasn't even sure how long it would take to get there. The city was too mesmerising to not watch and to check that, it felt bigger from the outside than it did when you were in it and far brighter. It was noisier too and polluted the sky above it with light.

In the chair he rested he was alone, or rather separate from his co-conspirators. They were in a booth ahead, he could barely see the back of their heads with how tall the chairs were. Kirishima had gone to do something, maybe go to the bathroom or make a call, he wasn't sure. That had left him alone with his thoughts and sometimes images, there was nothing else much to have as empty as the intercity train was for a Sunday. He wondered if this was the train his uncle took but he doubted it, the man loved his rickety car too much for that. He had offered to teach him a few times back home when he was older and sometimes that had even led to him being allowed to drive it in a parking lot. Not that it mattered now, he didn't need to learn to drive in Hosu and it wasn't even something he could do if he wanted.

He was unsure why that had been what trailed into his head, his uncle that was. Probably because he'd be worried sick if he knew. Even that was preferable to thinking about Bakugou's situation despite the fact they had yet to come up with a plan short of anything but 'rescue him.' Hopefully they would take the time to do that when they arrived. It was wishful thinking, they were in over their heads and willing to drown themselves further if that's what it took.

Thunk, two cans chunked the top of the table as Kirishima slid into the seat opposite him. Then he pushed himself up and turned in the seat, handing the bag over the back of it into the crowd of four before collapsing back. "Here," he said as he pushed one of the two forward and then began to rifle within a second, smaller bag.

He grabbed it and popped the tab and didn't hesitate to sip it. It was coffee flavoured, he realised and checked the side of the can. Caffeine-less iced coffee, it read, he was unsure how Kirishima had known that about him but it didn't matter. The drink had a strange flavour that lingered on the tongue with an after taste that clung to the back of the throat for bit, not in a bad way though.

"These are for you as well," his friend pushed across two thick looking granola bars and a square packet containing something called a 'Hunger-buster beef crepe.' "Chow down man," he said while having a similar snack himself, though not quite as filling as the ones he had pushed on him.

"Gee, thanks dad," he rolled his eyes and tore open one of the bars. Even considering the situation his friend hadn't forgotten. It was getting kind of ridiculous, even if he did appreciate it.

Kirishima smirked at him in response, "Just looking out for you."
He nodded at that, he knew. He hadn't really meant his sarcasm. "Not far now," he said.

"...Yeah. We'll get him back, we got this."

"I just don't understand why they wanted him," it was better he just spelled out what he'd been thinking about.

"No idea man but it can't be good."

*Mhmm*, he answered. "No matter what those bastards have planned we gotta stop it."

Kirishima frowned a bit at that, "Remember it's a rescue mission and nothing more. We promised that."

"I'm not gonna do anything stupid," he said as chunks of bar crunched between his teeth. "A fight is what Janus wants and I don't really know why. So I can't give him that... besides this rescue is all that's important."

"Yeah," his friend nodded as he watched him eat. "You're kind of a different person when serious stuff happens, ya know? Even when you're stuffing food into your mouth."

He shrugged, "I guess." He recognised his habit to lock up a bit in the moment now, for better or for worse. "It's probably my quirks fault."

"Bakugou is kind of the same, all business all the time."

"More like all anger all the time," he laughed.

"Yeah and anger," Kirishima nodded. "Wish I knew what was going through his head half the time. The closest I get is when he's trying to blow a hole in me."

"I mean," he answered as he took the crepe. "Besides Midoriya who really knows anything about Bakugou outside school? I certainly don't," his interactions with Bakugou, as cut and dry as they were, never went in that direction. If anything that guy had some kind of disdain for such topics.

"I know it doesn't look like it but if anyone's serious about becoming a hero it's him."

He put down the can again, it was more than half empty now. As much as he despised coffee he could use one more of these. "Pretty sure he still holds a grudge over the festival, our fight was kind of a shitshow with what happened."

"You can bet your ass he does," Kirishima grinned. "He wants to knock my teeth out too for losing to you."

He could only chuckle at that, "I think I'll lose more than just teeth so count yourself lucky."

"True that," Kirishima tapped the table. "So... what's your reason for wanting to become a hero? Like your real reason."

"What?" he paused as he emptied the last of the wrappers.

"It's fine if it's a secret. It just dawned on me I never really got a straight answer out of you back then."

"It's for my sister and I guess for myself now," something had changed, he didn't feel shy to say it now.
"Your sister, huh."

He rubbed his jaw, it was a bit sore from the chewing. "I owe my sister a lot, anything I can do to make it easier on her... and mom, I'll do it. First step was being able to take care of myself and the next step, well," he pushed his palms outward slightly. It was all of this, really.

"So that promise you made, it's something to do with your sister then," Kirishima folded his arms like a sleuth. "What's the promise?"

"I'm not going to say it," he answered in a stern tone. He'd only ever repeated it to himself and for good reason. All his guilt, any he'd ever experienced after that had happened, it paled in comparison to the reason for the promise. It was a lifelong shame.

"I understand," Kirishima said. "I didn't mean to pressure you."

"It's whatever, I honestly thought Jirou told you about it all."

"She told me stuff but not that."

_Hmm_, he answered. He was surprised if anything, out of all the things Jirou could have told him she hadn't given that up. That in of itself was pretty impressive, he hadn't given her enough credit. Then again when did he ever? Somehow topics always devolved back to him when they talked. He should change that. He would make that effort once she had awoken.

"Like for instance she told me that you're kind of a nerd when it comes to retro movies," he chuckled.

His face brightened at that, "S-shut up. You're no better fitness nerd."

Kirishima snorted, "Well you got me there," he said.

"Hello passengers aboard the express train to Yokohama City. We will be arriving at our destination in ten minutes, please prepare for disembarking."

"Almost showtime man."

"Yeah," he nodded and took the rest of the drink down in one long gulp.

_Yokohama City – Police Station Bathroom – 7:25 PM_

Toshiniro tugged at the bronze felt of his lapel and removed his jacket in a careful fashion. Beneath it were stripes of red and blue set among white, it was his Silver Age regalia that still gave off the same sheen as it had the day he had first received it. He messed with his hair next, pushing the unnaturally golden strands beneath his fingers as he smoothed it all back in one stroke, an action which the frail man in the mirror mimicked. Then he touched the familiar wound on his stomach with two fingers which caused him to wince, it was purple and singed into his flesh as if it had been done with a branding iron. The truth of it was far more ghoulish, he remembered.

He tugged the loose costume into place, the sight of himself always gave him immense dissatisfaction at times like these but doubt wasn't something he could easily afford today. The image of his disdain vanished with the thought into thin white smoke and soon the image of All Might had replaced him. He knew in this form his frailty did not show, that like this he had the power to stop history from repeating itself.
Vrrm, his phone vibrated in his belt. He knew what it meant without as a much as a look. The time to act was almost upon them now, something he had been waiting on for hours now. If it had been up to him he would have already been out there with the vanguard ready to strike. It would have been payback for what they had already done but also petty and something he could not indulge. The situation was too delicate and he needed to conserve the time limit he had left, still it was hard too feel anything but livid. He had to keep that emotion banished if he wished to prevent Bakugou's harm. The potential of ransom, or to have Bakugou used as a bargaining tool was the same reason was why Naomasa had insisted it all went through official channels.

The very building they were in was the result of that, it was now filled with allies, acquaintances, sympathisers and the very people who had once called themselves students of Yuuei. They were all of similar mind after what had been shared in the meeting; the first kidnapping was an unforeseeable tragedy, the second blatant and unforgivable.

What they were about to do would be a show of defiance. That was why they had the backup of not only heroes but the entire police force of Hosu and Yokohama behind them. It was a joint force, a united front of justice. A statement to the villain underworld that they could not act as they pleased and get away with it.

He let his hands off the basin in front of him, he knew deep down it was all the doing of one particular man. The same man that had given him his fatal wound that numbered his days, All for One. Even thinking of the alias chilled him. He had little more proof other than what Naomasa and him had deduced since a few days ago, which wasn't much. Still he knew he was right to think it, all the evidence indirectly pointed toward it. It formed a caricature of the villain through the distinction of it's unique handiwork, manipulative was what he had come to describe it as.

His deadliest foe had a gift for bending people to his will, changing them in a fundamental way that no quirk could imitate. He felt it would be tonight he would witness the man's insatiable appetite again, his hatred that was born from having his throne smashed to pieces beneath him. He did feel prepared, he had been prepared for a long time just like all the users of One for All before him. It would be his last gift to the world and his legacy.

He looked up at the mirror once more through which All Might stared back. It might be the last time he saw it like this, he knew. He dismissed the thought and the grimace vanished as he replaced it with the unwavering smile he had worn countless times before. Failure wasn't something he could allow himself to succumb to again.

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[Yokohama City, Kamino District – Matsu Train Station – 7:30 PM]

The train stuttered as it came to an abrupt halt and as soon as the doors slid apart he left it with an eager jump. He had to envy the efficiency of the transport here, the whole journey had taken them less than an hour and a half in all.

Frigid air enhanced by the persistent drizzle was first to hit him but he paid it no mind as he jogged to the edge of the high platform upon which they had been set. He wanted to get his bearings and as he looked down he soon did, though not in any way that he might recognise the city. He had never been here, in Yokohama, but he could tell at a glance it was not somewhere he wanted to stay.

It looked different to Hosu and in many ways negative, like they had entered an alien place dedicated in it's antagonism to the city in which they lived. It stared back at him with slanted, moss covered roofs stacked high, squashed into decrepit streets marked by rusted and broken signs. It gave off a sinister feeling through which one could not see more than a street or two away but could hear much further. It was the sound of a city which lived by night and died by it too, partying and celebration of
the last breaths of Sunday careened through the streets in ecstatic voices. It felt odd to think that somewhere in this city Bakugou was being kept but he knew it true, it was the one place his uncle had never talked about after having gone there.

"It's, um," Midoriya hesitated. "Different."

"It looks like crap man. A real villain's lair," Kirishima said.

_Ahem_, Iida coughed. "Let us not assume, it has just had a bit of downturn as of late. It is far removed from other cities and we shouldn't judge it by it's cover. I'm sure the people that live here are just like any other."

"The most unassuming cities are the most dangerous," Todoroki shook his head. "Let's proceed with caution."

Kirishima gave an eager nod, "Alright enough talk! Tell me where to go Yaoyorozu!"

"What part of caution do you not understand?"

"...Haha, right, my bad," he chuckled.

"We need an escape plan before we head off and something to hide us, we stick out like sore thumbs."

"Then let's go there," Momo pointed over the railing at what looked like a costume store.

"Disguises... really?" Riley said. "They'd have to be pretty convincing considering the villains know our faces."

"I'm sure Yaoyorozu can pull it off," Midoriya said in agreement.

The girl nodded, "Leave it to me."

He looked at the vice-rep then shrugged, she seemed to have confidence in it and it wasn't like he himself had a plan. "Let's go then," he said and began marching in quick steps down the ramp that led to the streets below and into the guts of Yokohama.

[**Kamakura City – Havawa Room – 7:40 PM**]

The man gave a recurrent cough as he pushed his handkerchief into his face. Once he was sure it was finished he tucked it away and went back to inspecting his take beneath the dim light of a chandelier. It wasn't as much as last time however it would last him a month, and his nephew several in addition to that. After finishing his counting he was decidedly more careful putting it away than he had been with his handkerchief.

He took the fancy glass off the counter and pushed the cheap beer it contained to his lips, it was on the house and he knew better than to refuse. Neshi, the lanky man who tended here always gave him one after their work was concluded, especially now that the times they saw each other had lessened. He preferred to spend his time near Hosu now, near Riley. One side effect of that was that it kept what he did to get his money far from his mind. He wasn't exactly proud of it but it was a necessary evil, not illegal but not ethical either. The glass clinked as he put it down on the mahogany table. He swallowed the last of the amber liquid and along with it his distaste of the thought. A few seconds later he watched the glass melt away, the temporary construct returning to the man it had come from as wisps.
It was all worth it, just as it had been for a year or so now, it meant his nephew wouldn't be stuck where he had been because of his ass of a father. He pulled at the inside of his jacket again for his wallet, what he searched for was a picture. It was the only thing he kept pristine, he went as far as he could to reprint it every few months. He knew it wasn't good to linger on it but it kept him going. The picture was of a woman, back when she had met his sister, back when he'd been much happier.

One look was enough and he put it back. Many people wouldn't call him a smart man but even he knew that the most important thing was family, even if that family wasn't one he had fostered on his own and now never would. A bit of distaste was the least he could put up with for sis. He pushed the chair back and stood.

"Alright, I'm out," he waved a hand toward the man as he turned.

"Done already?" Neshi asked.

"I can't be waitin' around. Gotta get back to Hosu," he shrugged.

"How's that kid of yours doing?"

"I ain't drunk nor foolish enough to tell you that Neshi. And he ain't my kid," he gave the man an annoyed scowl.

The man chuckled, "Right. I'll see you soon, Alo."

"I hope not Neshi, I hope not," he said and proceeded toward the door. Above it a monitor crackled. It had been bothering him all night, now he only gave it a cursory glance. He did not have the means nor the bravery to stomach the situation, not again.

[Yokohama City, Kamino District – Streets – 7:50 PM]

Riley groaned as he looked at himself in the reflective glass of a shop window. The getup Momo had chosen for him was as uncomfortable as it was impractical. It proved that black hair did not suit him in the least and that the way it sat so straight on his head looked off, in fact it could not have looked more fake. To accommodate the mockery of the style he felt at ease with he had a long flowing trench coat on whose sleeves his hands could barely peek out of. It was deliberate to hide the thin scarring. The bits Momo hadn't been able to cover with it she had instead powdered with a foundation that matched his still paled skin tone. In the end he could see what she was trying to do but it did not make him to feel less silly with all of it on. One final sigh was what he allowed himself before he decided to bare it, it was necessary. He then turned back to the group, within which he watched Kirishima continue his effort to help Midoriya disguise his distinctive voice.

"Awww riiight," the boy said with jutting jaw.

"No, no, it has to be further out man," Kirishima hung his jaw low as if he was trying to dislocate it.

"Uhh, like this?" Midoriya tried to copy it with little success.

Kirishima pinched his brow as he tried to hold back a snort and frustration. "Not quite but good enough dude," he said before he turned on Riley with a smirk.

His face turned sour before his friend could even speak, "Don't say a word, I know I look ridiculous."

Kirishima gave a sympathy chuckle in response. His disguise wasn't much better, jagged horns
sprung from his gel-less hair combined with a black jacket and multicoloured red and yellow shirt. He looked like someone who was trying to cosplay but had very little experience in doing so.

"Say Yaoyorozu, couldn't you have made these for free?" Todoroki asked as he parted his new black fringe and tied it back in a neat ponytail behind his head. He looked the least like himself with the exception of his face, which hung expressionless as ever. It all kind of suited him.

Momo looked flustered as she tugged on the hem of her long red cocktail dress, "Um well, you know I can't just go around making everything I want for free! I would disrupt the economy and that would just be ethically wrong."

"...Ethically wrong, sure," Riley threw her a sceptical look. If that was the case then he might have to reconsider exactly how she was so wealthy. Back when Kaminari had told him about her estate before the exam he hadn't believed him, until he had shown a picture. It had been just a bit more than ridiculous.

"R-right," Iida said as he swallowed loudly. His costume was on the other end of the spectrum, far from hipster and more closely representing Momo's butler than anything else. Riley was glad to see someone else was as uncomfortable in their new skin as he was. "Let's get on with it, I don't want to wear this for any longer than I have to."

"Awww riignt!" Midoriya tried the slang expression again. This time Kirishima and him couldn't hold back a snort, it was too much to not lose his composure.

"Please stop messing around," Todoroki shook his head.

"Sorry," he and Kirishima apologised in unison. He had to remember what was at stake.

"It's still going?" a man said over from their crowd. He was watching a TV behind some glass, on it was a sight he had been trying to avoid. It was the press conference Momo had talked about.

"Yes, it's dragged on quite long," the woman beside the man said.

"Well, that school sure has a lot to answer for. They're getting what's coming to them."

Worry crossed his mind watching the spectacle on screen and he knew those beside him hid similar feelings. The teachers had acted as best they could, they had taken every precaution yet there had been nothing they could do. Now they were paying an unfair price. Aizawa looked so different on the screen under scrutiny, all the teachers did.

"This is the fifth time this year that student's have been exposed to villain activity. This isn't the first time students were injured or even kidnapped for that matter. What steps are you going to take to address this issue?" one of the reporters asked.

"We're taking strong measures against villain activity. Security has been strengthened and the entire outer ring of the Campus's crime prevention system has been reworked recently," Nedzu answered from behind a tall wooden desk. It dwarfed him in size but he looked calm and practiced nonetheless.

"Ehh? They're not protecting them at all. Just look at the result!" the first man spoke again.

"Indeed, what a bunch of liars. I have better things to do then watch this tripe," a second man beside him shook his head before turning and walking away down the street.

They were fools he felt but only out of ignorance. It wasn't something they could criticise them for and it made the air feel rigid in turn. It was a microcosm of the flack the school would take,
judgemental eyes from all over the country would use this against them. And considering all that, if they were caught doing what they were about to do...

"We have to save him and prove them all wrong," Midoriya whispered.

"Yeah," he answered. There was no question about it and no time to spare. He turned and left the public execution behind, when they returned it would be with Bakugou.

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[Yokohama City, Kamino District – The Silver Glass – 8:10 PM]

*Flwoom*, the thin walls of the bar shook as flame engulfed Tomura's face. The blow pushed him downward where he stayed frozen as one of the many hands on his face fell to the floor. He grasped at it while covering his face with a real one, a desperate measure to hide the flaking white skin which had withered to the very bone that sat beneath.

"You heard them you shitheads! That's how it is," Bakugou yelled. "My combat restrictions haven't been revoked so you better stay the fuck out of my way."

"I told you not to undo his restraints Tomura," Kurogiri said from behind the gold inlaid counter, where a half polished glass sat between cloth and vaporous finger. His other hand had been preoccupied keeping one of the few bottles of vodka he had left nailed to the wall where it belonged. His concern for the bottle was short-lived as he now saw exactly what the boy had done to his confidant, in turn his eyes narrowed.

"So he understands the position he's in, what a clever boy," Magne said.

The girl beside him grinned with glee. "Let's stab him," she said. The words weren't enough to flinch their prisoner.

"He isn't clever, he's just an idiot. He could have pretended to be won over, not that it would have done him much good," Dabi shook his head. His fingertips had already begun to glow as he made his approach one step at a time.

"I'm not the type to lie about things I don't want to do, got that? Same reason I have no desire to stick around in this goddamn shit-hole," Bakugou said before lashing out at one of the lamps beside him, causing it to crash to the floor.

"That's the last we'll hear from you," Dabi held up his fingers and aimed them like a gun.

"Tomura..." Kurogiri said.

"Enough!" Tomura threw up his hand to block Dabi as he gave Bakugou one glare, it stabbed out like a spear from between his sapped white strands. This time it was enough to freeze him and make him take a step backward, it gave him room to secure the hand safely back to the centre of his skull.

"This one is mine. He is an important piece."

*Click*, a sound in the back of the bar went. A door opening, followed by a *clang* as it shut again. Then it was followed by a harsh *snap*, as cold as the face it belonged to as it stepped from the darkness.

"Wha-t do we have here..." Janus said as he approached the room, next to where Tomura stood.

"An important piece," Tomura said with the irritability of repeating himself. "One that might understand a proposal when it is offered to him."
"No chance," Bakugou answered.

"I remember now. It is the same one. From that night. He has taken your interest," Janus walked toward the boy as if the arms that held his fiery quirk did not exist. Each step was slow, analytical and accompanied by an uncompromising stare. His mask was whole again and with it his face emotionless. "If you truly are an important piece then there is no room for you to act on your own. Yes, this one implores you to make it easy. Sit. Down."

"Fuck off bastard," Bakugou swiped him across the face but he avoided the blow by an inch and caught the hand. He looked at it as if he was sifting through it for impurities.

"Careful now. This one implores you to be careful. Even a driven subject such as you. Even one such as you that has been deemed important with a destructive quirk. Should you grow in-com-plai-cent then you may demoted to a mere pawn at any time," he dropped the hand. "Then you might find yourself the subject of someone who carries no such interests in your importance."

"Hands off doc," Tomura placed four of his five fingers on the villain's shoulder before looking over it at Bakugou. "We are already out of time, the heroes are launching an investigation. I would have liked you to hear me out but if you won't then there isn't another choice."

"I see," Janus walked away from the grip and shrugged his gloved hands. "Might you try with a different one. A different result it could be. They are all so malleable."

"Your game hasn't worked out so well either doc, you shouldn't be lecturing others on what to do."

"This one's game has worked out exactly as desired, only the path has changed," the villain stepped out of the back room and into darkness. What followed was the sound of rushing water and then silence.

"Now where were we," Tomura looked over his shoulder at a monitor. "Right... teacher, lend me your strength," he said as he turned back toward Bakugou.

[Yokohama City, Kamino Ward – Storage Facility – 8:15 PM]

The city had funnelled them toward their destination with nothing but speed, alcoves and pockets and side streets made it easy to navigate into the depths of the city and into what was an industrial district. They had left the sound of partying behind except for a few stumbling drunkards. They were beneath a building now, or rather beside it. It stood tall and had been hard to single out but with the help of the GPS they could be sure it was the correct one. It was fenced by tall walls but unlike the buildings around it air did not have crevices to whistle through and it's windows still remained whole. It was an intimidating sight and one they couldn't approach easily.

"So this is the place? Damn it's so cramped!" Kirishima said as he shuffled through the alleyway in front of him, almost side on.

"I'm going to get stuck at this rate," Momo said behind them.

"Bare with it, we're almost at a window," Todoroki said ahead. "We can get a better view there before we try anything."

"Guys, are we sure this is the place?" Midoriya asked.

"A warehouse in the city is just as inconspicuous as a tree in a forest, this has to be it," Todoroki answered.
"I'm not sure..." the boy mumbled incoherently.

"This isn't the time for that Midoriya, we gotta check it out," Kirishima said. "Yo, Riley give me a lift and Iida you help him out," he pointed at Midoriya.

He bobbed down to give Kirishima the lift he desired, though he was sure his shoulders would collapse under his friends weight. He was just as heavy as he looked but with some effort he brought him up. He wasn't sure why Iida had gotten the easy job with the far lighter person.

"It's too dark to see anything," Midoriya whispered.

"I'll make some night vision goggles for you to use," Momo said.

Kirishima pulled at the back of his pocket and took out a green slab, "Don't worry about it, I have just the thing." It was the same one he remembered the guy buying when they'd gone back to pick up camping supplies.

"That looks really expensive, are you sure?" Midoriya looked at him. He was right, the thing had a pretty little price tag even with a discount.

"Never mind that, this isn't the time to worry about stuff like that," he said as he used them to peer inside.

"Anything?" Riley huffed after a minute or two. He adjusted his stance, he didn't want to drop Kirishima.

"It's pretty bland inside, wait.. what's that?!" he almost toppled backward, only for him to grip his legs firmer.

"Careful dude," he whispered.

"Look Midoriya," Kirishima ignored him and handed over the scope.

It only took him a few seconds by comparison to see what Kirishima had, "There's so many Noumu... it's like a storehouse. Wait, someone's coming," he gasped.

"Who?" Kirishima snatched the scope back. He looked through them and then dropped the scope to his side before he looked down, "Janus."

His skin crawled a bit at the name but he tried his best to shake it. Of course the man would be here, why wouldn't he be looking over his precious creations? It was natural that he would be.

"Shit, get down Midoriya!" Kirishima yelped as he bobbed down and behind the wall, a struggle Iida remedied on his behalf by pulling the student down with him.

"It looked like he was inspecting the Noumu they kept there but I could see him messing with the buttons on the machines," Midoriya said.

"Perhaps they're about to use them," Todoroki said. "Our cover could already have been blown if that's the case."

"I don't think they need Noumu to deal with us if that's the case," he shook his head as he forced Kirishima off his shoulders. He'd had enough.

Kirishima nudged him in the side, "There's still time for you to retreat if you want to change your mind Riley."
"I don't, I can't run away now. I'm not afraid of him," he said but he didn't believe it. He looked at Kirishima and leant his back into the wall. "I'm not," he repeated himself, to which his friend gave him an unsure nod.

"It can still only mean trouble. Where do we go from here?" Momo asked.

"We might be best off going around to another side and get closer to the building. There isn't much we can do from here," Iida said.

"Yes, he's right. If we're going to barg-"

**Boom,** the world imploded around his ears. The wall took most of it but not before it was riddled with a series of small potholes, enough for him to look through with caution. On the other side he found not what he had expected but instead a sight that brought him elation.

"The cavalry arrived," Kirishima said wide eyed.

"It's Ko," he said as he counted the heroes. There were four of them in total, including the aforementioned sidekick as well as Mt. Lady, Best Jeanist and Tiger. In their hands and quirks respectively they held Noumu, as well as a woman, Ragdoll.

"Suppression complete," Best Jeanist said. There were threads coming from his clothes, a quirk he had read about. Complete and utter control over the fibres within clothes. It was fast and deadly, something that could easily capture villains.

"This job was a bit too easy; perhaps we should have gone with All Might. Are you really alright with being given clean up work, Jeanist?" Mt. Lady said with a booming voice from atop the building through which she peered down.

"There's no need to intertwine the degree of difficulty with the importance of the job, rookie," he answered as he sheared together the many monsters he'd grabbed into one tight bundle.

"Now those damned villains ain't gonna be able to launch a counter attack or nothin' from this base," Ko nodded.

"They took care of it, we should leave before they spot us," Iida said, his voice trembled with relief.

"Yes, the heroes can handle it now," Momo nodded.

"Yeah," he said. "Bakugou is probably already safely in their hands. There isn't much mo-" he paused to look again as a deep, discerning voice silenced him. It was ushered in by a clap from somewhere within the darkness of the collapsed building.

"I'm sorry, Tiger. I thought she had a useful quirk a long time ago. I suppose I just can't keep my hands to myself."

"Another member of the league?" Tiger asked. It was far too dark to see anything. "Someone shine a light."

"Ever since my body became like this I haven't been quite myself you see. There is only so much work that can be achieved through the means available," the voice continued to speak uninhibited. The clapping became louder, though now he recognised it wasn't clapping at all. It was the sound of hard leather shoes on concrete, coming closer bit by bit.

Best Jeanist threw his hand at the sound in response and tightened it into a fist, causing it to silence.
"That really hurts hero," it muttered, though not as if it was in pain even, as the cords and strings tightened.

"Ho-hold on, Jeanist. If that's a civilian we'll be in real trouble!" Mt. Lady said in a panicked voice.

"Think about it, if we hesitate for even a moment it could decide everything. Don't let this villain act."

"You have the right idea but it's a shame. I thought you could see things my way for a moment there," the villain said. His voice sounded sad at the realisation. It was followed by a rumbling in the floor as the darkness that still surrounded him fell away from around his body to reveal a man in a suit. His head was not that of a human but a metallic mask with tubes radiating downward into his body.

Black webbing ebbed from behind him as stretched across the floor and toward the heroes in an instant, gripping them by the legs. It then stretched in all directions from where it had travelled, entwining pillars and walls alike. Everything looked like it had been dipped in oil.

"What the hell is this?" Tiger yelled as he tried to pull away from it but couldn't.

"This is your demise;" the man said and the building vibrated, the wall upon which he leant vibrated and their very bones themselves vibrated. Kshhh-shing, the sound of a knife slicing another knife rang as he covered his ears. It made him spasm as he felt everything collapse where he had been looking moments before.

Then it's fury ended, just as fast as it had begun. All he could do was grab the wall as he dropped his hands from his ears. He felt overwhelmed by it, it made it impossible to move at all. He knew it could have torn them apart if it had found them, if it had touched them with just one bit of it he would be dead. It would have choked the life out of him and everyone else around him. Sweat dripped down his brow and each breath felt hard to make. He knew the heroes had lost, though he could not even force his body to peek at look. He was sure Ko was dead, that Tiger was dead and the rest of them.

The villain's voice broke the stillness of the aftermath, "Why do you heroes always insist on interfering? And just when Tomura was learning to draw others to him, learning to lead other people, how disappointing." Every word was tinged with indulgence that had been long suppressed and the steps he had taken before were now slower. Finally he stopped and he did clap his hands, a sound much higher pitched than that of his shoes. "As expected of the number four hero I suppose, in the very last moment you pulled all of them out of the way. That kind of strength, those nerves of steel must have been culminated through years of practice and experience," his voice sounded unimpressed.

He gritted his teeth as he listened to it, Stain's wrath felt like a child's wrath compared to this. It still felt like his whole world was wobbling and he wanted to throw up at the thought of it, the idea that someone like this had been hiding the entire time.

"I won't let you get away with this!" Best Jeanist said. He sounded weak now despite the sound of ripping fabric that signalled the activation of his quirk.

"Your quirk is magnificent, sadly I have no need for it. It does not suit Tomura's personality, you see. Goodbye fourth hero, I'll have All Might sending you my regards soon enough," the air gave another shorter shing. The cry that followed, the yell of pain was something he knew he would not soon forget. It lasted for an eternity and reinforced his rigidity as another set of steps joined the courtyard.
"Most unfortunate. A necessity but unfortunate," Janus said.

"How many Noumu did we lose?" the man asked, remorseless over his transgression.

"Ninety-nine percent incapacitation rate of our Noumu. The ones we sent are all dead. It matters not. I will make more, I will make better ones."

"Very well, I suppose that means I cannot sit idly any longer either," he said. A sound like rushing water filled the air as he finished the sentence, it ended like it had spilt on the ground where it turned into several thuds.

"Ugh, this smells like shit. What the hell is this?!" Bakugou shouted as he pushed himself to his feet. The realisation was enough to lend his body movement again, which allowed him to turn his head toward the others who were still petrified and then back through the hole in the wall.

"I'm sorry, Bakugou. This was a necessary measure."

"Who the hell are you supposed to be?"

"You can call me All for One but it matters not for now, we can have a formal introduction later," the villain said as he turned to Tomura. "So, you've failed again."

"I haven't failed," Tomura answered.

"You must not get discouraged. I have brought your comrades back for you, along with the boy who you deemed important. Try again, as many times as you'd like. That is why I am here, all of it, everything is for your sake."

Riley's throat felt numb, the way the man spoke. Not only had he been around the entire time, he had a direct hand in everything. Janus... Tomura... they were only puppets for this man. He didn't feel hatred as it should have been, only hopelessness. How were they only finding out about him now?

He mustn't have been the only one feeling it, a glance to his left showed Midoriya struggling with both notions of defiance and desolation. Before the boy could move to act on it Iida grabbed him by the collar and he gave him and by extension all of them a long cold stare. It was as clear as any words would have been, he would not let Midoriya throw his life away. Not any of them.

"Tomura you and I must leave before All Might comes. He comes at any moment. Should he reach us..." Janus trailed off. The villain almost sounded nervous but there was excitement in it too.

"It's too late for that," All for One said as a crackle came from the sky above. "All Might is already here. Do not forget your role Janus."

"It will be done. As you have envisioned."

Before the sound of thunder cracked through the air All for One lashed out at his comrades, slinging them back and making room for the landing of a voice that even in the distance shook with discontent and spite. "I will take everything back from you All for One, I will force you to give it! I will crush you!" All Might boomed as if he were a comet falling to earth.

**Crash,** All Might tore into the dirt and flung a torrent of dust in all directions. There was no mistake in his vision, he'd come again to save them. This time the man did not spare words and instead launched a fist directly at the villain. **Thwoom,** it went as it parted the air and pushed every other villain further away. It should have been a punch that annihilated the thin man, yet all it did was scuff his suit as he stopped it dead in it's track using a single finger. The earth cratered beneath the two, All
Might and All for One as they held against each other. There was animosity between them that looked old, it made his own feel small by comparison.

"Are you going to kill me again, All Might?" the man tossed the fist aside. It had taken him no effort, as if the gigantic man was a mere child. All Might didn't answer his taunt and instead threw another. "The bar isn't even five kilometres away and yet it took you so long to arrive. Have the years made you soft?"

This time All Might's fist did go through the man, pushing him back a few feet with it's power, "You're one to talk. Aren't you trying a little too hard with that ominous industrial mask All for One?"

"I guess we both have our little clichés," All for One chuckled.

All Might took his time approaching again, this time with his fist already bunched up. "This ends today. I will not make the same mistake I made five years ago and I will not let you do with my student as you please," he said in vengeful tone.

"It's already too late for that. I'm already far further embedded in your precious student's psyches then you ever imagine, All Might," the man laughed. The whole sentence made Riley's stomach turn, only adding to the discomfort of his shaking hands.

"The lives of others aren't your plaything. I will take back young Bakugou and this time you're going to be locked away for good, along with your little league of villain puppets!"

"Just like before you're all talk, nothing has changed. Nothing except the years catching up with you," the man raised a hand as All Might lunged.

Thwoom, All for One's left arm engorged and became massive, on it little bolts settled turning it almost metallic. He threw it forward in less time then it took to blink. Bang, the hand struck All Might hard across the face sending him through the building behind him as he was launched like a cannonball. Crash, three more fell as if they were trivial obstacles. It looked like someone had run each block down with a bulldozer.

"Atmospheric Compression, Corkscrew, Rivet, Burst and Reinforcement. I need to remember that one, what a fun combo," the villain shook his head as his arm returned to normal.

"All Might!" Bakugou yelled.

"There isn't a need to worry Bakugou. He won't die from something so simple. Now, however, is the time for you all to leave. Otherwise I'm afraid you're going to die too along with the Symbol of Peace," the man raised his other hand that hadn't been torn from the sleeve. Hardened black tendrils erupted from his hands like charcoal vines and stabbed in a straight line through the unconscious Kurogiri. The villain erupted in a massive black swirl that engulfed the immediate area in a warp gate.

"Kurogiri, you awake man?" Magne asked his downed companion.

"He is not, this quirk simply activates another by force. Now go," the villains voice was growing as agitated as it was arrogant. All the while his eyes were peeled on a specific spot where he had launched All Might.

Boom, as if on cue the buildings beneath which the man had been buried were torn apart and flipped like plates, shattering as they collided with ground already torn asunder. There was murder on All
Might's face as he dragged his fist and dashed, it was fast enough to serrate any concrete in his path.

"Teacher," Tomura said as he stood at the peak of the warp gate. The villain turned toward him at the words.

"I want you to remember Tomura, there is still so much room for you to grow," thoom, All Might's fist landed in the villain's stoic embrace as his hand engorged and took it once more.

"We are out of time. Let us go. Or it will be the end," Janus said behind Tomura.

Tomura hesitated and looked back at the gate, then at his supposed teacher, then at Bakugou.
"You're right," he said. "But bring him with us."

"It will be done," Janus answered. The rest of the villains were already well ahead of him, encircling Bakugou in an ever growing, tighter net.

"We'll seize what's important and then leave to rebuild," Mister Compress nodded as he reached out his hand at Bakugou, who retaliated by burning it and half the man's body. He was already at a wall, it was all he could do.

"No, I will not let you!" All Might broke from All for One and kicked the man hard in the gut before disappearing in a mind-numbingly fast display that left the villain reeling for a moment. He reappeared inches from the back of the villains and his fist almost connected with two of them in one swoop. Before All Might's strike could land three more of the dark prongs sliced him in the back and impaled him to the floor, "I can't allow you to do that All Might. That is why I'm here after all."

"Gah," All Might spat. "So be it!" he tore the wire from his back and pulled the villain toward him, connecting his fist to the mask and sending him flying.

"This isn't good, All Might is being completely overwhelmed by the amount of enemies," Todoroki said. The words came unexpected enough to startle him and cause him to turn back to the group which he had almost forgotten about.

"We can help. We need to help and give All Might the chance to fight back," Midoriya said.

Iida gave him a distraught look, "What are you saying? We can't fight, even if we wanted to."

"Please listen and I'll explain. There is a way for us to save him without combat and for us to get out of here too," he answered. "I need help from all of you but especially you Kirishima."

"Me?" Kirishima asked.

"You're the key to its success, if I were the one to do it it'd surely fail. This is the only way."

He gave a stoic nod, "Then tell me man, whatever it is I'll do it."

Toshinoro's mind was on fire, this wasn't going his way. He needed to separate Bakugou from those villains before they reached him. A look over his shoulder revealed he was almost out of time, he regretted checking almost immediately as a metallic riveted fist gutted him.

"Leave him out of this," he coughed as he hunched over from the blow.

All for One gave a sadistic smirk from beneath the mask. "I'm not the one who dragged him into this, I believe that fault lies with you Symbol of Peace," he said.
"Nonsense!" he punched the man across the face but it only served to keel him, it wasn't opportunity enough to jump away to help Bakugou. He peeked another look, there was smoke in the way of his sight, the boys efforts to retaliate.

Schick, he swerved as a steel blade launched sideways from the villain's hand, barely grazing his left shoulder but still leaving a shallow cut. He wiped his hand across his mouth but his dirtied gloves left more grime then they took with them. "I will not let you!"

"The choice isn't yours," All for One struck up his hand. "He is going to go with Tomura whether he likes it or not. Magne."

The villain's words were cut off by a crash, which caused them both to pause and watch as the wall behind their battlefield shattered. "BAKUGOU COME!" the student who had sailed through it yelled beneath him.

It was young Kirishima, he recognised him in an instant, the carriage which he rode were two more, Midoriya and Iida. It was a reckless manoeuvre and one that left him breathless as he watched it. "Those kids...!" was all he managed to gasp as he watched Bakugou launch himself upward with a tumultuous boom and catch the offered hand just by the tips of his fingers.

"Do you think we'll just stand idly by?!" Magne yelled as he pulled the villain next to him onto his shoulder. The rod attached to his shoulder quivered as it surged with magnetism and sent Mister Compress hurtling upward toward the four. Fingers grasped at them as he made it within inches.

Thwoom, a tower erupted and blocked the path of the misguided magician, colliding him face first with Mt. Lady, it was an instant K.O on both their parts and she fell down like a tower, but she had succeeded in blocking the attack. On the ground Magne met a similar fate as a blunt hit ran through the bone on his leg and up through the shoulder, the pain of it caused the man to pass out on his feet as Gran Torino appeared beside him.

"A precious subject. Cannot be let to escape. This easily. It is unjust. It will not stand," a figure, who he could only recognise now through the pictures he had seen spoke. Janus, he realised. The villain raised his hand and wires fell from it like tangled fishing line, "Marionette; seize!" At the sight of it he turned back to All for One and pushed him as hard as he could, only to not budge as if he'd been stuck to he villain like glue.

"You won't be allowed to interfere, didn't I tell you? Watch your precious students pay the price for their idiocy."

He twisted at the grip but even as it came loose he knew it was too late, the line the villain had thrown had ensnared a leg mid flight, it threatened to pull Iida to the earth as it tugged. As Janus wrenched the wire back into his hand he paused, as if he had lost his footing. Skshhhhh-fwww, the ground hissed with steam as vaporous clouds erupted from beneath the dust caked landscape. It was hot and masked everything like a dirty smokescreen for but a few seconds. His mind whipped to find the source of it and as it cleared he saw it at the far end, just behind the very villain who had thrown the cord, who was now looking at the tattered wires on his hand like he was coming to a grand realisation. He must have, as his head snapped exactly to the wall where the source of it had huddled, Momo, Todoroki and Torenagi.

"A chance for redemption," the voice crawled from Janus's throat. "You will be mine," the villain dropped his hand and began to walk in a single minded one two step. The students backed away, scrounged off the floor but the villain was much faster. He hadn't been able to help Bakugou escape but he would help the rest of them. The taste of iron filled his mouth before he could even raise a hand to smash All for One and daze him long enough. He fell in bundled heaps backward and far
out of reach of what he had planned to do.

"Even if every little thing should go wrong I will make sure that you die here All Might," All for One said. He was already in front of him again. "And that you find yourself with as much regret as possible."

Smack, the engorged fist hit him again. "Augh," he coughed up blood. It had hit his injury, a deliberate strike.

"Still feeling a bit sensitive? We both have souvenirs from back then," the villain chuckled before turning his head toward Janus. "Leave him, there are more important matters at hand."

Janus turned back with a glare, "It must be do-" crack, a flash collided with the villains shoulder, it broke the metallic carapace to pieces and knocked the villain to one knee.

Gran Torino landed beside Janus and launched another kick. This one the villain caught it with a net of wires from his other hand. "You're a tough one, eh?" his mentor said. "Go you three! Get out of here!" he yelled at the students. Torenagi looked shell shocked, however Todoroki grabbed him by the shoulder and pulled him to his feet. They disappeared over the last cusp of the already fractured wall along with Momo.

He pulled himself to his feet, all he'd done was watch as his students had done all the heavy lifting. No more, now that Bakugou was out of the way and the rest of them safe he could go all out without a care.

"Oh how I've missed that endearing little look in your eye All Might. A pity, it looks so much dimmer than before."

"Enough of your games," he said as the power of One for All surged with all its remainder around his body. "This is going to end now."

Three new prongs sliced through the fabric of the All for One's hand, he dodged them with ease and drove his fist underneath them into the man's cast iron mask, cracking it. All for One grasped at his throat as he did, catching it in a steel grip as the prongs he had thrown impaled the incapacitated magnet villain, Magne. He snatched at the wired quirk but it was too late, it had already activated the effect.

"Teacher, I still haven't..." Tomura said as the magnetic power pulled him and Janus backward toward the portal with the rest of the villains.

"Continue the fight my student," All for One cut him off as the portal swallowed him. The look on his face would almost have been regret, if it wasn't covered by a taunting smile. "Now we can both go all out."

He threw his fist in response as he watched the black tendrils curl back into the villain's hand, he couldn't give him a chance to react. Black oil ripped from the man's pores and he dissipated like smoke, his fist still hit flesh but not the flesh of whom he wanted. Gran Torino shuddered under the weight of the blow as he took the remainder of what he had not been able to pull back.

"Sorry!" he shouted as he turned to where All for One had moved, five metres behind him. His face tightened into a scowl, "Play dirty all you want All for One, you will not walk away from this."

All for One scoffed. "I only came here to rescue Tomura but I am not foolish enough to think of escape, not when I have the chance to end you in your weakened state All Might," he said. "After all, I despise you. You brought down so many of my comrades one by one with that idiotic smile of
yours. How is the view from up there, on your mountain of corpses All Might?"

He jumped forward toward the villain, who now floated. "You can't speak so chivalrously from your position," he growled as his fist was cut off and pushed into a stalemate. "Your 'comrades' were mere puppets, you threw them away like cheap toys. Nothing more than something to be used and then discarded!" he yelled and dodged All for One's quirk enlaced hand. There would be no escape this time.

"You laugh at those who want to live peaceful day to day lives. You force hardships onto them! Those are the kinds of things I simply cannot, will not," he felt the energy of One for All surge through his arm, "Forgive!" The crackle bared through his wrist and shuddered his fingers as it slipped past the villain's guard in an uppercut. It rose through the mask, the metal and glass splintered as he drove the villain upward.

"Augh," All for One stuttered as his body shuddered and was wrought upward. Before the man could fall he brought his foot back and grabbed his fist with his other hand. He twisted his body and spun in a fraction of a second allowing his elbow to come down into the villain with full force.

_Crash,_ All for One smashed into the floor and bounced before laying still. His face was now a broken shell, his respirator was smashed and beneath sat wreaths of scarred flesh. The image was grotesque and unknown to him, the eyes he had grown to hate had been marred from his body as if a bird had ripped them out with razor sharp precision.

Blood spilled into his mouth again as he beheld the villain, enough to keel him and force him to hold his wound. _My time limit, it's almost_, his hand shivered as he contemplated the thought and wiped his mouth. He needed to end this now.

The first movement that arose from All for One's stricken body was a strangled cackle that transformed into a long, dull laugh. "What irony. I've heard all these excuses before and to hear them again is just as satisfying as it was the first time."

"What are you talking about?" he spat away the blood.

"You sound just like your predecessor, Nana Shimura. She said the same words just before she died."

Anger filled him, "Don't you even dare speak her name you fi-"

_Thwoom_, All for One swept up beneath him and struck his fist into the wound again. It had been faster than he had been expecting and more powerful as it threw him skyward, further than the wounded villain should have been able to. He almost caught a helicopter on the way up, the blades rang in his ears before he began to fall again, however his fall was no longer unassisted. Around his waist Gran Torino had grabbed him and was pulling him safely back down.

"Get a grip Toshi, it's do or die now. You can still do this!" his mentor said as they landed and he set him down slow. He looked up at All for One who had gathered himself up off of the floor, with one hand the man dusted down his clothes before he looked at him in turn and spoke.

"Even though I killed your precious teacher you've taken something away from me too, that's why I'll make sure you die the most gruesome death possible. However first I'm going to start with something you value more than your life All Might, your precious pride."

"Dodge and counter attack!" Gran Torino yelled as All for One's already unsheathed hand drew back and twitched, muscles pulsed and his stance changed.
"Hmm, should you dodging, I wonder?" he pushed his hand forward slowly and gripped it with his other. The twitching ceased and the muscle settled, his hand opened from a fist to a palm. This was a ranged attacked.

He stood to jump but heard a whimper, one that made him look over his shoulder. Then he knew why he couldn't move. There was someone there, behind him, in a crevice. A girl. An innocent life that if he dodged would be snuffed out.

"You said I could play dirty all I wanted, right?"

Vwoom, he crossed his arms as the blast left All for One's hand like a blinding laser. The bolt hit as if it were searing lava, burning away at his skin. He pushed his arms apart as it did, as it carved at his flesh and diverted the path of the beam to the sides of him. It cut into the floor and touched concrete near him as it burnt through the landscape and terraformed it. Under it's intensity concrete melted and sanded earth turned to glass, leaving shards of ebony stuck to the earth.

The beam fizzled and left smoke behind. All Might had not wavered but he had, as the smoke cleared around him what was left was not a hero but a mere man. His smile that had made the muscles in his face ache had slid off it, leaving behind for all the world to see the remnants of a scathed, broken figure. He still stood, he couldn't afford to fall down even as the sound of helicopters in the air above returned.

All for One floated back to the earth and walked a few steps, then he gave a mocking bow. "Are you ashamed All Might?" he said with a chuckle. "Those sunken eyes, that beaten body. You aren't such an amazing, unstoppable hero after all, are you? The world is watching Symbol of Peace. You're disappointing it."

He knew it already and self-loathing racked him at the fact. Every inch, every fleck of his tarnished, withered body was being shown and judged. "I know I look pathetic, that the world can see me in this terrible condition..." he said.

He knew it but it didn't matter, not any more. His role had always been larger than his shame, that is how he managed to do it all. He pushed himself together and made himself tall as he raised his fist toward All for One. It was clenched and drowned in blood that was all his own, it was not the blood of the innocent. He held it firm, in defiance.

"No matter how much you beat me down my spirit remains. I AM the Symbol of Peace!" he yelled through labored breaths. "And there is not a single thing you can do to take even a fragment of that away from me."

"Magnificent All Might. I had forgotten just how much of a stubborn child you were," All for One chuckled as his body began to rise from the floor once more until he was several feel above. "In that case, I hope it won't hinder that spirit of yours when I tell you this; Shigaraki Tomura is Shimura Nana's grandchild."

His eyes went wide and he lost his words. His mind was reeling, it couldn't be true. "Y-you're lying..." he stuttered as he went through it in his mind. The league of villains, the child of his predecessor, all the events up till now and a single disappearance that had occurred long ago. His heart sank in his chest and it's beat slowed.

"What happened to that smile of yours, All Might?" All for One asked as he placed his fingers on either side of his mouth and pushed upward turning his face into a perverse grin. "I always wondered how much that little fact would disturb you."
He fell to his knee and beat his fist on the concrete, dust stuck to the blood which ran across the floor into the dirt. "You scum," he said. It was followed by a sigh, his mentor's family. His own mentor's family twisted like this, at the will of this man. He felt sapped, drained, like he could slump and die on this very earth. All this pain that had been inflicted, that had persisted and taken on new forms had been because of his own inaction.

"Looks like I got a little bit more than a fragment of your spirit there, isn't that right?" All for One said as he raised his hand once more. The same shaking began but he couldn't hear it. "This is the end of the Symbol of Peace."

He closed his eyes and everything felt slow around him, he couldn't muster the strength any longer. "All Might!" his eyes shot open and he looked over his shoulder, it was the little girl who had spoken. The very girl he had saved earlier. She was still there, huddling and afraid. "Please All Might," she said again with tears rolling down her cheeks. "Help!"

It hurt more than any injury he had, it churned him more than the revelation. She would die with him. He couldn't allow that, he couldn't allow this man to continue to do as he pleased. Everyone was counting on him, on One for All and on the Symbol of Peace. "Of course," he answered and his fingers dragged dirt together as the power was fanned, his quirk irradiated. He turned back toward the villain, where a low golden orb hung in his palm, it crackled with the same dangerous energy.

Smack, his fist hit All for One into the floor. He had never felt himself move so fast, before the man even hit the ground he had grabbed him by the neck and flung him several more feet. The villain caught himself and spun to face him. Before he could utter more vile words he drove his fist across All for One's face and threw him into a wall, dust spun from it as he fell to the floor. The red tint of One for all flickered over his body as he watched the collapse and then he was Toshiniro again, the last of his power had faded. He hoped it had been eno-

"So, that was your final attack All Might?" All for One asked as he rose once more. He froze as the man then jumped high into the sky above. "Even back then you went after me with your guts hanging out. You disgust me," he said as his arm began to expand. "I won't give you that chance again."

"Stoccata," sching, a knife like projectile struck All for One across the face, however it retracted unnaturally back to re-merge with Edgeshot's body. "Do not kid yourself, savage. The likes of you could never strike down All Might."

All for One held the wound with his right hand as his vision snapped at the lithe figure. He opened his mouth but in that instant a fiery orange tint engulfed him from behind. "What's with that unheroic appearance All Might?!" Endeavor shouted, half as question and half as fact.

"This is about as much as we can do for you All Might!" Tiger said behind him. He had the little girl he'd rescued in his arms.

"No matter what your appearance Toshi, he can't strike down your heart," Gran Torino bobbed down beside him. The man looked far older than he remembered. "You remember it don't you? The promise you made to Nana," his head nodded. "Then go. Everyone... is wishing for your victory."

Vwoom, the air pulsed as fire was pushed away. "Enough. You can discard your petty sentimentalit,y. All for One raised his hand and the dark edged prongs sprung out in groups from behind him and lunged. "An audience should behave!" he said as they collided with each of the heroes around him and threw them backward with ease. The villain breathed as the tendrils returned and his floating subsided to the point where he was only a meter above the ground. "This is reality, not a fairy tale. I will strike you down All Might."
The villain's arm grew twice the size of what it had before as he raised it, he caught it with a malformed one of his own as he forced his quirk to meet it. His fingers broke but he smashed through the attack and landed his left fist across the ragged face of the villain with a deafening smash. He could feel the embers of One for All burning in one last blaze of glory.

"Shallow," the villain scoffed as he brought his own hand back around and thinned it into a steel blade toward his heart. "Goodbye Symbol of Peace."

"I am not done," he took the knife with the arm he had punched the villain with, lodging him deep enough to keep him still. All of the crackling energy of One for All drew from it and transferred to his fist, that he had already raised far above. It flourished and became strong as it grew into the fist of All Might, the Symbol of Peace for the last time.

"This is farewell All for One," he said. And to you too, One for All. He gave his first sincere smile in a long time. Then, his fist came down all at once.

Chapter End Notes

*I do not own BNHA. OC material is my own.*
[Yokohama City, Kamino Ward – Downtown – 9:04 PM Sunday]

A seismic punch separated the ground as All Might's fist collided with the villain's skull. In an instant the sight vanished as a dust storm followed it and covered all in a thick halo, which caused the voices surrounding to drop into whispers that were then cut into complete and utter silence. They were all holding their breath and he was no exception. He needed to see All Might win, to see the mightiest hero banish what he could now only perceive as the most repulsive villain.

Particles danced for an eternity around the spot before it all gave a final quiver, as if it had realised that this was the conclusion of the battle, the finale of a struggle. It imploded and swept before furling inward like the centre of a vindictive hurricane. Upon entry it flattened and became something different; the form of a man who might have been anyone, who had a face he could not yet see. Every second that passed revealed more shreds, the outline of a leg, a tuft of torn clothing and then finally a shattered fist struck up toward the sky which beneath sat a broad, unbroken smile. It was All Might's, he was left standing high above the villain.

Cheers erupted in a manner that was not sudden. It was as if they had all still to come to the realisation, to put one and one together and conclude that even this villain, one that held so much power, had fallen to the symbol of peace. He had done it, he had won. As it came to his mind he found it impossible not to yell out, to celebrate even against his own nature the success of a man whom despite having been torn down had still come out ahead. The camera zoomed in on him and All Might brought his hand down to point at it.

"You're next," he said and the crowd shook. The message hung clear; any villain who dared would meet the same fate. He felt far beyond giddy in the light of it, even calling it elation wouldn't be much of an exaggeration. No matter what happened now this night belonged to them and no villain could do anything about it. The staggering sensation came to pass over minutes, after which he finally found himself looking around at the others. Half were as overpowered as he had been, for better or for worse.

"You alright Midoriya?" Kirishima asked. He didn't seem sure if the tears glassing his face were of joy or sorrow, though he was inclined to assume the former.

"Y-yeah," the boy choked out between breaths before wiping his face across the long velvet sleeve of his brown suit jacket. His eyes were left red after but they never strayed from the monitor longer than they had to other than to blink.

He could understand but he had a similar question in mind as he looked over at Bakugou. "How about you?" he asked.

Bakugou looked busy with thought and registered his question well after the fact. "What?" he answered like he had recently been placated.

He wasn't sure how to phrase it without awkwardness, "That man, Janus, did he... do anything? To you, I mean."

He answered with a vacant stare then scowled, dismissing it just as fast. "I didn't let him get
anywhere near me," he said.

The answer allowed him an incremental amount of relief. He had lost his questions as he had watched the fight but they had sat there ready to come back. There wasn't a certainty in his mind that if something had happened Bakugou would have answered truthfully but he had no doubt the guy would have torched Janus if he had so much as tried. It felt better having asked, even if many questions were beginning to crop up in his mind again. Janus and that man, All for One, there was a mystery behind it he intended to solve before it got the better of him.

Kirishima bumped Bakugou with his shoulder and grinned. "Glad we got you back man," he said.

*Tch,* he gave him an annoyed look. "I could have handled it on my own, I just didn't want to get in All Might's way. I don't owe you punks anything."

"Sure thing McSplody, no need to justify yourself to me."

"Yeah, I bet half of us would have choked in that situation," he nodded. Multiple villains had been trying to get him and he hadn't even flinched, even if he wasn't going to last it was impressive.

Bakugou ignored the statement and turned back to the monitor, if he didn't know better however he could say the attention was split between it and Midoriya evenly. It was as if he was too busy digesting everything he'd seen to even spit insult back, especially at the nickname.

*Ahem,* Iida coughed loud behind them. He'd torn off the moustache and pushed his hair back to it's different version of straight. "I know we have only just regrouped but I think it best we return to Hosu at once. After we hand over Bakugou to the proper authorities of course. I'm sure the police are searching everywhere for him right now," he said.

"Agreed. If we stick around longer than we have to it'll begin to cause trouble," Todoroki said.

"Yes," Momo said. "I am sure the school is quite aware of our actions by now, the press conference was cancelled part-way in light of the incident. I am afraid even with our excellent disguises someone could recognise us easily through footage alone."

"You don't say," he shook his head. Who would have ever thought that would happen.

Kirishima winced. "Oh god, Aizawa is going to kill us isn't he?" he said.

"Probably," Todoroki answered before shrugging. "What's done is done, there isn't a point in worrying about it now."

"He's right," he said as he pulled out his phone. He had accepted his fate already, this incident could very well be the straw that broke the camels back. In light of that he didn't want to entertain the idea as it was out of his control. There was certainly regret but none of it was tied to having tried and succeeded in rescuing Bakugou. "Besides, Aizawa isn't the only one," he held the phone screen up to Kirishima's face.

3 – Jirou Kyouka – NEW
2 – Kaminari Denki – NEW
1 – Sero Hanta – NEW
1 – Uncle Alo – NEW
"Shit dude," he grimaced. Then he took out his own phone, it was in a similar state. "They must've seen everything. Especially Jirou."

He nodded, "She's absolutely pissed." Most of them were, he noticed as he flicked through, except Sero's. He'd just asked what the hell was up with the trench coat, once again affirming the shitty nature of the disguises. His uncles message had simply said 'Call me,' somehow that was the worst one.

"But that means she's awake," Kirishima said. "Let's go visit her tomorrow, yeah?"

"If we have that option," he answered. He did want to, if only to see her awake instead of unconscious and half dead. Hopefully he still had the guts to follow through on that tomorrow, for now everything they had done was enough.

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[Eastern Hosu CBD – Naeto Train Station – 11:31 PM]

As he stepped out onto the increasingly frigid pavement it was only the two of them left, surrounded by crowds of people rushing in and out of the train station behind him. He had a bag in his hand, the one that contained his original clothes that had been locked up in the Yokohama station. He was glad he hadn't forgotten them but unfortunately he hadn't thought to change.

"Feels weird, doesn't it?" Kirishima asked with a complacent smile. He was looking around a fair bit, like he was trying to take it all in.

"What does?" he said as he pulled the trench coat tighter around him and searched for his phone. As unsuitable as it was it did have the advantage of being warm.

"Just handing Bakugou over like that to the police after rescuing him."

"I mean, Iida was right."

"Yeah I know, I know," Kirishima laughed. "Still doesn't make it less weird handing him back over after all we did to get him in the first place."

"I guess you're right," he answered. It did feel a bit weird but that was the way it had to be. It wasn't like they could escort him to the school, now that would have been idiotic. After a few more pats he did find his phone, now he had to make that call. "Gimme a sec," he moved out of the archway of the train station and under the back of a nearby bus stop. The less people that overheard him the better, he wasn't sure what to expect. Although he had many things to answer it was his uncles he intended to entertain first, he owed him that much. The phone rung a few times, then stuttered into a busy tone and the beginnings of a voice messaging service.

"Hey uncle, it's me. Call me back when you can," he said before hanging up. His uncle was a bit paranoid about the wrong people calling him, considering the man had only just fixed his phone he doubted he'd even remembered saving his name onto it.

"No luck?" Kirishima asked.

He shook his head. "No, I'll try again when I get back to Yuuei," he said, to which his friend gave him a strange look.

"You aren't seriously planning to walk home from here, right?"
"Uh, yeah, why not?"

"How far do you think Yuuei is from here, exactly."

"Like... a few miles maybe?"

His friend chuckled at that, "Dude you crack me up sometimes. You seriously can't just walk from one end of Hosu to the other in the middle of the night you know. You're going to get jumped and considering what we've just been through that seems like a bad way to go."

"Didn't you walk home when you stayed at my place?" he'd thought the guy only lived away a short bit, at least that's what he'd made it seem like. It made him wonder exactly where he was right now. The streets didn't look familiar, there were many tall white buildings and intersections that travelled down several blocks.

"I took the train near Yuuei to this station, I don't live that close to the school. Why did you think I took off like my hair was on fire on that morning? I only had like eighty minutes to get there and back, normally the whole trip takes me a good fifty."

"Guess I should just take a train there then too," he mumbled. It was annoying that he hadn't paid attention to that. It would add at least another thirty minutes to his journey.

"Hah, screw that. Just stay at my place for the night," his friend smirked. "I don't mind, and my folks might not mind."

"I don't know if its a good idea, knowing the school they've probably already flagged my ID to make sure I get back," he said. He wouldn't put it past Aizawa to be standing at the gate ready to put him in chains himself. On second thought it might be better he didn't go back right away.

Kirishima rolled his eyes at him. "Don't 'I don't know me' and just agree," he said.

Before he could answer his phone hummed with a vrrm, which when he looked at it he knew was Alo. He gripped the phone harder and pressed the button as he raised it to his ear, to prepare for whatever the man had to say. The first thing he heard on the other end was a cough, followed by a pause as the man treated himself. "Riley," his uncle's voice said loud and clear as it passed.

"Alo," he said back. "I can explain."

"Look," the man interrupted him. "Just answer me, was that you that I saw?"

Cold traveled down the side of his neck as he realised he was completely busted. "Yes," he answered. "It was me."

"That was a stupid thing of you to do. To get mixed up in all that business Riley. You could have been killed if all those heroes hadn't been there."

"I know but-"

"You guys went and saved that kid with the spiky hair, yeah?"

"Yeah."

"And you made it out alright, you didn't get hurt?"

"I'm alright, we're already ba-"
"That a good thing you did, no matter what happens now. As stupid as it was, I'm glad you went and helped him out. No matter what happens I want you to know that."

He paused and trembled a bit, he wanted to say thank you but it didn't come. There was apprehension, like his uncle still had more to tell him and to ask him. It hit in splices of tension that nagged at him, until his uncle spoke again.

"Riley... I know that... in this stuff you're not always gonna be safe. You need to make your own decisions, I can handle that but you need to remember I ain't the only one who is gonna see you do it. I don't want to be standing next to Kumai some day while you're lying in some damnable casket because you tried to do something you couldn't handle."

His throat closed up at the words, and he felt his eyes grow hot. He turned away from his friend and rubbed his hand across to banish it. He understood and that didn't make it any easier. "I'm sorry," he swallowed again, harder this time, with his voice sticking. "I'm really sorry uncle. I understand, okay?" He was trying his hardest not to let it come through across the phone nor to Kirishima right behind him.

"I know you do," his uncle said. There was some delay before his uncle spoke again, they both hadn't coped very well in hiding it. "Now... how are you getting home? Are you with the police in Yokohama?"

He let go of a drawn out gasp, it was more like a shudder, before he answered, "No, we're back in Hosu. I'm with Kirishima, I can head back to the school right away."

"Kirishima?" his uncle said it like he knew the name.

"Yo, Mr. Torenagi!" Kirishima yelled loud enough for his uncle to hear, causing him to turn and watch as his friend grinned and put his hands behind his head.

"I remember, he's one of those that helped you out, right? Just like that kid you guys went an' rescued."

"Yeah, he is."

"Don't worry about him Sir, I'll get him to crash at my place for the night. I won't take no for an answer."

"That's good to hear... wouldn't wantchu walkin' bout on Hosu streets in the middle of the night."

He gave Kirishima an irritable look, it wasn't like he could even hear what Alo was saying back to him but he sure looked pretty smug about it nonetheless.

"I'll be back in Hosu soon, had to make a detour that'll take me a few days. We can catch up then, I just wanted to make sure you're okay."

"Alright uncle... I guess I'll see you then," he answered. He still had a bit of a knot over what his uncle had said. He was right in his harshness, he didn't want his mom to have to see him in that state like Midoriya's had.

"Take care of yourself," his uncle said.

"I will," he replied. Then with a beep the call ended.

He gave a bitter sigh of defeat as he put his phone away. "Guess I'm going with you," he said.
Kirishima gave him a pitiful look in return, "Hey, hey it's not like I sentenced you to death. Besides, you let me stay over that one time, consider it returning the favour."

_Hmph_, he answered and rolled his eyes. "I could think of better ways of spending my night, like being arrested or thrown in detention with Aizawa," he shrugged. Then he looked at Kirishima, who was dramatically taken aback, like he'd taken a wound to the chest. In fact, combined with an overdone pout and a literal grabbing of his left shoulder it became too much. Neither of them held it much longer before bursting into simultaneous snorted laughter.

"Man you had me going for a second there," his friend said as he begot himself.

"Thank you, really," he said as he wiped his tear away. He had needed that, or what his uncle said might have escalated. The night had already been filled with so much fear, relief and confusion.

"Let's go then, it's not far from here," Kirishima said and turned away from him, allowing him to follow behind into the crowd.

[Eastern Hosu CBD – ? – 11:45 PM]

Their footsteps trot in slow pace between snaked streets that ran off the main intersection like veins. They were descending from a place of many to the suburbs of the few and inbetween, however unlike his old apartment it did not feel empty and heartless, not forgotten. They passed through lanes of lights that marked dozens of huddled convenience stores and schools that blended into the background of tall white buildings that stood like guard towers above them. It was hard to see the homes of those that lived here at a first but he soon grew familiar to spotting the nooks and crannies that spread into two story households on each cobbled pathway. It gave it a homely vibe, with the leaves of red trees that scattered and carpeted the floor in both scarlet and withered brown.

His accompaniment to it was silence from Kirishima, though maybe his friend had decided to give him a break from speaking. Exhaustion had taken him like a sleep draught, alluded to by the ever present vigil of a moon that had taken sole captor above them. It made him realise he kind of missed it. The small town feeling, even if this wasn't a small town it sure felt like it sometimes. His grandparents place had always given him that feeling too, they lived near a lake and by far one of the largest he'd ever seen. Lake Nidas, if he recalled. It was a man-made thing far south of Chicago and something that hadn't existed for more than twenty years, they had told him. It was named after a hero who had made themselves famous there by preventing the collapse of the damn that fuelled the supply of over five million. That was a feat hard to top, he had to admit.

"So," Kirishima said, interrupting his train of thought.

"Hmm?" he answered and looked around. He hadn't been paying close attention but it didn't feel like they were there yet, unless Kirishima lived in a police station.

"I kinda wanted to ask this before but," he paused. "It's all fine between your uncle and you, yeah? You looked a bit devastated back there."

"I was," he said as he remembered it. "But he was right to say what he did, he was just being honest. It just hit a bit harder coming from him."

"Well, that's a good thing right?"

"What do you mean by that?"

"If it hurt to have him say it then that means you cared about what he had to say. That also means
"You want to protect him, right?"

"Sure, I suppose you're right," it felt like he was going somewhere with it. "What are you trying to say exactly?" he asked.

"I don't really know if I'm being honest," his friend shrugged. "But I think a lot of heroes just say they want to protect everyone but... having someone in particular to protect feels a lot more sincere, ya know?"

He slowed his pace and gave Kirishima a bit of a look. He hadn't expected him to say something that sounded so deep. It wasn't entirely on point, but he got what the guy was going for. Understanding that made it kind of embarrassing. It shouldn't have been, he felt. He did want that kind of resolve when it came to his sister and his mom and maybe that guilt was proof of it.

"Forgettaboutit," Kirishima said after a few seconds. "I'm just rambling, must be the lack of sleep."

*Mhmm,* he answered. Maybe it was, maybe it wasn't. "Protecting someone else with your life is the kind of manly thing Crimson Riot would have done right?"

"Exactly, see, I knew you'd get it," his friend grinned.

"So who are you trying to protect?"

Kirishima paused at the question and stopped at an alleyway they had been about to enter. He looked up at the signpost and then back to him. "I don't think I have reached the point where I can say that for sure yet," he shook his head. "But when I do I'll let you know, okay?"

"Fair enough," he said. Then he rubbed the back of his neck awkwardly before taking a breath of cold air. "Man, I didn't expect you to get all serious on a walk back to your house."

"Haha, sorry man," his face lit up. "It just kinda came to me after your phone call, that's all. Anyway, we're pretty much here, see?" he said as he pointed down the alleyway at the third house down.

It was dug into the side of the alleyway itself, larger than the other houses they had seen so far. In fact this part in particular had about double the space. On the front of it a sign read "Kirishima Residence," illuminated by a porch light that only served to cover about half a step of stone outside the front door. Bleached walls stared down at him as he looked up and about and on either side of the door stood fences about as tall as he was. Behind the one on the right was one of the scarlet trees in full bloom. It had to be a gardeners worst nightmare, he surmised at the thick tapestry of petals beneath his feet that probably replaced itself daily.

"So this is your place," he stated as Kirishima unlocked the door with a *click.* He had an old fashioned key for it and everything.

"Yeah, like it?" he said as he peeked inside. There was nothing but darkness visible through the slit.

"It definitely beats standing out here in the cold," he said as he followed Kirishima up the step to reach for the door handle. He’d had enough of waiting.

"Ah-ha-ha let me stop you right there," he said, catching his hand before it could make contact.

"Remember how I said my parents *might* not mind?"

He tilted his head at the sentence, "So what you really meant is they will mind."
"Well, you know after I got put in remedial things kind of got blown out of proportion," his friend gave a nervous laugh. "One thing led to another and I kind of got banned from having anyone stay over till the start of next semester. You know, no biggie, really. I'm sure it'll be fine, uh, as long as you climb the fence and I let you in without anyone seeing, that is."

"You're joking, right?" he said, to which Kirishima shrugged in apology. He wasn't.

"I have a stepladder in the back, you wait out here for a second while I make sure no ones around and then I'll come get you. The backyard door is right near the stairs, so once we're up it's home free."

He groaned in reply, which Kirishima took as his cue to go on in before shutting the door behind him just as quick. A few minutes later he was still alone and growing colder, something even the silly coat couldn't help him with enough to make it comfortable. He wondered what he must've looked like. Ridiculous would probably have been right, with his oversized sleeves and coattail that hung close to the ground. He looked just the part to play a discount Neo, all he needed was a water pistol or two painted black and some sunglasses. At the thought of it he pulled at his scalp and wasn't sure why he hadn't done it sooner. The black wig came off easily, though he couldn't just start stripping off the rest in an alleyway. Kirishima needed to hurry up.

"Psst, dude. Over here!" a familiar voice said as if he'd beckoned it with his thoughts. He walked up to the fence where it was, underneath the tree he'd spotted.

"Took you long enough, this alleyway is starting to give me the creeps," he said as he took what could only be modestly described as a stool. It wasn't even two feet tall.

"Sorry," his friend answered. He couldn't really see him through the fence.

Despite the awkwardness of it he put the stool down and did his best to climb up and onto the fence. His hands dug into the wooden rim and caused him a significant amount of pain, but it was preferable to toppling over and falling on Kirishima. He didn't want to break his neck. He dropped down the other side with an unremarkable thud, landing on both feet in the dirt.


"Easy for your maybe. You aren't getting that stepladder back just saying."

"Yeah, yeah, whatever I'll get it later. Come on, lucky for us my folks aren't up," he said and turned toward the backyard door a few feet behind them. Either side of it was entrenched by flowers that he couldn't see but did smell. It was Lavender, which irked his nose. He wasn't sure why the damn weed was so popular in Hosu of all places, bad luck for him he supposed.

"I know we're trying to be sneaky but take off your shoes, my mom can spot a speck of dirt a mile away and if she sees two sets of prints she'll go ballistic for more reasons than one."

"Fine," he said and pulled his flat laced shoes off. It was weird that he had chosen to wear these over sneakers, those probably would have been easier to run with. He stuffed the pair into his bag before Kirishima pushed him forward in the dark and toward some steps. They creaked every third step he took up them and he stumbled more than a few times on how steep they were. It took longer than it should have to reach the carpeted terrace at the top, on which there were three doors and a hallway closet.

"That one," Kirishima whispered and ushered him to the furthest. He opened it and shoved him inside, which would have annoyed him had not a moment later the hallway lit up in a vibrant yellow
"Eijirou. Down here, right now," a deep voice commanded to which Kirishima winced.

"Uh, h-hi Dad," his friend choked and scratched his head. He was making a signal behind his back toward him with his other hand. It was a single finger that told him to not so much as breathe right now.

"Now," the man repeated.

"Yes, Sir," his head drooped before he reached for the railing and began to walk back down. He took that as his cue to shut the door as quick and as quietly as possible, which while effective left him submerged in darkness. There was no way he wanted to get busted now but he also wasn't going to stand there until Kirishima was back.

The first thing he did was turn to reach for a light switch only to stub his toe on something hard and metallic. He let out a pained groan and stifled anything that came after as he reached manically for some kind of button to press. Click, the switch went as he touched it, bathing the room in a much less harsh, orangey hue.

He now saw that the thing he'd stubbed his toe on was a dumbbell and one of several that lined the bottom of a rack of heavy equipment. Beside it was a punching bag that barely fit where his friend had set it up. The rest of the room was an equal mess, dirty clothes were piled in the corner next to a futon and a flat mat, which sat beside a desk upon which books were piled high. He recognised most of them, they were from exam. The guy must have been studying day and night to pass by the looks of the notes. On the wall behind it were posters and knickknacks of Crimson Riot first and most in view, although barely any part of the wall was untouched.

One thing he was trying to spot now in particular was the aforementioned fridge, though he saw no trace of the thing anywhere to his disappointment. It would have been a great thing to tell Kaminari about. He crossed the room and pulled back the curtains to look outside, as expected there wasn't much except streets upon streets and then even more streets all washed out in grey and white. There was however something that caught his interest; a single plant pot on Kirishima's windowsill, it was odd until he saw it was rather neglected and dead looking. That made more sense.

Now was probably the perfect time to change while Kirishima was getting chewed out by his parents. He set the bag down and got to work by abandoning the coat along with the tacky shirt and annoying skinny jeans in favour of a plain green short sleeved shirt and long albeit thinly layered trousers. It suited him far better than what Momo had chosen, not to mention his quirk, he had been fearful of the coat smacking him in the face during the steam distraction Momo had suggested. He'd originally planned to just send the villains into a pit but the ground had been far too hard for that, it had been a lucky thing she had come up with it in such a short time frame.

He wasn't sure what to do next as he sat down against the wall, upon which his friend had mustered several large pillows in and attempt to make it comfortable. All there really was to do was think about that burning question he had favoured in dismissal of earlier. That was, the relationship of Janus and All for One and in particular the Noumu.

If he were to take the leap in logic from the words he'd heard then it wasn't a stretch to say that those two were the exact reason those things even existed. Ragdoll was the evidence and it made sense, how else could anyone have multiple quirks? A quirk that could take quirks and give them, the idea that something like that existed unnerved him though not as much as another question it brought. If the man could do that then why did he still have his quirk instead of a Noumu? That, was far harder to think about. He had no answer.
What had Janus said back in the forest? He was having a hard time remembering it now. It had been only a few words, uttered through darkness as he was being submerged. His memory was good but hardly that good, especially not under stress. Maybe he couldn't remember because it wasn't important, however he doubted that. Everything that villain had ever said had been and would continue to be important. Hopefully it would come to him later.

A thing he did remember about it and wished he didn't was his face, or rather lack thereof. It still flashed in his mind and had awoken him even the night before in his bed. Those insects Aizawa had mentioned, the ones that had acted as a mind control agent, they were part of the man's quirk which he had called Marionette. A fitting name, one that should have cut him up if he hadn't let that thing take over again. He had been feeling it since that night, stronger than before. It was gone now, in the same phenomenon that All Might had exhibited back then in the rescue race, only this time he was sure it was because of the villains aura not the heroes. That fear had been real, astoundingly soul crushing in fact. If anyone needed a reminder of why heroes existed then a video of that man was all they would have to be shown.

He gave a long yawn as he sat there and went over the same thoughts again and again but his mind wasn't having any of it. It was already hard to keep his eyes open with how foggy the lighting was, you'd probably need a desk lamp to even see any words on a page at all. Maybe he should get Kirishima a proper lightbulb for his birthday. He smirked at the idea, more so at the chance that Kaminari would probably break it just by being nearby.

Click, Slam, the door went next to him before he'd even turned his head at the first sound. Kirishima stood at the doorway with his eyes closed and his head pushed into it. He looked almost confused at what had just happened to him.

"Yo," he moved his hand up at him in the most lazy way possible so he had to expend the least effort. It could barely even be called a wave.

His friend let go of the frame and fell into the door with his back, before sliding down. "I don't know what just happened," he said.

"That bad, huh?"

"Mom almost yelled her head off at one point but dad was like the total opposite. It was weird. If yellproof is a word, then that was it. Also I think I have a curfew now? I'm not sure," he frowned.

"Parents yelling becomes a bit less intimidating when you're not in the same country as them," he chuckled. "Though I think my uncle could yell ten times worse than they could if he wanted."

"Well, chances are we aren't the only ones who got yelled at," Kirishima nodded. "I guess only Bakugou would really be spared from that..."

"You think so? Considering how he is just think how his dad must be."

"You're right," he laughed. "Though I think Midoriya said his mom was worse, she probably beat him bloody by now. Anyway, I'm freakin' starving, how about you?"

"All I want is sleep," he yawned again.

"Well you can't sleep against a wall, your neck is gonna kill you. I have some spare stuff in my closet, so just sit tight," his friend said as he stood. Then he walked over to a thin part of the wall obscured by the punching bag and tugged. Almost the whole corner slid back like some kind of magic bookshelf.
"Holy shit, you really do have a fridge in your room," he said as he saw it. The thing was downright massive. He did his best to hide his laughter but it helped little. It was too absurd.

"What, you didn't believe it?" he looked back at him, then threw several bits of a bed right at his face. A blanket, a flat mat and a pillow.

"Thanks, and no I didn't," he said and pushed it all haphazardly into place. He didn't really care how it looked at this point. It must have already been well past midnight. "I did kind of wish it was true though."

"Wish granted then."

As he turned back he saw that Kirishima had propped up a small camping table in the centre of the room. On it he had shoved several packets of what claimed to be 'meat-pancakes' among other things, along with a few bottles of water.

"You sure you're not hungry? It's all you can eat on me dude."

"I'm good," he said and fell back on his train wreck of a bed.

"Suit yourself," Kirishima said almost like he was disappointed.

He did have to admit he was feeling a bit peckish all of a sudden, far more than he had felt even before he had eaten that crap on the train. The aroma of it was enough to sway him after a minute or two. *Fuck it*, he thought. He had survived enough tonight, a bit of junk food was justified. He sat back up and snatched one of the things off the table and tore it open with his teeth.

Chapter End Notes

*I do not own BNHA. OC material is my own.*
Stoic

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

[South-East/-{ Hosu – Riley's Apartment – 6:20 AM MondayThursday---} Saturdd dDay]

Heat awoke him as the etchings of summer hit him in the face. It came through a window he had forgotten to close. He didn't mind being struck in such a way and rolled off his bed faster than he normally might. Class was always so early that it became a surprise he didn't miss the train to get there. His uncle couldn't have chosen a more inconvenient location from a place all the way out wessssouth:

A glance fell upon his stuff as he passed through the door to get to his bathroom, his black blazer with its emblem, a haze of red and green. He blamed his poor perception of it on his morning dreariness. Water cleared it up as he twined a toothbrush between two fingers but before he went any further he realised he probably needed to check the time to see if he could still practice before he had to leave.

It was where it always was, next to a deranged assembly of cards and a baseball bat on his nightstand. He opened his phone, taking care not to rip the green plastic mishmash further. It had been coming apart throughout the last few weeks. His schedule was on it and a map, times and tables, buses and trains. Not only did a view of it tell him he was an idiot but it also caused him to groan an irrevocable sigh. Today was Saturday, he didn't have class. He wasn't sure how he hadn't remembered that. He threw his phone back on his bed and it bounced three times, into the wall. He hadn't thrown it that hard. He shrugged a bit. It didn't matter if it broke. His parents could just buy him a new one, like they did everything.

Now he had all the time in the world to do whatever he liked. What he decided to do was pick up that rubber ball he always carried around and roll it in his hand before squishing it like a stress ball. He closed his eyes and thought on it and pushed his fingers firmer, the compression pushed down his arm and vibrated the ball. He held the quirk for a time, bringing it to certain thresholds he had worked out in the past seven months. He had a good grasp of the weight of it now thanks to his teacher, he was lucky to have him. A certain amount would inebriate someone, a bit more would pin them to where they stood and just enough might knock them out completely. Now that he'd learnt that stopping anyone from reaching him in a fight had become trivial. It was so easy to push a frail opponent into the dirt.

A loud repetitive yelp from beneath him caused him to drop the ball back on to the table. His mind ran red at it. It was the damn dog again. He couldn't count with two hands the amount of times that had happened. That woman at reception was inadequate, she couldn't control it and she refused to learn how after his complaints. She had patronized him. People did that when they didn't know how fearful he could be. Intimidation was always a good tool. It was Leineif that had taught him that, his training had reinforced it. It didn't always work and this was exactly one of those moments. He could do something else, though.

All he needed to do was raise his hands and think about it. Then he wouldn't have to hear that damn dog any longer. It would be that easy to shut that woman and her barking hell hound up. No one would come to investigate it, after all how would they know it was him? He wasn't anyone famous. He was just some nameless student, going to a small school at the far edge of town. A foreigner even, he could just disappear.
He knelt down and pushed his hands at the floorboards. It would be satisfying. He began to imagine her, sitting gaudy and string-like in her chair at the front desk watching some crap on a small T.V clammed in a selection of tacky crap. As he did it felt like he was reaching his quirk down there, furling around like a web on the room she was in, on the air around her, then around the woman itself.

"Comp-ress," he said and a scream rang out.

"Ah!" he yelled as he grasped his makeshift bed, swung up from it and flailed the blanket away all at once. Breathing was rapid in his lungs as it heaved in and out like he was being pressed upon with bellows. His mind was a mess. His sheets and clothes lay drenched in sweat and at his fingertips sat creeping indentations where his quirk had bit into the mat. He blinked several times in succession as he looked around but he was exactly where he had fallen asleep, in Kirishima's room. It had just been a nightmare.

"What the fuck..." he said under his breath. He wasn't sure exactly he had just witnessed, dreamt about, except that it hadn't been good. Even the idea of it made him sick. That damn apartment. He reached for his phone, buried somewhere in the wrappers on the table, it was only seven-fifteen. Click, the door went and Kirishima entered the room.

"Yo, everything alright up here? You gotta be careful dude, my parents are still downstairs. I covered well enough- wait," he interrupted himself as he looked down at him. "Duuuude what did you do to my floor?" he put what he had between his hands on the table, bobbed down and pushed him to the side. Beneath where his hands had sat were crunched swirls in the carpet, it was compression, he knew.

"Man my parents are gonna explode if they see this. What happened?"

He rubbed the hand across his eye and felt the thin tremor within each finger. "I don't know, I had a nightmare or something," he answered.

Kirishima gave him a furled look of worry. "Was it about that villain again?" he asked.

He shook his head. "No," he said. "It was something else."

"I swear that's the first time that's happened."

"It's okay man, everyone has accidents sometimes."

"Yes, his friend said before he shrugged. "It's alright. I'll fix it somehow, or just hide it."

"I swear that's the first time that's happened."

His friend gave him a sly grin, "It's okay man, everyone has accidents sometimes."

His face burned at that. "Shut up," he said and punched him in the shoulder.

"Kidding, kidding," he laughed. "Anyway I got some bad news. My parents got a call from the school like ten minutes ago. That's why I went down there."

"And?" he asked.

"Mr. Aizawa's gonna be on my doorstep on Thursday to discuss stuff. I'm not the only one, Kaminari, Sero and Momo told me the same thing," he scratched his head. "He wants to talk to my parents himself."
He bit his thumb and looked away from his friend. "Damn," he said. That meant him too, certainly. "I guess I shouldn't have joked about my parents yelling at me." He knew how his mom would be, but with his dad it would probably be unpredictable. Both were malignant. He shook his head, he would deal with it on Thursday. "So, when are we heading out to see Jirou?"

"Well, we can go with option A, where you climb out the window and I meet you outside or we can go with option B, where we wait till my parents head out."

He offered a look toward the window, the sill was slippery from where it must have rained in the night, which meant the roof tiles were too. Not to mention it was quite a tall two story building. "I'll take option B," he answered. Breaking a leg was not how he wanted to get caught.

"Figured you might," his friend laughed. "Guess there's nothing to do but eat then," he grinned.

He looked over at the table, food was indeed what his friend had brought. "I swear that's all you think about. That and training," he said. "We aren't going to run to the hospital, right?"

"Hah, shut up man."

He let his smirk fade and rubbed his neck, it stung. It must have since he'd woken up, but other more prominent signs had covered it. "Jirou is going to explode at us, I hope you're ready for that." He still remembered the last time he'd angered her.

"I texted her we were coming but I didn't get a response, so take that how you will."

_Hmm_, he answered. Hopefully that didn't mean she had checked out and gone home. Though if she only woke up last night he found that unlikely. It would be what it was, they had been reckless and all so she deserved to tell them that but that didn't mean he was eager to get punched by her again. _Thunk_, a loud noise came from downstairs, causing him to turn to the door.

"Looks like they left early, lucky us."

"Maybe we should just go then," he said. He wasn't really hungry after that dream, it left his stomach churning.

"Relax man, we can go soon. You still look like shit so just stay still for a bit."

_Hmph_, he said. He was just eager that was all. "You got a bathroom up here?"

"First door on the right," his friend answered and dropped himself near the things he'd gathered on the table.

He pushed himself to his feet. "You don't mind if I shower do you?"

"Knock yourself out," he said through mouthfuls of reheated rice.

He walked to the door and pushed it open without trying to make any noise. It wasn't that he thought anyone was still around but he was kind of paranoid. The hallway was as it had been last night, though now that he saw it with daylight it was far more clear what kind of household it was. That was in simple terms, chaotic. There was just _stuff_ lying in piles in the hallway below, hundreds of exercise products in boxes, and many shoes strewn against a mat on the wall near the backdoor. It ran along to a cabinet next to a door that he assumed lead into the kitchen and even from there he could tell it had similar disarray. He felt he knew where his friend got his cleaning habits now.

He turned to the right and entered the door that Kirishima had indicated. It was a small bathroom that
must have only been used by his friend, as empty gel canisters, a toothbrush and packets of used red dye were the only thing in it. He locked the door behind him and looked in the mirror. He did look terrible, just not as bad as he expected. The foundation had smudged as he had sweated and rolled in his sleep and his hair was sticking out in every odd way like a teal wave was running down the side of his head. He should have asked if Kirishima had a spare change of clothes for him to use, he felt disgusting.

That apartment, he thought again. His apprehension was marked by morbid curiosity. Would he be allowed to see it if his intentions were clear? Probably not if he went and asked Aizawa, but he wasn't about to do that. He just wanted a quick look to see... to verify his nightmare hadn't been a warped version of reality. Rationality told him it could not be but he needed to see for himself. He reached one hand into the shower beside the sink and twisted, causing it to spring to life. It could wait, there was no need to bother with it now.

Before going any further he looked around for a towel. There wasn't one, just his luck. He pushed the door to the bathroom open again, he'd just have to go get one. The first step he took out was his last in that instance as he almost walked straight into the woman standing right outside the door. His heart froze and his mind blundered.

"Hello there young man," she said as she looked down on him before folding her arms. "H-hello," he answered dumb and wide-eyed. She was tall and had stark, straight black hair that looked like it had been cut into odd rectangles. A tight jacket was donned on a more restricted and restrained white blouse and a pair of heelless shoes. He didn't need to guess who she was. It had to be Kirishima's mother.

"Heyyyyy mom-" Kirishima said from the arch of his doorway. The woman began to tap her heel. "What are you doing back?"

"I never actually left, but I didn't think it'd be this easy," she said and gave him a scowl. "Honestly Eijirou, did you really think we didn't know already? I was hoping you would come clean. I far prefer it over enforcing some arbitrary rule over you."

"Sorry, Ma'am," he said before Kirishima could offer his own. "I didn't mean to cause trouble."

"It isn't you causing trouble here," she answered and shook her head at her son.

"Mom I can explain," he said and began to move toward her.

She placed a hand on her hip, "There's no need, you clearly can't be trusted."

"But."

She waved the arm from her hip to cut him off, "That's enough. Maybe this is best a matter for your father to handle. He might have gone easy on your last night but fool him once..." his friend froze at the words, like he'd had a loaded crossbow aimed at his chest.

"Please," he said loudly, enough to turn the woman back to him. Then he gave her a bow that almost put him at a right angle with only just enough room to be able to see her. "It wasn't his fault. I asked him if I could stay, he even told me he wasn't allowed to have people over. I didn't have anywhere else to go for the night... I'm sorry. I'll leave right away."

The woman gave him a harsh look, then one to Kirishima to which he winced. Then she looked back for what felt like too long. A few seconds later she slapped him on the back of the head, though it was light enough it still hurt. He didn't dare move, however.
Once the pain faded the woman sighed, "You can stop bowing already. Honestly. You kids today think you can get away with anything."

He righted himself and looked at her, then she dropped her mean expression. "I'm not heartless enough to kick out my sons friends just for something like that. But really, you two could have just come clean, even in light of what you did. And yes, I already know exactly who you are."

He looked over at Kirishima, who was a mix of relief and embarrassment over the situation. "Thanks mom," his friend said. "Next time I'll let you know, okay?"

She turned away, "Well, I doubt there'll be a next time but..."

"Huh?"

"Never you mind. I'll be heading out now, so make sure you lock up if you go," she said before trailing to the stairs and leaving them in a weird awkward, stifled trance. "And don't mess up my house!" she shouted before the front door slammed shut.

He only moved again once the sound had faded. All his muscles un-tensed at once and he let out a huff that was half of a breath that had still been stuck in his throat.

"That could have gone worse, thanks for taking the blame like that," Kirishima said. "She wouldn't have bought it coming from me but I think she has a bit of a soft spot for that kind of stuff."

"It's whatever, not far from the truth anyway," he shrugged. "So, uh. Can I borrow a towel?" he asked and grinned a bit. The shower was still on in the bathroom behind him. All that drama just for that.

[Kuwasagawa Southern Hospital – Hallways – 9:57 AM]

The hospital was an open score lighter than it had been before as he and Kirishima walked along it's empty corridors. Perhaps it was because this would be his final visit here and the last real reminder of that terrible night. In that capacity he also had to admit his sympathy; that which he had for those who worked here and had to relive this sort of depressing thing on endless repeat. The heroic era was a cruel one in that regard.

He stopped in front of one of the last doors marked K5 after passing not one but three ominous wheelchairs abandoned along the way. "This is it," he said and pulled it back.

The light blinded him less this time, so his immediate sight was that of Jirou, her realisation and a reaction that sat on her face, which for once was not anger. She was lying still enough, like she had been watching out the window and been entirely captivated with listening to whatever rock song was drowning out everything through her earphones. He didn't often see her wearing those, she said she always enjoyed hearing it through speakers more. Hagakure, he noticed, was nowhere to be seen which meant that in part he had been right but it was the person in question he had been wrong about.

"Took you guys long enough," she said, before popping off the earphones one by one and wrapping them around her finger in practised revolutions.

"Sorry, we got caught up a bit," he answered as he walked up to her bedside. Kirishima's mom's uncomfortable hospitality had seen to that.

"Glad to see you're all better," Kirishima nodded and walked up beside, before then dropping
directly into the nearest plastic chair.

_Hmm_, she answered. Then after what appeared to be a scowl and then a wrinkle of thought she said, "I'm glad you two came to visit. Exploder-boy is alright, right?"

"He is, but," his friend said with a bit of apprehension. "How about you?"

She didn't answer but she looked sad, though her face sat neutral. He could tell as much without the expression necessary for the emotion. Something was bothering her and he had an inkling of what it was. "I thought you'd be screaming our ears off by now," he said.

"Same," she said.

"So what gives?" he asked before then taking a seat as well, to the right of Kirishima and closer to one of the windows.

She shrugged her shoulders. "It's nothing really. I've just been thinking about it," she said and looked from them to her lap. Her fingers sat there, though not idle but drumming. "I came to the realisation that in your position I would have done the same thing."

He hadn't expected that. "Ah," was all he could think to answer. She was rational, she had continued to be in all the time he'd known her. A short time, but still.

"Really?" Kirishima said, expressing his surprise in a half hearted hop in his seat.

"I'm not gonna say it again but I'm also not a hypocrite. Those things I texted last night were just in the heat of the moment, that's all. I only woke up and found out ten minutes later... then I saw it all, it happened really fast, you know?"

"Yeah," he said. He did understand, they had all experienced the shattering of their moral over a day and a half, and their coming to terms with it even slower than that. Then their resolution had taken place in light. She hadn't had the time for all that, it must have been a torment. "Even with you saying that we weren't in the right. We shouldn't have, but we did. But I couldn't just sit there and let it happen to him like it happened to me and that would go for the both of you two... or anyone really. Men... villains, like that, can't be allowed to do whatever they want." It was almost exactly what he had told Iida but it had remained in his mind. Maybe, he realised, that was the kind of thing he wanted to focus his heroic work on. That bit of resolve he had garnered since that desire back at Edgeshot's office had been laid plain. He had to give that part more thought.

"I get it too," Kirishima said. His surprise was gone now and a more serious tone had taken him. "The whole time I was thinking about what All Might shouted during his fight with that Noumu. A hero smashes through all obstacles in their way... and what Aizawa said when we drove back to Yuuei after that fight in the warehouse. I had to go and help him." He rubbed his hand lengthwise at the palm, like he was remembering an old wound. A slicing one present in the room. "I almost lost it when that man, All for One, came onto the scene. Damn, I was so scared I thought I was gonna piss myself. I felt like such a loser talking big and then just being shut down like that I couldn't stand it. I hated that feeling of powerlessness, it must have sucked to be bedridden through all that. Sorry."

She looked at Kirishima and then him before her inflection washed away. It wasn't a smile but it was normal for her. That sat for a second, before her face pulled into a superior scowl, "You're both still idiots. You got that?!"

He chuckled a bit, as did Kirishima. "Yep, idiots, got it," he said.

"So, I know we have that big parent teacher thing coming up but we gotta like, cool off right?"
Kirishima asked.
"Big parent teacher thing?" she said.

"Yeah and I'm pretty sure I know what it is so... I gotta take my mind off it. Why don't we go somewhere?"

He shrugged, he did kind of feel the same way. Though he knew where he wanted to go he wasn't going to suggest that yet. Maybe after. "How about we go to Meina's place? I bet she's messed it all up again."

"Meina's, really?" Jirou scoffed.

"Meina's?" Kirishima said, perplexed.

"That hair lady, remember? I told you about it back at the lodge."

His eyes brightened a bit, "Oh right, her. Sure, why not? I've always wanted to see where Jirou goes to hide when Kaminari embarrasses her in class."

"I might have forgiven you but I can still beat your ass without leaving this hospital bed," she said with almost a hiss.

"I was just kidding Jirou, jeez," he said as he backed off in his chair. "Anyway, that sounds perfect."

He nodded. "When are you getting out of here?" he asked.

"Not until Wednesday and even then I'm gonna be stuck dealing with my family. Maybe in the afternoon we can go. I also want to visit some other places first though."

"Alright, sounds like a plan. Wednesday afternoon it is," he said. Then he looked at Kirishima, "That's not past your curfew, right? Three...four pm?"

Kirishima didn't answer and instead jumped at him, though he dodged the swipe. "Come here, I'm going to put you right back in this hospital smart ass!" he yelled as he began chasing him around the room.

[Eastern Hosu CBD – The Brass Record – 4:52 PM Wednesday]

The door of the music store shut behind them with the same sound as might originate from an ancient bronze gong. It was a new addition, to be sure, and one that vibrated the guitars on the walls who were now more numerous in number and just as perilously hung as before but the thin strings on their necks. Meina had changed little else about the place, although some of the large bins she had around the room had been replaced with wacky tall ones, that were almost like skyscrapers of CDs. He was sure to reach some of them he would need to risk injury climbing or get a stepladder.

This wasn't their first stop, they'd gone to see Momo at a cafe and then headed to a dozen other shops Jirou had wanted to visit after her recovery. They had obliged her, although unlike Kirishima he'd ended up carrying everything for her again, somehow. It was getting annoying but it didn't matter, he'd feel bad if she strained herself after the effects of the gas just because he didn't want to carry a few bags. He was glad enough to spot she had chosen to keep that music note he had given her, it was pinned to the bottom right of the front of that black jacket she always wore.

"Daaaamn, this place is pretty retro, isn't it?" Kirishima said as he took the lead walking through the
aisles. He looked impressed if anything

"Remember, if you tell anyone about this place then I'm going to strangle you," she said.

Kirishima gave a nervous laugh, "I already said I wouldn't. Sheesh, I don't know why you care so much."

_Tch_, she answered. "Meina, you in here?!" she yelled through the room.

The shout was responded to by a harsh _clang_ as something fell in the back of the store, then several high pitched _tings_ and _pangs_ before the woman in question stumbled through into the room from the very same back door they had used last time. She looked a bit out of it, like she was high. Splotches of green, yellow and purple were streaked across her palms. Paint fumes were still paint fumes, he supposed.

"Oh!" she said as she looked across the room at Jirou, then him and then the guy standing only a few feet from her already. "This is the guy?" she said in a way that entirely too normal and calm, as if this calamity was an everyday thing to her.

"Yeah," he answered her. "You okay?"

The woman looked down at her ruined white top and giggled. "Your concern is sweet but I'm just fine. An experiment that went wrong, that's all."

"She's a bit eccentric, isn't she?" Kirishima said and smirked like the woman couldn't hear him two feet away. He shrugged his shoulders in response, eccentric but cool.

"So did you all want something done or just this handsome, rude little lad?" she asked as she walked past Kirishima and rode her fingernail across his shoulder. The touch instantly ruined his red shirt in a miasma of psychedelic purples and greens.

"Woah, awesome," he said as he grabbed it.

"Not for us, just him," Jirou said. "He's a bit thick, so don't mind him."

"Yep," Kirishima grinned. "Sorry," he chuckled and grabbed the back of his head. He must have realised how his comment had sounded.

"It's alright. I'm just joking around," she turned and touched the shirt again. It fixed itself, mostly. One cool streak of harsh, contrasting red cut like a jagged scar from the front to the back. It looked better than before, somehow. "You ready to do this?"

"Sure am," he nodded fast.

"An eager one, oh I like that. Already got something in mind?"

He raised his own voice before Kirishima could, "A nice Magenta would suit him, don't you think Jirou?"

"Or a banana yellow," she said.

"Hey, hey, stop it both of you. I like my current colour just fine... it's just redoing it that's annoying."

Meina grabbed Kirishima's high peaked fronds lightly and the red drained from one tip just the tiniest amount before she stopped and rubbed the fingers together. "I see, no problem. I have this exact shade. I think it was called earthen red, or something, right?"
"Is it?" he asked with a laugh like he had no idea.

"I've got you covered," she said with an amused smile dancing across her face. "Come on then," she then turned away down the isles, back to the room she had apparently demolished. Kirishima followed behind the woman much more attentively than he had back then. Dying that red must really have been a huge pain. It was hard to imagine how expensive doing that every other week would be.

He watched until his friend disappeared, then it was just him and Jirou and thousands of CDs. "Guess we're stuck waiting," he said as he followed her to the first tub of many.

"Guess so," she answered absent-mindedly. Her hands were already busy rifflng through rows, this one in particular had a wide selection of Guns and Roses remasters and covers.

"I think you and my uncle have similar taste."

She paused, "Are you saying he's cool or that I'm lame?"

He gave a half a laugh at that, "I didn't mean anything by it. And his taste is kind of cool, honestly." Some of the stuff he'd shown him he'd gotten into, though he still preferred his own taste.

"Damn straight," she mumbled and went back to her work.

It wasn't the reaction he wanted, causing him to step closer in an attempt to interrupt without being rude. "So, your families full of musicians right? I know you can play guitar and all but have you ever written anything original?"

She stopped and gave him a sceptical look out of the corner of her eye, as if to penetrate his sincerity. He had no motive ulterior to what was plain but she knew why she did it, it was guarded like someone else he knew. "Why do you suddenly care what I do in my spare time?" she asked.

"There's no real reason," he answered. "I just wanted to pass the time, you know?" She didn't looked like she believed him one bit. He rubbed his neck in awkwardness. The words he chose to say needed to be more careful than that or he would get nothing out of her. If anything she probably would want a trade, like last time. "How about this, I'll tell you something about me and you tell me something about you. It'll be like the first time we talked on that roof top."

She sighed but then left the CD stack. Intrigue had taken her despite the attempt at brushing it off. It really was just like the first time, when they had become friends. She leaned her back against the plastic basin and said with an inciting tone, "Fine then nosey, you first." There was a small, noticeable smirk present now, so he knew he had her.

Progress, he thought to himself. Then he leant up beside her. He wasn't exactly sure what to share, he hadn't thought that far ahead. It had to be relevant and most of all not boring, something he couldn't know and similar to what he thought she might reveal. He knew one thing that was, although it was kind of an annoying subject to him. It shouldn't have been, he felt he'd made it that way on his own.

"Well, don't tell anyone I told you this but before I got into heroism I actually really wanted to draw for a living," he said.

"Draw? Like an artist or a graphic designer or something?"

"Not really. All I drew was portraits and nothing else, no cool buildings or landscape or anything. I could draw stuff with a background but if there wasn't someone to centre it around it wouldn't turn out how I liked it."
"Huh. That's weird," she tilted her head at him.

He brightened a bit, "No it isn't. It was just a hobby. Anyway I said mine, now it's your turn."

"Well come on, hold it. I didn't mean that it's weird that you drew. It's weird that out of all the quirks you could have the one you ended up with is the one that's least compatible with your talent, right? Drawing portraits with jittery hands must be like fishing with a toilet paper roll."

He lifted one hand to his cheek, "H-hey, you know that only happens when I use my quirk too much. Anyway like I said I stopped, I don't have the time for it."

"I get that. Every second I spend on playing guitar and stuff feels like that too sometimes," she nodded. "It's all time I could spend working on my quirk, or my fighting ability or my knowledge on heroic stuff too."

"Yeah, exactly." She had hit the nail on the head, it was for that reason the last time he had drawn anything for fun was back when he'd entered Leineif. Since then his skills had grown rusty, even his costume drawing had been shoddy not to mention those villains. That's how it had to be, this was all more important than drawing... or baseball or anything like that.

"I do write my own stuff, not as much these days but I do. I try to make time for it. Meina always tells me it's important to do things like your hobbies even as a hero, they kind of make you who you are, don't they?" she looked at him as if were a question posed but he had no answer. He didn't feel the same way. All his time had been in a single pursuit, that kind of stuff he could leave to others. He had his promise and he had his own goal recently admitted, that was enough.

"All this stuff that happens to us is pretty fucked up," she said in an odd, matter-of-fact way. "But if we run away there isn't really anyone else is there? Or there isn't going to be... we're supposed to be the next people who protect everyone. That's a lot more responsibility than some silly old music concert," her voice was more flagrant than before, clear and honest. "I think we're allowed to have pursuits of our own, heroes are more than just symbols. They're people, even ones like All Might and stuff."

The idea of it bounced around in his head a bit, though it didn't come together. It was exactly because he had a quirk and because he was the only one in his family who did, who had the ability to change the way things were going in a dramatic fashion, that he couldn't devote such time. A lot of people didn't have the ability to do that. He didn't want to waste it.

"I guess you're right," he said after a bit. Though he didn't agree it was hard not to remember that Midnight had tried to raise the exact same issue with him. He could keep it to himself until he worked out exactly what the conflicting ideas in his mind added up to. He gave a long breath, he didn't enjoy thinking about all this stuff especially not in a near constant as it had been. "You know, if you do wanna show me the music you made sometime I wouldn't complain."

"Sure, just show me how to hit a baseball more then ten metres and I might."

"Deal," he laughed. He could throw around a ball for a bit without guilt. It'd be interesting to see how she stacked up to Kirishima anyhow. The guy had urged him to go sign up for that team again on the way here, but he'd played it off.

*Clang*, the door went. "I'm back!" Kirishima shouted. "How do I look?"

"The exact same," he answered. It was completely true, except for the fact his hair had been cut for what it had grown in the time of the semester. For what it was worth it was a fuller red now than any
dye could have matched.

"Good," he nodded. "I like the way I look."

"Where'd Meina go?" Jirou asked. It was odd to notice but then he did too, only Kirishima had come back not the discombobulated woman.

"Uhh... well, things started kind of falling over back there and she rushed off to deal with it?"

She frowned, "If I didn't know her then I'd call bullshit but. Whatever, where are we going next?"

"Already bored of this place?" his friend asked.

"Well, duh. Aren't you?"

"No way, this store is great. I didn't think we had any left in Hosu."

He folded his arms and spoke up before their pointless conversation could go any further, "Actually, there is somewhere else I wanted to go but I don't think we'll have time tonight."

"It's still pretty early dude, I'm sure we can go wherever. If it's a Karaoke bar or something I can get Kaminari to come out too. He's a shit singer but it's a good time."

"If you think I'm singing for you guys you can shut down that idea right now," Jirou said.

"Oh yeah, does that mean you're terrible?"

She jabbed him with her elbow. "I doubt you even know what good singing is you brickhead."

"I doubt you do either shoelace ears," he laughed.

"Alright you two, cut it out," he smirked. "The place I really want to go was actually... my old place."

Kirishima blinked at him, while Jirou said nothing. "Your apartment?"

"Yeah," he nodded.

"Why would you wanna go there?" Jirou asked.

"I haven't been able to get it out my head, that stupid nightmare. I think it'll help if I just see it again," he looked down. "And I don't think I should go alone, yeah?"

He expected a refusal, it was kind of a silly request. It wasn't like it was anything more than a building other than through what had happened there. He had seen that woman's interview, but it wasn't related to that in any way, what she'd made up didn't matter. It was all about getting answers, or closure, or something out of it.

"Sure thing buddy, we'll go with you," Kirishima said and hooked him in the left shoulder.

"You will?"

"Well yeah, idiot," Jirou said. "You think we'd really refuse?"

He looked left at her and right at him, then reddened. They were acting like it was the most obvious answer anyone had ever given. Maybe he was being silly by assuming it wouldn't be something
they'd be willing to do. He'd almost, very almost considered going alone out of fear of suggesting something so trivial. Now he was glad he had not.

"Thanks," he said.

"No problem man, but like you said it is getting a bit late for it... how about we go after the interviews?"

"Yeah, that sounds good."

"Well, I have no problem with that. You know, if you guys haven't been expelled by then," she waved her hands.

"Hey there's no way that's gonna happen!" Kirishima said with a frown, then he said, "There isn't, is there?"

He rubbed the tip of his finger against the scar on his wrist. What he wanted to say was 'yeah' but he wasn't sure. It could go any of seventeen hundred thousand different ways in his mind, though only two came out as absolute certainty. He would either be leaving within the week or he would be staying with any and all of the consequences and attrition and infamy his stay so far had caused. It was surely not just this one thing that would be judged, it would be USJ, the incident with the hero killer and the sports festival too, though he doubted any of it would be directly referenced. He was sure only Midnight and Nedzu had spoken with his mother before, and that meant whoever would face her and his father tomorrow would be witness to exactly what talking to them meant. Like climbing a wall of thorns, he liked to think of it.

The rubbing of the scar stopped and he dropped his hand. "I don't know," he answered, that was all there was to it.

[Yuuei's Campus – Dormitory Lobby – 8:42 PM Thursday]

He twiddled his thumbs to battle the nerves as he sat across the meek dorm room dining table from his two teachers. It was Aizawa and all Might, though neither were the cause of his unease. It was why they were here and the videophone sitting between them that raised his apprehension to the peak of anxiety. Next to him were copies of forms he had already been shown and had read himself. They were plans to turn Yuuei into a fully fledged boarding school and in hindsight it made sense now what Kirishima's mom had uttered in passing. It was all in preparation that was required to house not only his class but all classes from every year, the idea of it was almost absurd.

They hadn't made a mention yet of his role in all of this, how he had gone there and directly interfered four nights ago. However he was sure that would come, sooner rather than later. Not that he minded right now, thoughts of expulsion made him less ill than why the teachers were here. Maybe the mere talking to his parents alone would be enough to give the teachers reason to kick him out.

He had put on the blue hoodie that he had bought for the camp despite it being blazing outside, he would rather wear it and be uncomfortable than allow his mom to see the things she hadn't yet been made entirely aware of the extent of, nor give that man reason to degrade him. The article sat baggy on him still, despite Kirishima's insistences. It would be that way a while yet.

The wait throughout today he'd had, waiting for this time at night, had brought only more worry about his dream, about his apartment. They were going to there tomorrow, he'd texted Kirishima and Jirou about making sure it would happen, almost to the point where they'd asked him to shut up
about it. He couldn't help it much, as mundane as the trip might be to them. Terrifying might be more adequate of a term, he wasn't sure how much those two hated the apartment where they'd stumbled upon a scene of his kidnapping.

"Torenagi, stop spacing out. We're about to begin," Aizawa said. His face was a mean scowl, like he had a lot on his mind that he wished to say but couldn't right now.

"Sorry, Sir," he answered.

"There'll be no need for your input, your presence is just required, so do not overstep your bounds."

"Yes, Sir," he answered but less unnerved. Overstep his bounds? They were his parents, he should be allowed to talk to them. It must have been because of what happened, the man was mean and cruel but hardly ever without reason. He clenched his fists against his knees, it didn't look very good.

"There's no need to treat him like a criminal, Aizawa," All Might said. His smile was bleak but kind, matching the skeleton of a man he currently was. It was a strange form to see close up, with zero muscle on his frame and the lack of a gleam in the eyes that now rolled in the back of their sockets.

"Sir, did the others get approval already?" he allowed himself to ask just before All Might touched the call signal.

"That is none of your con-"

All Might cut Aizawa off with a hand, much to his annoyance, "Most of them, young Torenagi, we have yet to visit Midoriya, Bakugou and a few others. There's no need for you to worry," he reaffirmed his smile.

"Thanks," he nodded in response. A bit of weight fell off his chest but he knew they also hadn't gone to see Kirishima yet. Jirou had gotten permission, despite suffering some of the harshest consequences of the attack. He was glad for that.

Aizawa groaned and pulled at the collar of his brown suit. It didn't fit him to look so formal, his hair was slicked back and his five o'clock shadow had been trimmed. "Let's get to the point already," he said and pushed All Might's hand away before prodding the green button firmly. It rung for less than a second before someone picked up. The woman who appeared was gaunt with wispy hair black hair, her eyes were an alert blue. She had probably been waiting next to the videophone like he had figured she might. She appeared to be alone, however with how narrow the screen was it was hard to tell.

"Mrs. Torenagi, I presume? I am Toshiniro Yagi, also known as All Might," he said in an upbeat tone, like he had become practised at his introduction now. The woman offered only a nod of acknowledgement, no hint that she was impressed, which caused his teacher to cough.

"Is dad around?" he asked, he had to know even if Aizawa had told him to keep quiet.

The woman didn't glance at him. "He had more important matters to attend," she answered with no emotion toward how true that was. It wasn't, he knew, All Might must have read that off his face with how confused he looked. He hadn't expected his dad to show, not truly, he wouldn't unless it became absolutely unavoidable. Not for him. He found himself kind of glad, the fact he wasn't around eased his burden a little. Though it would be lying if for an inkling he hadn't hoped the opposite. It would still take far more to get him to pay attention.

"...As you have been informed the school, Yuuei Academy, that is," he coughed again. "Will be converting into a full boarding school from this week onward, this is because in light of recent events
it's pivotal we nurture each of our students into the best they can be under our close tutelage," the way the man talked now was reserved, like he had grown tired and some of the heroic grandeur had left him. "This meeting is mostly to establish awareness, since Riley already lives on campus due to the first incident," he stopped his speech abruptly, as he noticed the look on the woman's face.

"There is no need to waste your time explaining such frivolity. I have only one concern, that is exactly that incident. The one where you let my son get manipulated, kidnapped and tortured right under your so called, 'close tutelage,'" she said the phrase in a harsh, menacing way, like she had been waiting a long time to direct it. "As the staff of the school it is all under your direct responsibility, as I understand. So explain it to me, how exactly it could have happened. If I recall you never did, in fact the question was outright avoided."

"That-" he cut in, he had to say something, "It wasn't their fault, I told you." He shook his head. "The school didn't have any blame for that, it all came about because of what I did," he clenched his fists tighter. He knew what she was doing and he hated it when she did it.

"As you so claim, however as a child you have no responsibility for the matter of a situation that you have no choice of being put in," she waved her hand. Still not glance, he found it ill to notice. "It is utter negligence what occurred. If I had a choice none of those involved would be teachers again, but incidents like these are what people like you sweep under the rug. Are they not?" she looked at All Might.

"Well, um," the man coughed a third. "That is…"

"So you still do not have an answer even after it has occurred not once but twice. I cannot think that your school, with a reputation built up so highly, could shirk their duty in that regard. It is deplorable at best."

He opened and then shut his mouth immediately, in an attempt to hold himself together. Of course she wouldn't risk speaking in front of them like she did when they were alone. The understanding side of her always dried up, it was all a fault of her pride, pride that his dad had inflicted on her. She had gotten it worse since he hadn't been around. He had been a fool to try and convince her. The hint to what she was like was all he could give them but he had probably only made it worse.

She turned back and her face settled into neutrality as she wiped away a wispy bang with a finger on which a ring firmly sat, "What would you say if I were to order you to pull him out as of today? What argument could you make to possibly convince me that your ineptitude won't someday cause my son to die? To cause one of your other students to die?"

All Might looked wide, and open and lost at what to say. He couldn't help the man now to win this argument, it was long beyond his influence, he would have to figure out what to say to appease her on his own. If he did so much as hint at exactly what she wanted, how he knew she was, then she would switch entirely. That is how she worked, how she assessed the value of their person, not by reputation but by their character under scrutiny. The aim of that scrutiny was not really relevant, or perhaps even accurate, to her own philosophy.

It was Aizawa's turn to talk and when he did it came with a stern, uncharacteristic fright. It was not menacing but a patron of rationality. It was the kind he had used on them many a time and one particular to his own brutal honesty. "As his teacher I cannot make excuses for what happened," he said. "It is the utter truth that we failed in upholding that part of our duty. However the one thing I can honestly say is that no matter how hopeless you may think we are it is objectively true that what happened, how things unfolded as they did, were not mere accident. Your son is a target for these villains, and I can say for certain that should you choose to pull him out he would suffer for it."
"Not only because he would become an easy target but because it is fundamental that he continue on the path he is headed down right now. Even after what had happened he has stuck with it, whereas he had ample option to drop out. That is not only because he wants to become a hero but because he knows that the only way to resist, to stop these villains from getting what they want is for him to become strong enough to prevent it from happening. I was there that night, when we found him, I have seen these men myself and I've fought them, they are ruthless and cunning and they will try to get whatever they want however they can. That means they will not stop.

"I know we are the best school for heroics, of that I have no doubt in my mind. It is within our interest as an academy and within the personal interest of everyone on our staff to make sure he is not only protected from what will surely occur again but also that he is prepared for when it does. To remove him from our care, that is what I would think not only a foolish decision but also an irrational one. That is the bottom line and whether you can accept it or not is ultimately up to you, we are not going to beg for your approval."

His mom paused, for good reason, she was taken aback. The look on her face was the shattered kind, although still more guarded than that. She gave the man a long, hard, difficult to bare look that was more than of an interrogation than words could have been; to see if she could call his bluff, to tell anything that might be insincere about what he'd said. It was the face of a viper. After half a minute her face regressed and the emotion she had shown had been removed again as if by surgeon's hand. She had gotten an answer, it all depended if she had gotten the right answer.

"You are a very hard-headed man, Mr. Aizawa," she said. "I can't say that I find your words without truth. That is not to say they have swayed me, not in the slightest. However even after everything that has happened and with how harsh of a person you appear to be and that he still defends you and this school in spite of it. I... cannot say I find that to be the sign of a bad influence or at the very least one that I can justify the removal of. For now at least, I will continue to let you help my son."

"T-that is great to hear," All Might gave a bow of his head, which Aizawa mimicked.

"I must now take my leave. You have my husband's and my own permission to do as you wish. If there are any matters which do not require our immediate attention please defer to Aloysius, I will send you the signed documents shortly."

"Thank you for meeting with us today," the hero answered, to which she replied by cutting the call off. The screen flickered and died.

"Sorry," he said as soon as he knew for sure she could no longer hear them.

"There is nothing to be sorry for," All Might said, "Your mother is a strong woman," he scratched his cheek. "A little intense, but strong."

"Yeah," he nodded. She was strong, it was true, but for all the wrong reasons. "I guess this place is going to start filling up, isn't it?" he looked at the men as they stood.

"Take this," Aizawa put a small booklet on the table. "A checklist of preparations, your stuff will be shifted tomorrow and you the day after. It is a separate building, so clear out of this one in advance."

"Oh?" he said and took it, from the forms he had assumed it would be the very building he was already in, not a new one.

"As for the matter of your interference," his voice sat grim. "That will also be discussed on the day," he shook his head before turning to leave. All Might followed him.
The words didn't shake him, he already knew, "Thanks, Sir," he said and then added, "For everything." That, caused Aizawa to look back and give not a smile or anything so cliche but rather only the silenced expression of something... he wasn't sure if it was relief or disappointment, maybe both.

Then the doors shut behind the two men and he was left to sit alone to think and to mull. His next aim was that apartment and whatever it held, though he held it constant in his mind that he would not be doing so alone.

Chapter End Notes

*I do not own BNHA. OC material is my own.*
In plain sight

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

[South-eastern Hosu – Near Riley's Old Apartment – 12:30 PM Friday]

It had changed. That was one thing he could say for sure as he walked down his old, familiar street alongside a heave of dry air that shook the faltering leaves of the green headed oaks ahead. Their tall peaks had been slaughtered and the weeds that impaled the cracked pavement below pulled. He looked past them in search of the beige colour that gave the second story eyes but found only a stark white that sat contrasted by pillars dipped in black soot. Grey tiles lined not only the roof now but the banister as well, like a sad wilted line of hair, the kind which an old man might have.

It was different yet familiar. He knew it through it's new facade, it's attempt at giving itself an identity less tainted by malady. As he approached the door on the downstairs lobby confirmed him why that was and also attempted to shoo him away. 'Under new management – Closed for renovation,' the silenced abode told him, where no sound of barking or televisionistic drone escaped now. The feeling of it was bittersweet. It hadn't been real. It hadn't. It wasn't even a little bit. He could repeat that endlessly but he was eager to see it true now.

Next he went for the stairs which he did not touch. The silver polish that they now had, the wide stone steps of safety they bared, did not lend comfort to him. It was wearing a new face but he knew it as the same place where it had all happened. The top of the steps went far the same, only now they felt wider with the splash of the white they had been gifted. There was a view as well and zero privacy. An attempt to show it had no secrets, that it could be trusted. However only malignant silence purred.

"This place feels like some kind of abandoned theme park," Kirishima said. Him and Jirou had both been silent up until now as he had made his inspections of his neighborhood. The fishy smell, the shops and the occasional unanswered look from a person in a doorway.

"Yeah, gives me the creeps..." she said.

He didn't bother with a response, instead taking steps along the floor of wooden, unnatural black that led the way down to the apartment numbered eleven. It wasn't inviting as he looked at it. The frame had been replaced and the rubbing gone and he wagered that was because they had experienced the same frustration as he had many times. There was no need to charge his way into it now to open it because the lock, the lock he remembered twisting on purpose, had been removed.

"Isn't this enough?" Jirou asked him before he could push the hinge open.

He turned back at her and answered slowly, "I know it's not my place anymore but I need to see it. Otherwise it's pointless that we came here." It would have been as he had no visual confirmation yet. No peace. Kirishima folded his arms at the statement but said nothing. There was the blank slate of unnerved anticipation on his face. Curiosity.

He struck the door open without a sound and stumbled upon dark. A smell was all that allowed him to know there was still a room to walk into, though not the musky smell he knew. It had lost that part of it's identity. What remained now were the stipulated stenches of ammonia and bleach that burnt his nostrils as he stepped inside a place that had been cleansed a thousand times in his absence.
A hand by instinct gave it all light, a bright bulb lit the room than he remembered and all that came with it. He spotted each aspect fast as if they were deadly to his senses. All the furniture was gone and all the door frames empty like it had been desecrated. He stepped forward and the floorboard creaked. Not a speck of dust must have graced the wood that now shined with a gold lacquer of wax.

His mind paid it nothing but annoyance as he spotted a bit far more interesting. Long white sheets that went along four distinct areas along the wall, three in the living room and one in the kitchen. Above each hung in a ripped fashion the beginnings of plaster work that intended to hide both the large holes and smaller punctures that still hung there.

"Surprised how fast the police finished with the place that they already began renovating it all," Jirou said.

"Yeah," Kirishima said as he walked forward to stand beside him. A few more strides brought his friend to the bedroom and then the bathroom within it, like he wanted to check something.

He found it all wretched. All this work they were doing to cover it up. They had taken everything from the cupboards, to the fridge and even the brass hangers on the doors. It was stunning to him how thorough it had been and all too dramatic. It really was no longer his place.

A walk forward brought him to the first of the holes and he was careful as he touched it as to not splatter his fingers with the must have been less than twenty-four hour old work. They had been lucky to catch it empty as it had been. The hole itself was offensive to the eyes but he knew why; all of them were all his doing. He didn't remember it but he knew it as clear as day. The swirling crunch where wall had collapsed in and the tattered fringes that could only have resulted from the act of closing his hand upon it with his quirk. What had been the purpose of it? He had to have been aiming at something... or venting indiscriminately.

He turned to the right and looked down at a specific spot, the one that described the ground to the side of where his table had sat. He knelt to set his fingers down on it. It was smooth to his touch and cold but most of all it was featureless. There was no mark his compression had invaded it like it had in his dreams. His muscles didn't flinch in disgust like they had at the holes, he didn't clam up. That told him enough. He hadn't done it as he had feared deep down he might have tried. The nightmare really had been just that, not a fractured memory of fevered unrest engaged in over that forgotten weekend.

It gave him ease and let him stand without trembling. There was no need to keep his fright now. Like he had said, it was no longer his apartment and not a place he had committed something he could not take back. That had been much grievance to him after yesterday, after the talk with his mother and with his teachers. It had made sense in his mind but logic was something that he knew he could override. He had done it before, he had done it again now and prevented it's spread. This would help him next time it tried.

"So, got what you came for?" Kirishima asked as he returned from the bedroom.

"Yeah, I think so."

"Good then let's get out of here already," Jirou nodded. Although he hadn't been trembling he could see her on the verge of it. The place freaked her out, maybe he should have asked if she wanted to wait outside.

Rather than answer by word he nodded and gave the place one final look. Every empty nook and cranny. There was no need to ever come back here now, he was content with what had seen and now content to leave again just as quickly. Now that he had gotten what he wanted he did kind of
want the place to forget it's old face. As much as it annoyed him to see it torn away he too was part of that, which meant that once he left it truly would take on the terms of just another shoddy, refurbished apartment in a bad place of town. It might become home to someone else, or live solemn, but the place where he had been tormented would be gone for good. He turned and walked out of the door behind his friends, then shut it without another glance.

"Thanks, both of you. Sorry for dragging you along."

His friend gave him a lighthearted shove, "No problem dude but next time something like this comes up let's not walk. I'm still sweating my ass off."

"Sure," he chuckled. "We can take the bus back. It's nearby."

"Man if you already knew a route why the hell-"

"And here I thought you of all people would love a bit of exercise," he said, followed by a tut-tut.

"Okay, now you're just taking the piss."

"Maybe," he gave a hint of a smile while moving to the edge of the corridor, where the floor met the overhang that looked over the trees and provided a view to the section of pavement below and the buildings ahead. It looked cleaner, somehow.

"Figure out why you needed to see it again?" Jirou asked as she moved up beside him.

"I don't know really, after that nightmare I just couldn't help myself. Maybe there wasn't really a reason," he said. The knot in his stomach had unraveled from coming here but he did have to admit her calling of it was a creepy had been nothing but correct.

Hmm, she answered after a moment. "I get it. Since you didn't leave on your own terms it makes sense you'd want to come and see it."

"Does it?" he wasn't really sure if many would go back to a place where something like that had happened to them.

She shrugged. "I read about this stuff. It's like... self-therapy I guess."

"You're right, yeah. It is like therapy isn't it?" he said. Then he clicked his teeth. "I always kind of lived away from my parents while I was studying and stuff but this apartment was my first place in another country where that was the case. The first few days got a bit scary since I didn't know where to go and everything. I only really got settled in because of you guys... and then all that happened."

"I understand now why you didn't tell us what was going on with you back then," she nodded.

He gripped the banister a bit, then he looked at her. "I wanted to tell you guys so badly. I almost told my uncle everything... then they threatened his life. I didn't want you two or anyone to be targetted too because of me."

"I'm not gonna tell you that you shouldn't have told anyone. You could have but like I said, I do understand. I wouldn't trust anyone else either if my families lives were on the line. That's why I'm glad you asked us to come with you," she said. Then she shook her head. "Anyway, that's enough of that sappy stuff. We can leave it behind instead of repeating it like some broken records."

He huffed a bit and smiled, "A music comparison from you, really?"
She blinked, then laughed just for a second. "I didn't even realise. Shit."

"I know you two are having a moment but can we get going? I told my mom I wouldn't be out for more than a few hours and she's pissed enough as it is. The glare from that house is starting to give me a headache too."

"What glare?" he asked before shoving his friend over to take a look. There was indeed a glare but there shouldn't have been, the sun was high above, not behind them. That meant it was hitting something at an angle to them.

"What is that?" Jirou said as she took a closer look too. He could see it now and the longer he did the more clear it became. It was the outline of a round, glass lens. A camera lens.

"Why the hell is that pointing at us?" Kirishima asked.

He looked behind him. It wasn't. "It's looking at this building… this apartment," he said. Nausea swept through his complacency. "I'm going to check it out." How long had it been there? Considering he always came home when the sun was going down it wasn't surprising he hadn't seen it. It required a keen eye and irrational paranoia to spot. Not to mention the trees... they must have provided the perfect cover, until now.

"Hey, dude- wait-" Kirishima said as he jogged after him and down the stairs. He caught him by the arm as he reached the last step. "You sure this is a good idea?"

He turned back. "I need to know why the hell there is a camera pointed at my fucking apartment," he said. His nausea had changed to anger, it must have shown on his face because Kirishima tightened his grip.

"Calm down okay? We can go look but you need to think this through."

He paused and then stopped trying to escape the grip. "You're right," he nodded and took a deep breath. "Sorry. It's just…" he already knew which building it was, the disgusting nature of its red exterior had told him from above.

"I hope that guy isn't here this time," Jirou said as she finally followed them down the steps.

He turned back to the building in question, "You guys went in there? And what guy?"

"We did, to ask for directions while we were looking for this place," she said as she walked ahead of them and toward it. He followed close. "It was just some unfriendly cashier who asked us a few too many questions."

"He said he wanted to stop students from getting mugged," Kirishima scowled.

Jirou shook her head, "Obviously we didn't buy it but it's not like he followed us. It was weird as hell."

He wasn't sure how to take that but it didn't matter. "I'll keep it in mind," he said. All the waiting did was to threaten to rile him up again, which he couldn't afford. He would get his answer if he just confronted it, he was sure, even if it meant meeting an uncomfortable situation.

His walk to the red house took him past paper buildings that fell into the background, up the road and near the intersection at the corner of which the red house hung like a specter. Its windows swam in reminiscent murkiness and the sapling of life that he remembered seeing in his fever had perished. 'Closed' it read once more, however he still shook the handle. It wasn't closed, truly. He knew it
wasn't legal but neither was spying on him. He pushed the door in, which gave and clicked and triggered a jingling bell above him. Nothing moved at the sound of it, only the shuffling of his friends behind him.

Inside the walls were lined with crooked glass cabinets to which dust clung on the inside yet somehow remained spotless on the surface. The walls behind it was a cinder red that looked freshly painted but crawled in peeling waves to the carpet. That was horrible too, like it had been ripped up yesterday and replaced but already rolled with bits of mold and the tread of dirty boots upon it over years. His stride and his sight found itself to the counter, abandoned by both signs of hospitality and the aforementioned tinkering a clerk might leave behind. Beyond it sat a door, wine red and drenched like one might do if they had no taste and desired their entire abode to be the same colour. He went around the table to reach for it, upstairs was where that thing was. In truth he dearly hoped they had been wrong. That it hadn't been a camera. His instincts told him they were not.

"Wait," Jirou said. "Before we start a crime spree let me at least listen to see if we're alone."

He nodded and watched as she placed her jacks on the floor, between the fringes on carpet. After five seconds she pulled them up and repeated the process on several other places before finally switching to the roof. Then, she was done, and dropped them again. She had become far faster at the process than he remembered.

"There's no one here," she said before looking at Kirishima. "For sure this time."

The guy gave a bit of a groan before pushing his face to be something more resolute. "If we gotta do this we gotta do this, but let's do it fast."

That he took as his cue to push the door, which opened into a narrow staircase that led up as vertical a spiral as it could have. He almost had to crouch to not knock his head on the beams. He took about twelve steps before he was up it and at another door, this one he pushed open softer. A peek through a slit revealed there was no one here, so he entered.

It beckoned them in like a conservatory sutured from red wooden tapestry. Above him a tall dome hung and beside glass panes that revealed a view of the street that they had walked not five minutes ago, as well as the white in the distance. On his immediate left sat a door which might have been unremarkable had it not been for the fact it was crowded by plain brown frames. Hundreds of them. Their visages were haunted by what first appeared to be portraits of people but the more steps he took the more it became clear they weren't drawn but instead photographs. Each was wilted and he couldn't recognise any of the faces they had but it did serve to chill his skin.

He took his eyes off them fast, as unnerving as the strange collection was it wasn't why he was here. That reason he was led to as he trekked across the corridor and the same red mess of a carpet. It ended at a window and more precisely than that an alcove carved outward like a watchtower. A desk within it had been turned toward the street and upon it he found exactly what he had been looking for. It was a camera with a nose that was long enough to double as a sniper scope.

He made no hesitation to touch it and to peer through the viewfinder at the back. In focus was the door, the apartment marked eleven and with that all his thoughts rung true. This entire time he had been observed from a decrepit tower without knowing it. His hand almost knocked the camera over as he stumbled away from it. His lungs were on the verge of hyperventilation which raged through his mouth and left behind a fiery distaste. He was going to be sick. Before he could fall backward to handle it Kirishima's hand caught him.

"Hey man, Riley. You're alright. No one is watching you."
"He's right," Jirou said. "It's abandoned. The man who did this must be long gone."

Unrest ceased in his chest like a cap had been placed on a fire, dissipating it's intensity to naught but smoke. His friends were correct, he knew, all the clues were there. Whoever had lived here, whoever that man was the two had seen on that day in this place wasn't here any longer. Everything had been abandoned, pieces of paper with unintelligible scribbles, the photos, even the unlocked door like they had been in a hurry for whatever had come for them. Paranoia ran away from his mind at a frightening speed but leaving questions as to what exactly that entailed. The most prominent also turned out to be the most obvious. Why?

Had he gotten what he'd wanted? To watch him until their plan was complete? And if so, did that mean the man was one of Janus's lackeys? He was inclined to believe it. There had to be proof to that end, a sign of collusion left over in the storm of abandonment. He looked down at the desk and through the mess, he swept aside what he couldn't read but found nothing better to entertain his thought still. That led him to rip open drawers one at a time and hawk through them like he'd lost a valuable belonging. Messes of pens, the kind an enthusiast would have sat by the dozens and beside them knickknacks that could have belonged in a museum. He threw more open until he came to the last, and within it he did find something. A tiny, black USB. However it was not any USB, it was his USB. The listening device.

That realisation tasted foul. He had recalled it not being in the box the school had left in his room, and he hadn't remembered it in the aftermath of memories. He had lost sight of it entirely and had assumed the police had taken it as evidence. That was not the case or if it was it was a very unlikely coincidence, right down the placement of the buttons and the discrepant scratch marks on the side where he had whacked it in order to practice percussive maintenance out of his frustration.

It dared him to press it, and he did so willingly. It had life in it, to his surprise, and began to spew that silent but constant sound that an old cassette tape might emanate on replay. His friends gave him strange looks as he listened to it, though he continued the exercise for at least a minute before something changed about it's drone. It crackled, just as he remembered in those recordings he had done and in which he had found nothing.

_Crash_, something went beneath his feet before he could bare through the crackle to determine if it held more. It had been a metallic smash that echoed like a glass case had been cut and broken from within. It must have been one of the ones they had seen downstairs by the dozen. He looked at Jirou and Kirishima in turn, and if they had wanted to say something about the device they now held their tongues. The place had not been as abandoned as their assumptions had suggested. They needed to leave, that was the gist of the looks they gave him now.

That was easier said than done as the thing was still a two story building, where there were no other exits. That he knew as soon as Kirishima turned backward in frenzy and pulled at the door with the photos, which did not so much as budge at his strong pull. They were trapped. Or so he thought until he looked more closely around himself and spotted the metallic rung of a rusted ladder peeking over the edge of the windowsill to the left of him.

He cocked his head at it and the sill gave a loud _rap-thuck_ as Kirishima hardened his hand and pried the rotten window next to the desk open. His friend jumped out without pause, making his way out onto the rickety metal that would lead down the back of the store. Jirou went next, and the sound downstairs did not return in that time. He didn't say it but he made apparent his hurry, they needed to go and now. He touched the window frame and hopped it in one go then pushed down hard on the window from the outside. It crunched but it did go down, he made sure not to slam it. Then he looked to the side, Kirishima and Jirou had already gone all the way and in a few steps he found himself half climbing and half jumping down the old wire stepladder as well.
*Thump*, he jumped the last five rungs and landed in a bush next to some trash cans. The fire escape they’d used was one shared with the building next to it, it would be hard to tell which building they had specifically just jumped from.

He noticed their confusion combined, like they weren't sure where to escape to in this unfamiliar place. "Go," he whispered and pointed down the street past his apartment, where a gangway that people barely knew would lead into the sheltered parking lot he had surveyed every other morning. That bus stop he had mentioned wouldn't be far from there.

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**[South-eastern Hosu – Bus – 1:58 PM]**

The ride felt as secluded as the bus itself, which was nearly empty on account of both time and location. Not many from South-east Hosu would have had need or desire to head toward the direction of Yuuei. As it drove the uneven ground shook the buses frame, creating a large amount of noise that provided enough cover to talk in relative privacy about what had just happened not twenty minutes ago.

"Man, that was crazy," Kirishima said. "You really think someone knew we were upstairs?"

"Honestly, I doubt it," Jirou frowned. "I never heard that bell on the door ring so unless they got in some other way it's more likely we just got paranoid after that noise. Still, better safe than sorry."

He listened as he twined the USB between his fingers. "Even if that's the case it's my fault we were in that situation to begin with because I was too stubborn to listen. Sorry."

"You say that like that camera wasn't unsettling as shit," Kirishima said. "I wanted to see too man, even if it was a bad idea."

"He's right, we're all equal idiots going along with it."

He scratched the back of his neck with his palm, the dry sweat that had dragged through there was gone now. "Thanks," he chuckled.

"So, what is that?" Jirou pointed at the device.

He dropped his hand again and put the USB in his other hands. He turned it over twice before holding it up. "It's a listening device. I bought it back when I thought I was being followed but I think it's busted, all it plays back is static."

"Shame," she said. "Still even without that we still need to tell Aizawa about that red house."

Kirishima nodded, "Yeah. Whoever that clerk was that was running that place has to be part of the league, right?"

_Clerk? Right, they mentioned a man_, he thought. _Do you two remember anything that man told you, or what he might have looked like?_

His friend snorted, "Dude that was forever ago. All I remember is that he made me really uncomfortable and he had these thin glasses on." He put his fingers to his ears as if to show him what glasses were.

"That's not much to go on," he mumbled. It was probably a cold lead, he doubted the league would be so careless, especially now.
"Well," said Jirou as she held up her hand. Then she tapped the ends of each of the digits. "He did have these weird holes in his fingers. They were probably part of his quirk."

"Oh yeah! He did, didn't he? I remember now. He also had some posh accent, like in one of those cheesy spy movies."

Holes in his fingers. A posh accent. It sounded familiar but he wasn't sure why. It had have been because of something during that time. Someone he met. It couldn't have been the man with the black tar quirk, he had no such features. Earlier than that perhaps, what had happened before that? He looked at his finger. Holes. Then it dawned on him. That little cactus needle. That reporter outside the gates of Yuuei.

"He looked like a reporter with combed brown hair, right?" he asked and watched Jirou's expression widen in surprise.

"Exactly," she said and frowned. "How did you know?"

"You remember back when all those reporters were stuck at the barrier, right?" the two nodded at his question. Then he was sure he hadn't been mistaken. "Someone like that tried to get answers about All Might out of me," he said as his anxiety came back to him, that man had been in that building the whole time and he hadn't noticed him.

He shifted in his seat uncomfortably, then dropped back completely. "You're right. I definitely need to tell Aizawa about this as soon as possible. Even if that man is long gone he left behind all that stuff, it'd probably help them if they had all that evidence. It might give them clues that'll tell them where the league escaped to."

"Then let's go together, it'll be more believable that way," said Kirishima.

He fumbled with the device. "I want to tell him on my own," he said.

"Dude, what? Why?"

"Believability isn't an issue... and because I think there's more to this," he held up the device. "There must have been a reason it was there. Also, you think Aizawa isn't going to blow up at us for going there? I know he is, and considering your track record he'll probably go even harsher than he would on me alone."

Kirishima groaned, "No way man. A real man can't sit on the sidelines like that."

"Typical," said Jirou. "But he does have a point. You've kind of been directly involved in everything Kirishima. That doesn't mean I can't go, though."

He bit his lip, it would be nice to have backup and really he could only think of a reason why Kirishima had to sit out, not Jirou. "After the move in, then," that would be plenty of time to try and look at the files on a laptop. The school could lend him one, surely. It was something he needed anyway, for another reason.

"Man, this is all too stressful," said Kirishima. "And for the record I hate this plan. You two better tell me what he says if you're gonna do this."

"We will," he said. There was never a mind to do otherwise, whatever happened this time he would keep them both in the loop.

Their talk making ceased as he began to look out the window. They were almost back at the school.
Considering what he'd said he was also mindful of the move in date, everyone had to be a little on edge. Other than a few people including Jirou and Kirishima he wasn't sure who else had gotten permission to move in for certain. That wasn't so much on his mind though. It would be what came after, what next thing would lead to an inevitable run in with Janus again.

Chapter End Notes

*I do not own BNHA. OC Material is my own.
Debriefing

[ Yuuei’s Campus – Heights Alliance, Building 1-A – 9:44 AM Saturday ]

The night and morn thereafter had made his mind a hive of activity and his body more so. It had been something he had answered with busywork as the last of his access to his room was finally cut off and he’d been left to wander the grounds for a couple of hours. It hadn’t done much good, considering the school was empty while his mind was not. There were no distractions from the questions that played dice with his emotions, the ones that had been unearthed by what him and his friends had found.

He had vented his frustration about the USB in his pocket to that end using his quirk instead, as it's answers remained locked from him for now. That'd be the case until at least this afternoon, as his application to borrow a laptop for personal use hadn't been approved right away when he'd put it in the day prior. He had been tempted to quench his thirst for answers using the library computers instead, however in the unlikely event he did find something he didn't want prying eyes around him, or rather ears.

Ahead of him down a slim bronze path he found himself approaching a crowd. He recognised them from the back but not what was in front of them, though he could guess. This place was the one they had been bid to, where they would now be staying to keep them safe from the grasp of villains. He had wondered about that idea a fair bit, though it mattered little.

The mansion was gargantuan in size and built within a backdrop of identical ones behind it, disguised in alternating fashion. It had a tall, green flock that stood guard in front of many a pillar that each encumbered a set of windows and led up into what could only be described as a pronging set of hallways. At the sides he could spot verandahs creeping along it's pastel skin and walls, all the way four stories tall where fanciful lashes, that curled around it's roof, lay attached like ribbons. On it's front it had it's own name chiselled into it's bones, 1-A Alliance, it read in bold white font on a plaque that matched it's bloodied red dome.

Unlit lamps and sculpted hedges guided him along the stone until he ended up at the back of his class. There he went along the side until he found Kirishima, who looked positively stoked. Aizawa mustn't have addressed them yet, he doubted his friend would have been if he had. There had been instruction to him not to arrive before the scheduled time, which had been nine-forty exactly, however it wasn't really because of obedience that he had followed that but rather because he knew what was in store. He recalled exactly what had been said only a few days ago. It, the incident, would be resolved here and now.

"Hey," he said as he made the quickest headcount of his life. It came to twenty, excluding himself. Everyone had made it. That, he had to admit, had him very glad despite impending anxiety.

"Man," Kirishima answered, preoccupation splayed upon his face. "It's absolutely massive dude."

"Yeah," he answered. Considering the school could afford to fund those mechs, he felt he shouldn't be surprised. Yet, he was, by both their splendour and the speed at which they had been built. There wasn't a single sign of fault, as if it had been raised from the earth only a day prior.

"We're lucky kids aren't we?" Ashido said.
Satou nodded, "You can say that again."

"Ya know, I'm just surprised we all got permission," Sero said.

Hagakure answered him with a stretch that started with her shoulders and ended at the tips of invisible hands. "You say that like it was easy. Mine was an uphill battle all the way through," she mumbled through a yawn.

"Yours and mine both," Jirou shrugged. He already knew enough about that to know she wasn't kidding.

*Mhmm.* Kaminari agreed as he touched his neck, just above the shoulder. His own fingers on the soft white gauze caused him to flinch. He had Recovery Girl to blame for that, she had deemed the matter only requiring the lightest touch of her quirk to close the wound. At least now he would get that cool scar he always wanted, albeit tiny.

"Your catchups can wait, there isn't much on your schedules right now since it's technically still your break but let's get through this nonetheless," Aizawa said as he pulled his hands from his baggy pockets. His black attire had returned and so had his formality vanished. Scruff had conversed across his chin once more and if he had to judge the man's tendency to hunch had been exaggerated even further. "It goes without saying that each and every one of you should be grateful there were no lasting injuries, and to count yourselves lucky you're here right now. It's important to the school that you've all made it today."

"...We're happy you managed to be here too, Mr. Aizawa," Tsuyu interrupted the man.

He answered with a nod. "It was surprising to me as well," he said and then paused as if he were thinking. The girl had interrupted his flow. "Be that as it may," he pointed over the shoulder at the building. "This is the place where you've all agreed to staying from now on. It is the schools newest safety measure in making sure you keep your noses out of trouble. That is also why we must address one more thing before that can happen."

Aizawa dropped his hand, his face deepened with a line that was as a scowl at no one. "Kirishima, Torenagi, Midoriya, Yaoyorozu, Iida and Todoroki. All of you took it upon yourselves to go to the site of Bakugou's rescue like you had any right to do so. That goes especially for a few of you," the man said as he turned his gaze like a pendulum over each of them. There wasn't a need to name it, he could feel it by the way it hung over the two of them in particular for just a split second longer, as well as another on the right side of their group. "Continuing to act as you have can only be considered idiotic and the repetition of it not anything close to heroic."

He could feel the stares on his skin like the stings of wasps and it caused his hands to clam and his shoulders to tighten like a shroud had been tied around them. It was a shame that swept him up and engulfed him and exposed him by gasps and realisations of those around them alone. Anything that might have stayed mysterious about what they'd done had been thrown open like the scrambling of insects under the intense glare of sunlight. It was a shared agony, one his friend would have felt and surely mimic by wanting to sink into the very floor beneath him as preferable repercussion over the humiliation. It lasted and trod over him longer than any pity or shame that could have been evoked from scar and action alone.

Aizawa knew it and he let them rue under it, before he continued his first word in what must have been a slow drone. "It goes without saying that had it not been for All Might's sudden retirement you would all have been expelled, with the exception of the obvious three. That goes for the rest of you as well, the admittance of silence is equivalent to the approval of such actions."
Even as the man turned away to look at the building he could only watch him as if he were turned to stone. It was a stance he could hold and keep forever as another reality of his actions dawned on him. That was the knowledge that his actions would have cost not just him but all of them had it not been for the exceptional circumstances. Their teacher had made light of punishments like expulsion before, played them off as idle threats but this was different. It was riddled with insistence, with contempt, a feeling no amount of practical punishment could mimic.

Before he began the trot the now dulled cobble the man turned back over his shoulder to say one last thing. "If the six of you could follow procedure from now on it would go a long way to restoring some of the trust you've betrayed," he said before he did finally step forward. "Now then, let's go on and greet the new place with some energy."

The statement was a mockery to him now. How could he feel anything but drained? His body wanted to stay the way it was, as if someone had punched him in the gut. It was not from regret or remorse for his actions... no, he would do it again if he had to. The gut wrenching sensation stemmed from his lack of foresight and the exposé on his flaws more than anything. The ones that Aizawa knew every little detail of and was using to make his point crystal clear. It was hard to be cheerful after that.

"C'mere," Bakugou snarled and hooked Kaminari by his arm toward a grove of bushes.

"What? No, I don't wanna- what the hell- ah!" he yelped as he fell backward into them against his will.

"What's going on now?" Jirou asked as they watched the spectacle.

"Whatever, let's just go inside yeah?" Ojiro answered with a dejected look.

Before that could happen a crackling thwoom erupted, accompanied by a web of electricity skittering through pavement and air alike. It left his ears buzzing and hurting before it stopped. He was ready to call it quits too after that, he needed some rest or something to get his thoughts together.

His eyes were forced open again by the emittance of what was almost a squeal. It was in fact a high-pitched series of noises coming directly from Kaminari, who had stumbled back out of his bushes, although evidently downgraded. He swayed and twirled around in a series of smokey unbridled tumbles through the crowd.

"Whew-ew-ew," Kaminari giggled to himself as he spun in ovals whichever way, before finally coming upon Jirou and repeating it six times rapidly. It was the most ridiculous thing he'd ever seen.

Jirou of course, was the first of few to lose her cool as she watched the newly made idiot stumble around her. "H-holy shit," she gasped as she held her stomach. "I can't see Kaminari like this," she snorted and doubled over in a series that soon took Sero as well.

"Did Bakugou really scare you that much buddy?" Satou said with a barrelling laugh.

"Wheya-whewy," Kaminari answered him with a big dumb grin which only exacerbated the situation.

It was funny to watch, even as miserable as he felt, but it didn't change much despite. He wasn't the only one, Kirishima hadn't cracked a smile at it either. He wanted to say something to him, but he needed to do something about his own sense of it first, like he'd said, or it'd come to what Midnight had told him to avoid and what he'd successfully fended off.

"Kirishima," Bakugou said as he walked up behind Kirishima and gave him a hard shove in the back
of the shoulder, to which he returned surprise and reluctance to meet the gaze. He had that flat annoyed expression on his face, one he'd come to know as guilt. Then it blew up as he realised the guy was trying to shove a tight wad of yen notes directly into his chest.

"What the? Dude, you're freaking me out."

"Just take it, damn it. You're making me feel shitty about it," Bakugou answered with a grimace of glaring teeth.

Kirishima took the notes haphazardly and then looked down at them, "The night vision scope. How did you know?"

"Who gives a shit?" he shrugged and turned. "Just keep being a dumbass like you always are."

He gave an eased expression. "Sorry 'bout that," he mumbled.

"And you, asshole," Bakugou shoved a finger in his face as he passed him. "Don't you dare start thinking this means shit. You owe me a fucking rematch, and you better not fuck yourself up this time. Got it?"

He dropped the hand he'd been holding to his neck out of shock. All he was left with was a bumbling, "G-got it," to answer with. Then he let out a short breath through his nostrils as the finger was dropped and Bakugou began to trounce away toward the new dormitory. It was a weird thing to do, and for him to say, and he wasn't even sure if Bakugou was serious but he did feel better, somehow.

"Oh my god, oh my god someone make him stop, I'm actually dying," Jirou said as she herself stumbled into multiple people including an annoyed looking Iida.

"Please. Watch where you are going-"

"Oh lighten up Iida," Hagakure punched him in the side causing him to jump and side step right into Midoriya.

"Woah," the boy answered, catching his heel and stumbling right into Kaminari who'd decided to go behind him at that very moment in his unceasing stupidity.

"Whewwwww..." Kaminari spun like some kind of twisted ballerina right into Sero, this time actually succeeding in laying him flat on his ass.

He didn't manage to hold back a smile at that, not any longer. "Damn," he laughed. It was like Kaminari's condition had become infectious.

"What a mess," Hagakure giggled.

"Look everybody, I know this doesn't really excuse anything but-" Kirishima raised the wad of money in the air. "I'm gonna use this money to treat us all to barbecue tonight on me!"

"Ooooh really?" Ashido beamed.

"If you need help shopping I'll be happy to go," Uraraka said.

Kirishima nodded, "That sounds great, thanks."

Once he himself had recovered from his amusement he took a long look over his shoulder at the building again. Then he saw it for what it was now, not some decrepit grove like he had been
banished to before but something like a new start. A fresh page. Eager enough he began walking toward it, up the segmented path, past the remainder of the bushes. He took it all in, the dress and view of it, and then the cold feel of the bronze coloured handles as he touched them and flung the doors open, leading him into a fanciful lobby that was shaped much like a square.

Like the outside of the building had hinted the inside too behaved like a prong that went in opposite directions around, and then came together like they wished to touch. They didn't quite make it back together however in lieu of a gigantic courtyard that led out between the centre that he could see through a curtain of thick looking glass.

On either side of the prong he could make out sets of marked stairs, left for guys and right for girls, that also had accompanying bathrooms and laundry rooms. To the side of each such area had been hammered a large kitchen that pushed outward into two dining areas with white chairs and black tables. As it moved from dining to lounge the brown hardwood flipped on itself into deep red carpet which bared couches, chairs and stools alike as well as a TV set and a table behind which to view it from. The finale of the space was a terrace, with large red and green potted roses forming an escorted path toward the entrance at which stood but a shoe rack, of all things.

"As you can see," Aizawa said as he took the lead into the area. "The bottom floor is a common area, you'll find laundry rooms and such down here."

"A shared... common area?" Mineta asked. "Did I hear that right?"

The man shook his head, "All the usual stuff is separated by gender, obviously, I didn't think I had to point that out. Give it a rest already."

"Yes, teacher," he glowered.

"It's like a freakin' mansion," Uraraka said, her wide eyes betrayed how little experience she had with a building like this.

"Now the second floor and above is where your rooms are located. You'll each have your own private room, which you'll find marked on a placard next to the stairs. They can be locked with your ID if you so choose and each is fully outfitted with personal bathrooms and fridges alike, quite luxurious if you ask me."

"A personal fridge, huh?" he said aloud within earshot of Kirishima. "Man that sure is convenient."

His friend shrunk a nervous tic. "Oh yeah, I guess it is," he chuckled.

"Your luggage has already been delivered, among whatever other crap you've decided to bring with you. The summer break is coming to a bit of an abrupt end, so take the next two days to make yourselves comfortable. On Monday we'll go over how things are going to operate from now. That's it for now, you're dismissed, get to it."

"Yes, Sir," they all answered, and then Aizawa left back through the way they'd come.

"I still can't believe we're really going to be living here," Kaminari said as they walked toward the card that marked the rooms.

"Yeah, kinda weird isn't it?" Ojiro said. "I've never lived on my own before."

"I don't think any of us have-' Sero paused with realisation. "I suppose Torenagi has."

Kaminari snickered, "Yeah, that worked out so well the first time."
Kirishima frowned at him. "Hey man-"

He rolled his eyes, "Ha ha, very funny." He wasn't bothered by a simple joke. He placed a finger on the placard and scrolled down the surface and glanced at each name until he reached the last floor. That was when he finally found his name, next to Satou’s, then Todoroki’s and finally Sero’s. Kind of rotten luck he had to admit, not because of the people on his floor but the many flights of stairs. He was right at the end of the furthest hallway possible. It would be a pain, but definitely one he was willing to accept. He could very well not have been standing here at all.

He began to trail up the stairs and each set of people peeled off one by one, until he finally reached the last floor. "Guess this is me," he said as he took out his ID. The lock was reminiscent of his old dorm in that regard, and it clicked open with a beep as it registered the card for future use. He hadn't expected much when he walked inside, though what he did more than exceeded any he could have set even if he had. It was that way for more reason than one, particularly the boxes stacked in the centre of the room.

"Damn, looks like you brought even more than I did," Sero said.

"I didn't," he answered as Sero left him to it. He hadn't brought any of the furniture that stood beside the cardboard boxes, or at least not these. The nylon table he'd had wasn't here, neither was the dingy mattress or the well worn dresser. Instead they had all been switched with replacements, solid oak things that looked new and, although not expensive, something he would not have thought to bother with due to a sense of frugality.

Upon the desk was a laptop that had a note on it, along with a receipt with a school stamp. He took the note, which read, 'All taken care of! Next appointment is tomorrow, same time. Don't be late! – Midnight.' He bit his lip, it must have been her who'd gone to the trouble of speeding up the process of getting the laptop and bringing in this stuff. He wasn't sure what to make of it and it was something he felt unnecessary of her to do. Though, he did feel grateful. That woman was always putting up with his shit when he went to those sessions even if he didn't want to be there. She probably didn't either. He shook his head at the thought, and then he began to unload the boxes one by one.

[ Yuuei's Campus – Riley's Dormitory – 4:56 PM ]

Furnishing his room had been a task he had overestimated and finished long before the sun had even begun it's descent into dusk. The result surprised him however, because he had put more effort into it than he had initially intended. That might have been because Midnight had, he wasn't sure. Either way it was something he much preferred to what Jirou's well meant intentions had gotten him last time. It was a simple room all in all, clean and most importantly his in every aspect. He no longer felt like an intruder.

A white mattress, the one they had provided him with, sat upon it's aforementioned oaken frame. It now wore garments of deep blue, bordering on green. It was teal, one might call it, though that hadn't been his intention when he'd gone out to buy it earlier. It was a plain colour, made only slightly less plain by two sets of two thick dark lines on either end of the cover and by the matching pillows. Those he had picked too, firmer than the ones he'd had, he preferred them that way.

The bed itself, which he had shoved to the right wall near the bathroom door, held above it a rack and beside that his Nine Inch Nails poster now in full view. Upon the rack itself he'd stocked his modest collection of CDs, there was some satisfaction he'd found in owning the physical copies. Beside them rested an old player; one he had wrested from the trenches of Meina's shop.
At the bed's flank he had laid a frill-less carpet from one end of his room to the other. It was a more solidified blue than his sheets and was marked with eight black squares that started at the outside and got smaller toward the centre. Where the bed ended he'd placed the table that looked out onto a blue curtained verandah. He'd tried to keep anything but what he'd deemed necessary off of the surface. All that inhabited it now was a brass box and a rectangular vase with a plastic flower he could actually stomach for once. It was an Adenium, which crawled with white stem from the equally white vase and flourished into green stalks upon which deep red flowers bloomed.

The box itself was simple enough, though surrounded at the back by a baseball glove and three balls to match; two signed and one not so. Inside he'd stashed a few things, most personal. His grandfather's necklace, as well as his mom's letter to name two. The gloves, shredded, to name a third. That was more of a reminder than anything.

He'd bought a new baseball bat too, but he'd decided against leaving that under the table. Instead he'd put it in the small storage space where the closet and fridge were, next to the bathroom. In spite of that he had actually chosen against dumping his training equipment in there with it. That he'd all put in the shadow of the door, on the left hand side in the corner by the full length mirror. He had tried his best keeping it all organised but he had to admit it was still a mess of mats and weights, metal and dumbbells and bands alike. It was an eyesore, one he needed to find a better way to organise eventually.

The last thing he'd sorted out was his desk. One lamp and a black desk chair in front, as well as two hefty drawers, and stooped beside it a metal waste bin. Above it he had installed another rack though not stacked with CDs. This one held books, more than it could handle. They spilled down onto the desk beneath in rows, he'd had secure them with others not vertical but sideways. That psychedelic book has somehow ended up at the forefront of them all, he was sure he had lost it but evidently not. Just like another thing.

Sitting open and having just finished rebooting was the laptop and a charger. Stuck within it was the device of his preoccupation, the slim USB he had secured to it a few minutes prior. That was the one thing he had not boxed up, instead carrying it with him wherever he'd gone until now. He went forward and sat down in front of it, now that he had finished what he had set out to do there was no longer any excuse to put off investigating it.

He began by doing the most straightforward of it; opening the USB drive from where within he found a folder, labelled 'data.' In that there were two, one which he knew must have been the actual recordings. He delved into it, but not before first copying the file and putting that on his desktop. Just in case something screwed up with the device, he figured. It wasn't particularly large, more than a few gigabytes but he'd expected that considering how much he had recorded. There were maybe a dozen of individual sound files, it must have created one every time he started and stopped it from that Thursday on. The number still did not add up, he noted.

They were, to his dismay, also not marked by anything particular. Just a simple one, two, three and so forth, evidently the first real shortcoming of the device other than it's obvious one. It would take time to go through them, time he did not have. All he needed was evidence, perhaps something better than a crackle and an abandoned building with a few pictures in it. A hint of why he had gone to the trouble of stealing the device would be a start.

He played the first file and it filled his silent room and reintroduced him to the sound of his own breathing. He did, in that moment, know exactly which file he had clicked on first. It was actually the final file he had recorded, the one with... that noise. Did that mean the man had changed the numbering by hand? He thought on the trifle though not for long because there didn't seem to be a point. To distract him further another sound arrived to accompany his breathing. It was a twine that
escaped the speakers, the better quality of the laptop meant that he now knew, with what he'd become familiar and with what he had heard, that the noise could never have been just a truck or a washing machine downstairs. It was the sound of that one man, a snap and a creak of his frame, and then it was gone. It had made the briefest appearance before the crackling jumped on it like a ferocious swarm. It obscured the ear tingling noise with oscillation that would be sickening to listen to for hours.

He paused the recording. The sound told him well enough that the static had not been the device malfunctioning on it's own. Janus had done something to encourage it, and that was likely using another quirk. His attention drew itself to the other files and with each he clicked he heard the crackle in an instant, and nothing else. After the final sound of displeasure entered his ears he paused a final time and then looked at the tips of his fingers. Holes and needles, that's the quirk that clerk had, not this.

Logic dictated that it was the same man that had jammed Kaminari's radio at USJ but it couldn't be. That villain was locked up somewhere like all the rest that had attacked them and been subdued. Not to mention jamming a device like a headset was probably far removed from planting custom messages on a phone. It had to be a different quirk and thus a different person altogether. That meant there must have been at least two of them in that house, watching him, messing with him, reporting on every move he made and making him paranoid. Isolated.

The thought made him queasy, like any thought that surrounded that villain, though this time not enough to dissuade him. He needed to find a way to get something out of the static. Before he could so much as think to try one of the files again there was a sharp knock at his door, done with the back of the knuckle, it had a particular sound. Kirishima.

"What is it?" he asked as he pushed down the laptops screen with one hand and slipped the USB from it and into the first drawer on the right.

"Room service," he heard Kaminari answer.

"Classy," he said and walked up to the door. "What do you want?"

"Nothing," Kirishima answered this time instead. "And it's uh, everyone! Kinda."

He wasn't sure he liked the sound of that. Still he opened the door, which had already been bearing a strain due to the amount of people crowding it. It really was everybody, almost. "What's going on?" he asked as he stared around the faces. Uninterested would be the way to describe most. They clearly had other things on their mind. "This isn't some kind of intervention is it?" he chuckled.

"Intervention?" Hagakure said. "No silly, this is a competition! Now let's see what you got!" she sprung forward and pushed past his shoulder right into his room. Then Ashido, Uraraka and Tsuyu did the same.

"Hey-" he followed them about a step, there wasn't much room, before stopping. They were indulging every look like it was some kind of police search.

"Nice, I like it," Ashido nodded. "It's pretty minimalistic and everything kind of looks like it belongs right? Not like Kaminari's room."

"Hmph," Kaminari grumbled. "You guys just have no taste."

"...The only thing that kind of throws it off is that stuff," she pointed at the heap of training equipment behind the door.
"Yeah it's kind of ugly," Tsuyu said, followed by a ribbit.

"You know Riley," Kirishima said whilst snickering. "When I said you could try making street art I wasn't being serious." He gave the metal a push with his foot, causing the tower of discs to topple over.

He shrugged, "It's not like I have anywhere to put it. I just threw it there since I use it often." Speaking of that, he should probably begin wearing those weights again. He had taken it easy in that regard with all the stuff that had been going on.

"If you want I can lend you a bar rack or something. I have a few spares."

"Sounds good," he nodded. The timing was nothing if not convenient.

"Hey, is this a real signature?" Ojiro asked. He'd taken one off the balls off the table, this one scrawled with the name Naota Ichizuma.

"Sure is," he hadn't realised who it was when Kirishima had given it to him, however he would have been damned if it hadn't come to him a few weeks later. The guy was a legend, though retired now.

"Awesome. Count me jealous," he grinned as he put it back down.

"You play?"

He gave a nervous laugh like he'd been put on the spot, "Just a fan."

"Cool."

"Okay, okay. That's all the guys rooms right? I say we meet downstairs and vote on our favourites!" Hagakure said and stormed out, the rest of the crew followed, except for Jirou.

She looked down the hallway till she was sure the rest were out of earshot. Then she turned to him and specifically at the laptop. "Find anything?" she asked.

"No," he admitted. "But I did figure out a few things. I don't think there was just one villain in that building. You remember that jamming thing that happened at USJ?"

Mhmm, she mumbled.

"Well it's not really like that. Someone's messed with it in a specific way, there's lots of background noise. I can't make much progress the way it is."

"Well, if it's just background noise you might be able to get rid of it."

"You think so?"

She sighed. "Do you think I'd say it if I didn't? I'll check it out for you if you're so hopeless."

"Right," he answered. He couldn't say he knew how to do that kind of stuff, though he supposed it wouldn't be hard to find a program online for it. However if she was handy with it like she claimed, then he might as well let her. "You got time for it tonight?"

She shook her head, "Not tonight. Let's just go with the others for now."

"Huh?" he blinked. It was a weird thing to say.
"Can't you tell? Some people are still really on edge," she said before she turned to walk to the door. "Empathy is an important trait for a hero, you know."

He let his surprise drop. "...True," he said. Then he patted his pocket to make sure the ID was in there before he followed her and closed the door behind him. He didn't need to solve it tonight, as much as he wanted to. A bit of time to go over his deductions might help anyway, he could very well be wrong. If he was going to find evidence then he needed as little holes in his theory as possible.

In number of stairs him and Jirou were already back at ground floor, although they had trailed more than just a few minutes. They'd spent that time deciding when exactly things would be cooled off enough to tell the teachers about their little day trip. Probably not in the few nights, but not longer than a week.

As they entered the common area there was an aroma in the air. It must have been the barbecue Kirishima had mentioned, simmering away. It was a glance that allowed him a sight of it and the smell, well, it made his mouth water. He hadn't eaten anything all day, or rather he had forgotten more than likely. It was well underway to being done, but it'd be a while yet with Ashido at the helm behind the counter.

"I think we can all agree the winner here is Satou. Despite the boys best efforts nothing can top cake, right?" Hagakure said as him and Jirou approached a collection of couches and chairs.

"Yes. Quite a superb display," Momo answered. He could see in her hands she still had a bit of the aforementioned cake. It was Chiffon, it kind of made him wish he'd been around to get some. On the table in front of her she'd placed a cup of tea to go with it, mint flavoured if he had to guess.

"Man, that's bullshit! Bribery I tell you!" Kaminari yelled.

"Lower your voice, some of us are trying to relax," Tokoyami almost purred, coming from a beak it was impressive.

"Yeah well at least they went to see your room," Mineta shuddered. "I could have shown you girls so many wonders of the world!" he said, his face creased with desperation. It was a bit pitiful.

Ojiro smiled. "Hey don't lose hope, maybe they'll see it some other time."

Sero snorted, "Fat chance. You couldn't pay them to go in there."

He split from Jirou and allowed himself to fall into one of the armchairs next to Ojiro, whom was still trying to find a comfortable position to fit his tail. The earlier nuance had made him curious. "So you said you were a fan. Go to any games recently?" he asked.

Ojiro looked at him in confusion, then realisation set in. "Actually, I did," he said as he finally shoved the tail in a slot between both couch and chair. "I went to see the Ichigaya Strikers play a few weeks ago with my dad, they're my favourite team."

While he did recognise that name on the baseball before he couldn't say he recognised the team. 

"Hmm, he answered despite, as if he did. "I'm kind of a sucker but it's hard not to cheer for my states home teams. I don't have a real preference other than that but..." He wasn't really into the rivalry. People at his school definitely had been. Half had flagged blue and the other to white and black.

"You should go to a local game some time. There's actually one coming up pretty soon if you're keen."

"Maybe," he nodded. He wasn't entirely enthusiastic about that, he preferred playing to watching.
And, the commitment thing. That was a factor too. "I'll try to find the time-" before he could continue a palm pushed him on the shoulder, in an attempt to get his attention. He turned to see Uraraka standing over the back of the chair.

"Uh, hey Torenagi, you mind if I grab you for a sec?"

He raised his brow at her. "Sure," he said and stood to follow. Where she led him, of all places, was to the front door and subsequently the stone steps that chilled his bare feet. In front of him he found a crowd, not just any however, the exact people who had belonged to the rescue squad. Tsuyu made up a seventh person and Uraraka an eighth. He shared an uncomfortable glance with with Kirishima as he walked up. They were both equally confused, from the feel of it.

"Thank you guys for meeting us out here on such short notice. Really, the reason I asked all of you out here is because," she paused, then threw a look of concern to Tsuyu before finishing, "Tsuyu has something she wants to say to you all."

Tsuyu moved forward at the prompt, but only half a step. The way she curled herself felt like it would topple her, but instead of that all that stood strenuous was the subtle pain on her face. It was delicate, unnerved through the wide features. It was as if for once she wasn't exactly sure what thing she wanted to say, or rather he suspected, there was too much to put forward without thought.

"I..." she began and looked down upon the finger she had brought to her chin. "I always say what's on my mind." She looked up again but not at them, she was looking beyond them at the building. "But there are times when I have no idea what I should say..." she trailed off. A dry cough left her throat, hidden by a quiet croak. "Do you all remember what I said back at the hospital?"

"Yeah..." Midoriya answered. His posture was sympathetic to hers, deep in thought as he remembered the words.

They burned in his mind too, they had been hard to forget. *If you engage in battle aren't you breaking the rules? Then your actions would be no different to those of the villains.* He couldn't say he had taken the words seriously enough, he had still been thoroughly set upon doing that exact thing he had decided. In light of Aizawa's speech the words meanings had changed. It made a lump form in his throat.

"My choice of words was really severe back then. My regret from my own cowardliness wanted to stop you guys... and then when you actually went through with it I was shocked beyond belief. I didn't know how I could see you all again like we were before with all these negative emotions."

Tears were welling up in her eyes now, as much as she tried to rub them away. She gave up the endeavour and stopped her inspection of the building that had suited as a coping mechanism. She focussed it all on them now. "I had no idea what to say, or do, and that. That made me really sad," she bunched up her fingers to an amount that was the least required to ball a fist. "So that's why I had to do this, to set the record straight. I want to be able to go back how we were before. To laugh and have fun and play around like we always did."

The girl croaked and swallowed away her tears as Uraraka slid an arm onto her shoulder. "You're not the only one," Uraraka said and looked at them. "Everyone was feeling really worried and uneasy and that's probably how the whole room king thing came to be. We all understood how you felt and, um," she stuttered. "It was just a really hard thing to tackle so instead of blaming you all we figured we should... we should all just maybe laugh it off together?" she chuckled and pushed her fist into the air in front of her. "...And give it our all from now on, something like that!"

Tears and silence after that second lasted no more than a portion of one's breath might. Instead, Kirishima jumped forward and grabbed Tsuyu. "I'm so sorry," he yelled. "Thank you for talking to
"I am sorry as well, Ms. Tsuyu," Momo nodded and encompassed her around the side.

Iida stepped forward like a robot might around the other, "I as well, I am sorry for my shameful actions."

As Todoroki and Midoriya did the same he was left to go last, but in the moment he had he remembered what his uncle had said. He had been given advice, he had been told what others thought but he had never really considered them. Narcissism had egged him on, he knew that. That was the reason why Tsuyu was boiling up like she was now, why Jirou had acted the way she did. It was why his mom had cried, why he had risked making Elle upset. His failure to heed advice, to even consider a view beyond his own that was most definitely correct. He was truly a self-serving idiot.

"I am sorry I disregarded your feelings, Tsuyu," he said, to which she gave the slightest hint of satisfaction with the answer. He knew something so shallow didn't mean much, he had to prove it like Aizawa had said.

As the others went to go back inside he stayed to feel the bite of cold on his toes a bit longer. Soft yellow light spilt now from the mounted lamps and caused the ground to shine like amber. He took a lungful of cold air in and he heard the orchestra in the trees, buzzing and clicking away. He thought of the USB and dropped it just as fast. Then he finally turned to go and join the others, he could take it easy for just one night.

Chapter End Notes

*I do not own BNHA. OC material is my own.
[Yuuei's Campus, 1-A Alliance Dormitory – Riley's Room – 6:10 AM Sunday]

Dreary, that was what the following day had chosen to be. It was rain that blurred his windows and dulled what was beyond them. It might have turned into skeet, and even hardened into frost, had it been allowed to sit for a time. That wasn't something the cold day had planned as it beat down wave after relentless wave upon his room.

He supposed were he superstitious he might have called the shit weather an omen upon what was to be the dawn of a new day, a day he had decided he would take with all the motivation he could muster the night before. Luckily, he wasn't, but it did still bring him unease. He could take guesses for the reason of that but he dropped the idea instead, he didn't need an answer so obvious. No, today all he wanted was to pick everything back up again, all the slack and ease he had taken for granted would end today.

He flung the thick woolen blanket that lay on his body from it, and pushed himself up and away. He stepped toe to heel toward the weights which now lay upon a used rack. It was a habit he had inadvertently picked up walking across cold floorboards, not that he would need it now with the carpet he had. A touch of his phone still on the oaken desk told him he had plenty of leeway to do as he pleased, the usual time that Midnight had specified would not be for a long way yet.

He fumbled in putting the weights on, becoming once more familiar with the straps the further he got, the last time he had worn them was during the beginning of the camp but even during that time it had been intermittent. He had let Kirishima wear them instead during their training, he recalled. Once he did secure the last one he looked at the dumbbells, but decided against them, he would go for that last in his new routine. Instead he stepped into the bathroom behind him, the door to which he had left open in the night. Suspended above the door adjacent to the mirror, was a bar of metal with thickly attached plastic ends, designed for pull ups. He neglected to look into the mirrored surface before he went to work, he had done that the night prior, taken care to mark the areas in which he lacked visibly. His arms, and especially his forearms, had lost the most of all, though with Leina's help he'd recovered other parts of his body, it would take time and the sooner he started the less of that time would remain.

He stretched, careful and light enough to allow his muscles to get used to idea of working out seriously again. He wanted to run too, after all this, but he doubted the weather would allow him that much. It didn't matter, he would do that tomorrow. He looked at the bar again then gripped it. Three sets of fifteen pull ups, interrupted between each set by light squats. They were done fast like one might expect but he felt inevitable lethargy at it, some sections of his shoulders burned, as did the forefront of his chest and the back of his legs. He knew it would be like this for a time.

Next he took an athletic band and pulled and stretched the way Kirishima had shown him. They must have spent at least thirty minutes going over all the stuff yesterday. It was surprising how badly he'd been misusing some of it, so much so that he had been embarrassed, though his friend had been a good sport about it. Push ups came next, and stomach curls to accompany them and after that it was finally time for the dumbbells. They, unlike his others exercises, were not broken up. Once he was done his lethargy had very much dissipated, and he sat for a few minutes to contemplate it before he dressed in clothes that disagreed with the weather. He knew later he would need to wear the blazer, but he wouldn't do that until he actually went to see Midnight. It was a pain to get all dressed up for
He left his room with a bag slung over his shoulder, filled with those school clothes, and the pressure and sweat on his brow from effort. He'd need to shower before he went to see Midnight, though he could do that in one of the gyms after practicing his quirk. The steps he fled down with relative haste, he felt strangely buzzed, or good so to speak, that lasted well until the final floor where his stride was interrupted and halted. Shouting was what had caused it, loud enough to where he could guess the instigator as it charged up from the lobby like an angry bull roar. He frowned, then went down, and to his complete lack of surprise it was who he had thought – Bakugou, but with his neck choking a helpless looking Midoriya against the hard surface of the kitchen fridge.

"Don't play dumb with me shitwad, I know you're hiding something," Bakugou said as he strengthened his grip.

Midoriya choked his next words, "I don't know what you're t-talking about, let go of me K-kacchan" he pleaded.

"Whatever your fucking secret is you can't keep it up forever."

"I just wanted to know if you were really alright. I'm not hiding anything."

He'd seen enough to decide it was better to intervene, he curled his fingers and rapped them against the frame of the door loudly in an attempt to pull attention. "What's up with all the noise down here you two? Some of us are still trying to sleep you know."

"Torenagi- Hey-" Midoriya said as the grip on his neck loosened, if only slightly, it left him still looking rather pathetic tied up as he was. "We didn't see you there."

Bakugou let go and around the victim's neck he could see indentations of the grip, deep but not permanent. "If I find out you're fucking with me you're going to get it," he said as he backed off. "And I'll make as much noise as I damn well please, so keep your fucking nose out of it." He scowled at him then turned away, toward the corner by which the front door sat. A shutting of that same thing echoed a not long after, signalling that he could move from the steps with tension eased.

"What was that about?" he asked as he moved around the counter opposite Midoriya, who had taken a seat. He dropped his bag to the floor and then proceeded to remove a glass from one of the cabinets above. It was hard to be nonchalant about what looked like it would have ended in assault.

"Oh, um, it was nothing," Midoriya answered. His head had drooped and the shake of his head came slightly after.

Hmm, he curled his brow as he filled the glass from the filter next to the tap. He put it down, then turned and leant against marble and wood. "You sure? I know you and Bakugou don't exactly get along but he looked like he was about to deck you," he said. "...More than usual, I mean."

"Kacchan is always like that," he mumbled. There were streaks on his face, though not tearful or resultant of the strain on his neck, they were those of stress, lack of sleep and nourishment. It made sense, hospital recovery, rescue mission, interviews, it mustn't have left much time.

He took a gulp of the glass and thought on it. It must have been because of All Might, or rather his retirement. The mystery was why now, of all days, Bakugou would choose Midoriya to vent his frustrations on. Maybe it was because Midoriya and the man had been close. He put the glass back down, empty, before he spoke refreshed. "Is it because of All Might's retirement?" he asked, to which Midoriya's eyes flitted up from his puffy, scarred right hand.
He looked surprised, or some kind of uncertain. "All Might? What makes you say that?" he said with a nervous cut on his voice, which told him just enough. That was it.

He shrugged. "I was pretty upset to see him like that too you know," he said. It had been hurtful thing to witness, especially the press conference.

"It's not about that, I'm fine," he said. His posture didn't reflect it, nor his sudden watching of the water as it surged down the center and into the courtyard of the building.

He could have been wrong, he supposed, but he doubted it. Jirou had shown him a picture Hagakure had sent her of Midoriya's room, and to call it an obsession was too lighthearted. Not to mention Midoriya wasn't the kind of guy who cared about getting injured, that much was obvious enough now, hence it wasn't apprehension of all the wounds he'd suffered and how they might affect his quirk in the future like it had All Might's. It was most definitely about the man himself, what he represented in his life, even if he wasn't going to admit it so easily.

He paused, then put on the deepest voice he could muster, "The Symbol of Peace; The World's Pillar, The Incarnation of Justice." He spoke the words with dramatic venture, and waved his hands to exaggerate them a bit. "All Might has lots of names in America too, lots of titles, and he's just as famous there as he is here," he said as he moved to place the glass in the dishwasher. Then he turned back and took a seat diagonal to Midoriya, on the corner edge. "We have our own famous heroes as well but it's hard not to admire someone like that, isn't it? When I heard he was going to teach us… well I'm sure you can imagine."

"Yeah," Midoriya shook his head. "I think that's probably why they didn't announce it until after the entrance exams."

He nodded, "My point is you were closer to him than anyone in the class, we can all see that. It'd be weirder if you weren't upset after his retirement and hiding it is just going to make you feel like crap. I should know."

Midoriya's face brightened just a tad. "Y-yeah," he said. "I just didn't believe All Might would ever fall."

"At the very least he's still here. He didn't die after all that happened and I think that's more than anyone can ask of him. It must have been difficult too, to have the hopes of an entire country on his shoulders, let alone multiple. In the end he won, and he put the head of the league out of commission. Is it really fair for anyone to expect him to do more than he already has?"

The boy sat up and straightened his face, "It's up to all of us now, then All Might won't have to worry about a thing and neither will anyone else."

"You got it," he said. It was invigorating to think of it that way, even if in the end he knew what was actually fueling him.

"Still, even if he did put All for One out of commission, Tomura and Janus and the rest of them are still out there."

"Then let's let the pros handle it, we're learning to become heroes and, well, we haven't really done a good job following what they've told us. It might be better things cool off for a while," he said, then stood. He flicked a different cupboard open with his finger and took out two bowls, then went for the fridge. No leftovers, but milk and some plain looking corn breakfast cereal in the pantry beside it. He grabbed it all and placed it on the counter between him and Midoriya, before sliding him one of the bowls.
"You're right... Thanks, Ril-Torenagi," he said as he took and filled it.

"Riley is fine," he replied, almost automatically, to which he received an energetic nod.

[ Yuuei's Campus – Gym γ – 7:44 AM ]

He gave his breath way in silent whispers, letting it drone in and out and focussing on the action as each of his other thoughts drained away into nothing. In, his chest rose, out, it fell. It lent calm and was no placebo like he had feared. He would need that calm if he wanted to try again what he had discovered but not yet figured out. After another ten, twenty, forty or even a hundred breaths he finally stood and came face to face with a dummy he had dragged out of the back room of the very place he was now sitting.

He had ideas about why it hadn't worked and why he had gotten zapped. So instead of above he placed his right hand on the dummies ear, this time it would handle the decompression, while his left would be on the other, and handling the opposite. He was unsure if it would work, and he would surely regret it if it didn't, but he'd be damned if he didn't try. Experimentation and accident was how he had stumbled on the intricacies of his quirk in spades.

His tremor began like someone had strummed a cord on a guitar, and he braced himself against it to mitigate the effect. It combed around his bones for a time, and when it did not find sufficient weakness it instead spread into a dull, evenly spread throb. Then, he allowed his right to do it's own role, and felt the effect reverse until it became as if the energy and unease were flowing into his left hand, and pins and ache out of his right. The dummy showed him nothing, though he began to get close to that stage again, where the quirk would touch as it had before. He imagined it was something akin to an intertwining wave, though there was no way to certain without the ability to see into the dummies skull.

It proceeded on pace, gaining in strength and pushing with retaliation, and then with all the might of a storm it stopped. All at once. It stopped. And he, well he wasn't ready. A burst, a zap quivered his palm as he felt it happening again. Before he could even think to stop it struck his right and rammed into his left. His teeth clicked and his gums felt like they would bleed at the volatility of it this time. He had gone further than he had before, a fatal mistake as he realised the effect did not leave him even as his hands dropped. It pulled his fist tighter and tighter, and the others bones further apart.

The pain intensified, like it wanted him to pay for his transgression of mixing the two aspects. "Shit, shit, shit," he gasped, though his teeth wouldn't part to make the sound proper. Throbs turned into thumping hurt and needles into swords. In panic he looked around, though he had no real reason to, he had no idea why it wasn't going this time. He dashed forward, he needed to find help.

He tripped, face first, arms out into the floorboards as his knees buckled under the strain. He slid a metre as he braced himself and it surged through him like he had grounded it into the wax and fake mash of wood chips beneath. It did not warp to his touch, it did not quiver or crack under the strength of the quirks power. It remained normal as he curled up into a ball and waited for it to pass.

When he was reassured, and it had all subsided he opened his eyes. He pushed himself to his feet only to stumble. He felt dizzy again, very dizzy enough to make the floor swim. He calmed it by breathing and waiting for it to pass in full. He wasn't sure why he was even dizzy... he hadn't been dizzy during the fight with noumu, or at the lodge. The only time he had been dizzy in this same way was after his fight with Kirishima. A final shake of his head tossed the feeling from him and he was left to stare at the floor he had slid across.

It was, weird. It really hadn't changed – at least not in texture. The grain had instead. He scanned
behind him across the floor from where he'd fallen, and drawn into it was a line that went against the very direction the wood faced. It was as if the filings of what made up it's existence had been tossed around and mixed in a dryer. He raised his hand to his face, his right hand, and stretched the fingers out. Then he repeated it with his left. They were extremely sore but not broken, he'd lucked out again.

He stood and walked back to the dummy, he prodded it's head but nothing occurred. He huffed out in disappointment, he'd kind of been hoping to just... poke through it. That would be an effective weapon for such a detriment, yet it didn't have any effect at all. It was a shame that it hadn't worked, maybe he really could only replicate the effect with the gun on his costume... which made it useless too. He couldn't blow the arm up for one powerful attack.

He groaned a bit as he left the dummy behind, he felt silly now. Kaminari and Kirishima would probably laugh their asses off if they'd seen him face plant like he had two left feet. How empty the school felt was to his advantage in that regard, no one had been around to witness his demise. He'd need to figure out something else.

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[**Yuuei's Campus – Outside the main building – 9:44 AM**]

He knew he was early as he walked slow steps through the rain umbrella in hand. The dark glass of the building drowned out the vision ahead, or at least what he could see through the pink-soaked petals of the trees before it. It was not often a path he walked, however with the new location of the dorms and the gym from which he had come he had come he had little other way.

His uniform pants were already soaked as he approached the doorway, though at the very least it was empty inside here as well, not just the gym. The abandoned hallway made it easy to traverse his way to the stairs where he before had to shove past a few lurking groups to get there. Much to the bothersome design of the building the office was on the second floor, next to the classroom of one of the sophomore general studies courses. That was another aspect that made getting to her awkward. He always got... stares.

He stepped halfway up the very stone access before he paused at the step of another. "Ah, Torenagi, good morning," Cementoss said as he met him face to face.

"Good morning, Sir," he answered. He hadn't expected him to be trolling around the hallways, by himself, on a Sunday. Maybe he found the silent hallways calming, he had to admit he kind of did himself.

"Off to see Midnight, I see."

He nodded, "I am."

"Good, I am sure she has much to speak about. You may have to wait however, she is seeing a different student at the moment."

"A different student?" he asked. As far as he knew she had no other visitors, though he supposed it was possible.

"Yes, this institution is quite strict on these things as that is an aspect of heroism too, keeping an eye on those among us," he gave a broad smile before turning to descend the last few steps. "You keep an eye on yourself as well Torenagi, along with your studies."

"I will," he said as he contemplated it. Cementoss always had some wisdom to spare whenever they
spoke, though he hadn't seen much of the man recently. The frequency of his advice didn't make it less right. He had wondered more than once what had caused the man to become like that. "Hey, Sir," he uttered before the man could disappear. "Thank you for your words back then, I didn't really get to say anything and-" he paused. Then decided to put it simply, "They helped."

Cementoss said nothing in return, but instead offered one of his singular, full-bodied nods. Then he turned the corner, leaving him on the steps by his lonesome. He hopped up and found himself at the opposite end of where he needed to be, though he could see the line of chairs on the west wing in the distance. Those were a recent addition. He sat as he eventually reached them, and watched the windows in front. The rain definitely wasn't letting up anytime soon, it was a time to stay inside for most. Villains like Janus probably didn't sit still on days like this.

He abandoned the thought, only for his relaxation in the seat to be met by a loud crash on the back of the very wall he was leaning into. It was what he could assume was a chair meeting a violent and collision filled ending. Midnight did not appear to be having much, if any, success with whoever it was. It spiked curiosity, though he did not have the time to look through the film covered glass to speculate who might have done it, because the door swung open.

He caught it with his foot before it could nail him in the face. It was Bakugou, once again, and he looked nothing short of pissed, also once again. Now he could guess at least one reason as to why he had been wringing Midoriya out earlier that day. Their eyes met as he passed, and it was too weird for him not to at least say a word, against his own better judgement. "They got you in this too now, do they?" he asked. Frankly he could not think of a way they could have managed it other than through his parents.

In return to his statement he got nothing short of a look of disgust. "What the fuck is it to you?" he spat.

"Nothing, nothing," he answered with a shrug. "But if it makes you feel better I think mandatory counselling is pretty bullshit too."

Bakugou gave him a sharp, tch, in response before he said more, "And yet you're still here, shithead."

He cocked his head a bit, he needed to choose his words carefully. "And yet I'm still here, even though I hate it," he said. "But it isn't that bad really, you should give it a shot." He turned his head to peek in the door. Midnight didn't look distressed but she was preoccupied writing, enough to not notice him.

"I don't need advice from some piece of shit who can't even control his own fucking actions," he said in a snide tone.

He grit his teeth, "And I don't need to be judged by someone who thinks the solution to every problem is blowing it up."

Bakugou scowled. "Maybe you should try it some time instead of getting someone else to do it you pathetic little chicken-shit," he growled.

He bit the skin on the inside of his lip, even he hadn't remembered that until now. That was after the fight, when he'd been most vulnerable of all, "I might be a chicken-shit but you're just a grade-A asshole, you know that?"

The sentence had barely left his mouth before he was off his chair, courtesy of a grip of his blazers collar, though he resisted the push that came with it enough to not collide with the wall behind him.
There was a fuming palm already within scolding range of his face. "Come on, say it again. Give me a reason to add a fucking scar or two."

He eyed the hand but he couldn't let himself be intimidated. "I bet you couldn't last a damn second listening to someone else for a change," he said.

"You don't know me."

"Do I need to? I can pick it up from a mile away."

Bakugou growled, and for a second it looked like he was going to explode his head clean from his shoulders. Instead he chunked him down the side of his face with a fist. He clutched where he had been punched as he fell back into the chair, that had fucking hurt. He didn't say another word, neither of them did, as his attacker already begun stomping his way down the hall.

Then, he was gone, and he left with the door. That hadn't gone well. He wiped his jaw, it stung to touch and would surely be noticeable in several minutes. It hadn't even been his intention for his words to come off as advice, or to make Bakugou angry at him, he'd just wanted to know more about that thing this morning. So much for that.

"Good morning Torenagi, I'm ready for you now," Midnight said, in fact right beside him. She was looking down the corridor where Bakugou had gone with a scowl. She gave a deliberate sigh before she went back in the room. She must have heard it all, including the smack.

He slammed the door shut behind him as he entered. It dissipated his annoyance less than he'd hoped, and he was still staggered as he let himself down into the therapy couch. If he cared enough he might have taken notice that it was not the same leather ordeal as previously but a slim rugged blue thing.

"Morning Ma'am," he said out of courtesy as he adjusted. The couch felt a bit big, or maybe the pillow wasn't in the right place. He pushed himself up a bit and looked around, the stool Bakugou had kicked had collided with one of the bookshelves and tossed several heavy tomes to the floor, as well as accompanying brochures.

"Apologies for the mess," she glanced at him, or more accurately at his rapidly purpling cheek. "Bakugou did that to you, I assume?" she asked. He shrugged. It didn't matter and he didn't want to talk about it. Being punched had managed to tank his good mood rapidly enough. She coughed a little in response, then detached a page from her clipboard and put it in a draw beside her own chair. "I'm sure as his friend-"

"We aren't friends," he cut her off. "I'm pretty sure he considers me an enemy... or an obstacle or something." The small courtesy Bakugou had paid him only yesterday was clearly nothing more than a show of his selfish intent, not what he had thought it to be.

"If you say so sweetie," she smirked. "But I think you're wrong about that."

"Yeah well what do you know," he rolled his eyes. It was hard to ignore a bruise. He felt foolish now, for even having attempted to speak to him, he'd know better next time. "And even if I am, I don't give a shit."

"Very well," she shook her head in frustration.

He felt a pang of guilt at it, he wasn't sure why he was taking out his anger on her. "Sorry," he said and let out a breath. He needed to stop acting this way, or he'd be no better than Bakugou.
"Thank you," she smiled. "Now then, let's change the subject." She scribbled, before speaking again, "Your family, let's talk about them."

"My family?" he gaped at her. He had expected the incident to come up, not this again. This was even more annoying. "I don't want to do that either."

"Yes, I know. However in light of what's happened..."

"I already know what they think," he answered.

"It's all good and well to think about how they might react but another entirely to hear it and see it."

"I did," he said with annoyance. "with my uncle."

"And what did he say?"

"Exactly how he felt about what I did."

"Did you feel angry or perhaps regretful?" she asked.

"Terrible," he answered. Out of the corner of his eye he could see the woman lean forward, if only slightly, before she spoke again. It was as if she wanted to get an exact reaction to what she was about to say next.

"I see, but you'd do it again, wouldn't you?"

He hesitated, but she could be trusted well enough. "In a heartbeat," he said. She scribbled and he gave her a look as she did so, then decided he might as well ask. "Do you think that's wrong?"

She paused, her pen stuck to paper, then dropped the clipboard into her lap. "Wanting to save people can never be wrong."

"Yeah," he nodded. It couldn't be wrong. That was the whole point of heroism, even if many heroes were in it for other reasons. He tapped his fingers on the side of the chair, then slumped. His head felt warm, and tight. Too many blows to the head, probably. Well, that wasn't all. There was a reason why he had asked.

"Is something bothering you?" she asked.

"Mhmm," he answered and pulled his right leg up a bit, just enough to clasp his hand around it. "There is."

"Go on, sweetie, I'm here to listen."

He traced his thumb around his teeth as he wondered if to say it or not. The idea of it made him queasy, even. "If I lost control, or if... I acted selfishly while out of my mind, would that make me villainous?"

The woman gave him an apathetic stare that made him uncomfortable as she considered his words. "No, it would not. Is there a specific reason why you would think that?"

"Because sometimes I really wonder," he said hard and fast. "I wonder if it's not the villains quirk, that it's really just some mental illness I've got, like psychosis or something like that, and that I could be living with it for the rest of my life." His annoyance at Bakugou had somehow transferred into this. Thoughts he'd been having, periodically. He had felt safe from it after his fight with Kirishima, thinking that All Might had silenced it. All for One had reinforced the effect, though it wouldn't last.
The forest, he recalled, was proof.

"Torenagi," Midnight said as she folded the glasses she had on her face and put the clipboard aside. "Before you go any further with that line of thought, describe to me how you arrived at the conclusion."

"You already know that I ran into Janus at the lodge," he said, she nodded. "I know it's a stupid theory," he said as he moved his free hand, the one not clasped, to his shoulder blade. "But it was removed back then. There is nothing in my shoulder and the villains quirk should be gone." He let his shoulder go and tapped his head. "That means there's only three possibilities. It came from me, Janus left it behind or he's still actively controlling it."

"Torenagi-"

"Please, let me finish," he interrupted with an icy glare. "It doesn't feel like it did before I was kidnapped. The quirk, that creature, isn't in there any longer and I'm sure of that. That rules the second theory out. And out of the two possibilities that remain, have you ever read or heard of a quirk like this? I sure as hell haven't." Shinsou's detail only lent credit to that theory, he'd said it was long gone, whatever it was, if it was true then what exactly had been left behind?

"It's normal to have these thoughts for someone in your position."

"That's just it, I don't know if they're my thoughts sometimes, don't you see?" he looked at her again. "Are my actions really mine as well, or is it all being influenced? No matter how much I think about it I can't come to a conclusion."

"Paranoia is not a way to solve your issues. It is not good to keep going over them, to dwell on them. That's why I wanted you to get them out in the open, to talk with someone you're closer with. The best way to know if you're acting like yourself is to speak with someone who knows you better than you."

"With all respect, Ma'am, I don't think I have enough time for that," he said.

"You do have time, you're safe here."

"Am I?" he asked. "Every place we've been was supposed to be safe, but they show up anyway. Even if it's over now, just thinking about it stresses me out." He had been a bit braver about it this morning with Midoriya, but that had been just to make the guy feel better. Defeating a villain and capturing them, only the former had been achieved when it came to the league. It didn't take a genius to figure out they were constantly getting stronger, with each strike. Now they didn't even have All Might.

Midnight stood, an action that made her upon him in an instant. She grasped the hand he'd gripped around his hand and gave it a gentle tug. It came loose, and the pain he hadn't even registered from the tight coil of his fingers around it released. He shuddered and dropped his leg. "I believe it is time for a more practical approach," the woman said.

"I'm all ears," he answered her.

"I sure hope you are, because you are not going to like what I am going to tell you," she said as she turned away. Her face was dark, sadistic.

"Huh?"

"I know it's difficult but you are not going to solve these issues by pushing yourself further into them. 
You recall when I said I would do what it took for you to keep attending?"
"Yeah," he nodded.

"This is in the same vein. It is is going to seem harsh, but you've let me with no alternative."

"What are you talking about?" he furled his brow. She was acting strange.

"I'm giving you a choice, to follow my instructions precisely, otherwise I will be forced to stand you down from classes until you do fix them."

He sat up alert, "What, why?" He stopped his voice from rising into a yell.

"The way you are and the way you're thinking," she shook her head. "It's not healthy for you or those around you. And since you refuse to follow my advice, it seems the only practical solution is a threat, Torenagi."

"That's not fair," he jumped off the chair. "Isn't everything I say in here meant to be in confidence?"

"In confidence, sure, but do you really think I'm so laid back I am going to watch you destroy yourself piece by piece? No, as your teacher I don't think I will be taking that approach, so I reiterate, you will follow my instruction or you will not be attending for the foreseeable semester."

"Ma'am-"

"I won't be repeating myself. Honestly Torenagi, have you never thought that the heroine and the woman who talks to you aren't so far removed from each other?" she gave a coy smile. It felt vicious now.

He shut his mouth in quenched rage and clenched his fists. He felt furious, why the hell had he even agreed to come to these damned sessions if this was going to be the result. More pressure was not what he needed.

The woman placed a hand in the drawer beside her and chucked a book, a small leather bound thing at his face, which he caught. "That is the first of your tasks this week, and from now on going forward. You will write in that book, about yourself, a page each night. Then you will bring it with you next time."

He clutched the book hard and let it drop to the side, "This is stupid."

Fwick, the whip beside her chair went in an instant before he could continue. "Second, you will call your family. Not just your uncle, but your entire family. I don't care about what, or whom, but you will." His annoyance must have been evident on his face, because Midnight almost seemed to be enjoying herself. Egging him on. "And lastly, you're going to go find something non-heroic, non-quirk related to do each week, understand?"

He quivered, as he realised it was time for him to answer. "I understand," he said as calmly as he could. "What I don't understand is why the hell you're doing this-"

"That'll be all today Torenagi, please go," the woman averted her eyes to her clipboard. "Remember, you only have until Saturday. I don't want to do this but I will, don't test me."

His fists scrunched. "Fuck you," he growled.

The door echoed on it's hinges as she watched him leave. If it kept up this way it would surely
shatter the frame or the glass soon enough. She strained a thumb against her forehead and rubbed her temple with a finger as she let her persona settle back to normal and reached for her phone. In all honesty she hadn't expected it to be this much work. Guidance, someone to talk to, that's what Nedzu had asked her to do. She was barely qualified for even that. Now her efforts had doubled... if not tripled. That wasn't even including Bakugou, though his problems were entirely different.

Maybe she had been too harsh in her ultimatum, though looking at the things he'd said and that she'd written, that was not the case. He was doing well too, progress, a change in looks and attitude, up until now. He was even more positive, however clearly that had been a bit of a show to hide how scared he was of what had happened at the sports festival. That was nothing she could blame him for, in fact she could empathise if anything. Even Nedzu had been weary of what the best course of action was, exactly.

If she did not stop it now it would escalate, but simply going on telling him or suggesting to him the right course of action was not going to work. He would break. Not now maybe, or soon, but he would, that's why she had to do this cruel thing, especially with the license exam coming up. They weren't as kind as she was. Maybe they were right not to be. Heroic work wasn't for the weak, even if their numbers were dwindling. There was still a chance to prepare him for that. If she had learnt anything about him then it was consequences that caused Torenagi to take control, and if surges of teenage anger and hatred toward her was what was required to make it happen, then so be it. Though, if she was right, it would all change very fast now. Tough love had always been her strong suit.

She placed the phone to her ear as the number finished dialing and waited until a hackneyed cough of a voice answered. "Alo speaking, whatcha need?" it said.

Chapter End Notes

*I do not own BNHA. OC material is my own.*
His mind was calm but not complacent or well placed. Above him a green metallic shrug of an overhang stretched along the wall of the main library, it was slim just like the hastily constructed concrete walkway that accompanied beneath. Red mottled flowers lined it, choked by green weeds that indicated that although the path was new the location was not.

He had run, despite, and in spite of the weather. It had given him what pity it had in return by soaking his once more donned sports clothes with only a light spittle. The sky was overcast now and threatening and he was sure it rain again later that day, however for now he had his reprieve to make his way back to the dorm. The pant his run had gathered had gone and, although it had not been a very satisfying one, it had relieved some frustration.

In his hands was his umbrella, tied back by a Velcro string, while over his shoulder was slung his bag. He hated having to change so often, but it was a necessary evil in this case, just like his run had been. His path came to an abrupt end and turned his step from the click of stone to that of soft sod. He half slid down a muddy hill, though he kept his balance by reaching for a grove of trees as he passed through them. He was surrounded by their copper leaves, water cupped within them and tipping as he disturbed their buds one by one. He avoided the onslaught with relative ease, and even admired the nature of it. Their stems were bound and nailed by wire, though it was not done by hand, vines stretched and bound them taut instead. It was cool, that much he could admit despite his weather related unease.

The grimy earth came to an end and he stopped in turn, and removed his earbuds. Then he took a deep breath, it filled his lungs and made him feel more awake, causing his skin to shiver as he looked up at the tall dormitory building. If only it was a bit hotter, a stark wind combined with a minimal warmth was his favourite weather, the kind that rushed through you and made the world appear bigger than just where you stood.

The thoughts of earlier came back to him as he took it in. He didn't enjoy his own brooding one bit and Midnight was right, but she had no right to force him and he did not have to be happy about it, even if he did feel bad about swearing at her. That'd slipped before he'd had a chance to stop it. The tasks themselves were in all thought arbitrary with the exception of one. To do something non heroic, to write about himself, he could do these things he was sure, but to talk to his family, to be persuaded, scrutinised and perused and to bare sight of that physical proof of his transgression, that he could not call arbitrary. Those terms didn't even include his father, not that he seemed interested in chatting anyway.

Out of the door of the dorm escaped warmth that set the sting of chill on his skin to non-existence and instead replaced it with a more comfortable feeling. He flicked the umbrella, still laden with drops, from the tip of his head to his heel ridding it of a strip of water in the process. Then he kicked off his trainers, and stuffed them where his name had been rendered next to his actual school shoes. Some people preferred to wear their costume shoes to class, a small privilege of their heroics course, however his cleats weren't comfortable enough for that. A shame, really.

He took a turn left and was intrigued by a look, though he did not wish to entertain it because of exactly who it was, and the two who were beside him half lying, half dropping off both couch and
"Hey Riley," Kirishima said, "What's up? You back from your thing?"

"Yeah, I am back from my thing," he answered in the same ridiculing inflection. It annoyed him enough to make the effort.

"Nasty bruise," he wiped his chin to indicate. "You alright dude?"

"Training accident." He looked as Bakugou as he said it, only to not get much more than a dead-eyed glare over the guys phone, from the aforementioned armchair in which he was curled.

"What?" Kaminari blurted out. "Did you smack yourself in the face with one of your gauntlets or something?"

"Something like that," he shrugged.

"You remember you're meant to aim away from yourself with your quirk, right?"

"Next time I'll aim at you," he said the words, intending them as a joke, however they did not leave his lips that way.

Kirishima gave an awkward chuckle, "That'd sure teach him a lesson. So... you're free now right?"

He nodded. "I'm going to go lay down now," he said before his friend had a chance to add another sentence which he was sure was an offer. He had no real intention of sleeping, though he did feel tired and a little rude. Maybe the recordings would distract him, Jirou did want to work on them with him today.

"Hey-hey," Kirishima jumped off the couch after him just as he set a kettle to begin boiling on the kitchen counter and began to empty his pockets in search of his I.D. "Wait up man, you sure you don't wanna hang out? We were gonna go and find some place to eat and chill a bit. If you thought that noodle place was good man, there's lots of places like it in--"

"I really don't, sorry," he frowned as he found the card and placed it on the counter. It wasn't ruined like he'd feared. It'd be a pain to remove from his pocket when he got to his room, he'd use it as a coaster until then. "I just feel a bit off, that's all."

"I didn't take you for someone who needed naps, I mean I know Bakugou sleeps all the damn time, but you didn't strike me as the type," Kaminari said from the couch.

"Shut your face," Bakugou growled. There was at this angle nothing particular on his phone that he was actually looking at, that much was obvious, though he did not appear to realise it could be seen.

"Yeah, he's right," Kirishima smiled slightly and then his face darkened as he said the next words in almost as a whisper. "Did something happen? Is it that again? You can tell me."

"It's not that but," he looked away. "Forget about that stuff for now. It's fine and I don't want Jirou on my case, she's already worried enough about the recordings."

"Did you find something?"

"Not yet."

"Then... was it something Midnight did?"
"I don't really want to talk about it," he shook it off. Kirishima was getting more perceptive.

The kettle popped, and he took a mug from the cupboard behind him. There were three different types of sachets of tea stuck in canisters against the wall. Green, chai, and lemon tea. The last was his only real choice, but it wasn't like he was going to use his quirk again today anyway. He went for the second one, and it tinted the mug as he poured water on it, then bled into a red white as he added milk. His sister liked chai exclusively, he remembered.

*Hmm*, Kirishima answered. "Alright man," he gave him a light punch in the shoulder. He must have felt how tense he was because he pulled his other hand back from what would have been a one-two combo after the first hit. "Alright..." he repeated. His friend turned, then he appeared to give it second thought, he was tapping his fist into his palm as he did so. "You know Riley, I mean this in the best possible way but, you've really got a problem with letting things go. I know you have a lot... a whole lot that you feel like is on you but it does get on my nerves sometimes, you know?"

He looked down and away. "I'm," he paused, it stung to hear it. "It's just personal, that's all."

"It's alright, I don't need one of your excuses, I just wanted to get that out there. I know we're still on break but this is really our last free day and it'd be a lot more fun with the Riley I saw over the past week, not the one in front of me now." Without a pause Kirishima turned and walked back to the couch, before hopping it and landing half on the cushion, half on Kaminari. A burst of laughter, followed by a zap which he didn't really notice, followed.

He was left staring at the cup he'd made, not something he even wanted to drink now to replace the bitter mud that had drenched his mouth. He thought about leaving it, slinking back to his room, to sulk, that was the truth of it however. He clenched his hands at the thought.

"Hey," he approached the back of the couch once more, with the steaming tea in hand. It was searing his finger tips just a tiny bit as the last of the cold eroded.

"Hey," Kirishima answered.

"Sorry, I was being a real dick," he said. "I know you were just trying to help."

A wide, toothy grin was given in answer, "Acceptance is the first stage you know. Don't worry, I forgive ya."

"Mind if I join you?"

"Sure dude," he answered.

"Thanks," he said as he walked around the couch, placed the tea down, and fell in between him and Kaminari.

"At least I don't have to worry about cutting myself sitting next to you," Kaminari said as he scooted over just a bit more.

"And at least you can't keep shocking me either taserbrain."

He looked to either side of him and grimaced, "I feel like I chose the wrong place to sit."

Kaminari gave him a strong, electric slap on the shoulder before he could react, causing him to jump and yelp. "Shit," he exhaled. "What the hell?" he gave a look of murder. Kaminari had a bad habit of discharging his quirk when it was humid. Today was not such a day, cold and frigid as the air was
that had been on purpose.

"Duuude, he made your hair stand on end," Kirishima laughed as he grabbed at it, it was sticking out at odder ends than usual. Even the hair on his arm had jumped up to attention, and the ones on the back of his neck.

The electric student snorted, "I've been working on my control, so you shouldn't threaten me. I bet even Bakugou wouldn't be safe now if I really tried."

"If I feel so much as a fucking tingle there isn't going to be enough left of you to make a goddamn battery," Bakugou answered.

He raised a finger at Kaminari, "Even if I was being an ass I'm not your test subject."

"Alright, alright," Kaminari shrugged. "Just one more try," he said with a quick jump.

He was ready for it this time, he dodged the hand and gave him a rough slap on the back in return, pushing in with his quirk as he did so and hard enough to send him off the couch and onto the floor. Kaminari struggled, however his shirt was now far too heavy for someone with his frame to lift.

"Shit man, no fair!"

"I did warn you," he wiped away the tremor into the couch. "Now you can stay there in time out for a while." He didn't bother hiding his grin at his struggle.

"Serves him right," Kirishima said as he leaned forward and put his phone down in front of him. "Now don't get too comfortable, we're heading out soonish."

"Got a place in mind?"

"Not really, Bakugou wanted to go there," he pointed at the image of an arcade.

"An arcade?" he eyed Bakugou, who looked away at his notice. Not so serious after all.

"Arcades suck dude, all the places Bakugou picks suck."

Bakugou responded by kicking the table one inch forward with his heel, right into Kaminari's exposed rib and causing him to gasp. He'd resorted to trying to throw the shirt off now. That'd nullified all the protection the item could have provided him from the blow.

"Come on guys, this isn't funny," Kaminari yelled. "I'm freakin' suffocating here man."

He ignored the please, it wasn't that heavy. "How about this place?" He scrolled down to a Korean barbecue joint, right in the vicinity of the arcade. It looked fine, and one of the few things that wasn't intrinsically Japanese for once. He could only eat the same things so much, really.

"Looks good to me," he nodded.

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Yuuuei's Campus – 1-A Alliance Dormitory, Jirou's room – 2:53 PM

She hated winter, and all the dampness it brought. Today had turned into that, it made her bangs frizzy and liable to be commented on, not that she would admit to caring about that stuff, but still. After a final attempt she gave up straightening it, not because of the frustration it brought to try but rather the noise jumping in from every paper thin crevice was beginning to drive her mad. She took the ends of her jacks and enclosed her fists around them. Silence, sweet silence.
She let go again and the noise returned, albeit less overwhelming. It was kind of humiliating that the trick her dad had come up with all those years ago still worked as well as it did. She stood, and took the guitar she'd lent against the bed earlier and flicked a string, before setting it back on the wall where it belong. She had tried to practice but found it futile, those recordings were where her thoughts were, what they contained and how they'd gotten there. Torenagi had given a vague answer as to what exactly the static noise was, but there was no way it could be good if it really was anything more. It might be worth going to check if he was back from his therapy now.

The thought signalled a quick tramp to the lobby. It was a surprise Torenagi even went to therapy if she was being honest, she herself had refused as Meina was much to much of an analyser already to add Midnight to that list.

"Uraraka," she said as she reached the bottom of the stairs. She was with Tsuyu, the two were standing next to identical mixing pots, no doubt trying to recreate that chiffon cake from yesterday. She had overheard them asking about the recipe. It wouldn't do much good without that oversized bakers oven.

"Hey Jirou."

"What's up?" Tsuyu asked.

"Did Torenagi come back in?" There was no need for her to go up to the boys section if he wasn't there. Not to mention it felt awkward to do so without prompting already.

"I think he went out with Kirishima and Kaminari... and oh, I think Bakugou went with them as well."

She gave a mild groan back to Uraraka. "Seriously?" she mumbled. So much for getting those recording deciphered. "Did he say when he'd be back?"

"No idea," Tsuyu croaked. "I think they were in a hurry though, Torenagi left half his stuff here." She pointed beneath the side of the counter, to which she had to move around the other side to see. A bag, opened and filled with all parts of a boys uniform, minus the blazer. "He even left his I.D. card for his room." She held up the silver backed item, with Torenagi's face on it.

She took it without hesitation and flipped it. Last door on the last floor, it really was his. Those idiots must have gone without even giving it a second thought, was he not taking this seriously? In that case there really wasn't a need to feel guilty about what she was going to do with it. The program would take time anyway.

"I got it," she said and took the bag while slipping the I.D. away. "Can't just leave his crap in the lobby for someone to trip over. Thanks you two." She gave an over the shoulder wave at the two, who looked confused, but she didn't feel like she owed them a better excuse. Even if they were living in the same building now her business was still her business.

She moved in discreet fashion up the opposite stairs and by the time she made it to the last door she was exhausted, if Torenagi was serious about getting in shape again like he never failed to whine about then this certainly would help. She might have wanted for that too, if it even mattered in the slightest to her quirk. Understanding helped more than fitness, and, well, procrastinating was vastly more tempting than training, especially when she had a mystery to solve. She had to do it, before Torenagi and Kirishima began to do stupid impulsive shit again. The only thing rash about herself was her temper... not that it was something she liked.

The door opened to fine, to her surprised that should have not been surprising in the least. It was a
room key, it'd be weirder if it didn't work. Maybe it was a bad idea to go in here alone, like some kind of taboo. Too bad really, she thought as she closed the door, doing things you weren't supposed to be doing was the name of the game. They'd only been here a day and a half, hopefully he wouldn't have piled up too much embarrassing junk by now.

As expected, it was the same and it was fine, a messy bed and a dirty shirt half sagging off the back of the computer chair was all that presented itself as different. She peeled it off with a flick, using the least force possible and causing it to fall to the floor as if by accident, he'd be none the wiser. She opened the laptop that sat vacant, then opened the drawer beside it. It was obvious that was where he'd hidden it, she'd heard the hasty sound through the door last night. As she sat and the laptop started up she was greeted by a password request screen. *Figures*, she frowned.

UAC0012; she typed in, then hit enter.

*Error; password invalid.*

*Hmm,* she tapped her fingers on the side of the keyboard. That meant it was the default serialised password the computers were manufactured with. There was no way Torenagi would bother changing it after one day. An idea came to her, almost too simple really, the kind of stupid password people would guess on T.V.

Yuuei1;

*Welcome.*

The screen lit up. That was far easier than she'd thought it would be, now hopefully the files would be too. She opened the USB files and found many, eleven by the count. It really would take a long time... and hour or maybe two. There was a guarantee it'd worth either, after all it would only try to remove and separate sounds that were distinctly different to each other. She found the program she had in mind mere moments after, it had been useful to her once in fixing the sound file on an old disc Meina had sold her. Some old Woodkid song, she remembered. She wasn't into that music much any more. It was hard not to jump from band to band, genre to genre when there was such a wide selection both online and at her convenience.

The rudimentary interface opened after install. The laptops were fast but no too fast, nothing like a few hundred bucks couldn't buy you if you were a bit smart about it. The next part came up automatically - *Would you like to auto-detect?*’ it read. She leant back in the chair as far as it would go, and allowed laziness to take over that part.

A poster caught her eye, and made her glad. She'd gotten Momo to help her repair it, as antiquated as it was. It was lucky that the hole hadn't gone through the signature on the bottom of the nine inch nails poster or it mightn't have looked so much like the old one. She'd probably be on her case about being in here, but not as much as Iida might. Not like it would matter, no one could know it was her with the door shut.

She looked down at the monitor again, it had provided a time now; just under one and a half hours.

[Eastern Hosu – Leisure District – 6:39 PM]

They had eaten, and soon found it a bore to stick around a place crowded as that any Sunday could make. Their escapades had led them to that arcade Bakugou had wanted to go to, or rather he had nudge it in that direction. An apology maybe, he wasn't exactly great enough at arcade games to warrant his own want to go there.
It was cut off from the street by two ramps each more than twenty feet longways that sank at an angle into the floor. The floor was tiled and held a brightness enhanced by every part of the buildings itself. Time-well-wasted arcade, that was it's name, and it's logo was equally articulate – a stopwatch with a bomb wick counting down from one minute to the next in endless conundrum. Inside the place was a labyrinth, and one in which he was soon left to wander in tow, as the others amused themselves with each machine. The only place he'd ever really played video games was with his friends at Leineif, in a single room made for two as a group of four in the middle of the night. His main enjoyment had been fighting games, but he wasn't all that apt with them. It required more time than he had given it, than he had to give it. That was as good an excuse for notorious button smashing as any. It did win it for him, sometimes, and to much more than a chuckle.

"Who woulda thought Bakugou would be so good at a Taiko drum game of all things?" Kirishima said as he watched the machine light up in a fast, repetitious thump-thump with each aggressive slam of the drum. He really was good.

Kaminari shrugged, "I didn't think the machine would still be standing by now."

"True that."

"Shut up, shitheads," Bakugou barked, though through his anger he missed one note completely, and ended the combo he'd built up just like that. "Fucker," he said and threw the large stick at Kaminari, who dodged. It gave him another pity point to mock that, before falling and being caught by the cords they were attached to.

"I guess that lasted about as long as it could have," he said. "Still, I didn't take your for a drummer." He certainly had the attitude for it.

"Did you take lessons or sommin'?" Kirishima asked.

"Doesn't fuckin' matter," he curled his face in frustration.

"Oh shit, so it's a yes then?" Kaminari laughed.

"Fuck off," he said as he pushed him aside hard with his shoulder.

"Touchy, touchy." Kaminari gave a fitting smile, like he'd just discovered a great tool of many advantages to secure away for the right time.

"Well I'm not beating that score even if I had a million go's, so let's try a different game," Kirishima suggested and pointed over his shoulder at an antiquated boxing machine. It had a single large rubber ball hanging from it, and behind it was a smirking caricature of All Might, along with the very matching words 'Put the might in All Might!' As with all the machines, it had a strict sign of it disallowing the use of quirks.

"Whatever." He didn't look so infused to switch over after losing his cool on the previous game.

"Suit yourself, why don't you have a go first Riley?"

"Me?" He gave a look at the machine, from the type of it he could guess all it gave you was a single punch. The backlight illuminated as Kirishima turned it on, all the machines here operated at the press of the button rather than a coin cost, they'd paid at the door.

"Go on, unless you're a wimp."

He tightened his fist fast, and swung it almost side on, not really the angle he wanted but he went
with it. Not a clean punch, an annoyed one, a playful one if he wanted to cover for how weak it felt. There was a lack of power behind it, even with the weights making it harder to throw a punch it was... atrocious, really. The machine told him as much as it whirred, spun a thousand times in a thousand digits, and settled on a meek three ninety-nine.

Kirishima gave a drawn out laughter at the score, "Wow, I guess you really are a wimp." He made it worse by grabbing him around the wrist he'd swung with, like he was trying to make sure he hadn't somehow bruised himself on the soft material. "I bet even Kaminari could do better."

He pulled back, "Enough to beat you, apparently." A low blow, that.

That was enough to take the wind out of his sails at least for a second. "Let me show you what a real man's punch is like," he smirked. He rolled his shoulder as the machine flared up once again. He delivered upon it a powerful downward arc, the brunt of it brought by the tensing of his upper arm at just the right second. Six seventy two, it read this time. "Impressed?" he said.

"You're both fucking weak shits, move it," Bakugou gave a fierce expression, a spark of interest in the little competition. The machine stirred a third time, but he didn't give it his attention immediately like they had. His foot slid back an inch, both his hand went up in front of his chest, and then he drew it back, tight and in control of where it was going to land in his mind. A full-bodied mortar sailed through the soft opponent, it would had shattered any guard if it had one. Even the machine itself wobbled at that. Eight ninety two.

"Impressed, bastard?" he said in a mocking tone.

"Jesus christ man," Kirishima said. "First you drum and now you box? I didn't realise this was Bakugou power hour. What's your secret?"

He shrugged, "Doesn't matter does it? I don't need to blab all day like you fuckin' grannies. Just do it."

"Man, that's not an answer, it sounds like something off the back of a cereal box. Show me your stance again, or your wind-up dude-"

"He probably just takes steroids," Kaminari rolled his eyes.

"Fuck off, you just gotta punch it like you mean it."

"Punch it like you mean it?" he himself asked this time.

Bakugou turned on him, "There's no other way to fuckin' punch is there? If you throw a punch you better hope the bastard you punched goes down without getting back up."

"Manly as hell," Kirishima grinned.

"Right, I guess," he agreed. There was truth there he had to admit, it wasn't like quirks were ever the only way to bring someone down. He'd achieved as much with his gauntlet back when he'd been with Edgeshot. Still, three ninety-nine was hardly going to stop anyone from getting back up. He did have a quirk though, and that thing had proven very well that a quirk could make up the difference. It wasn't a completely foolish thought, but last time he recalled he could see bone because of that very reason. Unholy might was not the same as a hardened knuckle.

"Alright, alright, I'm not gonna humiliate myself by scoring lower than Torenagi," Kaminari said. "Let's go try one of those racing cabinets at the entrance."
"They were crowded as hell dude, we'll be waiting for days."

"Well the sooner we go and line up the sooner we get a turn," he said and went. Kirishima shrugged and followed.

He frowned, as he wondered if to ask or not. It couldn't hurt anyway. "Mind showing me how you punch like that sometime?" he asked before Bakugou could leave too. Kirishima had asked, but not in earnest. It was a thing of practice, something learned.

Bakugou scowled at him, but took his second. Maybe enough to look at the bruise he'd inflicted on him that morning. There was an obscenity on his lip to answer it, but he held it. "Fine," he answered, then went without specifying a then or how.

A second bruise would have left him less dumbfounded than that answer, at that second, as he watched him follow the others. He realised now he'd been pushing his boundaries back then with Midnight and him. There was no talking someone into therapy, truly and just as Midnight had no right to force him to do things he had no place suggesting Bakugou to do things either.

His phone vibrated in his pocket, Jirou.

Chapter End Notes

*I do not own BNHA. OC Material is my own.
[Main Class Building – First Floor – 7:10 PM]

She had chosen to remain collected, well, as collected as banging on the teacher's lounge door at six at night with not a soul around could make you. It was more than urgent to her, even if the nature of it demanded no urgent action that she had not already taken. The teacher's needed the recording and she sure as shit wasn't letting Torenagi get a chance to hear them before that happened. It was an ill confession that left her sick in turn, and she could only believe what the voice had professed was true, it was too specific and too filled with some sort of nasty passion that the man held.

Her patience had set to meet impatience only a second later than it took for the door to open and reveal Midnight of all people, though more stressed out than any time she'd yet seen her. Her casual outfit hid the lines less than her heroic one and made it obvious, as did her surprise, that she had not thought anyone would see her like this.

"Jirou?" She hesitated. "Why are you here sweetie?" Her lip twinged into a smile, before she spoke again, "Finally decided to take me up on my offer? The door is still open."

"No, Miss," she said as she rolled her eyes, though not for the heroine to see as she was busy rifling in her pocket. "I could explain but it is easier if you just listen to this." She held up the USB. "It's a listening device, and it's related to Torenagi," she explained. Midnight whisked the thing from her hands before she had a chance to play show and tell with her.

"A listening device." She held it up to eye level, accompanied by a low tone. Then she traced a fingernail across her jaw and slanted her eyes. "Where did you get this, exactly?"

"We went to his old apartment, and then one thing led to another and..." This was getting them nowhere. "It's easier if you just listen to it. It's proof that someone was spying on him at the beginning of the semester. There might be a way to track the villain down with it."

The woman diced the device between her index, thumb and forefinger, then slipped it into a slot at her hip. She looked around, then spoke again, "I see you've made up your mind about this, but this isn't the place. Whatever it is you've found, it's best we show Nedzu." She turned, and went, and she herself followed.

[Eastern Hosu – Time-well-wasted Arcade – 7:17 PM]

Call me, that was all the message had said. It told more, urgency, her messages were usually longer. He'd already raised it to his ear and it was dialing fine, for about six seconds, and then it declined. No answer and no voicemail, not that he'd expected Jirou to bother setting something like that up, however he did know she watched the thing like a god damn hawk. It was odd and it gave the fact no answer came all the more weight to the message.

He tried once more, futile as no one answered again. Odd again, odd enough to have him checking if he had signal. Of course he did, and he'd paid his plan just fine. He even shook the phone out of frustration, knowing it would do nothing before he tried a third time and last time before leaving a text message instead, a quick 'What's up?' It felt as if he should be worrying more than he was, but
that wasn’t going to lend an answer. Seeing himself by going there would, though.

"Yo, Riley. Get over here," Kirishima shouted from across the arcade. He looked up and gave a wave to indicate he had indeed heard him, and that he was preoccupied. At the fourth attempt to call he now felt like an idiot, and groaned like one, if what Jirou had to tell him wasn’t serious then he would look almost desperate. Something told him it was important though, he couldn’t remember at any point that Jirou had actually wanted to call rather than text him.

"First you text me and then you don’t pick up, very classy," he mumbled under his breath. He did not try again, not because he did not want to but because he was interrupted by a nudge, a looming figure, and a wriggle of black, gleaming eyes. Almost a foot taller than him stood a man whom was almost uncomfortably close for a complete stranger.

"Hey," the man said as if he knew him well.

"Hello," he answered as if he did, though he wasn’t sure why. His mind must have still been on the phone, which bled out as he perceived more of the man, who was in of himself also just that, odd. A pierced ear, a brown tan that crawled beneath a neat, clean cut collar and hair that verged from black to grey, something he guessed was due to quirk and not age, though he did look far too old for the arcade.

"Uh, nice blazer." The man stumbled. "I thought I recognised it."

He slid the phone away, reassessed himself from hunch to proper posture and still found he was shy by half a head. Then he shared the awkward silence, just for a second before overpowering his own rudeness with a question that should have been asked at the start, "Do I know you?"

The man returned a struck look, dumbfounded in it’s hurt. Then he urged to slap his forehead, stopping just shy of the action. "Right, right," he said. "I do this all the time. Hōtai Shokasuki’s the name."

"Hōtai," he repeated back to him. Still no bells.

"Come on, you gotta remember me right? She told you about me." The man flailed his fingers around his face if to mimic a picture frame, but then realised his futility and dropped them, along with his head. He wiped his face, and surrendered to a humiliating display of raising his hands once more, only this time in front of him like a zombie. "Frankenstein guy," he said.

Realisation hit him like a car stuck on a train track. "You were the guy who rescued Yono."

"That’s it." He snapped his ghoulish fingers, grey beneath the nail. ".Now why you remember her and not me, and to have to go to those lengths to make you realise it too, sheesh kid." He flicked his nose to dissuade his embarrassment. "I got a pretty good look at your face when you guys brought out the hero killer but it took me till after the incident to realise you were the same sidekick. Colour me surprised when I saw you a second ago."

"Is Yono alright?"

"Sorta," he answered with a painful smile, his maul was full of grey teeth. "Actually that’s why I’m here now, you haven’t seen her, have you?"

"No." He had mind to ask why he was chasing her, and why he had pinned himself with such a look.

"The runaway princess does it again. Anyway she’s not meant to be walking around alone right
So it wasn't injury related, the thought relieved him. "She can look after herself can't she?" It sounded a bit ridiculous.

"Oh no doubt." Hōtai nodded. "No doubt, and she agrees, doesn't mean it's safe though. Eastern Hosu is where her legal firm operates, the one established by her father. My agency and her firm kind of have a mutual thing goin' and she's my charge."

"A heroic bodyguard," he said. He couldn't say he'd heard of such a thing and it didn't seem necessary. The woman probably had a quirk of her own.

"We don't like that term, but considering the amount of flak she gets for her job its not inaccurate." He shrugged. "Most villains don't like those who help lock them up, and if anything happens to her then her dad would kill me, not that I'd be able to forgive myself."

"Sounds adorable," he smirked. He was keeping his answers brief on purpose now, as much of a chat as he enjoyed he needed to figure out what Jirou wanted. There hadn't been a reply yet, or a call. Worry was as mercurial a beast as ever.

The man played it off. "It's not like that," he said. "Anyway, I'll get out of your hair. Just figured I'd ask. You stay safe too, it's getting real dangerous out in the streets lately with all those masked guys running around."

"Masked guys?" The obvious came to mind but he didn't phrase it.

"You haven't seen? It's all over T.V, some fanatic group of villains, robbing ATMs and all that. They all wear these creepy masks, and started showing up right on the heels of All Might's retirement. It's like they're getting braver, somehow, even though it's only been like a week."

"I... I'll be careful," he answered. He wasn't sure if Hōtai knew about it, but he had no reason to mention it. Masked guys on T.V, it was a stupid sounding thing to get unnerved about under any other circumstance and it didn't make sense. Janus seemed to like working alone. "If you do find Yono tell her I said hi," he added as the man stepped away.

Hōtai nodded at him and turned to the door of the arcade, he half sprinted toward it and then he was gone. He reformed his own intention by taking out the phone again, nothing. It occurred to him then that he did have Yono's number, he could have assisted in that way, but it was too late now. He looked up from the device to see where the others were. It would suck to cut the trip short, but Jirou was not without rhyme, and rarely without reason. Something was up.

[Yuuei's Campus – Nedzu's Office – 8:20 PM]

"Troublesome, troublesome." The principal paced back and forth on top of his own table in front of her, and in front of Midnight and Aizawa, between which she awkwardly sat. "Eraserhead," Nedzu stopped his pacing. "Since this is your student, what do you make of this?"

The man returned a bored expression. "There isn't anything to make of it, it's intended for Torenagi and perhaps the police. That's about it." He tossed himself back in the chair, half lapsed, eyes closed.

"Passing it on now would be a bad idea," Midnight cut in. "At this stage I'm afraid he might not be able to handle it."

That prodded a half-lidded response, "Makes no difference, why do you think he hasn't already
"He hasn't, Sir," she answered this time. "I... deciphered it, today. Only a few hours ago."

"At least you had the sense to come to us with it right away." The man scoffed and looked back at Midnight. "Then, don't tell him now and you'll cut him down later, or tell him now and push your luck that it doesn't go too far. Those are your options, I couldn't care less either way."

The woman shook her head before she spoke, "It is important he knows, but not like this. I'll give the messages to him when he's ready and in a controlled setting."

"And people tell me I'm the cruel one," his tone was terse. Abrasive, like he was amused.

She ignored him. "At the very least wait until after the examination. It is important that he is in a right state of mind for it."

"Oh I am very well aware," Nedzu spoke, he had begun pacing again, slower this time. Each step was slower in fact, until he was at the very far edge on one of the corners. "I am also aware that any idea of keeping a secret such as this would most likely end in a failure, nor would it be morally correct." He took a look through the glass dirtied by night and storm, a long stare at nothing in particular, beyond the heads of the dormitory block and even those trees that sat at their hind.

"There is no immediate danger here," he finally spoke again. "But we do need to be careful, so for now, Eraser Head, you and All Might will keep a close eye on the one A Dormitory. The rest of the matter, as it stands, I will handle," he finished his sentence on a soft note, one that left an impression that thought lingered. A thought on the best course of action. It did come to him a split later, with the upturn of the nose, a spin on his heel, and a look at her between the two teachers.

[1-A Alliance Dormitory – Lobby – 9:01 PM]

A collage of failed attempts was splayed out in front of him, a result of a trip back to the dorm, a poke into the lobby and an estranged sit at the counter. It had taken persuasion even with the text and it turned out Jirou had pulled a fast one on him, worse still he couldn't get into his room; he'd lost his I.D, though lost was a strong term. Jirou had it, as Uraraka and Tsuyu had been ready enough to tell him which meant she'd been in his room. What had she found? The thought malnourished by answer had him on the verge of grinding his teeth. The most obvious possibility plagued him, those damn recordings.

"She really didn't tell us much of anything," Tsuyu said, this time not followed by so much as a croak. He'd infected them with his worry.

"Yeah." Uraraka frowned. "I hope everything's alright."

He looked up from a phone devoid of confirmation. "I'm sure she's fine," he said, and he did partially believe it. It wasn't like anything on those recordings hadn't been on there for a long time, it could bring explanation, and a sense of dread, but no necessity. The league, as voracious as they were, had to still be on the back foot. Perhaps that was a naive thought, masked beaks, coincidence didn't flatter the idea much.

"Hey at least think of it this way Riley," Kaminari said, straight-faced, but hard pressed to hide a corner of a joke at his lips. "If she doesn't come back then you and Kirishima can have one of your adorable little sleepovers again."

It burnt to be at the end of a similarly placed joke he'd made a couple of hours ago, but not enough
that he couldn't respond. "Just because your house is an electronic nightmare that scares all your friends away doesn't make our sleepovers adorable."

Kirishima whispered loudly in his ear, "I think his quirks started making him passively more stupid now." He snickered, then he spoke up, "You sure you haven't started leaking lithium boy?"

"Oh yeah maybe." He returned a playful look. "But you two ganging up on me again is even more adorable, you know? Not manly in the slightest, but whaaatever."

"I'll show you manl-"

"Are you jealous Kaminari?" Tsuyu asked, sharp like an incision, a grin behind a smudge of neutrality and simple to-the-point expression.

It worked enough, the fact Kaminari even put down his phone suggested it. "Am not." He frowned.

Uraraka exhaled just a tiny bit and hid her own laugh behind a large wooden spoon that previously lay discarded next to a mixing bowl, and among a collage of failed baking. "He sure sounds jealous," she said.

Kaminari gave an awkward expression, then huffed. "Not cool," he mumbled.

"I didn't think it actually bothered you." Kirishima rubbed the back of his head. "Sorry. Next time you can tag along."

"Considering we live together isn't that a bit redundant?" He looked at Kirishima and at Kaminari, the former shrugged, the latter did not.

"I'll keep you to that," Kaminari said, he sounded annoyed but didn't look it. If anything there was an odd glee there.

*Ding*, the oven behind Uraraka went and she clapped her hands together once in delight. "Alright test number three is ready!" She took a glove, opened the shutter and pulled on the tray which then made it's own way up to the counter before dropping on it hard. He pulled his hand away to avoid getting burned but by then Tsuyu had already nailed it down.

"Since you three are here anyway you don't mind being our test subjects do you?"

"Test subjects?" he asked. It didn't sound good, a test implied there had been other attempts that hadn't been successful, rather then them having made two good cakes before this like he had hoped it meant. His apprehension didn't stop much, she had soon cut three rather large pieces off, which on the surface did look good with a light and fluffy glaze. However, the side of it spoke danger, it was hard and crustaceous. He was no cook, and certainly no baker but he could practically taste the salt in the thing from a foot away.

"I think I'll let it cool off," he said.

"Nonsense, go ahead and eat it while it's hot!" she answered. Now he'd put himself in an even worse position, however Kaminari gave him a hard nudge before he could be guilt tripped into trying it. The look he gave him spoke a thousand words, danger. Now he knew exactly why Sero hadn't gone with them that morning, this cake, or rather even a worse attempt, had capered him.

"Free food is free food," Kirishima said, and before he could warn him of it he'd already taken a large bite, then another.
"Uhh," he said, but that that point all he could really do was watch, and observe the catastrophe. It was impressive how quick Kirishima turned from cheerful, to dull and sweating. It probably hadn't help the cake was still half molten from it's trip to the inferno, her insistence that it was good while hot was naught more than a cheap trick.

He dropped the fork he'd used. A growl came from his stomach, and he gave a choked sound. "Shit," he managed to get out and he hacked up what remainder of the cake was left in his gullet. That was barely any, although impressively what he did get out remained mostly in tact like it had been made of rubber.

"Are you alright?" Tsuyu asked. Kirishima answered by pushing off the table, and scattering toward the bathroom.

"If you two ever get tired of hero work you can start making poison," Kaminari's words dripped with sardonic overtone.

Uraraka frowned, unperturbed by the damage she'd done. "Darn, I really thought we had it that time."

He took the recipe from the table, the one they'd evidently used. Their ingredients matched, everything matched, until he looked at the scale they'd been using. He wasn't sure why or how it had ended up reading negative two hundred and fifty five grams, but that surely wasn't meant to be the case. Baking soda and salt at those quantities, even flower without enough egg to back it up, that would explain it. He picked up his fork and poked the cake, he had to push hard to even get through some of the surface, how Kirishima had taken so much of it in one go he wasn't sure. Must have been that iron gut of his, and those razor teeth.

Kaminari must have realised too because he looked over his shoulder toward the bathroom. "I think he might be done for."

"Definitely." He nodded. "You guys might as well have been troweling cement into your cake." He scratched his head, then he saw the reason. The measuring plate, the one to pour ingredients on if you hadn't the tool, was absent. They mustn't have re-calibrated the scale with the bowls they had been using.

"Maybe I should go check on him," Tsuyu said.

"I'll go." His friend probably didn't want the girls stumbling after him into the guys bathroom. "Maybe you should ask Satou for help." It was weird he hadn't yet heard about their murderous baking and it left him wondering how many others had fallen for it. Midoriya could be a good guess, he'd probably find it hard to refuse Uraraka, that thought had him hiding a grin as he made his way to the bathroom with a bottle of water in hand.

It kind of hit him with a bit of nostalgia, his old friends had pulled pranks too and he'd helped out like this more times than he would have liked. The idea that Uraraka and Tsuyu had planned this was as amusing as it was ridiculous. It took no guessing which stall Kirishima was in, as only one of them made a sickening hurling noise and a few groans. Still, just to make sure he tapped it with his knuckle.

"Occupied."

"You gonna be alright?"

"Tell my family I love them," he said through a pained laugh.
"Good enough. "Here." He rolled the bottle of water under the door. Then he let himself down on the plastic surface connecting one closed stall to he next. As awkward as it was it did give him a chance to talk in private, and the puking and... whatever else appeared to have passed for the most part.

His friend answered after a few chugs, "Phew.. I thought it would never stop."

"I think Jirou must have found something on those recordings."

"Huh?"

"The listening device. I think that's why she texted me."

"Did she text you back yet?"

"No but what other reason could she have?"

"True, true. Maybe it's for the best."

"Yeah well now I won't find out what was on it." He knocked his head back a bit, a tap on the plastic, in frustration.

"I wanted to know too man, but you can be you'll hear it sooner or later if it's about you."

"I guess."

"Is that why you were so upset this morning when you came back from Midnight's?"

He twisted his head to the right a bit, then back. An exhale came as he blinked, but he answered anyway, "No. And I was pissed off for the record, not upset."

"Okay, why were you pissed then?"

"It's..." He thought about deflecting again. "Midnight wants to stand me down."

His friend might have jumped in surprise, as he heard the bowl's plastic cover fall down behind the door. "Wait, you serious?"

"Do I sound like I'm kidding? Anyway she said it's only if I don't do as she says."

He heard the sound of the door unlocking and shuffled aside a bit. "Damn man, that sucks." He looked recovered, partially, but he didn't make a move to leave. He slid down, on the same panel of stall to the right, he had the bottle in his handle and fiddled with it, before putting it down gently.

"It does."

"So what's she want you to do?"

"Talk to my dad, I'm guessing, and my sis."

"That doesn't sound so bad."

"It's fucked," he said and shifted, the floor was starting to make his ass sore.

"Well if it's fucked then it's fucked, but a real man would try anyway. It's easier once you get the ball rolling." Kirishima gave him a look that was wide and earnest, and maybe a bit sympathetic of the soreness.
“Yeah, but that's easy for you to say,” though as he said it he heard himself, and added a quaint, "I'm not upset about it or anything, really. It is what it is."

He snorted. "I get it dude. It's kinda hard to keep explaining to your parents why you're constantly coming home with bruises. In your case it must be pretty difficult too."

"Well, my old man...” He flicked his finger against his knee. "My old man, he's, uh," It was hard to put into words how he was. Apathetic, disinterested, vitriolic?

“A dick?”

He twisted his mouth in what could have almost been a laugh but held it, it wasn't something he wanted to trivialise. "I thought you said Jirou didn't tell you."

"Doesn't take a genius to put two and two together when you barely talk about him. Your uncle on the other hand, it's pretty obvious man."

"It is?” he asked, though he expected Kirishima not to answer. He did, with a nod. He wasn't sure how he felt about that. "Anyway that's not the only thing she wants."

"If it's anything I can help with-"

"You still got one of those flyers?"

Kirishima moved his hand into his jacket pocket and filched out not one, but two. "Here," he said. "If you lose those I've got a few more dozen spare."

"Dozens?"

He rubbed his nose and grinned. "Well I figured if I just kept shoving it in your face you'd eventually give in and go."

He took one and gave it a glance. "I don't have much of a choice now." He didn't have much of a choice in the former either, Alo had texted him before Jirou had to tell him that he was coming back to Hosu as soon as two days from now and that they should meet up. He had thought himself safe from a face-to-face talk with the man since that phone call on that night, but he was true enough to his word, apparently.

"No need to be like that, it'll be more fun than you think. I'm pretty psyched to try Yuuei's boxing club after I saw Bakugou annihilate that machine earlier. You could come for that too if you'd like."

"One thing at a time," he answered as he slipped the flyer away after folding it longways. The brief view of it had told him the team wasn't meeting until the week after next but as long as he had proof for the woman that would be enough. She couldn't exactly fault him for something out of his control.

"Anything else she got you doin'? Maybe some dance lessons, or telling you to get a girlfriend so you get in touch with your emotions?" He jeered.

"No, what? No.” He threw him a look. "I gotta write about myself once a day, that's it."

"Okay, well I can't help you much with that. I bombed my last writing assignment, remember?"

"Yeah I figured." He chuckled in remembrance of it. "I think Present Mic said you had the creative prose of a doorstep."

"He was being generous, besides you're the expert on you, ain'tcha?"
"Should I be?" he mumbled. Midnight claimed it was other people who were the experts, and he was inclined to agree.

"Can't really be a wrong answer anyh-" Kirishima's stomach rumbled and he grabbed it. "That taste... I don't think I can trust cake ever again."

"That cake knocked Sero out for hours and yet you got it out of your system in like five minutes. If you ever get stuck in the wilderness alone then I'd be scared for the animals, you'd probly tear them apart with your hands and eat them raw."

"I think it isn't done with me yet." He shuffled to his feet and almost slipped as he dashed back into the stall.

He took that as his own cue to stand, he didn't want to be privy to whatever was gonna happen next. "Feel better," he said over the stall wall.

"Thanks," he stuttered. "Thanks man." That was all the reply he got before he left. He left the bathroom in thought and a tad more made up in what to do on the tasks and on the recordings. If Jirou had handed those USB in then it was no longer his problem, out of sight out of mind and that left him only with the former.

As luck would have it the moment he did step out of the bathroom near the stairs he saw the catch of a jack. Jirou's jack, unmistakably. She stood at the counter, peering at the cake and at Satou, Tsuyu and Uraraka across. Kaminari was gone, maybe headed the same way Bakugou was upstairs to black out like a sack of potatoes, or just to keep practising his endless text based prattle. That didn't matter now, Jirou was here and his curiosity reignited from candle to bonfire.

"There he is," Tsuyu said before he could speak.

Jirou turned and shoved a card, his I.D. "Sorry for taking it," she said, but then not one word more. As if nothing had happened.

He looked at the other three, then back at Jirou. "Can we talk?" She did nod, and they moved far enough away to be out of earshot.

"What's up?"

"You serious?" He frowned, pulled out his phone and held it up. "Come on, you're not gonna tell me that wasn't urgent."

"I handed over the USB, that's all. Don't worry about it."

"Yeah I figured that part out. So does that mean you found something?"

She answered, slower, he noticed that hesitation well enough. "No. I tried everything, just static," she said.

"Really," he said, "...nothing whatsoever?"

She shrugged. "Maybe the teachers will have better luck."

"I see," he answered. He wasn't sure if to buy it, he wanted to buy it, to believe that she wasn't hiding something. She hadn't done a convincing enough job for that, there was something she wasn't telling him but he knew well enough that she would say no more about it.
"I did tell them about the house. Principal Nedzu said they'll look into it, I'm sure they'll find whoever that guy was."

He dropped his suspicion better than she had dropped her insincerity. If she had found something, and if the teachers now had what she found, then they would come to him. He hoped, anyway. "I'm glad, but we're in trouble, right? For going to my old apartment."

"No, no we're not," she said, but it didn't sound like that was a good thing. "You can thank Midnight for that, she was the first person I ran into. She kind of played it off like she'd been the one to cause you to want to go there, you know, counselling stuff."

"...Right," he nodded. That could or could not have been a lie, depending on the answer to the first. "That's good. But seriously, nothing at all-"

"I'm going to go to bed. Just forget about it and focus on tomorrow, apparently it's going to be a big day. I'll catch you before class so don't oversleep."

*Abrupt*, he thought but made no attempt to stop her. "Night," he said as he watched her go.

He let out a bit of his frustration just by standing there. She had good reasons, and maybe she wasn't lying. There was no need to feel conflicted about it, and rather than dwell he went back to the counter. It wasn't late, and perhaps Kirishima would be back out sooner than he thought.

Satou gave him an ominous look as he sat down, though it was partially so because his eyes had darted to Jirou going upstairs moments before. "How are you, Torenagi?" he asked.

"Good," he answered. The guy sounded like Midnight talking like that, he had thought him less articulate than that but at least it was different coming from someone who wasn't a counselor. On that note he did feel good actually, despite. Out of sight, out of mind, again, though this time he had to kind of push himself to keep it at that.

Chapter End Notes

*I do not own BNHA. OC material is my own.*
He had watched Jirou out of the corner of his eye that morning but nothing had stood out as weird. He had mentioned the recording in passing, she had given him the stock answer and Kirishima had pretended like he hadn't heard at all. Dropping it became the best answer for now, he didn't want to be whiny or annoying with it when he now had to live with them. It was, essentially, their first day back after all so a little trust might get her to tell him anyway.

"Two weeks," Aizawa said as his first words upon entering the classroom. "That is all the time you'll have to get into shape."

Iida was the first to speak, "Two weeks, may I ask fo-"

"If you aren't up to scratch within that time frame you'll fail to make the cut for receiving your provisional hero licenses."

"Provisional hero licenses?!" Midoriya blurted out the words, causing annoyance on Aizawa's face at the parroting. "But if we have those it means."

"I'm getting to that," he interrupted the boy, who shrank under the scrutinizing gaze. "Yes, it means you'll be able to use your quirks to save lives, within reason."

"Then we'll be like... like the real pros!" Ashido cheered, which set off a bustle of similar paced gossiping.

"All it takes is a piece of paper to turn you from a bystander into a man of action, that's how important it is," Kirishima said.

"And people stop treating you like a kid," Ojiro added.

Kaminari grinned as he spoke, "And I bet girls would fall head over heels for me if I had my license."

"Not even a circus acrobat would turn head over heels for you, dork," Jirou said. She'd turned to Kaminari to say it but he himself had caught her eye, it was a blank look he returned and a stunned one she did. It broke away as abrupt as it had emerged.

He turned his thought away from it, and toward the topic. A provisional license. It was a tempting idea, beyond tempting even. He'd heard of the exam back home, they'd had them in America too though he had no falsities that there weren't differences. Anyone could take the provisional exam as long as they thought themselves confident, and could pay the fee. A worthy fee it was as a provisional license garnered you privileges with value beyond monetary and the ability to interfere further than self defence. It also gave you status, respect, even if it was below that of a regular hero. More importantly than any of that it signified you had the chops for it, which made it a must have. Now that, that would be something to show his sister.

"Settle down. I hate to say it but at this point I would wager none of you have a hope of passing so don't get any big ideas." The way he made it sound he didn't come off as very sorry at all, enjoyment
at the idea might be more palatable.

"Can the provisional license exam really be that tough?" Mineta asked.

"Why do you think we planned the forest lodge? Obviously that didn't pan out as we had hoped, so our only option is to use these two weeks to remedy the situation." Aizawa folded his arms and walked two steps backward before turning toward the blackboard. "Like I said, two weeks. That's all you have. It'll be intense, and constant, so don't be the first to hit the floor." He took a chalk from the bottom of it, though it was a fake which doubled as a remote type deal for the electronic backboard. Then he began to sketch a line, which looked to signal the steps they'd take. "The most important thing we have to do is to first begin the development-

**Wham,** the shutter of the door flew back. Midnight came in heel first and stomped it down, as gentle as a stomp could be when delivered by stiletto. "Are you sweethearts ready to come up with your very own special moves?!" Behind her stood Cementoss, complacent, and Ectoplasm whom was a man he had spoken not a single word with outside class. There'd never been a prompt to.

"Two, to be exact," Aizawa said. "There is little leeway as I said-

"Our- our own special moves!" Kirishima yelled as he pushed himself out of his seat, something Aizawa didn't expect as the rush of excitement that followed it as it had on his first announcement now came tenfold. It was one thing to get a license, another to have your own signature ability. It even left himself incensed, that had to be the perfect thing to take his mind off of the recording crap.

"Special moves, just like real heroes," Uraraka said.

"Here I thought we were in for another week of boring school stuff," Kaminari said.

"Looks like it, now you can stop playing games on your phone during class, eh?" Sero tapped him on the shoulder, mortifying him with the teachers nearby presence.

"There'll still be classes, two hours of them from six thirty to eight thirty," Aizawa answered, to an immediate groan from Kaminari. "...Since you're on campus you should have no trouble getting up a little earlier for a while. These are going to specifically be targeting your heroic reasoning ability as that will be important for the examination as well."

"I'll be heading them." Midnight nodded. "Any other free time is yours to use as you please, however let's get back to the topic at hand. This isn't going to be easy, it'll probably be the most difficult thing you've done so far."

"Yes, these moves are meant to be unique. Not just anything will do, they must be things that will ensure your victory," Ectoplasm explained.

Midnight pointed at the ceiling before parading to the center of the room. "These techniques will be what defines who you are as a hero young ones." She slowly lowered her finger and then put that same hand on her hip with a wink. "And we'll be the judges."

"Anything subpar will not be allowed, so do think of something that will leverage your advantages and make your opponent think twice about taking you on," Cementoss said.

"It all begins right now, so go get changed into your costumes," Aizawa pointed out the door. The class emptied as a hoard, with the teachers leaving first, minus Aizawa who had taken the time to wipe off his meager plan from the board. He himself was about to be the last to leave with case in hand, alongside Kirishima, when the man tapped his friend on his way past.
"Sir?" Kirishima answered but the teacher looked past him.

"Kirishima, stay. It won't take long," he said. "You can go Torenagi."

He didn't listen to the command as fast as the man would have liked, causing him to emphasise it with a head shake to make it clear he was only going to say it once. He took the hint, but not without a look back over his shoulder and a touch of the door frame. If his friend was worried he didn't show it, but he didn't look like he knew what it was their teacher wanted either.

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[Yuuuei's Campus – The Training Dreamland – 7:45 AM]

"You didn't need to wait for me man, it was nothing. Just some home stuff, my mum was getting cold feet and wanted to check up on me. That's all."

"Oh," he answered. He should have figured since Kirishima probably wasn't the only one. "Tough break."

"Yep, I sorted it out though. All good." He gave a solid smile, if it was forced he couldn't tell. There was little difference between fake cheer and not in his face. An envious trait.

"So uh, special moves, sounds complicated," he said in an awkward attempt to change the subject. They were only a hall or two away from where they were meant to be and they'd already changed.

"Yeah sure does. Donno what I could with hardening to really call a special move... You're lucky you already have one man."

"I do?"

"Don't you? Come on, don't play dumb Mr. I-can-sink-a-building," he said with no small amount of mockery.

"That, even if it was, it's not really a good considering how long it takes. Imagine if I'd tried to use that in my battle with Aoyama, it would have been a joke."

"Even if that isn't a special move you can do all sorts of stuff with emitter quirks."

"I guess Kaminari really will get to see me break my fingers." He chuckled, then noticed his friends expression. Kind of the same it had been at the camp. "Uhh, you know if you still wanna do that speed training we can pick it up again, or anything you think'll help you make a special move or whatever."


He tossed the final door open and was met with the gym they'd been designated too, large and white and cement spread. All of it was solid, from the floor to the walls and even the ceiling, the only part not made of the same type was four metal pillars that were each delegated at a corner. Vast sets of lights hovered from thick beams that connected the pillars at the middle of the room high above them. There were no obstacles of note, no high rises or segments to use as markers on the ground. His cleats made a harsh skidding sound as he moved with each step toward the other students who'd already met at the center, in front of their teachers.

"This is where the magic happens," Cementoss said in the loudest voice he'd ever used. It could have just been the echo, but for once the man looked excited, or rather felt excited as there was no easy way for his face to make such an expression. "Welcome to my personal playground, the essence of
creativity and something you may refer to from now on as The Training Dreamland, or TDL if you're so inclined. Here I can create specialised objects for each and every one of you."

As if to demonstrate the man placed his hand on the floor and picked up the cement like it was snow. It enclosed on his palm willingly as if comprised of molten metal, and flowed with it to rise into the visage of a dummy. A tall man with bitter teeth and fangs. Horns, wings, all manner of horror sprung from it's body until it was formed. A human gargoyle, so to speak.

Iida raised a hand, at a blood fast pace. "Sir if I may ask a question?" he said.

Kaminari made away with a quiet groan. "Nice," he said under his breath.

"I have a feeling you will ask regardless, what is it?" Aizawa said.

Iida gave Kaminari a sharp, wince inducing look that shone through even the yellow marble glass of the Gundam helmet. "Why are special moves necessary for provisional licenses? If you might enlighten us."

"Think about it," he answered. "It's a heroes job to rescue civilians and limit potential casualties in any calamity, be it natural or villainous. Naturally a heroic test designed to give you that permission would test your aptitude for this, so it'll cover anything from information gathering, fighting and even leadership."

"Sweetie," Midnight interrupted. "What better proof of your aptitude as a hero than to show you have a diverse arsenal of tricks up your sleeve that weigh success in your favour. They can be flashy or useful, or both."

She took her whip from it's holster and bowed her head enough to rest her hand on her leg, the material purred as she made a thin cut in it with a zipper. Then she launched the whip forward from her other hand and caught the gargoyle around the neck. "Total K.O," she shouted as she drew her leg behind her, tightened the whip into a choke and carried wisps of her quirk along every inch of her body. It spread, coming close to them, but not before the gaseous quirk swung with the gyro of her hips and foot and launched into the gargoyles face. If it had been alive it would have swallowed every inch of the powdery sleeping draught, instead the stiletto tore through it's neck, severing it and allowing it to hit the floor with a thunk. By the time she turned back to them the cut in her costume had drawn back closed and any danger of comatose extinguished.

"Wow, cooooool," Ashido said.

Momo nodded. "I see, so a special move has to be encompass technique, style and power into it."

"A mark of a heroes true fighting ability is their control of the situation, an amateur will instead be controlled by the situation," Cementoss said before turning to walk to the back of the room.

Ectoplasm began to follow the cement man. "Special moves can be for a variety of situations, for instance non-offensive moves like Iida's recipro burst provide a lot of utility. A short timeframe in which you can move at blinding speed… now that is worthy of being called a special move."

"You'd really call that a special move?!" Iida said as he almost glowed with pride.

"Yes, utility provides a lot of opportunity to save. Mass none lethal attacks are also effective, such as Torenagi's Unilateral Subduction."

"Ah," he said, and then he blushed at giving such a dumb response.
Kirishima nudged him in the back. "See? Told you dude."

"Of course, there is also room for lethal abilities so don't be discouraged if your quirk doesn't provide you with much beyond power. Like Cementoss said, creativity is key so aim for impressive."

"I guess it's true that some of us already kind of have some moves figured out," Satou said.

"And a lot of us have no idea," Ojiro added with a nervous laugh.

"Some moves may be the result of an accident, others experimentation and many more through dedicated work. That's why today we'll be focusing on helping you do exactly that," Aizawa said as he signaled Cementoss, who then took a firm stance with his hands resting upon the floor.

The floor tilted, then shook in a vigorous manner as if beneath it a volcano had begun to erupt. It didn't travel beyond the scope of the building but rumbled just below the area of the teachers touch. First came a hexagonal jut from the floor, uneven, followed by a dozen more than sprung into a valley of cavernous high rises which transformed the area from a mere training floor to a valley. Each was large enough to hold the size of their classroom on it's surface.

It didn't end there, behind the valley and circling around the walls the floor bubbled, and twisted and cascaded into archways and halls that looked like part of an ancient city. They were occupied by dummies and likenesses and more monsters that looked to be for target practice but their weathered, dark clay skin told him that to break these would be nigh on impossible. Last but not least in the remaining space behind them rose high walls, series upon series of them, and thin spires packed in a tight arrangement, he could guess those were for breaking and for scaling. More spaces emerged behind it, where he could not see, until the entire room had become another land.

It was a place someone could only dream of and it took the wind from Cementoss as he finished it. He stepped back and a chair rose to meet him while he wiped his slack hand across his forehead. It lacked perspiration, instead there were cracks that came and reformed over in endless assault. Ectoplasm took the place where he had stood and prepared to use his own quirk, the clones he had seen a few times. It made a sick sound as he gargled forth the clones from his mouth, as they splashed they crawled and formed into identical men to himself upon each of the hexagonal structures. Something living to practice on, he wagered.

"Ability development will be the highest priority in these coming days but remember that training isn't the only outlet for improving that capability," Aizawa looked over his shoulder at them before turning his whole body back around. "Some of you may want to delve into modifying your costumes, which could use some improvements by now. The support department is just through the back of this hall and to the left," he said and waved to the door behind them. "They're fully licensed under Power Loader to make modifications, so don't get on his bad side."

He walked back to them slow, slow enough that tension built over nothing but his footsteps sound. "So, are you ready?" he asked as if to dare anyone to say they were not. Fed up with semantics he mimicked what Midnight had done earlier by throwing his finger up, though more toward them than up above them. "If I see any of you slacking off I'll kick your ass myself, so let the spirit of Plus Ultra take you all to new heights!"

He'd found an area to himself, and for his version of the man whom was enigmatic to him. Around them was a stone garden, complete with trees that made a mockery with how detailed they were. It wasn't something he dismissed, as he recognised what Cementoss had made in this part, it was the very same garden where himself and the man had spoken about his abilities previously just scaled downward onto the posterior wall. Somehow fitting that this would be where he'd try to make a new
"Go ahead and show me how you fight Torenagi," Ectoplasm said. "Then we can go from there."

"Yes, Sir," he answered and took upon himself the stance. Rusty, he noticed as soon as he had. He adjusted his shoulder and his hand, then tightened it like Leina had told him. It was hard to take all the advice he'd been given into account and that meant he hadn't given it enough thought. Not for lack of time. No more recordings, just this, he told himself again.

He gave it a breath and set himself to kill the man. Then, he tightened his hand without speaking, upon Ectoplasm's position, who's face widened as if the clone had been hit with the pain of his compression. It slicked away out of the pressure of his quirk, an easy dodge but he'd been expecting that. He lunged next and brought his foot up to deliver a side on kick to the clones rib, this one it didn't dodge but parried with a fist as solid as any. It retaliated this time by giving him a hard push in the chest, a warning at best and a command to try something else if he read into it.

He tapped the floor with his foot and thought upon the cartridge, the compression built and he dashed. As he came up within arms length he hopped and brought fist down in an arc, Ectoplasm blocked it again, just in time for him to let the cartridge go. _Bang_, it shuddered and the clone stumbled, which gave him room to tackle him in the stomach and wrest both his hands in the tufts of his clothes to encompass both that and skin beneath. The texture was unnatural, but flesh was flesh, and his quirk drowned in myriad jitters from his own arms weighing Ectoplasm down. When he deemed it sufficient, to the point where the clone could not have moved itself he took the foot he had tapped and drove it hard, up and right with cleat tip to strange jaw.

Ectoplasm's face spasmed as it went backward with the blow, and as he watched he wiped his tremor upon the ground. He didn't expect the man to fall over, and he didn't, instead he came back to face him and reformed. His black eyes and unnerving visage dissipated and came back, his clothes tore and regrew and he flickered as if he did not really exist at all for that point in their fight, which was true in part.

"I believe I get it," Ectoplasm spoke with half his jaw rebiding the sentence to form into proper words. It clicked before it was whole again, a sight of that caused him discomfort, even though he hadn't used his quirk to weaken the man's face the cleat had still done some ugly amount of damage. "Torenagi, explain to what you believe your style is. The identity your heroism possesses."

He was tempted to say unpredictability, to cause uneven blows on a balanced enemy. That wasn't to the point enough, he knew, and then answered with, "I guess my whole thing is creating openings for my attacks with my quirk. Destroying defences and things like that."

Ectoplasm didn't nod as one might have expected a teacher to at such an analysis. He was perfectly still in all aspects except the sway of his own clothes. "That is true," he said. "However what I mean is when others see you, what kind of hero do they think you are?"

He frowned, as to think on it. The simplest version of it, was what the man wanted. "Someone who can do a lot of damage with a flick of his wrist."

"Right enough, however I would also say... you are someone who knows what villains can do, and would go to any means to stop it. Am I correct?" He noticed now, on his third time speaking that the man didn't move his mouth, his white, bleached jaw full of perfectly straight teeth did not even move once. Yet, a broken jaw had impeded his speech. How much of what he saw in front of him was actually the man beneath? And how much the image he had crafted with utmost care?

"Yeah," he answered. "I would want to put a villain down as fast as I could."
"Then the answer is obvious, some kind of capturing ability would suit you perfectly. It would need to be powerful enough to not only subdue those you use it on but leave any other villain who saw it trembling in fear. There's no need to fight those who's spirit is broken, I am sure you know that from your internship. Are there ideas that come to mind?"

"I can make things heavier," he answered. "Like I did to you, but that takes a lot of time."

"Yes, that would not be suitable based on it's temporary nature alone. Then how about this, are there any heroes whom you've seen using capturing moves?"

"Kamui Woods, with his Lacquered Chain Prison," he said. "Edgeshot had one too, where he immobilised a villain by moving through parts of his body." He looked over his shoulder, toward the entrance. "Eraserhead's entire style is to subdue. And then, you also have one, don't you?"

"And what do all of those moves have in common?"

"They're quick."

"They are, but more than that they are all unique. They use our quirks, be it to get the enemy into a position to be captured like Eraserhead's or to leave the enemy no option like the Lacquered Chain Prison."

"So my capturing move has to be something only I could do, and it has to be instant, is that what you're saying?"

"Yes, essentially something unique to you, but also unique to your other forms of attack. A special move carries a feeling of awe, it puts the fight to an end and carries word of your power beyond the encounter. Everyone knows the Detroit Smash, for example."

He looked at his fingers, there wasn't anything like that in his arsenal. His only move, Unilateral Subduction, was not so much suppression as it was another opening. If he tried to use it on a group of villains it would be futile since he'd need to target them all individually. Only that thing could do that, he recalled, it had done that to all the Janus clones. He could try it, he wasn't scared of it. Not while it was... absent. Another thing that came to mind caused him to look at his other hand, something he had found little success in.

"That gun move could also be particularly handy, if you have ideas on how to strengthen it's power," he said.

"There is one thing I've been trying to do lately, using my compression and decompression at the same time, but each time I've tried it kinda backfired on me and nothing else happened."

"Go ahead and use it on my clone, it will not feel any pain you might inflict."

He walked up to the man at his beckon, and made an awkward motion of placing his left hand on his neck and right on the ear. He was still reluctant to try it considering he'd faceplanted last time. Still he did, and he felt the weight in his right shoulder, and then his bicep, his forearm and finally the greater part of his hand. It expressed itself by tearing at him, to threaten him with collapse, it was odd to think that a feeling of collapse was welcoming and familiar. His left began to fight the idea of that welcoming with omission, a lack of feeling but for the subtle push of tightening muscle. It drank in what it could, it robbed the side of it's density and lightened.

There wasn't enough evidence to say switching his compression and decompression were the reason, or had helped him get further than the first time. If anything his right had been uncomfortable with the switch, as although both his arms had tried compression aplenty his right had little experience in
decompression compared to his left. If he was showing off how much he could do, or what he wanted the move to do, then it was right that he had switched back.

He wasn't sure as to why he had changed his grip though, now that he thought on it. Last time his hand had been on both ears, but this time it wasn't. A misstep, but one he was too far gone to take back. His left arm pushed further together, as if steel rings that grew tighter each time bound it and drove the stab of quirk into it first twice, then seventeen, and then hundreds of times. His right shook, and he shook now in that shoulder that had initiated it. It was to connect and to reach through to his left within his body just as it was now edging on within the clones skull.

He hardened his grip at the intertwine, that peculiar twitch that meant a touch of one to another. Then it came, and it shook and pierced the shaking with a blade and still he tightened his palm around Ectoplasm's neck, and pushed it harder to his ear. His concentration was all upon it, that if he could push through it he would make some kind of breakthrough. He wanted it to be, because it was so much so a thing that not even it could do, a thing that would be all his own even within his mind.

It was that thought that brought with it a key of fear when it did break, and it broke as it hadn't before. There must've been a reason why it tried not to combine the two aspects, and it wasn't because it would hurt him or it would injure his body. It relished those. It sung to the thought damage, to inflict and to take. Yet this, something that might cause a great deal it did not try for, and as it strung him back to equalisation and his finger twitched enough to release he grip he got a hint of as to why. It could have been his own thought with how untampered it was, like it was stating a fact.

"Guh," he struck the low noise of pain from his mouth unwilled and as his grip faltered. There had been no change in the man whom he had laid his fingers upon, not a drop, all of it was on him just as it had been with the dummy. He knew now not to run for his legs would twist and he would fall, but he took that fall that came with it would twist and he would fall, but he took that fall that came with it nonetheless as a staggered part from standing to slouching and then undignified hovelling. The ground simmered beneath his touch as the flood, all of it's rings and it's knives and it's shaking mass escaped his fingers from nooks in his body.

"Crack," the ground thundered. It split where he placed his hands and tiny self-propagating lines emerged which were then made visible by number. They spread and spread around him for several feet not in any pattern or with any tact, nor with any of his consent. Shhhkre, the ground grated against itself and he curled his finger through the now brittle stone, which lay around him like shards of broken plate. It gave one final toss and concaved ground, then, it was gone and he throbbed in his head, his hands, and along the lines that marked his skin from hands to heart. His right arm heated. He did not speak a word for the minute that he looked up and saw a haze of the clone, it had still not moved. It took time, he was dizzy, and he could hear noises which only added to that dizziness. The sound was his compatriots working on their own moves, not even far from where he was, but divided by walls and hills and ground and platform.

The clone did not move as it did finally look down at him through a shift in it's eyes. It was off but not for any particular reason he could find from the outside. It was an internal difference, a change in demeanor as the man comprehended whatever the quirk had done to his clone. It shivered as it had before and reformed again, like another ghost had taken it's place. It offered him a hand and he took it, which allowed him to stand until he found his own feet. Then the rest came back to him, his image of the world, and he was truly normal once more.

"It has potential," the man said. "But not as it is." He blinked with how normal a response it was, like he and the clone had just lived in two different worlds. He wasn't willing to go back to the one he'd been in though, not the one where it whispered back. It was like treading further into it's reach."
would lend itself to immobilisation, if you could bear it for longer than you did, and executed it as if second nature.

"I'm not sure I want to try that again," he said. Whatever technique it was he was stumbling on, it didn't want to let him have it.

"That is your choice, but heroes shouldn't shy away from danger."

"It's not that."

"Then I suggest you think about it thoroughly, and until you do we can polish some of your fighting technique instead. Perhaps try to think of some other special moves as well, such as modifying your costumes gun attachment as I suggested."

"Yes, Sir," he repeated what he'd said earlier and shook the tension from his left and the dance of contraction from his right. He raised his hands again, into his stance, and prepared to leap without a thought on that which had spoken into his mind. He wanted to discard it, just for a few hours, and so he did.

[ Yuuei's Campus – Sports Field α – 6:20 PM ]

"Enough, enough," Kirishima said through pants of breath. He was lying in the dirt of the field in which they'd begun, and now evidently ended, training in. The sports field they'd used for their quirk apprehension test stood as empty as it always did when teams weren't using it.

"Here," he said and pushed a finger into Kirishima's shoulder, enough to undo his quirk. He had lacked breath too, but that was just from jumping around and trying to hit Kirishima. It had been harder than at the camp, but not by much.

His friend collapsed in his entirety as the weight on his body went away. "Sheesh," he said and rolled his arm onto his stomach. "I'm freakin' exhausted." His breathing slowed, and then let go into a satisfied sigh.

"I'm pretty beat too," he admitted. "And we gotta be up early for those heroics classes." He wasn't looking forward to that too much, all he wanted to do was train. He wanted to figure out something he could do. "You wanted to go to the support department tomorrow, right?"

"Can't hurt. Kaminari's down as well."

"Cool," he said. "Got any ideas for what you're going to do?"

"I just need to make my costume as sturdy as I am, and maybe something a bit spiky so people can't grab onto me so easily."

"You sure that's a good idea?" He dropped down into the dirt, his legs ached and his arms hadn't stopped aching.

"What do you mean? Everyone I fight tries to grab me, spikes will give them something to remember me by."

"And if you need to help rescue someone are you going to hold them so they don't get stabbed?"

Kirishima raised his head from the floor and gave him a conflicted look. "I didn't think of that," he said. "Damn it. I thought I had something there."
"Still more than I've got." He shrugged. "All I can really do on my costume is change the gauntlets like Ectoplasm suggested."

"Any luck on your special move?"

"I managed to get close to passing out again, that's about it."

Kirishima laughed. "Well you're not alone there, Satou practically knocked himself out trying to tune up his punching power."

"How about you?" he asked.

"Nothing. Donno what I can do to make a special move." He held up his fist, hardened, then unhardened it and re-hardened it several times. "It's not very flashy... and it doesn't change much even if I pump it more."

"Well, you wanted spikes right? Can't you make yourself spiky?"

"It's hard," he said. "Truth is my quirk was kinda shit for a long time. Before the entrance exam I kinda pulled it all together, it just clicked after all my work."

"I see." He was kind of in the same boat as himself, and this was unfamiliar waters for all of them. He bit the inside of his mouth as he wondered if to mention it or not. "There was something else that happened while I was trying."

"Hmm?"

"That voice. I heard it again," he stated plain as he could. It was fact, he was being honest, as he had promised. It made Kirishima sit up right away.

"You gonna be okay?"

"I think so," he answered. There wasn't a way to know until something set it off again. "Say... what did Aizawa really talk to you about after I left?"

"Nothing," he answered.

"Right." He nodded at him with a fake smile. Nothing.

Kirishima pulled at his shirt and looked away. "You."

"Me?" he asked. "...Or the recordings?" Going back on his word made him ill, but he was well accustomed to illness.

"Both." That confirmed well enough Jirou had lied, and that the school was keeping it from him. It stung but not as badly as it could have, at least Kirishima had come clean.

"What's on the recordings?"

"I don't know and that's the truth man. All Aizawa told me was that I had to keep my mouth shut about them for now, till after the provisional exam. I'm not supposed to put ideas in your head," he said the last bit in a weird way, like he was quoting someone.

"I should go demand them."

He shook his head. "Then I'm busted and you still wouldn't get them because the school has em'."
He made light of his annoyance by tightening his fist. "Even if I had them it's not like I'd go find that stupid villain, you know?"

"I know," Kirishima said. He looked sympathetic, which was all he could really do for him. "If you heard that voice then you should go see Recovery Girl."

"No."

"Or Midnight."

"Hell no. Aizawa wanted me to figure it out, I'm figuring it out, my way and not hers." He still had yet to write about himself, he'd tried last night but didn't get far.

His expression was worried now, and turned more so as he spoke, "Don't let that USB sit on your mind then man. We'll just put all our energy into this training and managing whatever is going on in your head, okay?"

"Yeah..."

Kirishima gave him a light shove, and a smile. "Come on, cheer up."

He shoved back, a bit harder. "You cheer up," he said with a smirk. The next shove pushed him over and he jumped back up with his hand. "You're gonna get it now."

He laughed. "Oh man I'm so scar- oof," he was interrupted by a half shove, half dive that drove him head first back into the dirt.

Chapter End Notes

*I do not own BNHA. OC material is my own.*
[Yuuei’s Campus — Main Building — 6:03 AM Tuesday]

Weariness. A simple enough concept and not one he could use to describe what had pulled him into a deep and immediate sleep the night prior, long before the others had. It was a fleeting kind of inebriation instead, like wind whistling between trees or the touch upon the surface of a pool. Whatever had done it pulled him down and now he had risen back up, to make his way early and unaccompanied between familiar corridors toward a worn door with a window out front and another on the exact opposite side.

He had mind to solve a problem, to spar with ideas on what to do for his special move. That had brought him to the library and pulled him inside. It was warm, a silky humid warmth like a dryer might endow to an area surrounding it in an enclosed space. The shelves, which for some reason he placed clearly as to where they should be, now stood an inch to the left with wiry metal frames that were unlike the wooden ones it had before. To prevent damage, he guessed, from the stuffy air. It would have been unbearable to visit this place during the afternoon like he had planned, as luck would have it he had time due to that unexpected sleep. That, and a buzz in his ear that wouldn't let him get back to it, that had grown in the night.

Truth be told Kirishima had been awake but he hadn't bothered to ask him to come. Books weren't his thing and that made him doubt libraries would be either, so he had trounced off foot after foot after finishing his new routine. A benefit to that routine, as he had missed in many months, was that it energized him a bit. Clarity wasn't a normal part of that invigoration but he felt that too, like he was aware, as if he was in the middle of a fight. He wasn't sure the two were related but it might be to the buzz.

He made his way a ways to the back of the library and ignored the other loners who had chosen to come here at six in the morning, not many, one or two hidden behind the taller shelves. The decimal system told him where, and the spines told him what. Physics books, he decided quick, were mostly useless right now when what he needed was novel not similar. He went for the chemistry ones instead, taking out one on bonding and density.

The clarity continued as he torched the words with weird accuracy. It made him wonder if this was how Aizawa always saw the world, moving at a point slower than it should have, or himself faster in his perception. A trained eye, attentive to detail, still took two or three swigs of each line to begin to grasp it which told him that maybe this stuff was a bit too far above his level. Still he tried, and made good enough a job of it until the opposite book on the same shelf he was looking through was taken and he saw a face. Iida.

"Good morning, Torenagi."

"Hey," he answered, startled out of his trance.

"Getting a head start on the next semesters readings are you? I would expect nothing less," he said and moved around the shelf to his side. He had several books in his arms already, enough to make the action of straightening his glasses fidgety at best.

"Oh, uh, nah." He shut the book. "I'm just researching for my special move."
"I see." Iida reached to put the books he was holding on the empty space at the top of the shelf and took the one he'd closed from his hands. "You have similar thought to myself then," he said and flipped it cover to cover. "Might I suggest a book to assist you? From one classmate to another, of course."

"Sure." He nodded. Iida then took a sleek book from within his pile and held it out, the cover of which read 'Real applications of quirks within the natural order and everyday life.'

"The title is a bit audacious but the content is sound." He handed the book over, which he accepted.

"Thanks."

"I hadn't found it useful for myself however I had hoped to pass it onto Uraraka. As it stands I believe you might be just as suitable a candidate to use it, and she has already got her hands full as is."

He pushed the soft cover back to the content page, three took his interest, but one in particular stood out most of all because it was by far the most out there. 'Suspension of disbelief; the use of physics, chemistry and biology in heroism.' It was arrogant as Iida had stated, but if it helped he would read it, later anyway. He tucked it under his arm for now. "Didn't think I'd see anyone else from our class here, especially not alone."

"The same to you," Iida answered. "I am afraid the methods of older study aren't very persuading to our peers. Having said that I too am inclined to use online resources, however sometimes all the intricacies on a topic cannot be so plainly explored digitally as they can within a book."

"True." He thought he understood, to a point, even he had a collection of books in his room now. A small collection, to be sure. It was similar to his CDs, he didn't need them but they were nice to have in a way.

"I also have a tendency to get distracted." Iida coughed and looked away.

"Huh," he said and tried not to laugh as the guy appeared rather shy about it. "I think I get it, I have the same issue sometimes. I broke my phone back at Leineif trying out a trick I thought of after reading about it online."

The boy gave him a curious look. "Care to elaborate?" he asked.

He paused to think how he could explain it, but this was Iida, he'd get it. "I wanted to try manipulate the surface of the touch screen with my quirk."

Iida moved his hand to his mouth and scrunched his face but didn't laugh, though he looked hard pressed not to. "I-I see. Most… intuitive."

He tilted his head a bit. "Sure let's go with intuitive, rather than dumbass."

"There's no need to be embarrassed, truly. In middle school I once tried to create the smoke that a car would make by revving and overheating my engine."

"You can do that?"

"It worked fine, until I blew a gasket."

He grinned. "I guess at least I'm not the only one who did stupid shit back then."
"Yes. Now, I do believe we must get to class. After you, Torenagi." Iida beckoned with a hand toward the library's self-checkout machines.

[Yuuei's Campus — 1-A Classroom — 7:45 AM]

He knew menace sat in his mind more than it did in those of others, and now he was also aware what form it had taken. His earlier clarity, utter clarity. That would not be an appropriate term on its own. It was clarity gained by way of a wound, the buzz now a haze as it had turned in the course of an hour and a bit. He could feel it worming and becoming increased, deadlier. There was reassurance in knowing that, because if he was to be a hero that brought some kind of hope then this should be something he could conquer.

That meant pushing that boundary again, the one the thing did not want him to push. An idiot, that was the word it had called him. It was fearful of his doing in some way. So, like the idiot he supposedly was, he would push it. Ectoplasm had encouraged him as such, and defiance was motivation to do it despite what pain it brought, motivation he would hammer into discipline.

"Mr. Torenagi. I presume you are still with us?" Midnight asked, retrieving him from the automatic scribbling of notes.

"Yes, Ma'am," he answered and watched her.

"Then would you mind explaining to me a possible solution to this problem?"

He looked at the board again but he knew what she was talking about. "There isn't a right answer."

She tapped her heel. "Care to elaborate?" Eyes were on him now, just a few.

It was the classic trolley problem, she had marked it by the same method with different variables. The train, set in motion by a villain, with two paths in its way. You could change the path, saving four civilians but sentencing one to certain death. "You can save four but you become a murderer. There isn't a right answer."

She nodded. "True, and what would your answer be?"

He pouted a bit. A test, perhaps. "I'd let the one man die," he said. "But, I guess with my quirk I could stop the villain by killing him, instead." If he presumed it did stop when the man stopped his quirk, anyway. He got a murmur for his answer but shrugged it off, it wasn't like he was condoning the action.

"That is true, as true as any answer. However even if you were to kill the villain instead, you would still be a murderer, would you not? The villain even being a villain is still a person."

"Becoming a murderer isn't a good look for a hero, irregardless of the circumstance," Momo said.

"But it would save more lives in the long run," Tokoyami said. "It is a tough choice."

Bakugou smacked his desk in response. "Villains don't deserve any better than having their heads blown off," he said. It was a rarity that he butted in.

Momo scowled. "And what if those villains are merely misguided? Some deserve a chance to reform."

Midnight's voice was tinged by some delicacy when she spoke again. "Do not feel you need to come
up with a definitive answer, my little hero-lings. The point is that there isn't always a good solution, many are morally gray." She wiped the board clean of the problem she had introduced. "People are saved by heroes, because of them sweethearts, but others also die because of them. Remember that."

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**[Yuuei’s Campus — Support Sector — 2:33 PM]**

Their trod in search of the support sector had brought them somewhere into the lost corners of the campus, across from multiple winding corridors in need of refurbishing. They had tiles smocked in dirty bronze and the glass panes marking the windows were shot with dust. Some parts of the school it seemed, were still forgotten. He had obligated to open the book a few times as they walked but abandoned it, Kirishima and Kaminari were too loud for him to make any progress.

"We're lost dude," Kirishima said.

"No way." Kaminari shot him a look as if offended. "Aizawa said it was just back and left."

"Then where are we exactly?"

The boy puckered with a sheepish expression before answering. "We're… close. Very close. I can feel it."

Kirishima stopped and turned on him. "Bullshit, I've never even been to this part of the school."

"Well maybe you should have led then."

He grit his teeth, baring the sharp incisors. "I would have but you said you'd been there already. I swear this shit always happens, you're worse than Jirou with it too, somehow. I bet you both were those kids who got lost in the supermarket when they were little."

Kaminari was already busy ignoring him, with phone in hand. "Speaaaaking of Jirou, did you hear she-"

"Stop changing the subject man. We gotta find this place before the 1-B students come."

"-But dude, her mom's a rockstar. That basically means she's a celebrity by association!"

His friend expression dropped. Then he growled his frustration and scratched his hands through his hair. "This is getting us nowhere damn it." He glanced over his shoulder and looked at him. "You're sure being quiet, don't 'spose you got any idea where we are?"

He looked up from his own phone and locked it. Tomorrow, his uncle had just told him. Fantastic. "We're there," he answered and pointed at the immediate right of him, past Kaminari's shoulder at the wall. A map was glued to it, with a star captioned 'You are here!' Clarity came with some benefit, he had to admit, even if he would rather spend it combating what was doing it to him.

"Oh, at least you have your head on straight," Kirishima chuckled. "Maybe not fully."

He had to grin back at that. "Right," he said. He was eager to see what the support department could offer too, maybe something better than a gun attachment.

He prodded the map, and traced it back to the training dreamland. "We're not that far, I guess. A few hallways away." He dropped his hand and turned back the way they'd come, then left.

"If we hurry now we might be able to watch Mineta sneak into Momo's room on the way back."
"Man, is that why Mineta wasn't in the dreamland this morning?"

"It's admirable," Kaminari answered. "Any man would dream of the chance!"

"It's a bit desperate," he answered himself. "Not to mention Momo could kick his ass without raising a finger."

"True that, the risk is what makes it all the more heroic."

Kirishima snorted as they turned the final corner. "Heroic, right man, that's what I'm sure Nedzu will say when he gets kicked out."

"There it is," he said. Ahead of them was a copper door that had been added recently. It's hull shone as if made from pure bronze and a tremendous heat tinged his skin even at this distance. Above it a sign, **The Refinery of Hephaestus**. A fitting a name as any.

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[1-A Alliance Building — Lobby — 6:59 PM]

He watched the screen as he sat deep with his back in the red couch, removed from the conversation the others were having next to him. Focus, a secondary part to his clarity, allowed him to tune it all out as he thought on the book. The author had a compelling line of thought when it came to quirks. The idea that no one really used their quirk to it's fullest potential, not from the most insignificant to the most amazing and that the premise of that was a good thing. It indicated that the limit of the quirk was that of imagination, rather than the crushing realism of what our knowledge stated.

That hadn't necessarily helped him, he had to admit. What had helped him was the next topic beside it, a brief chapter on the interactions of quirks with one another. He had explained that the relationship and compatibility of some quirks exceeded on some fundamental level what should occur. That ice, for instance, if heated should melt but if subjugated to fire from a quirk and combined with ice from an actual ice quirk often caused unintended effect, like an explosion, for instance. Compression and decompression, he was sure, could be thought of the same way despite both being one quirk. There was a possibility that the technique him and Ectoplasm were practicing was only the tip of it.

He could hear the static now as a whisper, so he had retreated a tad from researching it further. It could wait until the next day, when he was refreshed and his guard wasn't down. Instead he had put his eyes to the news, as they were running over local crime. One in particular had caught his attention, that of a local Hosu gang that had gotten caught and apprehended without a hitch despite the area around them being ravaged.

"The masked men accompanying the gang were not taken into custody, as they had fled the scene. However, a video of the villains was successfully captured," the newscaster with the devil horns stated. Then footage showed over the screen, and he knew his hunch had been true with Hōtai. The people who had fled had masks, a variety of them. One of them had a long hooked nose but many did not, it evoked a memory of a black mask. A veneered mask. He had never asked what had happened to it after that night, not that he wanted it as a reminder.

"This group still remains at large and the police believe they may be related to another group known as the League of Villains, whom recently caused the disturbance in Yokohama that led to the retirement of All Might." A series of pictures were thrown upon the screen, causing him to sit up in the couch, leaning forward at the screen. All for One first, then Tomura and finally Janus. "If you have any information related to these incidents…"
He looked closer at the pictures. They were all new, taken from that night, probably single shots ripped from the broadcast program. Each had odd detail, one that he hadn't had the time to appreciate nor pursued after the night of the rescue. They brought fear to him, an innate sort of thing that one might have rush into their minds when approached by a rabid dog, or facing a hurricane. It set a pebble loose, and pushed the static to loud word.

A__nswe―r me. Are you h__is, o__r are you min__e; Ril―ey?

It hadn't howled the words so he had not expected them. Howls were not as intimidating a talon as a soft spoken word, ne'er one that matched his own so exact. It was a beast when it fought, but this was the same as the tunnel the first time he had heard it truly. There was no machine to measure the race it gave his heart, but the pounding gave rise to a coagulated mind. It made him shudder but he pushed himself to not react, to not give it an answer, as trivial as that was. The T'.V. turned off with a click, and so did the overwhelming murmur of it. Back to haze it went. Someone was waving a hand in front of his face.

"Yo, you alright in there?" Kaminari asked.

He shook his head and looked right. "What?" Looking at him was, well, everybody. Kirishima had the remote he'd had in his own lap now in his hands. He must have snatched it.

"Dude," Kirishima said, he cocked his head in response. "What was that, man?"

"Nothing," he answered. "I was just curious, that's all."

"Curiosity makes Torenagi act like a zombie, noted," Sero said.

"I think he might have had enough television for one night," Tokoyami said.

"I'm fine, they were pictures. That's all." He crossed his arms and fell back into the cushions. "It wasn't long ago, can you blame me?" He shrugged, though in reality his heart was still rushing.

"So?" Kaminari said.

"So what?"

"Did you make any progress on your special move or what?"

"None, and I don't have any real ideas yet." It was true, even if he was practicing with Ectoplasm.

"Is that why you were reading instead of training?" Kirishima fumbled with the remote, setting it down.

He nodded. "Iida recommended I try it." Half his day with Ectoplasm had been spent trying his trick, the other picking pages.

"Pfft." Kaminari wore a smug look. "I think you'd have a better chance just getting him to teach you kicks like he's doin' with Midoriya out there right now." He pointed finger over shoulder to signal outside, though he already knew of that.

Sero nodded. "Making someone heavy as a house with a kick would be awesome, right?"

"Probably," he said. "But I can't do that. There's a reason I said my quirk is controlled with my arms, it just doesn't work if I don't use them." He had tried long ago but whatever let him compress was lodged in them, somehow, like an extra bit in between the muscle. They were an active part of the
process, not that he'd ever outright told anyone like this.

"So what you're saying is that all Bakugou had to do to win was blow your arms up?" Kirishima asked.

Kaminari answered before he could. "I guess even nitro sweat boy didn't think dismembering Torenagi live was sending off a good vibe."

"Fuck off, like I'd think a quirk would be shitty enough to be stopped by that. It's pathetic," Bakugou answered, then kicked his leg off the table where it had rested.

"I'll take that over my options," Kirishima said.

Sero gulped down a drink, then spoke. "I don't know why you care so much, your quirk's great." The inside of the glass he'd used was stained an odd green, some cooked up herbal remedy.

He waved his hardened fist back at Sero. "Hey I ain't sulking or anything but even with training I'm not fast and I don't really have any moves to compensate for that stuff like you guys. Except Kaminari maybe."

"Hey, if you're gonna rag on me I'm not gonna keep charging your phone, jerk," Kaminari said and spit out the phone cord at the corner of his mouth. He'd been offered the same opportunity, but he'd refused. He didn't want saliva all over his stuff, or anywhere near electronics.

"Hey-" Kirishima protested.

"I see what you're getting at. It's difficult to tackle something you don't know the shape of."
Tokyoym nodded, and his shadow did it in turn. He'd been keeping it out all day whenever he'd seen him, even in the locker room. An allowance to help him train it, he supposed.

"All I'm sayin' is that when you're all pros where am I gonna be at?" He sighed. "It's fine, I'm just thinking out loud."

Sero gave a Kirishima a vacant look. "You're being way more of a downer than I'd ever expect you to be… and here I thought that was Torenagi's responsibility."

"Funny," he answered, unimpressed.

Kirishima chuckled a bit. "Look I ain't being a downer, I just want to keep pace."

Bakugou tapped him hard in the shoulder. "Keep pace, what the hell is that even supposed to mean?" He spat to the side, disgusted. "Didn't you say you would be unshakable in the cavalry battle? If you can't go down you're damn strong, idiot."

The boy chewed his teeth as he employed scrutiny over the answer and when he came to the conclusion he responded. "You're right."

The blond kicked at him. "No shit."

"It's settled then, I just gotta become the toughest there is!"

He was glad Kirishima had found his answer as he had found one of his. He still had to find those others before the two weeks were up. And tonight, he also had to come up with something for next Sunday. He couldn't keep putting it off, he knew, as much as he wanted to.

"I need to catch up on something. I'll see you guys later," he stood, abrupt enough as it were, and left
toward the stairs.

[1-A Alliance Building — Riley 's Room — 8:33 PM]

His touch of pen atop paper was nothing more than a prod followed by another. He was drawing dots but he'd rather do that then admit defeat. The leather bound page was filled with attempts, his generic I ams, I dids and I wants, each taking up several lines that had been scrupulously cut out of existence by even more lines that were more scouring in nature. How he was going to write a page, let alone three, he had absolutely idea, nor did it matter. Clarity, the problem with clarity, is that details no matter how tiny, gnaw at you like a bed of termites.

One such termite had begun on him again and he knew now why he had instinctively thrown the laptop from his desk to the bed as if he were just getting distractions out of the way. If his mind truly was a boat and his hull a guarded thing then this laptop was the means by which water would be allowed inside, for he knew that Jirou had not thought of it without even having to look.

They hid it from him, despite that being hypocritical. So that meant he should hear them, to spite them for that. However, they had hid them, and they knew it was hypocritical, so why didn't they want him to hear it, until after the exam like Kirishima had said? The conclusion was simple, they didn't think whatever was on them was something he could handle.

He threw the pen down and rolled his chair out, then did not go to the bed but the glass door instead. He wanted to drop the thought, ignore it, because anger could get in whether or not his mind was damaged. Static, and clarity. A drug, and it's benefit. Anger was the price, that voice a consequence. The veranda slid apart and the air pelted him with an indifferent cold. A stark cold, some warmth and the occasional streak that made him feel wide awake. A smell hung in the air, sweet and aromatic like cinnamon, it was blowing down from the room next to his.

On the building opposite all the curtains were drawn and he could well guess why. The buildings design was a bit poor in the fact that the boys' side of their own dorm faced the girls' side of the 1-B alliance building. It didn't matter to him much but a floor or two down it would have great consequence, he wouldn't put it past Mineta to use a telescope. They hadn't gone to watch him try to climb earlier, he had a bit too much pride for that.

His reasons still stood, he didn't have time for those pursuits, or for the joking one Kirishima had put on the table a couple of nights ago. Not to mention, he supposed, that he had enough relationships to maintain without adding his own problems onto someone else's. Putting it like that was the easiest method to killing a desire of it, to spread the idea that he was too fucked to push on it and he could chalk it up to needing to vent. That was also not a desirable quality, he assumed, not that it mattered. Having heard the voice again, twice now, reinforced it.

He would keep it simple, special moves and taking care to patch holes in hulls, and the easiest way to do that last one was to be preemptive. He turned, shut the door and took the laptop, booting it in the process.

Opening the folder several minutes later confirmed his guess, and took him by surprise. Not only had the files remained, they also all had a smaller partner with identical name but for a single letter, to distinguish they were a copy. They had already been translated. He hesitated as he mis-clicked once, then clenched. He hadn't hesitated because he was clumsy, but more so because an idea peaked itself again. To realize you are not who you thought you were, to become someone else in that realization. He took the psychedelic book behind the laptop and threw it across the room, where it slid into the bathroom out of sight. He was sixteen damn it, he had no need to adhere to some philosophical bullshit. He double clicked firmly and the media player opened.
"Hello... If you are listening to this, I am sorry. Truly, sorry. For it means that I have failed." He heard the voice, sultry, elegant, measured. It was that man. He put all thoughts aside, and prepared to listen. "This." The voice cut into a hagged disarray on the syllable, before continuing. "This my confession."

[Yokohama City – ? PM]

It was within the last fold of his leathered lapel that he found his scalpel, it's thin edge honed to be his sharpest implement, and with which he made the most delicate of cuts into the flesh beneath his finger tips. Droplets were slipping down his mask but no shallow breath accompanied it to cloud the glassy eyes through which he peered. There was no fog, and he could perceive it all in minute, intricate detail. The cold did tinge his skin between metallic joints, and they clicked and clacked as they worked but did not stray, he was far too practiced for something so amateur.

As he watched the wound it wept red and washed away as a dull pink. He paused to reach inside once more, and his shoulder gave a sharp twang throughout the damp alleyway. The scalpel he pronged between his fingers didn't fall as he clasped the whirring shoulder with sheer strength, twisting the metal back into the position it should have been in. The tools he used to hold his subjects in place were adequate for this, but it did not please him to rig his own bone with it.

It did stop, after a time and by the necessary crawl of silver string underneath translucent tides of many times sutured skin. However the fix would only be temporary, damage to the metallic structure was something no amount of superior regeneration could repair, it was sickening to think a man twice his age could bow him so. A man worthy of his attention, of disassembly and study, but that was a taste to indulge some other time, he had much more stringent urges on his palette now. To that end he would do as he was told, as long as he still had these husks, echoes, of his accomplices power. A swift hand removed one such echo, plucked it, it disappeared into the wound and closed. A scar remained but dropped out of sight and mind the next. Then, he stood and turned to deal with his new guest.

"As I figured, Janus, still scavenging alleyways like some filthy rat."

He spared no surprise for the man or his words, there was none to spare for someone who so eagerly triggered the very wires he had set up to make presences known. He knew him, the wide white cowl that flowed into an entrenching coat, there was even a beaked mask to match his own. However those aspects didn't provide much detail of who he was, what he knew far more intricately than that was his pale sinew that flashed between gaps in his outfit. Imperfect, withered, useless. A wire began to uncurl beneath his sleeve like a noose, a means to seize an end he desired for this utterly disgusting being. He took a step forward.

"Stop," the man said, and mimicked a step backward. "I came to make you an offer. You and your band of miscreants have been making quite a stir lately, noise isn't good for business and the boss-"

"This one. Has no use. None. Not for one with such meager ambitions." Another step, this one more than a notice, more than a warning.

"The boss," he croaked as he took several steps back and cleared his throat. "The boss wants you back. You should be honored." He waited, then flustered as he received no response, before reaching into his pocket in a state of near panic. He held out a white card as he found it, it etched itself brightly against the dark of the alleyway. He looked toward him, as if expecting him to steal it from his hands eagerly, when that did not happen he let it drop. It flipped twice and extinguished in one of the murky pools at his feet. "You'll regret it if you refuse, Janus. This world is sick and in need of our cleansing," he spoke, noting the loss of interest, then he skulked away.
The noose disappeared from beneath his fingers, winding back around his arm. It kicked again, but this time he did not correct it. Instead he clenched it and moved through splashes in the ground, they dirtied his feet, soaked his bones until he made it to that one single orifice to within which he reached. He found it, still white and unblemished as if the surface were covered by oil, protected by a blight from an eon ago. A deep, dark trigram graced the surface and spoke to him it's origin that he already knew, the sign of only one organization. The Eight Precepts of Death.

He turned it over and read eight numbers, a code only one who had once upon been one of them could read. An invitation. A message. A promise and an... opportunity. The card severed in fragments, then to snippets and finally to dust in his hand. He looked upward and lingered his gaze, dull. He imagined that it should have felt dull, imagined to feel that dullness but there was nothing. His head stooped as scent and urge ached him once more, threads in the air which had to be followed. He put his scalpel back into his coat, then began to walk, forward into the foul darkness of the arriving night. There was still so much left for this one to do.

Chapter End Notes

*I do not own BNHA. OC material is my own.*
"You may, for the sake of these recordings, call me Weiss. It is one of my names, one of many you see because I thought them necessary despite the tool I was." His voice was like a stringent dance, made difficult by a leg wound. Each word hurt the man, be it through a wince in his voice or a stop in his superior demeanor. "My brother, my dear brother. You must know that this was all about him, all I did was for him. I say it not to absolve myself and call it right, no, but perhaps it will help you understand my ramblings, and what it has forced me to realize. I now leave them to you to make of what you will." The recording stopped, a thunk as if someone had pressed a cassette.

He wasn't sure what to think of it, but it did prove his theory of two, of duo, just one that went beyond mere villain accomplices. He gave himself three seconds to clear any thought about it, then moved onto the next one. They had all been reduced in size and length by whatever program Jirou had used, but some were still pushing upon minutes. The second recording made a spattered noise as it began to play.

"It's all set up, Nathan, it is all working as expected. Now just do as I tell you and we'll be out before long."

"Is this really right, brother?" He sounded much like his sibling, a deep accent that could have made him as old, but more likely around his own age, fifteen or sixteen or just a bit younger considering the authority he had over him. It was hard to tell due to the quality of the sound.

"Irrelevant. It's necessary." There was a click in the background like a door opening that halted the man, Weiss. Accompanying it was a metallic bang, as if a piece of steel armor had collided with something equally unforgiving. "Blackmist, have you come to lord over us?"

"That remains to be seen, I presume you're comfortable? Or rather, I presume you are ready to proceed."

"It is as you say."

"Good, then follow instructions as they are given through your phone. Do not deviate unless either I, or Janus, tell you." As he finished the sentence there was a sound of a step, of the man turning. "Do I scare you, child?"

"No, you don't scare me in the slightest," Nathan answered.

"A shame, fear is a good survival instinct for a villain."

"I'm not a villain."

"Is that so?" Black mist sounded amused.

"Leave him, all you need is his quirk not his compliance. That's what you'll receive as long as you provide us with more Niter."

"Relax, Weiss. We are all on the same side here, I don't wish to remind you of that. You'll get your
Niter, whatever amount you need, the league treats its affiliates well.” A whirring sound happened, and a thunk of some crate-like object hitting the red floorboards. “Consider this an advanced payment, all the other supplies you would need can be found in the hidden basement room.”

"Payment, what an apt way to phrase lifeline."

Blackmist ignored him. "I suggest you store any sensitive material there, as well. It will be only you who goes down if you were to be found out."

"I am painfully, aware."

"Come Wednesday, you are to meet Tomura and I at the southern gate as discussed. That is all for now."

"I'll be there." The recording thunked again, as it did so too did his pulse. He hadn't been aware of much outside of listening so it had destroyed his immersion within it upon stopping. It must have been taken just before the first week but that wasn't of much interest, it could have been recorded at any time and it would not have made a difference now, save for a chance that it extended back before he had even planned to attend. Then it would have worried him. Since it hadn't been, what turned to disgust for him about it all was the payment that was indicated, he was being sold for some cheap trinket. Niter, he had called it. He wasn't sure why exactly the man was recording these private conversations in the first place, perhaps the rest of the recordings contained an answer. He clicked the next one.

"It's Weiss. Consider this my first official entry, for which I will now use the term log." He had to note that the pain he had captured in the very first recording was absent in this third one, and he recalled it was that way in the second too. "First contact with the target was made, as was instructed, this was purely observational in nature. It was derived over the course of the past three days that the subject, 786115, leaves about thrice a day. There are no extraneous habits to keep in addendum, however the subjects uncle, 786115-B, has a rather unpredictable pattern."

"Why do you speak that way, brother?"

Whatever device it was recorded on clacked as Weiss put it down. "That is how they desire it."

"At least use his name."

"No names, they aren't important. I don't wish to be incriminated."

Nathan laughed. "We're already incriminated, this is about as incriminated as it gets brother. It's a whole crock of shit, you're even using my name."

"It's not your place to worry about it, or do you really think I'll leave your name in? Perhaps I should just to teach you a lesson. Take your dose and be happy it isn't you he wants now, Nathan." He put emphasis on the noun this time. "I need your quirk starting tomorrow no matter how you feel about it."

"I'm no child, I can do things I'm not happy doing."

"Then act your age. I am your brother, not your babysitter."

There was a grunt of displeasure. "I don't even think it works, it could be sugar water for all we know."

"I'd know."
"You would? You've gotten in that far?"

"I don't wish to talk about it." The recording ended, again. A glance at the other few files after it, until the very last few told him they were all shorter. All logs of days, presumably. It would lead him down a rabbit hole, of that he had no doubt, and an experience re-lived from another perspective. Rather than wondering why the man recorded it he considered to what purpose, for no action could be so deliberate. Maybe he intended to edit them later and had never gotten to it, or another purpose. He wasn't sure if he wanted to continue, but he did anyway, before he could think of a reason as to do so, of a doubt as to let him do so.

"Log two, it's Weiss again. My watch continues," he said, then paused.

"Did you write a script? It sounded like you were ripping off a movie, brother."

"Let me try that again." Weiss didn't laugh but there was a smidgen of it in the words. "If I am to be indicted then I must not appear daft, Nathan. This recording is to serve a purpose, after all."

"To prove we aren't ruining that madman's plans, is that right?" There was a shuffle of a sound, like a bench pushing, or a chair, against the floor. Then a door opening. "I guess I shouldn't have said that."

"As far as he knows. Don't worry, I will purge what you just said, later, but for the record brother. I follow no one's plans but my own."

"Right, you sure don't," Nathan answered and shut the door, behind him judging by the silence that followed.

There was a sigh, a long harsh thing. "This is Weiss. Log entry number two, Monday. Subject proceeded to the school as predicted, pursued with no issue. I will verify that he uses only that same gate tomorrow, but I do not see a reason why this would change. He stopped to take a breath, and move paper like he wanted to read something. A script, like he'd been mocked, maybe. "The preliminary message was sent as instructed, at this time we have little control other than that over it's function. This should improve once I place my quirk. Subject displayed no significant change in mood upon return to apartment, it appears he has chalked it up to coincidence. We will continue to exacerbate this with the script given. Log finished." It ended as spoken, and he found it just a bit too much to bear. He strained to initiate the next one, but he did.

"Weiss again, this is log number three. It's Wednesday. Yesterday the subject displayed erroneous behavior to what was observed, however I do not believe there is necessity for concern. Subject returned to abode around seven forty-five, with the second message having no visible effect. Today the quirk was placed, and-"

"Brother, the uncles here. Stop fawning over your voice and look." A chair clamored, the device thunked again as Weiss stood. The shutters of a window opened behind what must have been the desk, where he remembered the camera. "What are we going to do? If he tells his uncle about it then we're through, the police will be all over this neighborhood."

Quiet, then a drawer being pulled open. "I placed my quirk, we can do something better now."

"You sure? If he doesn't get intimidated then-" "Enough, Nathan. We have no other choice."

There was an annoyed tut-tut. "You got it, El Capitan." A metal bit hit the edge of the desk, then a bit of glass. A phone. It was a time before either spoke again, but the sound of breath quickened.
"I've got it, now what's next?"

"Prevent him from having access to the messages we've sent, then wait and tell me when he tries to use the phone."

"Someone's calling. I can't do anything right now."

"It must be the uncle, just wait." Silence spanned after the word, then it sounded as if someone was placing a heavy rack on the desk.

"It's back," he said. Then recording stopped, abrupt. He hadn't expected it to and it left him frustrated because of the moments before. This quirk, these two brothers. It was all strange convolution. What he did know was of their success, he glanced at his phone, not the same phone but it brought the same memory by the print of it's cover. He found himself exhausted but not done as he leaned back in his chair. He scratched his hands across his forehead then opened eyes wide and just went ahead. There was nothing to gain through further torment.

"Hello again. Weiss, Log four. Apologies for the sudden ending of the last recording, my brother got carried away I'm afraid. It is a consequence of a quirk such as his when he does not take his remedy, but I digress. Subject was successfully intimidated, until the date of the trip we will only seek to disrupt him as much as possible as instructed. Entry to the abode has proven difficult, however I was able to place more of my quirk inside the apartment. There should be no possibility of his movements without our knowledge now. Naturally, I will keep watch."

"Brother."

"Not now, Nathan."

"Brother."

"What?" He snapped, the device fell. "Nathan- You took it yesterday when I told you, didn't you?"

"It didn't do anything."

"And why didn't you let me know?"

"I didn't want-"

"You didn't want what? You knew what would happen without it."

"Of course I know." There was a harsh cough, then a collapse like someone had fallen. "Hurts."

"Wait here. I will go contact Blackmist." The door slammed and then there were only groans for a time. Then a stir.

"It's still on, good," Nathan said. The pain in his voice was gone. "If you can hear me, then know if it wasn't for this stupid quirk then we wouldn't have to do this. It was Janus who… He told me he could help me. It didn't work out that way."

There was a clap of shoe on carpeted wood as he stood. "I'm jealous you know, maybe that makes it easier. I wanted to be like all of you in that school of yours. That's why I didn't think and now I'm dependent on this crap." Something made of glass shattered against the wall as it was thrown. "There isn't much choice left for us. We've found another man, someone who can help us for a price. But," he said, then didn't speak for half a minute. "I don't think there is a cure. I'm quite sure, there is not a cure, I can feel it in my head. Scratching." A gentle tap came across the recording, like finger on skull. "Sorry, whatever your name is, if that's worth anything. I doubt it is." The door opened in the background.
He turned off the recording at that second, that very syllable. Hands shook, and his head bled a futile ache. It wanted him to stop so he did, he pushed back and stood because he knew if he didn't he would vomit right then and there. He busted his knuckle on the table to gain some type of control over his senses, slammed the screen down next, grabbed I.D., took jacket from the hook on the door and stormed from the room. Think, he needed to think. Think, think, think, he repeated the words like a chant hoping that it would allow him to do just that. Steps were gone long before he registered too much of them, and he found himself in the lobby with fists balled in pocket. Anger? It wasn't. Frustration it was neither. Acute and stinging was it's conclusion, more of a confirmation of what he had already known on some level. There was noise up ahead, in the lounge part of the lobby, so he did not step the way the lobby entrance was and instead sunk out of sight through the back of the garden, or at least he might have had someone not caught his eye before he did.

"Heading out?" Jirou said.

"Yeah," he answered as chipper as he could manage. It actually came with ease, odd assorted triviality like things made more sense not less.

"A bit late for a walk, don't you think?"

He stopped, to shrug at her. "I gotta."

She looked displeased, like she was going to say something however she did not. Instead a compromising sigh. "Have fun then."

"I'll try." He nodded and then he was gone. There was no intention to walk three hours and find solitude this time. Just a walk to settle a mind made a minefield, perhaps a sit.

Light tinted the walkway as he chunked the door shut behind his step. It hung about him orange and walloped reflections at his eyes from bushes nearby that must have still held a hint of water. He took his time to walk to the end, then he went right. It was an obvious thing for him to choose because in reality he had no set destination. He met a path that was unlit after two minutes, took a curving path from it that went underneath a tall glass building. That brought him to that building's corner, from which a sly step through a single parted hedge placed him outside the entrance of a tunnel. That tunnel was an extended one that led toward one of the battlegrounds and he didn't take it, it would have been locked down for the night and he had no need to destroy anything either. Instead agenda had him on a narrower stretch that went around it, up some stairs onto the tunnel itself where there was a viewing platform, and a bench. It gave him a horizon from which he could see the main building tall behind him, the dorms in the distance but in front nothing except the trees and the city. He had come here once, to do much what he wanted to do now, made easier by the sight of Eastern Hosu's slow moving traffic. It was kind of close to his old dorm.

There is no cure, Riley.

He clenched the muscles in his knee as he heard it and sat down. His hands he uncurled, and rubbed them together against the toil of night. There was no cure, and as it stood this was now what reality was, that he would always be this way. He understood but what he did not was the man's reason, other than guilt perhaps. Villains shouldn't be ones to feel guilt but they were human, all humans felt guilt. Pity, born from the guilt of treating him, someone similar to his brother, like he had. A token gift to make some useless attempt at redemption.

"Not much of a walk, is it?"
"Jirou," he said. "You followed me?"

"I followed you." She frowned, he tried not to. This was exactly something she would do. "Tell me, how much did you listen to already?"

The muscles in his face strained taut, and he wasn't sure if to lie. Then, well, there was no point to it. She had a myriad of ways to know. "Log four, if that makes sense."

"I figured," she said and sat. "I stopped there too, kinda funny isn't it?"

He found no amusement in it. "I guess."

"I've heard all of it now." She hesitated then looked down. "It's my fault. Nedzu asked me to show them to you when I thought you were ready to hear it. I told them to wait, because." She shook her head at him.

"I wasn't?"

"That's not it."

"Then what?" He gritted his teeth. "I wasn't going to throw a fit or something. I want to know, and-"

She slapped her hands onto the bench on either side of her body. "Shut up."

He did, and rung his hands out more, before speaking again. "Sorry," he said. "Tell me."

"I couldn't listen to them again, alright? I needed a break from thinking about it. I still do, why do you think I was so eager to get rid of them?"

"Ah," he answered and his voice dulled. Idiot, he told himself.

"I know it blows but can you do me a favor and not listen to the rest before the exam? I… I need to wait a bit before I can do this shit again, even if it's selfish. I can't concentrate and it's just one thing after another. I just want to enjoy everything being normal for a bit."

He rubbed his left index finger with his other hand, the knuckle ached and he looked at her. Her expression was one wide worn and filled with distraught apparatus. She had given it thought beyond thought, probably worrying each night before when and how she might break this to him. Ask him to wait, to hold off. It would have been hell similar or beyond what he himself had experienced by not being allowed to know. Having pursued it, and being asked to wait instead of told, made it easier for the right words to come to his lips.

"We can wait until after the exam, or however long you want." He would deal with it, until then. Learn to placate it, live with it, before then. If the tapes had set him off in his room the consequences could have been dire. It had been pre-emptive, as he'd desired, but he had gone about it with the haste of a fool. That of a child. Another attempt to ask her in earnest would have been what he should have done, to relieve the pressure of a cage bound tight on his mind. A hull stretched to crack.

"Thanks," she said.

He waited, then decided. "I'm gonna delete the copies I made. If I have them there… I won't be able to stop myself looking at them. I think I've already heard enough for now, anyway."

She nodded, with some ease. "Let's go back." She stood, and he went to trudge beside her.
He found the morning's lesson to be the equivalent of a two pound-block of cement being shoved into his humming, aching skull. Probably far worse than that because at the very least bricks of cement didn't speak to you while you tried your best to ignore them. The lesson, which had ended now, had passed him by in epithets of case study by case study similar to what they had done the prior semester. He wasn't even sure when it had ended, but he stood as it did.

There is no escape, Riley.

It had repeated that phrase, damnably constant, in his mind and he knew why. No cure, no victory condition and it did not wish him to forget it for even a second. Peculiar it was, as due to the onslaught, due to being forced to think on the nuance that there was no cure he had found that it did not bother him. It did not bother him in the slightest. He supposed, in some way that catastrophic realization leaves behind only what is real, that because there was no cure he had no need to spend time worrying about it.

On some level it disturbed him as well, had he ever really expected there to be a cure? Some magic fix-it for his tapered thoughts of self-destruction? That just wasn't how this worked, it hadn't worked like that for what his dad had owned for a span; a scary bout of self-doubt and alcohol fueled loathing. Time was the only real miracle because time makes you cope, and with each second beaten you've shown to be able to cope more and to be who you are in spite of what might be unmaking you.

Not having those thoughts did leave a gap. He filled it with Weiss and Nathan, their accents repeated in ever reoccurring fact. Nathan was like him, but he didn't know the full story, he had to remember that. Still though, he wanted to know what had happened to them both. There was no going back on his word now, the recordings were gone from his computer, he had surprised himself by going through with it. There had been about five that he hadn't heard, and he'd know what they held in a week.

He took his bag from the side of the desk and pinched his hand in the process. Pain was a nice way to pull away from its whispering, it needed his malformed clarity to do what it did and the stubbing of toe, the slam of book on hand took that away for a time. Distraction did it too but in class there wasn't enough of it. He looked ahead, Kirishima had already rushed to go and get into the bowels of his training after what Bakugou had told him. Never to fall, that made one a kind of juggernaut to be sure.

"Torenagi," Midnight said as he passed him. "Are you alright? You were quiet today."

"I'm always quiet," he answered. He was, to be fair. His mom had told him concrete enough to only speak when spoken to in a Japanese class unless the teacher was searching for an answer.

"Remember what I told you, by this Sunday."

"I do. I'm working on it."

"I hope you are. I was serious about what I said."

He paused. Let it trickle. Then got rid of it. "I'm not-"

Don't you want to tear out her throat? You can't hide it from me, Riley.

"You're not?" She frowned. "Torenagi."
He pursed his lips, pushed the phrase from repeating itself in reality like it wanted. "I meant, I'm not stupid. I'm on it," he said. Then, pretending to be offended, he left her standing there and walked out the door. It didn't pay to be rude to teachers but he could get away with it under that pretense. He needed to move, to not indulge it.

"Hold on, Torenagi," she said after him and he halted with his fingers on the door, which he used to drag himself back a few steps.

"Yes, Ma'am?"

"Your uncle will be here about noon. I've already informed Aizawa so once the training dreamland session ends consider yourself excused for the day."

"Got it, thanks." He nodded and set about his walk. There was uncertainty as to why she had even bothered to tell him because, well, they were still on break. He had permission to do what he desired even if the expectation was to train and to get ready for the weekend following this next one.

[ Yuuei's Campus – Training Dreamland – 11:45 AM]

He held his finger to the man's temple and his right palm on his neck, he felt the push his right thick with shaking and his left born of blades. There was desperation in the new setup, hope that something would just 'click' as Kirishima had put it. The consensus, as he found out two seconds later as his arm pulsed with the shock of riveting convulsion, was that no, it would not click for him just yet.

He dropped, as he had every single time he'd tried it in the past two days. Arms to floor as quick as he could, this much he had picked up, as he watched the earth terraform about. Decompression cut into the ground and crumbled it, compression made rue with the fake structures. The bench Cementoss had been so proud of fell apart leg to leg, split in half. If it hadn't he might have just kicked it out of frustration, tried that suggestion of Sero's and laughed at his own wish for it. Yes, a kicking style would be just the thing, but no one quirk could be so easy as to give him each answer as if by platter and banquet. His own quirk, he found, he wanted to tear out of his skull right now, because despite his reading he still could not make sense of why it wasn't working. The static didn't help, for it droned it's danger in a serious tone only when it would bother him most, like after a failure such as this.

Useless, always so useless.

He ignored it, however truth in its righteousness still hurt. He stood, and looked at the man. No change but for what he had told him had occurred the day prior. "Anything?" he asked anyway.

"Sorry, Torenagi but the disorientation felt by my clone is too fleeting to have any real impact on my fighting ability."

"Figures," he muttered. "I can't do it again for today, so let's just go back to fighting instead, alright?"

He needed something to vent on. The man nodded, and he prepared.

No lunge this time but instead a compression centered beneath the man. It was dodged with ease and threw dust upward, which he kicked into to try and connect. It dodged him again, however the next fist did touch, and then another. In return he received a kick of Ectoplasm's own, one he dodged by jumping over it. All of it was fast but he had focus to spare. Enough to come up with something tricky.
He gave the man a third punch, cuffing his arm but not his face like he'd tried. That, he grabbed because it was opportunity. Heavy weight he gave it, it fell, the man didn't. He knew that clone was stronger than any normal person should have been, despite its endurance being frail. It didn't matter, he pushed himself back and put out both his arms and concentrated. Speed, possessed speed that made his quirk flow from him, came.

"Subduction," he said. The floor beneath Ectoplasm gave way by a foot. The area of it was small compared the real thing but it caused the man to fall and because of his heavy arm even fail to stand properly. He wrenched his hand up now and crushed it together. "Compress."

It did, more than he expected. Three times in separate bursts behind, above and inside the clone. It crumpled and collapsed, disappeared like so many others throughout the day. He stopped and looked at the hand, not because he was proud of what he'd done but because he knew he should not have been able to do it. He had thought and spliced three times, requiring three lines of his quirks so called attention to accomplish. It was unnatural to him, and the next itching of mind told him exactly why. It wasn't his doing.

Don't you still crave power? I can give you everything. Just let me in.

His hand dropped to the floor and let its shaking go as he entered the pit where he'd destroyed the clone. He saw the part it had eaten into, how each had formed and compressed and dissipated. Not him, acted through him. A shallow attempt at drawing him toward it. He responded by pushing himself back out of the pit and leaving the destruction where it was, as he had sated his quota of what disgust he could handle for today.

"Young Torenagi, still not making much progress I see," All Might said as he unclipped the gauntlet from his arm. It was a means to relief, since he couldn't take off the weights.

"Yeah. I'm still a bit stuck," he answered and let two fingers on his right hand hold the cartridges like empty glasses.

All Might's lip drew up a tad, then dropped. "If I had to say, you are playing it too safely. That immobilization move you've been practicing won't be of any use if you don't bring it to fruition soon."

He shrugged. It wasn't helpful advice, he'd figured that out. "Thanks, Sir," he answered anyway to be polite.

The man became more serious, like he was trying to draw an ember of the authority that he'd carried previously. "Go beyond, Torenagi, anything you have you should try, even if it's reckless because now is your chance to be reckless. We've got you guys under control, alright? Just watch Bakugou if you want to see what I mean."

"Bakugou?" He looked up to where he knew the student was, as All Might turned to walk away from him toward that very spot. The only glimpse of him he caught was by his spiky hair in a set of clouds, he'd pulverized so much up there it was hard to see. He was in the middle of something now though, his hands were held very still. It was of enough interest for him to fold his arms and watch. As he did he could more acutely make out the burns that Bakugou had inflicted on himself despite the smoke, scabs and purple abrasions dotted the arms and the tips of his green gloves where he'd broken the material. He shifted his foot back, widened and dug his heel into the dirt.

"AP Shot!" Bakugou yelled as a dense heat left his gauntlet like shotgun pallet thrice packed. It was bright against even the well lit area, as well as dangerous and red in a concentrated point at its tip as it left a hole like funnel the student had made with his hands. It was the similarity of it that caught
him, that was very close to his own softball technique. The distortion it caused blew a hole in the rock in front of the student before even the fury of the explosion did, that only served to widen it and then blow the stomach of stone wide open. It gave way, slipped off the top of the hill and rolled on its side. The roll became a bounce and careened now to the very edge before it flung itself right at All Might far below it. The student howled before resorting to words, "Hey, watch out! Above you!" All Might looked up but it wasn't like he could move now.

"Idiot!" Aizawa tore at his bandages to mount some kind of maneuver to save the man, and he himself held out a hand to crush it. It was too fast though, for both him and the teacher. Just five feet above the man it stopped, as a foot collided with it in a red blur, tossing fragments of the stone against the ground along with powdered dust. Midoriya landed just beside All Might, with a heavy metallic clunk from iron boots he had not seen before. They were both unscathed.

"All Might, are you alright?" Midoriya said as he stood.

All Might gave an energetic nod connected to a quarter of a bow. "I am, thanks to you young Midoriya."

"Wait, wait hold up. That was you, Midoriya?" Kaminari ran up to them. "That was a crazy amount of destructive force dude."

Kirishima joined them. "And here I thought you were the punching type like me, man. Sheesh, people are changing up their styles left and right."

He walked up to the, now quad, himself to take a closer look. "Those are some fancy shoes," he said as he bobbed down to look at them. "So you came up with something after all?" he asked. He could see they were Iron plated and had been dunked in green paint, it must have been something he received today just like Kirishima and Kaminari had with their upgrades. That support girl, Hatsume, was efficient in addition to insane.

"Hatsume came up with the design, the support department got all the materials and Iida gave me some pointers. It's not something I can turn into a special move yet, but it's kind of the direction I've settled on."

He smirked. "It's awesome."

"Yeah, damn cool," Kaminari said.

Midoriya stepped back and rubbed his neck. "It's just a stopgap."

All Might clapped him on the shoulder with as much strength as his frame allowed, which wasn't much. "Not at all, I'm sure this'll end up turning into something really special Midoriya. Keep working on it and it'll be great for the license examination."

"Seeing you make this progress is getting me all pumped up," Kirishima said. He'd been making progress too, not that he would admit it before it was done.

"All Might." Aizawa scowled. "It's dangerous. Keep your distance from now on, got it?" He turned away without waiting for an answer.

"That's rude," All Might said then looked up and shouting. "Bakugou, my boy. Sorry about that!"

Bakugou glared at them. "You should be more careful, All Might," he said before ducking away from the edge.
"Right." The man's shoulders sagged, making him look too small for even his suit.

"Anyway, never mind all that. You guys all upgraded your costumes too, right?" Midoriya said.

"Observant as usual." Kaminari grinned and stuck his new, white disc-like gauntlet in the boy's face which he grabbed at right away.

"I think most of us got upgrades already. Hatsume really is a genius, with Power Loader on her side she made all our improvements so quick. I think only a few of us couldn't make up their minds." Kirishima flashed his eyes right.

"Ah, you didn't modify anything yet, Riley?"

He frowned. "Not for lack of trying," he said and held up the gauntlets. "These can't really get any better without getting heavier, so I didn't bother. It's not what I'm looking for." It had taken much a debate to refuse Power Loader, whom had insisted on making a prototype for him to try. A few wasted hours later even he had come to the same conclusion, a downgrade to his mobility was undesirable for practically everything he did.

"Well I'm sure you'll come up with something great eventually."

"Hopefully." The voice was doing a good job of stopping him.

"Well as far as style changes go I think mines the best," Kaminari said. "Wanna see it in action Midoriya?" Before the boy could answer a large shadow appeared in the hallway that fed into the dreamland, larger than the door itself until he actually saw who it was. Blood King.

"Listen up class one A. It's our turn to use the gym so scram."

Aizawa approached the man as if he wasn't being towered over. "We still have ten minutes left, unless you forgot to how to tell time. Not surprising coming from a haemotolagniac, maybe you should have left some blood for your brain."

Blood King growled. "A deals a deal Eraserhead, I've let it slide too many times this week but it ends here. Gather up your knickknacks and move it before I toss them out of here on their asses."

He shrugged. "Fine, have it your way," he said and looked over his shoulder at them. "You heard him, pack it up. You can come back tomorrow."

Monoma walked out from behind Blood King and at them with the cheap clocks on his costume smacking this way and that. It looked uncomfortable. "Helllooooo one A. Did you know that half of everyone that takes the license exam fails? That means in a week all of you plebes can fail together."

He laughed.

He kicked the dirty floor in response and flung the two fingers baring the gauntlets over his shoulder before giving the student a nasty shove as he passed him. There were no words to spare though, he wasn't up for getting baited today or throttling him like he deserved. He'd almost made it to the door when he stopped by Aizawa. Before he spoke the man did.

"I already know, you're all clear to go. Your uncle is already waiting."

"Thanks," he answered and proceeded a few steps. He had figured out why he needed permission now, despite of his earlier conclusion.

"Don't keep lagging behind, Torenagi. There's no room for pitiful progress like you've been making
"so get it together."

"I know."

"Good, because that's the only warning you'll get, the next stop on that road is failing the exam and that isn't something someone with your reputation wants."

He stopped but wasn't sure why. His teacher was right, for someone like him to fail an exam to prove he could be a hero would be like giving them the right to assume all they wanted. "It's just, a lot, right now, Sir." He looked back at the teacher. "But I told you I wasn't going to waste your time back then, I meant it."

Aizawa gave him no sign of approval, or dismay. "Get going, you shouldn't keep relatives waiting. It only causes trouble." He nodded, and did just that.

"You think he'll be able to catch back up?" All Might asked as he walked up behind Aizawa.

"If he does or doesn't is none of my concern, unlike you I don't pick favorites. Don't devote yourself too much to one student," he answered and walked away.

He shook his head and looked down the tunnel that let out of the dreamland, empty now but for a few one B students that were still making their way in. "Is that so?" he said, to no one in particular.

[Eastern Hosu - Outside Yuuei's Western Gate - 12:31 PM]

"Sorry for the wait," he said as he got in his uncle's rusty blue car and slammed the door shut, it was the only way it would stay closed.

"No matter." His uncle pressed a knob on the dashboard above an unused ash tray, the hum of the singer's voice went silent. He wasn't sure who it had been, Johnny Cash maybe. "How've ya been, boy?"

"Alright," he answered flat. He always hated that question, even if it was just a courtesy to ask, because every damn person you passed on the street in his hometown was guaranteed to give it to you as if they actually gave a shit. That was one thing he liked here.

The man adjusted the rear view mirror before he turned the car on, although it didn't stay the way he had put it for very long. "Bin a while since we went anywhere, hasn't it? We'll drive round a bit and see if anything catches our eye." The car kicked into first gear, the old manual it was, and tuckered off the side of the curb like an old man. Another harsher crack came to follow it, turning it from old man to prime stallion. Despite the look of it, his uncle took good care of the thing. It had been his almost-aunt's car, if he remembered what his mom had said. He leaned himself against the door, now confident it wouldn't fall off and toss him out, the wind on his face once he put the window down was a nice sensation even with the light traffic.

"So, alright you said. That means you're making good with your schoolwork, right?"

"I am," he said. "We're working on special moves to prepare for our provisional heroic license exam." He had no need to worry his uncle by specifying other things. His minds buzz had calmed a tad the second he'd left the school.

"Provisional licenses, huh? Can't say I've heard of that."

He moved back from the window a bit. "Basically if I get it, I can help someone in trouble without
"A bit quick for the first year," he said as he turned the car to drive into a side street. They'd gone one or two blocks away from the school now, and the way his uncle drove they'd be several more away in but a short time. It was a direction-less drive, supposedly, despite his uncle looking confident in every road he took.

"I guess, but everything is a bit crazy right now with All Might's retirement."

"Oh yeah, he was one of the teachers wasn't he?"

"He still is. Mom gave him a real earful though at the interview, I think she almost had him right where she wanted him."

Alo offered a rickety laugh. No cough this time, it was so odd that it stuck out to him. "Sounds like her. How about your dad?"

"He didn't show up." He frowned.

The car slowed as it reached an intersection, and his uncle looked at him out of the corner of his eye. "Sorry, I shouldn't have asked."

"It doesn't matter."

"It does," he said. "Mans a bastard if he can't even show up for something important like that."

"He isn't a bastard."

"Always bin like that, with your mom too, and your other relatives. Blows them all off like he has something to pr-"

His fist smacked the door. "Can we drop this, please? Where are we going?"

His uncle tapped the steering wheel and smacked his dry lip, then he drove ahead through a tight one way street lined on each side by featureless doors, colored as if by a packet of crayons. When they emerged on the other side they had landed in a remote sort of car park, at the back of a building with a peacock weather vane on top, it was old and decrepit with blacked out windows and tiles missing from the roof.

"This is the place," he said and pulled the handbrake so tight it made a sharp sound.

"What is it, exactly?" he asked as he reached for the door handle.

"It's where I'm stayin' right now. Belonged to your granddad before he passed away, been sittin' with me since. An' before you ask, it wasn't in a fit state for living when you moved here, I was hoping to get the place all fixed up for you before that mess happened."

"For me?" He looked at the man as he got out of the car, then took another look. It was only a bit above a hovel, but plenty for one or even three people. It wasn't cramped either like many of the building in central Hosu, as the houses beside it were built in equal measure. It was like someone had constructed a Cul-de-sac in the center of a block made of taller business establishments. A hidden alcove, or suburb, so to speak. When he jiggled the door handle that led to it, he found it locked.

"Here," Alo said and threw something copper at him. A key, he knew as he caught it. The door went inward and a thick smell hit him, dust and neglect. Cobwebs were but an inch from his face, which
he batted away and made in between furniture that stood stacked and cloaked in sheets like a second hand shop. There was a stair that led into a presumable basement, another room for a kitchen and two bedrooms. The room he had stepped into first was then a lounge, and on the opposite end he could see the door that had originally served as the front was blocked off by the rear of a concrete shop that needed the street access more than they did. There were pictures on the walls, faded to the point of indecipherable. It was tough to think anybody had ever lived here.

"It's… something," he said as he tried in vain to see what the pictures were of.

"It ain't, and I can say that with absolute certainty because this is where your dear old uncle was reared and beaten bloody for the span of a decade. I shared that basement room with a cousin of mine, sis had a room up here next to my father."

"You're really staying here?"

"I sleep in the car most nights, or downstairs."

He made his way into the room that was his mothers, at some point. "Huh," he said but only to keep the conversation going. It stung his lungs to breath the air and his mom's room wasn't any better, devoid of light with no switch that worked to lend it that. The roof had caved in onto the bed and it had been cleaned of any memorabilia.

"Don't get too carried away, I came here to get sommin' before we head out elsewhere." His uncle proceeded down the stairs he had spoken about, his bedroom, while he himself continued to excavate what remained of this one. The nightstand drawers had trinkets in them, a fan that had been eaten by moths and a single fake ruby earring. Nothing under the bed but as he turned back he did spy a single frame that hadn't been tainted by the plague of insect. This one was of his mom, younger than young. He doubted anyone really enjoyed looking at pictures of their parents as kids but it was weird, stoic tendencies hadn't set into her yet. It was of a birthday party, if he had to guess, and she was standing next to a much younger Alo who hadn't put on the weight he currently carried. There was a genuine smile on her face with her older brothers hand around her shoulder.

"Damn it," he heard a shout from downstairs and a large clang. Then Alo came tumbling back up the stairs with a box that had been taped shut several times, none of which had flaked yet.

"You alright?" It felt right asking, as now there was a rip on the right cuff of his suit.

"No." The man whipped his hand, the fingers were bruised. "But I got it, just trapped it under some junk. Now commere." Alo ripped the top of the box open as he approached, inside was a smaller box that looked similar to a glasses case. He held it between the tips of his fingers, then he looked over at him with a smile. His uncle reached for this neck and he backed off a bit, though he stopped when the tips of the fingers touched the chain of the necklace and dragged it out onto the front of his shirt. "I'm guessin' sis sentcha that?"

"Yeah," he said. If he remembered there had only been a few days since he had gotten it that he hadn't worn it. "A little while ago, after the festival."

"Then you know it was my dad's yeah?" He nodded. "He was a good man but harsh on me and my sis, tore my mum to pieces spending those years alone, after he died."

He didn't say anything to that, he knew his grandmother if not his grandfather, on his maternal side. She was as traditional as they came, and made sure to remind him of that each time they had visited if only briefly. She'd only died four years ago, his mother had told him the reason was grief if lieu of anything else.
Alo let the necklace go. "Do you know what it means? The symbol?"

"No."

"It ain't anything you'd be taught now but he always told me it meant 'Awaiting.' Fitting I suppose, he waited his whole life for us to make something of ourselves, don't think I ever lived up to his expectations. Still." Alo lowered his head. "I do miss him. It's a shame he never got to meet you, bet he would have loved ya." He responded with a hmm, it was awkward. "Riley," he said. "My side of the family don't show it much but they're proud of you, yeah?" He looked back at the man, not quite in shock but with his heart stilled. The man had clasped the case tighter. "Not just cos you got a quirk, that's just part of it, but cos you're doing something with your life. They ain't never been ones to pray but they were all hopin' for you to pull through after what happened. Might seem stupid to say it since we're family but since you've spent your most of your life in America I wanted you to know that."

"I," he stammered. "Uncle." He scratched his wrist, then fidgeted.

Alo nodded. "Family is the most important thing; I don't need to remind ya of that. If you need support we're there."

He glowered, he wasn't stupid. Elle. "It's easy to forget."

"Yeah, it is." Alo rubbed his nose. "Now, I've been meanin' to give ya this since your birthday but I didn't get the chance." The case clicked open, inside was a watch with a silver inlay much like the necklace. The same symbol sat beneath the face, Awaiting. "Your granddad was a bit of a collector and it's better than having it just sit around in the basement. So, it's yours now." He handed it over, which he accepted. The case was heavier than he imagined it would be. He took the watch out, it needed a polish and probably a recalibration.

"I don't know what to say." It was retro but in the same way the necklace was. He understood what it meant, entrust of something. It was as much an extension of his grandfather's sentiment as it was from his uncle who was giving it to him.

"No need to say anything. We'll go get it fixed up and then head out somewhere to eat, think there's a repair shop down the street from here. And before I forget." Alo looked around in the box, he found something else. A set of razors, five of them still in a plastic wrapping. "Ain't as fancy as a watch but you might be the right age now."

"What?" he said, a natural burn accompanying it. He had a temptation to touch his chin but stopped himself. He'd shaved once before with his uncle's razor without his knowledge, prior to attendance, even though there hadn't been anything to shave really. If his uncle had noticed back then and now was making the effort to give him these then he could only think how it looked.

"Can't have a young hero, or a young man for that matter, walkin' round with peach fuzz on his face." His uncle chuckled and pushed him on his shoulder when he didn't answer. "If you need help I can teach ya."

"No," he answered straight away, but didn't look as it'd make him even redder. "I mean. I know how. Just."

"Ha, careful your face'll get stuck that color soon enough."

He stomped his foot, gave a defeated groan and accepted the gesture with a bit of a drop. "Aloysius," he said with deliberate slowness as to stick it to him. He shut the watch case and drove his fist hard.
into his uncle's side, hiding his grin as he did it. "Thanks uncle," he said and and the man grabbed him tight with one arm. He knew what he had to do next.

Chapter End Notes

*I do not own BNHA. OC material is my own.
He had read, and delved and sat in waiting throughout the remainder of the prior day, building what he had and reinforcing what he would say as he read through the book with as intricate detail as he could manage. It was a distraction and an endurance, until he slept, awaiting a time when it would be appropriate to make a call. It was that time now, just past three in the afternoon where she would be. That anticipation had pitched a tent in his chest, and became more so as he opened the laptop’s screen. On it’s plastic surface he’d stuck notes, which he peeled off, they read; ‘To Do: Call Elle. Write about yourself. Visit baseball club meet thing on Wednesday. Figure out special move.’

He was still getting his wits about for Wednesday and the his special move, and the second one he’d have to shove down his own throat to do, but at least he’d get one done now.

He touched his necklace after pinning the notes to the books behind the laptop instead, then tightened the re-calibrated watch on his wrist and entered a password which Jirou wouldn’t work out as easily this time. Then he opened a voice program, one by the name 'Tirade' which beneath it had the slogan 'In all ways near.' A logo came up in the form of a globe with several hundred cartoon arrows upon it, which then transformed into a bright chat interface that sat alien until he ignored the empty contact list and went right for the phone button instead. It asked him to sync the contact list with his devices first, primarily his phone, but he gave it a prompt refusal as an answer. The only reason he was using this was because it came with video chat, he at the very least owed Elle a face to go with a voice. Plus, it was free.

He entered the extended combination of phone numbers that would correspond to his parent's home, the landline of which was only active to provide a means for their grandparents to contact them without issue. His mouse pointer held above the confirm button, then he erased the number, he had a better idea. If he was in luck and his timing was correct then there was a good chance she’d be up at their grandparents house rather than with mom and dad. He entered their number instead, if they answered first then that wouldn’t be so bad either.

It rang, a synthetic dial tone that rattled the speakers sang to him but that was far more of an obnoxious annoyance than a homage to older means. Each time it cycled it's sound it rose a fraction of an octave and he would hasten his tap on the plastic surface of the keyboard. Once it had begun to throb him he dropped the tapping finger to the surface of the bottom of the laptop and dragged it across, the secluded alcove presented him with dust, he wasn't the first one to have borrowed this machine he wagered but it must have been sitting idle for a while. He didn't know how many students had walked Yuuei’s campus in the time it had been open but he could guess hundreds upon hundreds just through class 1-A and B alone. Just as he was about to hang up, to try again later, someone answered.

"Hello?" a young girl said. There was no mistaking it, it was her, however the laptop's screen remained dark.

"Elle, it's me," he said, in English. Then, he reminded himself how long it'd been and how the microphone's quality might be. "It's Riley."

"Riley," she repeated his name. He didn't expect the rummaging that came next, a combination of
movement and excited pitch. "Hold on, hold on. Let me switch phones." There was a cut off noise, like he'd been disconnected, however it restarted itself. The next the screen brightened, it was luck that she had brought her school funded tablet up to their grandparents house. It wasn't a good quality image but the black haired girl that met his eyes was as fleshed out as he remembered, and older. She had red flustered cheeks on skin that was pale, her eyes, nose and mouth were features that sat small but in argument, much like his mother. Unlike his own her hair was like their father's, even if it wasn't the same colour. You couldn't have guessed they were siblings without a family picture.

He smiled, then said, "Hey." It had been, he counted in his head, verging on eight months. "You're different than I remember."

She gave an eager nod. "I'm almost as tall as mom now."

"You are." It'd still be a while before that was actually true but she was tall, for a girl who's tenth birthday was still a month away.

His pause gave her long enough to falter in her own glee. "Did you want to talk to grandpa and grandma? They're outside but I can go get them-"

"No, that's alright, I actually called to talk to you Elle. There's something I wanted to tell you."

"Oh?" She stopped looking around and instead back at him.

"I'm sorry."

She sat back. "Sorry?"

"For being a terrible big brother, dummy," he said and renewed his smile for a grin. There was more there, specific reasons and indications and although he trusted her to understand what he meant, even at her age, that could wait for another time.

She didn't answer until she stood, then walked behind the chair. "It's fine, I know you're busy." She angled the tablet stand with her right hand so it revealed more of the room, then walked along the left side where carpet met ivory trimming and white wallpaper underneath a bulky AC unit that wasn't on. She stopped just past a window which was half open, near a shelf that had been his once upon a time, on top of it it sat a figurine which gave a plastic sound as she used the little finger on her left hand to touch it, he remembered painting that with her years ago. It fell over and she looked at it in annoyance, before using her other hand to stand it back upright.

"My being busy isn't an excuse. Elle, things are going to be different from now on, alright?"

She looked over at the tablet and separated the bang that had come loose, pinning it back behind her ear. Then she stood on her toes and went back to her chair bit by bit, before falling into it. "Alright," she said. "Then promise me."

"I do." He nodded, and appreciated the irony in the back of his mind.

She returned his nod. "If you break it, I won't forgive you this time, 'kay?" He nodded but she missed it as her eyes were absent-minded, the smile that accompanied it was wry as she began to drum finger across the desk with eye kept away. "How is it?"

"How is what?"

She looked up, eyes instead becoming fixed on him. To the point. "Your heroic course. It's amazing isn't it? I bet you get to do all kinds of things, things I can't even imagine."
He bit his lip. She wasn't small any longer, or at least not small enough to where he might have thought about softening it up. "It's scary," he said, then let it all come out like he'd been holding a breath. "And it's amazing, and there is a lot of things I thought would be different. The heroes here really are larger than life, just like you thought they would be. It's... It's." The words left him as they'd come, he'd need to pick them like one would pluck a ripe mandarin to even have half a hope of summing it up in less than an hour. Leineif had become like a hazed out dream, wisps of a life that belonged to someone else, no more important than a set of training wheels.

Her face lit up, like she'd expected him to downplay it. "I'm glad," she said. "It sounds wonderful, I wish I could be there."

"Maybe someday you can visit me, how does that sound?"

She gasped. "Really?"

"I'll talk to Alo about it, okay?" He wasn't sure of the chance, but he could try.

She gave several nods. "Please."

"So, um," he said. "Did mom tell you about what happened a week and a half ago?"

"A week and a half ago?" she asked. Then it clicked. "All Might's retirement."

"Yeah," he answered. "And..." he stopped. If she didn't know his involvement then that could wait. Next time he would go into it. "Never mind, it's not important."

She gave him an irked look. "Does he still teach there?"

"He does."

"Then can you do me a favor?"

"I can." He watched Elle fumble around in the drawer next to her. Then she pushed a piece of paper up to the screen. It was a drawing, a portrait of the very man himself. Every chiseled feature of the man was detailed right down to the shading of creases where suit met skin beneath the neck. That was proof she had been working at it for some time because for her such detail did not come with ease like it did him.

"Can you please give this to him? I wanted to send to him online but those social media accounts only get automatic answers," she said the words with a blush, like the prospect was embarrassing. He supposed it would be, considering he was one of her idols.

"I'll give you my email and you can send it to me. I'll make sure he gets it." It was the least he could do for her.

"Thank you," she said as she bounced up, then down in the chair. "So tell me more, how are your classes and the people in the school, they all have quirks too right? Do you have any other famous teachers? Did you go to any cool places?"

His face contorted in half a laugh as he answer, "Slow down, slow down. I'll answer anything you want."

Before his sister or him could continue her head turned right, he could hear but not quite make out the sound of their grandma calling to her. She no doubt needed help with some chores. That was the tax of staying there free of charge, he now remembered. They had both been glad to help, his
grandfather had always been a fan of making him split wood even in heat to prepare for when it got colder. He was a fan of the saying 'Why leave till tomorrow what you could do today.' There was no lack of wisdom in that, and he hadn't found the work to be disagreeable if only to help him build some foundation of muscle onto his frame at the time. He'd probably have been too meek even for Leineif without that.

Elle pouted. "I have to go now."

He nodded as he watched her get up. "I understand," he said. Before she could touch the button to hang up he said what was still on his lips. "Elle. I'll become a great hero, yeah?" He was tempted to add 'just for you' but, he did not. It would be dishonest.

She hesitated, then she looked content. "I can't wait," she said and hung up.

"That's not going to happen," he answered the voice. "You can fuck right off." Then he, stood and kicked his toe hard in the desk's leg, which dissipated the crackle and click of tongue. He wouldn't let it taint this, that was one thing he would not allow. As the pain faded he looked around for his weights, his bands, and went into the bathroom to get to work. It was time he had something click.

If you want to impress her all you need. All you need is my power. My power. It can all be yours. Then you'd be a great He-ro. Don't you want that? Don't you want her forgiveness, Riley? Let me in.

"That's not going to happen," he answered the voice. "You can fuck right off." Then he, stood and kicked his toe hard in the desk's leg, which dissipated the crackle and click of tongue. He wouldn't let it taint this, that was one thing he would not allow. As the pain faded he looked around for his weights, his bands, and went into the bathroom to get to work. It was time he had something click.

[ Yuuei's Campus — The Training Dreamland — 11:02 AM ]

His compression cracked the rock for what was verging upon the billionth time, or that was what his muscles sought to tell him through ceaseless ache. It sat now in a pit three feet below him but hadn't started that way. It might end up four feet by the time he was done because he had told himself, no, rather demanded of himself, that he would continue to practice for the full three and a half hours he had been given. Around him was Cementoss's stone garden, which now stood a great deal expanded to accommodate a bench four person's long upon which he could put his tools, such as a case of rubber balls he had brought to relieve his tremor. Beside that were three bottles, two drained and one half so, standing on a towel stained.

He had brought the book too but that was still in the sports bag. After his talk with Elle he'd scanned it again, then screened it, absorbed each word to a point in hopes of finding some kind of breakthrough. It was now littered with signposts, post-it notes that guided him to passages that proved useful and tatters of information he'd pulled from the web using prompts from words he'd found in that way. It had, in well reasoned conclusion, brought him back to what he had already stumbled upon. If he wanted to improve his quirk he had to go where the voice didn't want him to, and with Elle's words on his mind, his uncle's and his own desire he had decided as such. However first, to even dare upon it, he had to be stronger than he was and to reach that plateau of perfection that Edgeshot had so implied he needed to reach.

It was speed he was after again, not power, as such he needed to be able to compress with little
gesture and without word. The blatant point of saying his quirk aloud was a glaring weakness, one word shoehorned into one compression so no words might help him break the mental blockade and toss the frugal hindrance. Three compressions, like he had done before, would satisfy him. He had to admit now in retrospect he had zero idea of how exactly he had done it, how it had done it, but he knew what it felt like. An inexplicable visualisation of multiple instances of his quirk as one. Kicking his habit wasn't easy, he found, because every so often he would mumble it on his lips without meaning it. That would cause him to lose concentration in order to correct it, and oft result in a situation where he had to steady his arm just to keep himself upright. His arms had begun to burn thirty minutes into his training and now they were now on fire, a sign he was tearing muscle and forcing it to become stronger. One week and a day, that was all he had to make it happen. His hand closed again. It did not, despite the progress he was determined to make, seem feasible.

"Torenagi, hello."

His concentration fumbled as fast as it arrived, and the rock decided to amuse itself by punching him back with a wallop that had him reaching for one of the rubber balls. After he got one into the tips of his fingers he was quick to shake them, wave them around like they carried a nasty burn. It made the tremor less sore, just like any injury would through the rubbing of cold. He looked over his shoulder, to locate the source of his frustration and found he shouldn't have been surprised at who it was. The one voice he had a hard time placing, because it was just so damn ordinary. Ojiro.

"Sorry," he said. "I didn't mean to scare you."

"You did." Though he was annoyed he tried not to make it apparent other than that which the statement implied, it wasn't Ojiro's fault he had stumbled in here. He should have asked Ectoplasm to make a clone to stand guard so no one would come.

"Mind if I?" He eyed the bench.

"Sure," he answered and shifted his stuff aside, whilst grabbing the last bottle and drinking most of it, what remained he poured over his head which gave some relief. His towel he used to dab across his forehead, neck, chest and ribs to catch what sweat the water hadn't reached. The weights worsened his exhaustion manifold, he found.

"Thanks, I needed a break," Ojiro said as he watched him finish curing himself, once that was done he pointed at the rock. "At least someone's hard at work today."

"Trying to be." He dropped the towel at his feet then checked his phone which told him he'd lasted two hours and forty-seven minutes exactly. That brought a frown, but he dropped it, he would have made it with a little more privacy. "How about you?" he asked, then looked at the tail that twitched. It had a garish scab tissue, that must have been partially healed by recovery girl, just below the blond tassel tip. "You alright?" he added, before Ojiro could find his words.

The boy blinked back at his tail, then looked back at him. "This? Oh yeah, no, yeah I'm fine. Looks worse than it is, really."

"I guess the worst it could look is if it was cut off."

Ojiro winced. "Hey, don't even suggest that, it's like a nightmare for me."

"Does it get annoying having it follow you everywhere?" He'd had a classmate with wings before, but never a tail.

"Uh… no?" he answered and gave him a weird look.
"You don't ever get it stuck in doorways or like, roll on it while sleeping?" He imagined that painful in a way that rolling on many things in one's sleep could be. Such as an arm weight, that had left him sore the whole day once.

"Maybe I should be the one asking if you're alright, Torenagi."

"Sorry," he said and gave a kind of half-coughed laugh. "I'm just, kind of fond of dogs and I mean, with a tail you must kind of-

"Hey, I'm nothing like a dog." Ojiro backed off and his tail bowed to the floor which did not help the accusation. He folded his arms across his chest and frowned, a wound to his pride.

"Okay, okay, I'm sorry. For real this time." He shrugged. "Not like you guys don't make fun of my tremors all the time, or Midoriya breaking his wrist every other week."

"Come on, I don't do that. That's just Sero and Kaminari."

He thought about it. "I guess you're right." Frankly, spending most of the day around them probably made him biased. "So, any luck with your special move?"

He gave a declined nod, that ended at his chest. Then, he answered with a slow, "No."

It was a bad question, he realized now. Every single time to anyone he'd asked and been asked by the answer had been the same. Sure, some of them had made progress but no one had named something yet, except Bakugou. "Well, you're not alone," he said. "I can't get my move pinned down at all either." He should probably find Ectoplasm and try again. Mastering, beginning to master, being able to get something going was probably vital.

"Kirishima was really hitting the nail on the head when he kept talking about how emitter quirks had the upper hand when it comes to this. My tail is strong and all but it's not like flinging it left or right really makes a special move."

"Say that to Leina," he said without thinking.

"Leina?"

"I told you about her," he answered. "Edgeshot's sidekick."

His face darkened. "That lady? The one Iida talked about? Her?"

"That's the one. Her quirk adds up all the rotational energy, and kind of collects it? I couldn't really work out the details while I was there but it's crazy dangerous. She's a great martial artist, but I think it's mostly gymnastics that helps her."

"I'm pretty good at martial arts too," he answered.

"You don't say." He laughed. "I mean, the robe didn't give it away or anything."

Ojiro gave him an amused look as he grabbed at the parting of his Gi's midriff. "Right. What I meant to say is, I could be better."

"Well, she certainly is better than you, since she's with Edgeshot."

"Probably." He shrugged.

He tapped his finger, then a cruel smile curled upon his lips. "So what you're asking is, 'can I get you
in with Leina,' is that it?" It wasn't, but he was going to steer it that way whether Ojiro wanted it or not, because he'd just hatched a very nice plan in the back of his mind. "She could definitely teach you something."

"Wait, what?" He dropped his hand and looked over. "I didn't ask anything like that."

He gave Ojiro a light shove, enough to make space to grab his phone again. "No, I think you did. It won't be free, you can owe me one." He stood and walked a couple of feet away with the phone, flipping it in his hand then stopping and selecting a number from the phone book. A flair of dramas would aid his scheme.

"Torenagi, stop- I don't need any help. A real man can work out his own techniques."

"Leina, it's Torenagi," he said into the phone. It wasn't the first time he'd called her, though never for something like this. It'd been to get to Ko, the sidekick never kept his phone on. "I have kind of a biiiiiig favor to ask for this guy in my class. He's desperate." He held the phone close to his ear as he walked. "Call me back." He whispered the last part.

"Come on man, hang up," Ojiro said as he grabbed him on the shoulder. "You know I don't want help with stuff like this."

He dropped the phone. "It was voice mail," he said. "And I know you don't want help. I'm just the same way, so that's why I'm forcing you to take it."

The boy grumbled in return and let go. There was an expression of defeat, something he had not expected to come so fast. "And what makes you think she wants to spend time teaching me?"

"Because." He gave a glint of his teeth. "If there's one thing I know Leina loves it's beating the snot out of people who don't know any better. Plus, with all the fuss surrounding Edgeshot's agency I bet she's itching to find something to do." Ko had given him the hint to that, though in confidence, something was stirring up with the pro hero surrounding the formation of a super team. In truth he wondered how it'd affect the sidekicks, rather than the hero. Both him and Leina could be out of a job if the agency was deemed redundant.

"You're a real pain in the ass, Torenagi." Ojiro frowned. "But thanks, I guess, if she really helps me out."

"Save your thanks until you've met her." If he could get her to agree, he supposed, he would need to offer her something in return. The whole idea was kind of far fetched but it wasn't the only outrageous offer he had made today. He'd fulfill both, in some capacity.

"I guess I will." He rubbed his head, then traced along the fur lining of the Gi's collar. "It isn't annoying, for the record. Having a tail. It gets stuck and buying clothes is a pain but I wouldn't ever call it annoying. I mean, how many people can say they can do a hundred push ups without even using their hands?"

"So you don't even have to think about using it consciously?"

He nodded. "It's like an arm."

"That's cool," he answered then pointed over his shoulder at the rock. "That's what I'm trying to get to, using my quirk without thinking, like it's just an arm."

"Does that mean you gave up on Kaminari's brilliant Aero bar idea?" He chuckled.
"No, it's still useful for decompression. It makes it much easier to imagine all those tiny areas all at once." He stopped, then looked at his hand. It wasn't a bad idea at all.

"So what was that favor you wanted?"

He dropped his hand, then wiped it against the back of his costume. "Uh." Though the idea had hatched fast he wasn't eager to share it. "You like baseball," he said and Ojiro gave him a dumb look. "I know you said you watch and everything but you know how to play, right?"

"I do."

"Then I need your help." He dug into the bag then took out a flier. "Take a look at this," he said and waved him over.

The boy took the flier, scanned it, then looked up at him. "You want me to come?"

"I do." It was a silly thing, but one thing the flier had been building upon him was performance anxiety. He hadn't played in a long time in a proper game and it'd be better to have someone else there.

"You didn't need to make up that whole thing just to get me to do this," Ojiro said with a frown. "I would have done it anyway."

"You woulda?"

"I woulda." The boy mimicked his words, though they sounded strange on his tongue. He returned a grin at it. It occurred to him he could have asked Kirishima come, however he much preferred someone who shared his enthusiasm for the sport rather than just a passing. The plan, as it presented itself, had been forming in his mind since he'd gotten back from Alo's trip. That made two tasks down, his sudden vendetta against them was going as planned.

[1-A Height's Alliance Dormitory - Riley's Room - 6:11 PM]

He was pushing upon something with each little increment he made, between his fingers he held a chunk of iron and beneath that a sheet, beside it another rubber ball. The iron, which was a glob he'd appropriated from one of his misguided statues, was malleable as clay in his hands one second, then rigid the next. His hands smelt of rust and were tarnished by smudges from pieces that peeled off in impurity, but it was far from enough to dissuade him. Tetanus might, but he was careful enough not to cut himself.

The metal became light again, he removed his right hand and made a horizontal line on the page, beside which was his marked book. Then it became heavy and he did the same but vertical and shorter. It was Ojiro's suggestion, Kaminari's idea, that had had brought him to try and measure it. An aero bar was full of holes, a compression was nothing but a hole with an intent but different purpose. The reason was as obvious as the distance of the lines he had drawn, the amount of his compression and decompression it took to change the metal did not take the same of effort. Compression was applied in such a way that he might be able to compare it with bashing a massive hammer, while decompression more akin to pulling a crumpled piece of paper back apart with oversized tweezers. That was to say, one was quick with force and the other slow by touch and they took less and more energy respectively.

He needed more time to practice. But therein lay a problem, and why he had waited until now and tried it on a small scale to get an idea, he couldn't have someone stumble upon him and breaking his
concentration like Ojiro had or he might seriously injure himself. He put down the metal and settled his fingers, it was late enough and if he waited longer he mightn't have enough time to visit the support sector and still find someone there. He stood and went over to his desk, took his usual things such as his phone, then turned and removed the gloves from the box on his table. Visiting Power Loader without those was pointless, he needed a copy, and a modification if it was possible. He put them in a bag, the one he had used for his weights, his towels and water bottles. Although the dreamland wasn't locked at night he wouldn't be able to use it, supervision was a requirement by Cementoss. His stomach growled as he opened his door and went, he'd also need to do something about that.

Someone caught him with a loud and deft, "Hey!" before he made it all the way to the lobby. He turned around to see it was Sero, of all people. "Wait up," he added.

He did just that, and waited for Sero to catch up to him. "What's up?"

"Nothing," he answered.

Sero gave a taut grin and spoke in a tone high and belated, disbelieving, "Running down the halls like that over nothing, wish I could muster that kind of enthusiasm."

He made an annoyed face then decided to part with his unnecessary secrecy. "I'm going to go work on my quirk, just didn't think you'd care much."

"Me, not care?" He clapped him over the shoulder in the least convincing way, which also caused him to have to hold himself on the banister that led down the stairs to defy falling from it. "I care plenty, plenty enough anyway."

"I can tell."

He released the awkward hold. "As it happens I was about to go do that too, there's so little time left it might as well already be the examination. You want some company?"

"I'm heading to the support sector first."

"Support sector?" He frowned. "The dreamlands only going to be open for another hour, better make it quick."

He did kind of feel stupid now because he could have gone earlier, though he supposed he'd only been forming the glove idea then. Instead of admitting it he jabbed Sero in the rib. "I guess you better muster some of my enthusiasm and get running then. I need to take care of this before I can do anything." He held up the shredded gloves from his bag.

"A trashcan can take care of those real fast."

He smirked. "How is your special move going?"

"It's… going," Sero answered. He took on a different shade, crooked.

"Going how?" He regretted asking the question again, perhaps he was foolish to expect someone, anyone, but the obvious to have an answer. He'd been hopeful this time, rather than with Ojiro, because he'd seen Sero working on his.

His answer was delivered with a temperament of a failed mad scientist. "Tape bombs a dud, Celloweb is a double dud and that's about all I came up with so far."
They reached the bottom of the stairs and he made for the kitchen. "Sucks to hear," he said over his shoulder as he began to scavenge as only a hungry man could. The lobby was empty for the most part, the chill of the night hadn't reached enough people yet to discourage them to come back to the dormitory. The ones that did had holed themselves up in their rooms to deal with nerves or pressure, or both. There was a click of a T.V. on the opposite corner of the dorm from him but he couldn't see who it was through the glass screen and foliage separating the centre.

His rifling ceased once he had found enough food, chomped down on chicken noodle rice leftover from dinner and packed the rest. He'd replenished his water bottles as well, and grabbed three cereal nut bars. Once zipper was drawn again he tossed it over his shoulder, rubbed his eye to clear fog and turned back to Sero. It was going to be a long night.

"If you're stocking up then you can have a couple of these." Sero pushed across two tin cans with green colouring. He'd seen them before, one was a melon based energy drink that was meant to be all natural and the other a wheat based training supplement mixed with crabgrass.

"I remember these being kind of gross," he said but took them anyway. Anything and everything was good for him right now, his height was still vastly outpacing his weight.

"No prob, you'll thank me later." Sero chuckled. "I don't like the taste either but it grows on you."

"As you've claimed before."

"And will continue to, until I get all you guys to drink it. I swear by the stuff."

The taste was comparable to licking the underside of a lawnmower, so his testament was an understatement. "Are you coming with me to the support department then?"

He chuffed. "No freakin' way, I don't need a heat stroke. I'll meet you at the dreamland if you hurry it up."

He pushed the cans into his bag then secured it behind his back. This was something he'd need to get used to if he was going to join that team, he guessed. There was already a tight schedule and if he had to add practice to that it would become a noose. He pushed the thought to the back of his mind, at least his torment would not be endured solo if Ojiro really could play, and wasn't just screwing with him a bit to get back over threatening slash dragging him. Leina hadn't returned his call yet.

"Guess I'll see you there then," he said and gave Sero a final wave, who returned it. He wasn't in all honesty keen for him to come but it wasn't like he needed the whole dreamland to himself, even a portion would do if Sero wasn't noisy. He went for the front door, the crackle of the T.V. had him turning his head left as he reached the stairwell by the shoe rack. It was Satou, sitting there, by himself. He gave him a nod, causing him to notice, then a stretch of his fingers to indicate he was on his way out not in, to which he returned a lift of his brow, the universal sign of acknowledgement and returned to his program. It struck him how nonchalant it was, as if he had no fear of the examination a week away.

His contemplation of it was lost as he hit the open air outside, to the thought of his quirk and on the gloves. It was a span before he found his way to the support sector again, mainly because he made a detour to his class to grab his costume case. He found it embarrassing that the route he took from there mimicked the terrible one Kaminari had led them on. Heat was what told him he had found it long before he saw it, the great iron door of the forge. He was in luck, because heat meant the furnace they had running inside was still on.
As he got to the door he put the case marked twenty-one on the floor and pushed. The door gave way only by the brunt of his shoulder, he wasn't sure how some of the more frail support students could even get in here. Kirishima had heaved it open with a single hand. A chain brushed past his face as he stepped inside and pulled his case in behind him before the door clanked shut. He took his case and pulled the chain aside and then two more hooks as the heat grew. The floor was a pale orange and amess with a sea of material even more disparate than the sheared metal in his dorm. Despite the workshop not being massive it took him a few strides and a corner to find the alcove in which two wall length crafting benches stood. The air around this part was heavy with the heat as it bounced from one steel masked wall to another, and standing at the center of it was Power Loader.

As he walked over to the man he saw what he could make out to be an arm on the bench in front of him, one he recognised as the net gun from his end of semester exam. The teacher's long bleached hair fell in scoopfuls onto it from beneath an iron mask, which had a weight that a man would wince to think of wearing for an hour, let alone a whole day. The last time he had seen Power Loader it had struck him why the sight was unnerving, it reminded him of Pyramid Head from Silent Hill. The man's skin was bare but for sweat, a trait which he could feel himself beginning to share, and a belt lined with all manner of tools. The net gun, in which he was holding a screwdriver, had it's wired guts ripped out and the green sludge that covered the net wasn't present, so instead it just sat a dark pink. The sight of it made him queasy like some terrible equivalence of deja vu.

"Hello, Sir," he said and the man did not respond and instead continued to tinker away. "Sir," he repeated the phrase with a heightened emphasis. This time he got Power Loader's attention.

"I heard you," he answered and fumbled with his helmet. Then he tilted his head and pointed at his ears. "Earmuffs." He pushed a button which presumably turned them off. "By the looks of it you changed your mind about the gauntlet, that extra power took your fancy did it?"

He shook his head. "I didn't, Sir." He unzipped his bag and reached inside for the gloves, they were falling apart in his hand as he showed them to the man. "I wanted to see if you could help me with these."

Power Loader took them and smoothed the material in his hands which turned them from shabby to presentable, though still fettered. "A crying shame, these are done for."

"Is it possible to get replacements? And." He stopped to think of it, as he hadn't worked out exactly how he wanted them modified. "Is it possible to add a way to control the effect they have? Like not having them on all the time, so I don't have to take them off just to use my quirk properly."

Power Loader rubbed his heavy gauntlet covered hand across the underside of his mask, then he turned the gloves over and pushed back the fringes of the ripped fabric, for a man with such cumbersome armor he had supple fingers and trickshot sight. "I can fix it, but it'll take time, time I don't have. I'll give you a weaker prototype for now, just don't break it this time. As for modifications, it's a delicate piece of equipment that Thirteen helped me to make so I'd have to start from the very base of the design." He shoveled around in a desk, didn't find anything, then looked beneath the bench. He came back up with an identical set of gloves, except for the material they were made of, they looked less sturdy. The man pushed them into his hand. "You haven't made any other modification to your costume, have you?"

"No, Sir."

"Like I said, I don't have the time to see to you myself." The man paused, then snapped his fingers and looked past him. "Hatsume, come here," he shouted, then spoke the next sentence to him in a lower tone. "Give her a shot, she might just help you come up with something."
Not sure what to expect he turned around in time to watch the tech girl from the sports festival lift up her goggles, sway her bundled up hair and wipe hand across forehead. He hadn't talked to her much when he'd come with Kirishima and Kaminari, they'd both taken up all of her interest. He could have tried harder to do the same, but he'd been... preoccupied with the recordings. In front of her was a metallic spider, a gauntlet of sorts designed to shoot a canister perhaps. She looked at them and swayed as she walked up, scuff marks were sewed across her exposed forearms and a few too many bruises to be normal lined her from forehead to foot. She gave them a mad grin once she arrived.

"Hatsume," Power Loader said, then pointed a finger at him. "I'm strapped with the second and third years at the moment so help this guy out like you did with the rest of his class. I'll be heading off in a second here, so I'm leaving you in charge for the rest of the night." In charge of what, he didn't know, except for them two the workshop was empty.

Her grin widened, becoming Cheshire. "Got it." She gave him a glance, then turned it back toward Power Loader.

He folded his arms. The man turned back, grabbed a device off the table that looked like a strobe light, then walked past Hatsume. As he reached one of the chains he grabbed it and looked back. "And, Hatsume, if you mess up this place I'll ban you for life, got it? I don't want any more explosions in here."

She gave a weird mixture of pout, glee and bow. "I would never," she answered. Satisfied with that, Power Loader left, leaving him alone with he strange girl.

"So," he said, only to discover she had completely ignored him and instead grabbed the case from his fingers. He followed her as she brought it back to her section of the workshop. "Hey-" She as already unpacking it it piece by piece, taking in each wrinkled detail and tracing finger as if to estimate length.

"This is perfect," she said.

"What?" He looked at the black fabric, he didn't think the costume was the height of perfection in the slightest, it was good, but not that good. That wasn't even accounting wear and tear, which it had now gained aplenty.

"Not the costume," she said. "The opportunity." She took the helmet last, rolled it in her hand while her eye sparkled like a crooked target reticule. "You're already in the public eye, anyone that gets curious is sure to see my mark. If I surpass Power Loader's design and show the world my skill, through you, every pro and sidekick will want to be my patron." She wore an evil look as she went back to the gloves, folding them in much the same way Power Loader had, then she glared at him. "Tell me about your quirk. Everything. Now." He took a step back, only to fall into a seat she must have placed there at some point. He glanced at the costume, and then prepared to tell her everything as if she had woven some spell on him.

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[Yuuei's Campus - Training Dreamland Tunnel - 7:35 PM]

Over an hour had passed before he knew it, Hatsume had a way with drawing you in that he hadn't been prepared for and an interest that had fuelled his own desire to share it. He had shared intricate details, private details, of his quirk and annoyance about every inch of it and his costume. She had asked questions when she felt the need, about every two seconds, but she hadn't judged him. It was fascinating, really, to meet someone so dedicated for the sake of dedication. That, he suspected, was why he now took to walking toward the training dreamland with a grandeur of a person convinced rather than someone who wanted to test water.
He reached the halfway point of the tunnel, which was a considerable length of twenty-five feet, when the light at the end of it flashed enough to illuminate a silhouette of Sero walking his way. He'd completely forgotten about him, and he looked trounced now. There was a wound on his arm where the costume and skin near his tape dispensers had peeled and his costume had tattered rings of dust around the wrist. His helmet sat removed, and his hair stayed stuck to his forehead.

"Hey," he said.

Sero responded with a frown, but not one that looked to reproach him. "I'd say better late than never, but this is about as late as anyone could ever be."

"What do you mean?" He stopped in front of him.

He scratched his head. "Cementoss is closing up shop, I was the last guy in there after the one B students left."

"Damn." He looked at his feet, then at his bag. His costume case was with Hatsume now.

"Did you at least get what you wanted from the support sector?"

"Sort of," he said. "It's going to take like. He tried to remember what Hatsume had said. "Four or five… maybe even six days?"

"That's some favouritism." Sero laughed.

"She told me she had something to prove, I didn't get it either. Anyway." He proceeded to walk past Sero just a step, enough for the boy to give him a confused look.

"I told you it was closed."

"I know, I'm just going to ask how soon it'll be open again." And perhaps, practice for just thirty minutes, if Cementoss would allow it. Otherwise he'd have to find a gym to potentially decimate, and he did not want to be held responsible for that.

Sero's confusion became hardened, then he shrugged. "Fine then, suit yourself. I'll tell the other guys you won't be back for a while."

"Thanks," he answered and they parted, at least Kirishima wouldn't be waiting in vain for him to come work on speed then. As he reached the lip of the tunnel which contained three doors, one that led to the dreamland, he kicked himself. He should have asked Satou about his training back in the dorm, if only as a courtesy considering the guy was his most direct roommate. Talking to Elle had made him realise just how little of his time he spent empathizing. It was something Midnight had brought up too and tried to frame in a way that implied doing so would make his issues shrink by comparison. It had worked, with Ojiro, even if he had gotten something out of that deal. Selfish or not, it was a habit that would make him appear like less of an apathetic jackass. He shook his head and found Cementoss with a broom in hand, sweeping up the remains of the arena he had now flattened into a sound landscape once more.

"Hello, Sir," he said as he reached the man, who stopped his sweep mid stride and looked up. If he had been working hard he did not show signs of it.

"Hello, Torenagi." The man nodded at him. "I'm afraid the dreamland is closed."

"Is it?" He played dumb, adding a frown. "When does it open again?"
"Six in the morning," Cementoss answered. "However you have classes if I recall, so I'm afraid you'd only get a meagre about of work in during that time."

He gave a frustrated comb through his hair. "Is there really no chance I could practice here? Just for a little bit."

"I'm sorry, Torenagi," he said and went back to sweeping.

He tilted his head at the cement fragments the man was pulling together, trying not to show his disappointment. "Sir, if you don't mind me asking, why don't you just use your quirk to remove the leftovers?"

Cementoss stopped again. "Sometimes the easiest way is not the best way." He leant down to his pile of cement and searched in the rubble, then removed a long stick of metal bar, stuck to it were several strands of Cellotape.

"Oh," he said, realizing. It wasn't just cement, so he couldn't do it without merging some of it with the floor. The teacher smiled, and before the man could sweep again he spoke with the only thing he knew would be useful, honesty. "Sir, the real reason I want to use the dreamland now instead of during the day is so that I don't hurt anyone practicing my techniques."

"Without supervision you would be in danger yourself, Torenagi."

He knew, the man knew he knew, he eyed the cement and thought. "I remember you telling me to be patient, but I'm running out of time again and I don't want to disappoint Aizawa, or the school, or anyone else by failing. If I don't have time to be patient then I need to be smart and find ways to make time, don't I?"

Cementoss looked up, there was consideration there, of something. "I am feeling generous, so perhaps I could make an exception, under a condition."

"Anything," he answered.

He smiled, then held out the broom. "You do my work, and I will assist by supervising you while you train afterward."

"Deal." He wasn't sure if the man was serious but he did take the broom.

Cementoss nodded at him. "I'll be back in an hour, I expect you will work hard and be done by then." There was a veiled insistence in his voice, as if to say that failing the task would remove any chance of such a future arrangement.

He looked around, it was a tall order, however not undoable. "Yes, Sir," he said, dropped his bag to the floor and began walking to the farthest part that was still covered in dust. "No shortcuts," he mumbled his earlier sentiment. If all he had to do was shovel dust then it was a small price to pay, so he set to work.

Chapter End Notes

* I do not own BNHA. OC material is my own.
"Morning my man," Kirishima said.

He looked up and saw two upside down Kirishima's which merged into one as his eyes focused. "Urgh." He groaned.

"You asked for water last time so I figured I'd do as I was told." He held up the bottle, empty now, next to his wide grin.

His lip twinged upon seeing it. "I hope that wasn't one you drunk out of."

"Uh," Kirishima said as he looked back at it, then shrugged.

"Gross," he said and wiped his face more thoroughly, if he hadn't felt disgusted he did now. Then, he righted himself so the world wasn't tilted and noticed the light streaming through the windows, it was early, but not early enough. He looked back at Kirishima, then for his phone.

"It's already past ten if that's what you're figuring out," he said before the phone was within grasping range, it stopped his try for it.

"Past ten? Like in the morning?" Panic seized him and he sprung to his feet. "Shit, Aizawa is gonna kill me." His friend grabbed him before his attempt could become full blown.

"Relax. Did you really think Aizawa doesn't know about your late night excursions? Besides, it's Sunday, dude."

"No class," he muttered, then fell back onto the arm of the chair with a huff.

"I think your biggest mistake was falling asleep in the lounge. Kaminari and Mineta, well, they found you before anyone else headed off to the dreamland this morning." Kirishima put a finger to his chin. "It's weird how they only seem to be in the right place at the right time when it gives them a chance to do dumb shit."

He returned an odd look as he relaxed. "What?" Then he realized his hair didn't feel damp just due to the water Kirishima had tossed on it. He touched it, it felt greasy like the fat of a roast pig had been poured onto the strands. His neck flushed and then his cheeks. "Those bastards," he said with a grimace. They'd done this before, to Sero, he was sure his hair had quite the sheen to it now, something they referred to as a free makeover.

Kirishima chuckled. "Well, even if Aizawa knows why you're not there you're still gonna be in some trouble if you don't show up soon, I reckon, because Aizawa told me to knock you on the head if you weren't awake."
He nodded. "I got it. I just need to shower and grab some stuff and I'll be ready."

"Good, I wanted to make some protein shakes anyway." Kirishima turned and went toward the kitchen.

He grabbed his bag and proceeded up the stairs, two steps at a time. The two and a bit days had been a blur, after he had helped Cementoss there had indeed been a time for him to train. A longer time, he recalled, than even he had expected the man to entertain. By the time they had left the Dreamland it was out of his own exhaustion not because he had been kicked out. The next day he had come in the morning as usual and left midday, then hopeful he come back at night again. Just as before he had done the work and gotten the Cementoss's supervision. In total that made for more than a work days shift in quirk usage and training which, he now realized, was a little impossible to maintain without a day to catch up on sleep, especially after the rough sleep he'd already had the nights before. As such his body had chosen the day for him.

He clicked his door shut and dropped his bag and went to the bathroom. Seeing as how futile being thorough was right now he just hopped in and out in about seven minutes, enough to get the gunk from his hair and the marker lines from his face. He was going to find a way to kill those two, discreetly. After he was done and dressed again he looked through the bag. It still contained two empty lunch boxes and a bunch of cans, there was even a tall carton of a milk infusion in there that Kirishima had somehow slipped him one night when he wasn't looking. The gloves to his pleasant surprise were also in there, he'd be gutted if he lost them considering how much they helped speed up his testing, although they were a little scuffed already.

Two minutes later he'd filled the bag back up the way it had been previously, restocked from his fridge, he had to admit it was a handy thing to have. Next he checked his phone again. He'd taken twenty minutes, it told him and it also told him that he had a message, though the number wasn't unmarked. A thing he had done on this phone was deny any unsolicited messages and calls, if someone wanted to reach him he'd have to add them to the contact list or white list them in the phone's settings. It provided a fake sense of security, but did stop him from hesitating to check it when it vibrated.

1 — Tsunotori — New

He opened it fast enough, the two of them hadn't really talked since the camp and had shared only passing glances and obligated greetings entering and leaving the TDL.

Hey, don't spoooose you're still up for helping me? Before the exam.

She ended her message with a winking emoticon, which he wasn't sure how to take. He didn't mind teaching her, but why before the exam? As he thought about it he nursed a spot on the inside of cheek he'd bitten by accident because decompression had clicked his teeth together. It stung but he wasn't about to run to Recovery Girl until he managed to seriously mess up, which he hoped he would not. He looked down at the phone again, tapped his foot, then replied.

A bit busy but I have time on wed night, hb that?

It was the best offer he could make, since he'd probably be sagging and falling asleep in the lounge again by then if he didn't get some extra rest on that day. He watched the phone for a few seconds more awaiting a reply that didn't come, so he clicked the phone to lock and grabbed the bags handle strap before turning toward the door.
He adjusted the slant of his bag upon his back so the brunt of it rested on the left side of his hip, then
leaned forward and rested his elbow on his knee, with his head perched upon his hand. They were at
the side area that led into the training dreamland, a bare locker room that wasn't made to store
anything but served well enough. He hadn't actually needed to change, he'd donned a fresh set of
training clothes back at the dorm and that's it, so now all he had left to do was wait.

"You alright there?" he asked, after some time of watching Kirishima try and strap the last red lace
and Velcro strap across the bottom right of his calf. It was intended to brace the muscle there as to
not allow him to be tossed back. It had struck him as odd when he'd come back to the dorm in
regular clothes, but apparently he'd done it just to get out of the costume for a bit. It chafed, he
claimed.

"It's fine, I got it."

He did not, in fact, have it because the next second he dropped the strap entirely. That made himself
stifle a laugh as he watched. "Maybe it needs a few more adjustments," he said and picked it up,
handing it back to Kirishima. His friend pouted as he took the strap and took a different approach.
Rather than strap it from front of thigh to back he started at the back and pulled it around, making the
Velcro tight as he did and then freeing his hands to do the laces.

"Done," he said and gave him a thumbs-up. "Told you I didn't need any help."

He shrugged. "If you say so." The strap didn't look right, but it'd do for now.

Kirishima took his own bag, the one he'd stuffed with his protein drink among others things then
looked him up and down. "So how long did Hatsume say the adjustments were going to take?"

"Uh," he answered as he thought back. "I haven't heard from her but I figured I'd go take a look after
the baseball thing on Wednesday."

"Oh right, with Ojiro." He nodded at the words, which prompted him to continue speaking. "And
did you ever get in touch with that lady?"

"I did." He meant Leina, and he had, for a brief and rude period. That wasn't to say she had refused
his request, only that she would mull it over. Something told him it wasn't going to be as simple as
that. "Anyway, I haven't got much time. I need to go to Midnight's office at twelve-thirty after our
turn in the TDL ends." Kirishima took his cue and turned toward the door, shoving it open and
letting him through first. His face looked unresolved, like he still had things he wanted as they
walked through the last little bit of extended tunnel that twisted a sharp left into the main TDL
building. "Go on," he said to urge him.

"Bakugou's going to Midnight's too, isn't he?"

He frowned. "Yeah, why?"

"Think he's doing okay?"

"How am I supposed to know?"

His friend waved his hand, just an inch upward. "I don't know. But like, he's acting weird. That's
all."

He stopped walking and turned at Kirishima. " Weird how?" If he was then he himself certainly
couldn't tell, not with his incessant training and general tendency to be oblivious.
"Forget it," Kirishima said. "It's stupid."

He raised a brow at him. "You've already got my attention, so tell me."

His friend looked at him, then back ahead as if to check no one was listening. "He's acting nicer."

He crushed the inside of his lips together with his teeth to avoid snorting. "He's acting nicer, and that worries you?"

"Dude, we both know it's weird so don't act like it isn't." Kirishima backed off a step and swung his red sack off his shoulder, reaching inside. "Look at this," he said and pulled out a notebook of sorts, a day planner was more like it. "He left this at his desk on Friday, I haven't had the guts to admit I found it yet. He'd kill me if I knew I read it."

He took the booklet and looked at it, the page Kirishima had specifically opened was the first one, as no other page had yet been used, however upon closer inspection he found that at least three pages had been ripped out. On the page that hadn't there were three different things written in haste and there was a distinct smudge and crunch on the top right corner, like there'd been a considerable effort to not crush it and throw it away as well. It was more of a wish list than anything. The first of the points noted a date, October 16th marked 'important.'

"Huh," he said.

"That's my birthday," Kirishima said as he noticed him looking at it.

He looked up from the page. "Your birthday?" That was weird, considering it was still a time away, and, well, Bakugou caring about that was… interesting. Enough to mark it down, anyway.

"Read the rest," his friend said, and so he did. The other two things were less useful, but still had him pausing.

"Stop using quirk on," he said, and failed to make the last word out. "Something something… swear word." He looked up at Kirishima and smirked. If anyone doubted it was Bakugou's this was proof enough.

"See?"

"I do," he answered. However Bakugou would never write this, like some kind of reminder, unless he was being forced to. By Midnight. His stomach churned as he remembered last time, with the sound of the table being flung across the room. And then, for what it was worth, Bakugou not blowing up his face even if he had still punched him. He looked at the last point, it had been crossed out twice by thick lines that obscured what it said. But, there was a name he could make out without too much issue, Kaminari and a word, something about practice.

"I donno what to think about it, man, it's freaking me out."

He handed the book back. "Give it to him, as soon as you see him. You're only making it worse by keeping it."

Kirishima grabbed it by the spine, then looked at the back. "That's what a man would do," he said and pouted, unsure. "But dude, if he knows I read it it's not like I can deny what that date means. Not to mention, I uh, tried to joking a bit about the way he was acting." He made a pained expression, as if he knew how stupid that made him sound.

He scratched his head, then sighed. "Fine, I'll give it to him if you're so scared," he said and took the
book back before his friend could object.

"You will?"

He reached in his bag and pulled out a similar book, though his was thicker. "Remember when I told you Midnight asked me to write about myself?"

Kirishima rubbed his chin as he looked at his book, though he didn't try to take it. "So you think it's like that?"

"Sure. It'll be easier if I pretend I recognized what it was and since I have my own one he'll believe me. Maybe, anyway."

His friend gave a considering look, where his eyes flicked to both books then back at him, then he shrugged. "Thanks, man."

"It's whatever, now come on," he said and began to walk again. "If I'm any later I'm sure I'll be spending the next two hours tied to a concrete hitching post by bandages or something."

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[Yuuuei's Campus — Main Class Building — 12:40 PM]

His fingers twisted as he walked and bent them around the metal egg in his hand. It was a fragment, a remnant of his training from the TDL that morning. In his mind he counted his application in seconds and fractions of seconds as best he could estimate. In two days he had made some kind of progress, a step toward making his quirk as if it was breath. It was exhausting work.

A look ahead of him to where Midnight's office was made him uneasy, because of who was in front of it. Bakugou. He popped the metal egg back in a pouch inside his bag and found the book instead. He'd have to find some careful way to do this. The halls, were empty as he slid down into a seat with an empty space between them. Neither of them had said anything but it wasn't like the guy hadn't noticed. He was just too busy downing something that looked like a mixture of a sushi roll and a sandwich, a sushi sandwich as it were. Rather than baring the awkwardness he scraped his teeth against his lip, then decided it was enough, he didn't want his cheek to bleed again.

"Hey," he said.

"What?" Bakugou answered, he was already scowling.

He scratched his arm, then pulled the book up from where he'd held it behind his leg and held it out toward him. "You left this."

He almost dropped his food as he snatched the book. "What the fuck are doing digging in my things, asshole?"

He shook his head and reached into his bag again. "I wasn't digging so you can cut that out." He pulled out his own book. "I didn't read it, and I made sure no one else did either considering it's probably the exact same embarrassing garbage Midnight is having me do." Bakugou looked at him, then the book, then grunted and went back to eating. He found enough relief in that, so he leaned forward to look in the door past Bakugou. There wasn't a shadow in it, but he was rather early. "So how about your sp-" He got halfway through the word then stopped, remembering how it had gone last time. He adjusted and continued. "I mean, what did you change about your costume?" Safer question, that.

Bakugou reacted as if he'd caught a whiff of a bad smell, face scrunching and distaste forming.
"Didn't change jack shit, there's fuck all need to do that crap."

He gave a hum of agreement to that. "Surprised you didn't make it more flashy just to spite Midoriya." He tried to give a chuckle, but it must have sounded insincere because his face immediately turned sour.

"Fuck that, I don't need stupid shit like that to put him in his place," Bakugou said, despite the tone the words came with a quiet insistence like he needed to tell it to himself.

"Right," he said, and nodded, looked back in his bag and removed the egg again. It was flaking already, to his dismay, he'd been hoping it'd last at least until tonight. He began to compress it and relieve it again, forcing his mind to take note of time and amount like a metronome counts beats. If he could get a rhythm for it, and an intricate knowledge, then he would try that move again; he had worked out that this was the reason it didn't work. He continued on for nigh ten minutes, before he noticed Bakugou was watching him do it. He stopped and spun the egg in the fingers of his left hand like he could with a coin, or a pencil, albeit with some difficulty. "Need something?"

"Hmph," he answered and turned back. He'd finished eating and Midnight still wasn't here, he probably hadn't expected her to be half an hour late.

"If you want to ask something, ask."

"I don't want to ask shit," he said and fiddled with the fingers of his left hand as if to dissuade any notion of interest. There were burn marks on the very tip of them.

"Suit yourself," he said and went back to the egg. After this session was over, however long it'd take, he'd need to find somewhere to practice until the one B students had left the TDL. The previous two days he'd just spent that time doing menial things; cleaning his room, trying to write what was now in the leather book, trying to corner All Might to sign his sister's drawing that she'd sent him. "I was serious about you showing me how you punch like that by the way, what you said was true."

Bakugou grabbed the lip of the chair between them and turned on him. "Do you always have to talk this much? You and that red headed shit."

He stopped himself backing off at the accusation, instead he shrugged. "Sue me." Something told him that wasn't the actual question he wanted the answer to. He stopped spinning the egg, as something was shoved in his face. "Huh?" he asked, looking at Bakugou. It was one of the rice sandwich things.

"Fucking take it and shut up."

He did, clasping the paper wrapped thing in his fingers, he wiped his other hand with the egg in it to get rid of some of the metal residue, then switched hands and did the same. He looked sideways at Bakugou who had stopped paying him any attention, if he hadn't it wasn't like he would be sure what to say. A thanks or something of that kind would probably just make Bakugou angry again. So instead he began to eat it, just in time for the shadowed door to open.

"Bakugou," Midnight said and saw him. "And Torenagi. I'm sorry for the delay, I was in a call." She beckoned at Bakugou, who grunted again before getting up, then the door closed leaving him alone.

It took him some time to finish what Bakugou had given him, half expecting it to be poisoned or a joke to be played. Nothing of the sort happened and in fact it tasted better than most sushi dishes he'd had here, enough to make him question if Bakugou really had made it himself. It wasn't a secret now that he was a good cook, even if he did have a habit of scorching pans and beating skillets to the
stove like they owed him money. The kindness was, weird. Just like Kirishima had told him, it was completely unlike the guy, and the exchange outside the dorm when they'd moved in came to mind. The prod and demand for a rematch should, in hindsight, have worried him. It didn't, now at least.

By the time the door opened he'd started messing with the egg again. There was a reason it was an egg and not a sphere, during his training he had realized part of the reason why compression and decompression weren't consistent was because shapes weren't and, as he already knew, the density between flesh, stone and steel was vastly different. So he had decided to explore that too, though perhaps he would have been better off trying it on a watermelon to get something closer to a skull. He heard a click and looked up at the door in time to see it open again, glad to have it not be accompanied by a kicked chair or a door threatening to slam him, as he'd moved over now to where Bakugou had sat before.

"Next weekend, same time, Bakugou," she said.

He waved a hand over his shoulder to dismiss her nagging. "Whatever," he said and looked down at him in the chair, to which he gave a smirk that was sympathetic rather than chiding. There wasn't a scowl at it, only indifference as he walked off.

"Torenagi," Midnight said, though he'd already begun to stand. She nodded at the door and he went inside first, she sat down and then lounged as best he could in the long chair. "How are you?"

He grimaced, hid it, then answered, "I'm good."

"Then," she said and held out her hand. He gave her a confused look then realized, and handed over the leather book.

"I didn't write much but." He paused as he watched her, all she did was flick the pages with her fingernails marking each page for half a second until she reached where it ended, on the third page. That was all he had been able to write and they were scribbles, empty thoughts, at best.

"Here," she said and passed it back to him. Then she turned and sat down in her own chair, legs crossing and a flick of her wrist adjusting her hair.

"You aren't going to read it?" he asked as he took it back, glad to have his inner monologues secure again.

"I'd never," she said. "My only desire is that you do it. Now, have you done what else I asked?"

His lips drew thin. "I did," he said and removed the sheet from his pocket. The baseball flier, and handed it to her. "I'm planning to go there and sign up for it, but it isn't until Wednesday."

She took it, read it. Then looked up over the edge and put it down on the table between them. "Good, that's enough."

He hesitated. "I talked with my sister," he said it as if some remorseful admittance. "I didn't talk about… that, but we did talk."

"And how is she doing?"

He smiled. "Well, very well." It spread wider across his face. "As best as I could have hoped. My uncle is too."

The woman returned his smile. "Excellent, then continue with it. I'm sure it wasn't easy."
"It wasn't, but." He trailed. "Yeah, it wasn't." He finished, not wanting to say more. If the book was to be between himself then his conversation with his sister was between them. Thinking of it had him itching to get back to training. Midnight must have noticed because she hadn't even scribbled a word on the clipboard, it wasn't even near her. She usually only put it down at the end.

"Torenagi," she said and he perked up. "The examination next weekend won't be easy, but I do believe all of you have the capability to pass. No matter the circumstance."

"Circumstance?" It was an odd choice, perhaps she was referring to his situation. His face became harder. "I'm going to be judged based on that too, then? Even though it was." He forced himself to say the next words. "Out of my control."

She gave a curt nod and leaned forward, folding her hands. "That's right, Bakugou will be too. The committee who determines heroic licenses is frugal and strict when it comes to this."

"For good reason, I guess." He looked away.

"Villainous intent must be ruled out and, although the school knows you don't have any, it is the way of things. They need to be sure."

He looked back with his eyes narrow and his grip on the stool beneath him. His words left him as acid and the itch had become ravenous desire. "Then, I'll prove it to them."

Chapter End Notes

* I do not own BNHA. OC material is my own.
Of stinging necks and buzzing minds

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

[ Yuuei's Campus - The Training Dreamland - 10:44 AM Tuesday ]

A necessity burned inside him and grew as if it were being fed by the aching in his fingers and the jitter in his arms. His left hand was being splintered from the inside and his right crushed by a giant but he didn't relent; he had no more time for useless strutting. Knowing that it would only get worse from here he tightened his grip, pushing out some of the pain and riding through it. His shoulders locked up from the act but no panic overcame him as the weight of his own quirk had become a disturbing yet fulfilling sensation. There were quirks out there with far more discomforting side effects than his, so he wouldn't whine about his own.

He imagined the holes forming in the black acrylic skull he had gripped with his left hand at the base of the neck. Then he used that fondness and familiarity built up over days to estimate when it would be equal to the compression he was instigating at a similar spot on the forehead. Fervor had made him tuned to it, a keeness he had only felt when he was in true danger and to his disgust when that thing had taken over. He ignored that part of it and concentrated on trying to stuff the raging storm of a quirk into a vessel that did not want it. He wasn't a villain, using power available to his quirk did not make him any closer to being one. A license in that regard was a means to dispel rumor and as such he yearned for a special move now, to prove himself to those who would doubt him once and for all.

Skin, bone, sinew, he imagined it all twisted by his quirk. They were dense but none so much as Kirishima's shell, which he too had broken through. That was how he knew it should work, how he knew he could shake these things up and confuse them to their own nature. His reward was that on the fifth second something did happen. There was a crack in the air and his concentration broke, he stumbled and reached for the metal bar to his left that had been lashed to the ground there last night by Cementoss. It was a suggestion that had proved itself with immediate results, he was drained of his tremor by the material, which was just shy of pure steel.

He opened his eyes and dared to look, Ectoplasm knelt while clutching his head. A disorientated state of pain and urgency, though he doubted the clone truly felt either. It lasted three seconds and the clone shook, images intersplicing like a hologram as teeth shattered and reappeared, flesh mixed with itself and became anew. Ectoplasm stood, and gave a breath as if to gather a mind scattered. He attempted to speak before the teacher could, but found that despite relief having come fast his throat was stuck as if he had swallowed glue. He coughed twice and on the third it dislodged, bringing with it ragged breath, desperate like someone had punched the wind from his body. He swayed and steadied himself. Then he met the man's eyes, whom regarded him with his typical jaw bared indifference. If the teacher could express emotion then he did not himself know of it, for he was a strange abyss of a man. An enigma even among the strange cast of Yuuei.

"That was," Ectoplasm said. There was an edge to his voice, a weakness that escaped his ability to explain it. "Better." His teeth shifted, a twentieth of an inch to the left, then he craned his head. "You are close to a breakthrough, Torenagi."

"Thank you, Sir." He leaned back against the bar of metal, which was not the only thing of oddity now in the stone garden. Around him stood broken cement, slabs, experimentation, an attempt to quantify his quirk. Instinct had swept the logic of it through his flesh through enough bone quaking discipline.
"Rest," Ectoplasm said. "When you are recovered we can continue."

"Yes, Sir." His insides burnt like a pilot light on which someone had poured gasoline, but there was no energy left to take advantage of it. He trudged and slumped onto the bench which he had cracked earlier, but not enough to collapse it, then he rested his head against the back that Cementoss had attached to it. Vrrm, his phone vibrated in the bag next to him, around which rubber balls were warped and a page from the book lay open covering natural geological phenomena, he'd been using his Unilateral Subduction to help him work out how this all might fit together. He wasn't able to keep the phone on him with the gym uniform, not that it'd be wise to use with his quirk staining his hands like ink. He took it after the third ring, making sure that the tremor was really gone. Leina, it read. This wasn't the best time, but he feared the idea of not answering it more than he wanted to close his eyes and drift off.

"Hello, Ma'am."

"Ma'am, Ma'am, Ma'am," Leina said, mimicking him like a squawking bird. "I'm not some old hag."

He smirked and turned to lay down sideways on the bench, so he could look up at the wide ceiling. It would have been painful to lounge on cement if he hadn't rest his bag to rest his head on and a training mat he'd been using earlier.

"Sorry, Ma'am," he said, emphasising it this time. Teasing her by doing this was one of the little things he allowed himself when talking to her.

Leina groaned. "I'm here, so come out and get me mister hero. Otherwise I'll change my mind."

"Got it," he said. "I'll be right there. You're at the western gate, right?"

"I'm already on the grounds," she said. "Near the large glassy building. It reeks of snobbishness around here."

"Right." He winced, although he didn't agree he had found it better to concur with Leina than to deny it. "Is Ko with you?" he asked.

"He is, and so is Edgeshot. Your school should be honored, or something."

"Edgeshot?" Ko had already been a surprise but one of the top heroes? It was probably something best kept to himself.

She scoffed. "Yes, now hurry it up and bring whoever it is you meant, what was his name again? Oyeehro?"

He resisted the urge to chuckle. "I will," he said. He had been expecting the call back, as he had gotten a text this morning. Leina had, with some backlash, agreed. On the condition she could take a look at Ojiro herself first. Test him. He hadn't told him about that yet, but it was better he went into it without knowing, probably. The phone beeped as Leina hung up which gave him enough of an urge to drag himself from the bench. He needed to find Ojiro, who was somewhere on the other side of the TDL.

He hoisted his bag onto his shoulder and looked to where Ectoplasm had been but he'd already disappeared. The first step he took made him whimper, he was battered and sore all over. It was his own fault which, somehow, felt good. He would visit Recovery Girl later and get fixed up. It wasn't something he had wanted to do as a point of pride but pride was damn irrelevant with the time he had left. He was silly for refusing to bow to it when he'd needed it already, restraining himself when he could have just used it.
As he made it through the pillars of cement that made up the plateau that Cementoss had raised he came upon the main area where some of the others trained. He made sure not to touch the walls around him as they were covered in ice and others glowed as if hot iron, nor did he walk straight through as he did not wish to burn his shoes in pools of acid which had been launched like lances from Ashido's hands. There was a crackling from Kaminari near the right wall as he threw the beacon-esque device and surged electricity toward it. He was trying to improve his aim, an admirable effort. Kirishima, who was close, had three Ectoplasm clones on him beating him relentlessly to the point where it was hard to see him, his cheeks were hard but scuffed like a stone dragged across the floor. Momo, who had the corner of the arena to herself, was the oddest display. She wasn't fighting as much as experimenting, the floor littered with an increasing array of objects that became increasingly complex the more she made in succession. He knew she had stamina and speed issues just as he did, so this must have been to fix that.

Satou nodded to him as he passed by to get to Ojiro. He returned Satou the greeting, taking note of the stance he had; it was the stature of someone winding up as if they were a wrestler ready to tackle. He looked back at Ojiro, who was fighting a clone with fitful effort. His was a plain style, a mixture of martial arts, with a great deal of power but made for defense, not assault. He punched at Ectoplasm's shoulder, which the clone shrugged off and returned to him as a kick. The tail flung him over it, then he swung his fist again, this time aiming at the face. He glanced Ectoplasm, though the teacher did not just rebuke him but flung him to the floor with a well placed expansion of his own flesh that caught Ojiro in the side. He pouted at the display, he needed to do better than that to impress Leina.

"Ojiro," he said approaching, watching the dazed boy rub his side.

He turned his head toward him, becoming unmuddled as he did. "Torenagi?"

"Come on, Leina's here." He nodded to the entrance of the dreamland, which caused Ojiro's face to light up. The clone of Ectoplasm, possibly sensing it was over, dissipated. Ojiro reached for his hand, which he had offered, and pulled himself up. His fingers still felt raw from his quirk usage but he'd built up calluses now so at least they weren't swollen.

It was bright and warm as they left the mouth of the TDL tunnel. In the light of the day they both looked ragged, more like beggars than training heroes, even though one of them wore a costume. He didn't feel a need to fix his appearance because it'd be even worse soon, despite Ko having come there was an urge to get this introduction over quickly so that he could go back to training.

Regarding that, he wasn't really sure what to make of Edgeshot and Ko's arrival. If he had to guess what the hero wanted was information, directly from the source, for his supposed team. If he did it was likely Leina had only found permission on the account of that as to give Edgeshot a chance to petition Nedzu, though if that was the case it came as a surprise that he hadn't been called to be questioned. It could have been that the school didn't want to involve him or that he wouldn't be able to provide more information than Nedzu himself could. As far as he knew the latest lead was still that red house, so if the school was investigating it then it wasn't a long shot that heroes like Edgeshot would be involved. He didn't feel like Edgeshot would find anything if that was the case. The League had dropped off the face of the earth since the fight with All for One and those masked men had been replacing them in spades. Janus's associates. He shook his head at the thought, there was no proof of that except that stupid beak. He gulped, then noticed he hadn't said anything in over three minutes which had left Ojiro trailing beside him and parting glances.

"I feel kinda shitty pushing you into it. If you don't want to train with her then I can call it off," he said, frowning. He had dwelt on the reason for his doing it, and concluded that it wasn't just the baseball thing. It was more like he owed it somehow, like if others were making their resources
available to him then he should try to do the same and something about Ojiro's floundering had set it off. He wanted him to succeed.

Ojiro's face hardened and his features became narrow, expression pointed downward. "If I didn't want to do it I wouldn't have let you sucker me in. I was kind of nervous but after training with Ectoplasm I don't really have a choice. I'm going to get hamstrung at some point if I can't become a better fighter."

His skin prickled at the words. "Sorry. I didn't mean to belittle you." He looked down at his fingers, the calluses he had earlier found, then up the arm. There was a hint of muscle developing there, nothing substantial but it indicated it was something his quirk took into account. The conditioning his body had prior to attending wasn't nearly this noticeable, if Leina was right then there was a good chance no one suspected he'd ever been in the hospital, let alone twice. Or three times, now, with that forest stint. He didn't count the Stain incident.

"Even if quirks like yours have it easier making cool techniques that doesn't matter," he said. "We get what we're given and I wouldn't trade my tail for anything."

"Still, someone like Todoroki is going to have an easy time becoming a pro," he said, not wanting to use his own quirk as an example. Someone better than him might have an easy time becoming a pro with it, not himself.

"As cliche as it is that's also what works against him."

He raised a brow at Ojiro. "Hmm?" he murmured as they passed the corner of the a stone building from which the white trimming peeled. It reminded him of his old dorm, but they were a ways out from that.

"I realized it during the match Midoriya had with Shinsou, it isn't all about having an amazing quirk. People love an underdog, and as far as quirks go mutational ones are about as underdog as it gets."

"True," he said, Kirishima had been right in that regard. "You did make it into the second round of the festival without any help, that's gotta count for something."

Ojiro nodded. "I was thinking about approaching Hound Dog about his fighting style before you brought up Edgeshot's sidekick. Even though he's a guidance counselor he was a really good hero before that. Err, I mean he still is but." They reached the main building, saving him from continuing the conversation. He didn't really know Hound Dog. Ahead of him he found the double doors that indicated the main entrance, surrounded by those characteristic pink petaled cherry trees. Their buds were dormant right now, which made the area sombre.

He rarely entered through the front of the building but he was aware it had a pseudo reception area at the base of it, as that was where he had gotten directions on the first day. It was spacious on the inside, welcoming, with pictures framed with a number of famous quotes; Plus Ultra and the like. He turned right into the alcove where there was a wall interface with a Plexiglas window, behind which as a reception desk. The room itself was well furnished like the lobby of a doctor's clinic, knee-high tables complete with couches and magazines. It smelt of burnt coffee beans, acrid and homely. Speaking with the man who sat at the desk was Leina, he recognized her by those amber clips in her hair, if he didn't know better he'd say she was flirting however the receptionist's nervous laughter told him he only entertained her out of politeness.

"Ma'am," he said loud enough to make her aware of him and Ojiro, she turned and lead with the heel of her shoe, shoulders bunched in an intimidating maneuver. The receptionist looked visually relieved as she paced at them.
"Took your damn time," she said, and came to tower over him. She didn't anymore, but the woman had the weight of a thousand icy glares behind her. She might as well have been several stories tall.

"Sorry." He beckoned at Ojiro. "This is him."

"Miss," Ojiro answered and bowed at least three quarters of the way to his waist. It was demeaning, if appropriate. "Please teach me."

Leina groaned. "Cut the honorifics and stand up straight," she said. He did, more abrupt than usual, with his tail waving down like a submissive pet. Ojiro had a strong frame for someone his age, at least rivaling that of Kirishima and he wasn't short either. Stocky was the word for it, like an anchor. He had covered up the part of his Gi that would normally have exposed his chest, perhaps out of respect or embarrassment.

"So, uh," the boy said, only for Leina to wave her hand.

"The tail," she said. "That's your quirk, right?"

"Yes?" He raised his brow as if it should have been obvious.

She nodded. "I normally wouldn't consider someone with a quirk like yours," she said. "But it doesn't seem like you've neglected the rest of your body." She looked at him, standing to the right of Ojiro. "Go find Ko, he wanted something from you. Him and Edgeshot went up to your principal's office."

He nodded then looked back at Ojiro. "So you'll help him?"

"It isn't like I have anything else on my plate right now." She sighed, her face was some kind of disheartened, long, drawn out like even uttering that much had pulled her out of being the person she usually was.

"Thank you," Ojiro said and began to bow again, before stopping himself at the nod.

"Thanks, Ma'am," he added as well. It was stress, not reluctance on her face. She had not expected Edgeshot to find the training acceptable and something else was bothering her, maybe Ko would tell him. He turned into a right hallway and left the two by themselves. There were two and a half floors between him and the office. He supposed if the man was in the office with his principal he'd have to wait, as even knocking wasn't appropriate, but he hurried nonetheless.

Windows passed him by with the sun causing them to glint and blind him like they were lights surrounding a soccer stadium. Each floor was in all senses identical, from each room to every nook mirrored, including Midnight's office, though suited to a different purpose. On one floor it was a nurse's office, one of many, and on the other an empty club room. Almost empty, he noted, two students sat in chairs in there, one with a violin and the other a trumpet-like instrument he didn't recognize. The place he sought was distanced enough that he was tired again by the time he made it, he blamed the buildings peculiar U-shape for that.

"Sir," he said as he rounded the corner, spotting who he had hoped to find on the bench. Ko.

"Lad," Ko answered, stood, then grabbed him by the shoulder in a firm grip. The man looked better than when he'd last seen him, if a bit rouged up.

He looked toward the door. "Edgeshot's here?"

"He is." The man nodded. "Business."
"I thought it'd be just Leina."

"It mighta bin' but there was an opportunity, and sometimes ya hafta take those."

"Right," he said. "And… you wanted something from me?" He prayed it wasn't related, he didn't need something else to distract him.

Ko sat again. "It's nothing important, truth be told I jus' wanted to see ya more than anything."

"It's been a while," he said, joining the man and rubbing the back of his neck, it stung a little. That would go away if he ignored it.

Ripped laughter left him. "A while, that's a way to put it. Ya bin good?"

"I have, Si- Native."

He smirked. "Good thing you remembered, I was bouta smack ya. Anyhow, 'member when I told you I might be strikin' out on my own?"

"Yeah."

"I've already handed off my resignation, figured I'd tell ya myself. I'll be out of Edgeshot's service soon enough, though I'll still be an associate and the like."

"That's. He wasn't sure how to respond, his heart halted a bit, then filled. "That's great."

"That damned fight with the hero killer and all this stuff surrounding it got me into the guts of it. I can't do anything keepin' myself tied up in street patrols."

"Then you better help a lot of people," he said then smirked. "And you better answer your phone." It was important work, but he saw what the man was getting at, Stain had changed Ko, All for One had changed him more. This was a result of that difference. He was too, to be fair, the experience was stuck as tar in his veins.

"That's the plan." Ko chuckled but it petered out into neutrality. "Leina's been a bit torn up about it, thinkin' of joinin' me."

"Oh," he said. "So that's what that was about. Trouble?" He was glad he hadn't needed to ask.

"Don't worry about it, it's between me and her. You have that license exam coming up, yeah? When ya pass we can meet up to celebrate."

"Definitely." When, he noted the word and pride swelled in his chest. The door to Nedzu's office opened and Edgeshot walked out. He was identical to when they'd first met with his heightened sense of style and hardened eyes, it was like adversity did not stick to the man. Behind him stood the principal, even shorter than the man himself. He looked pleased, though he couldn't a recall a time the principal had not been so smug.

"Thank you for your assistance." Edgeshot nodded at Nedzu as they shook hands.

"If we can be of any further help please let us know, we're happy to indulge," Nedzu answered and let go. His gaze shifted to him, beside Ko. "Torenagi, were you looking for me?"

"Ah, no, I-" He flustered.

"I asked him to commere', my responsibility, Sir."
"I see, my mistake." He gave him a look, one that said his door was open to him regardless, if he needed it.

"Come Native, we have something to investigate," Edgeshot said and walked past them, giving him a glance. "Terra," he said, a gesture of acknowledgment. He would question how the man knew his face, but he hadn't always worn his costume at the agency, not to mention his face had been plastered several a time without it on in the news. He'd be damn well surprised if many people couldn't offhandedly recognize him with a half-decent glance.

Ko clapped him on the shoulder. "Right, lad. I'll be seein' ya and you'll be hearin' fromme anyhow." He stood and followed the man, leaving only him and the principal behind.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt you, Sir," he said. He hadn't, but he was obligated to say it despite Ko's excuse.

Nedzu chortled. "Apologizing is quite out of order, Torenagi. Yes, in fact, I think it was appropriate for you to come and see Native and Edgeshot. It is a rare opportunity to talk to our mentors again and that can be a very refreshing experience."

"It was," he said, though he had only talked to one. Ko striking out on his own was a kind of mind shocking, like you knew time was moving on and that nothing was a fixed point. He needed to keep moving as he had, too.

"Then, we both better get back to what we were doing." Nedzu turned and he stood, the man hung at the door before he went inside. "It goes without saying that we won't allow anything to happen to you again, Torenagi," he said.

Before he could say something in response the door shut and the man was gone. His heart thumped at the minuscule attempt to reassure him without conveying knowledge of what was on the recordings. He banished a thought of Weiss from his mind as he turned. He did not need to think about that for a week yet. His fingers zapped, he must have used his quirk on accident, so he tightened them. It was an affirming tremor, the only important thing right now.

[Yuuei's Campus - The Training Dreamland - 9:44 PM]

His hands twitched. One, two, three, four, he counted in the back of his mind. The holes formed as did the depressions. It was an art, really, and he was the technician or sculptor. He didn't like to think himself so pretentious but, well, he was the only one with this quirk so who was there to dissuade him? A twinge emerged at the ends of his fingers. The threshold from this morning was coming again; now that he had felt it once he was sure it was the same. He quelled it this time, increasing the use of both compression and decompression like tumultuous tides that would feed off each other.

The egg rattled and his left arm became empty while his right threatened to disobey. He slid it to the ground as his quirk halted to a stop. In his left hand he rolled the egg as if it were made of snow, although it's surface was still a smooth metal. It split at three sections where the material had failed to hold, then cracked open like it was hatching, which spilled iron innards across his palm. The inside was a bizarre corrugated mixture of sections where the metal had grown light and striated and others where it had come together like quicksand. It mesmerized him and then crumpled completely. He'd used too much compression, just a hair too much. Using an object to practice on wasn't as good as Ectoplasm but he had no real choice in this place, despite that the move he was making was taking shape before his eyes, the violence of it's prelude becoming the center of it. He'd felt first hand what it should do, now he had to project that onto those he used it on.
He dropped the shards and held his neck, bending it. It didn't click in relief, instead it cued a surge of heat in his mind. He pinched his skin to dissuade it but it came back stronger, so he hit his fist into the cement. Extreme, necessary. It went away and he reached for the gloves, slipping them on and then taking them off after five seconds. They hissed as he removed them like they couldn't take the strain. Although he could get rid of his quirk on the cement he found that using the glove was a good way to establish complete normality after having done so. A baseline, so to speak.

He glanced at Cementoss, who was dozing about a half a dozen feet away on the bench from this morning. It wasn't a comfortable seat, he'd learned that much already. The man rarely said anything while he practiced. He shrugged then turned back, reaching for another egg. On the Monday he had tried switching between practicing both his simultaneous compression and his special move, however it was obvious now that he had to choose one with the time he had. If he hadn't been as he had the previous week he could have managed to start on both but he didn't want to think about that. One was enough, changing his entire style with the ability to use multiple compressions like the thing in his head could wait. The thing in his head, he had to stop calling it that. 'Grudge' perhaps, but if he called it that he mightn't be able to stop himself smirking each time. He breathed out, it was easier without air in his lungs. Then he imagined the egg again, a minefield being controlled by phantom limbs crushing and pulling apart.

Restraint is a coward's weapon. Your enemies could bow before you, if only you allowed me.

It spoke like grinding gears with bits of cobble and metal gargling in its throat. He winced and lost his concentration, the egg thumping and his fingers snapping back open. Pain, pain, pain, he thought as it flooded his fingers. He tucked them under his arms and squeezed, dampening them somewhat. Then he went for the gloves again, relieving the quirk. It had spoken, and he'd lost his concentration again. He ground his teeth and clamped his hands harder, reinforcing the pain enough to blow whispers from his mind by force.

"Unfortunate," Cementoss said and he turned to look at him, he had one eye open now. He could only have looked more casual if he had worn a sun hat and had a glass of orange juice beside him.

"It is what it is," he answered. Everyone knew what his quirk did to him in terms of the discomfort.

"I'm referring to that scrape on your knuckle," he said. "Is that necessary to rid yourself of the tremor?"

He grimaced. "No, not exactly."

"Ah, so you use it to center yourself then? I have always been partial to tapping my fingers together instead. Punching cement is an odd choice."

"Uh..." He stumbled at the words, pulling his mind away from the task at hand so he could provide the incredulous look the man deserved to get.

Cementoss's lips narrowed, creasing the cement around it. "Perhaps you have residual resentment toward myself, Torenagi. I suggest you let it out if that is the case."

He frowned. "You're messing with me, aren't you?"

"I am." He smiled. "Find a better way than pain to manage it, otherwise pain will become a necessity."

"I've got it, Sir," he said and turned back at the rocks. He raised his hand, and took a look at the knuckle as he did so, despite not really wanting to. It was bleeding, because that was the fourth time
he had pounded it into the concrete that night. He had worse days and better days, today was the former.

"If I have taken note of it, surely the association would too. It would not, help, I imagine. Please remain careful."

He ground his teeth but didn't ordain the man with another look. Cementoss was right, he thought as his head sang again. Restraint is a coward's weapon, the voice repeated. That was in turn, not right. The repetition of the phrase was ridiculous, an offense that lent the idea credit. He refused to give it that, so he banished it away.

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**[Yuuei's Campus - Sports Field \(\Delta\) - 2:10 PM Wednesday]**

He scanned the flier as he walked, making sure the location was correct. They had arrived at the field in a kind of random trudge that led them this way and that, until they had found a miniature stadium of sorts. It was multipurpose and the only one of its kind, able to adjusted to suit a few different game types, one of them including baseball though he doubted that was a big ask.

At the back of it, allowing entrance, was an archway with two lights on it. Ribbons that had been left behind from a previous sporting event hung down from above them stating *Yuuei versus Shik-* the latter half having been ripped off. He walked through it, being guided into stands that sank down into the earth, it was a strange way to build a playing field but more practical than building a heightened one in a way. A few steps down he saw an overhang, a type of area for players to sit away from the crowd's eyes, opposite another on the other side of the field.

"Are you sure this is the right place, Torenagi?" Ojiro asked him. The guy had been silent about his training with Leina yesterday which, while weird, he had chosen to respect. She must have taken a chunk out of him by pointing out flaws, as she had with him. He'd bounce back. Probably.

"Sure looks like it," he answered. He was nervous too, even more so as he rounded the stand to look at who was there. A boy, with blond hair. "Hello," he said to try and gain his attention.

The boy turned on his heels, with more skill than the position should have allowed, a learned precision. He looked up at him, as if scanning him from the shoe up, stopping at his face and then stood. He was tall, but it was the confidence he exuded that told him this was who he was looking for. Mirio Togata. A captain, and not so much a boy, he looked older than the average third year.

He clapped his hands together, then held them like he wanted to flex them but was trying his best to resist. "Ah, Torenagi and Ojiro," he said, looking at his companion. There wasn't hesitation in it, no question.

"You know us?" he asked, the feeling was not mutual.

"It gets around," he said and gave a large smile. It was cartoonish, as was his cowlick. Saying he was clean cut would be doing him a disservice, he was the person the ideal could have been named after. "Your classmate, Kirishima, tipped me off that some people in your class were interested or, at least, that one person was. Two is a great surprise I have to say."

"Of course he did." And here he'd made it seem like he'd only gone and gotten fliers, he should have assumed. "You've got it right then, we're here for the baseball team," he said as he looked past Mirio and the two bins of equipment he'd set out. There were two guys and girl sitting on the bench not far from them.
Before he could take any step toward them Mirio came closer in a way that he didn't expect, right up in front of the middle of him and Ojiro, he would have taken a step back if it hadn't been so fast. Instead it froze him, something menacing overcame him and set his skin crawling with unease like a titan looking down upon an ant. He didn't know what this man was capable of, yet he knew the feeling. Awe. It drenched him, a familiar oil cast from behind a smile. It was similar to when he had spoken to All Might alone, intimidating but heroic.

"Good to have you, both," Mirio said and the tension crashed as he put up both his hands, one for each of them. He was firm now, rather than overwhelming.

His fingers were shaking before he clenched them, and sweat tapered on his back as he forced himself to take the hand. "...Thanks," he said and then found himself confused.

"Don't we need to, you know, throw a ball around or something?" Ojiro asked, as if taking the words from his lips.

His hand slipped through Mirio's grip as he chuckled, causing him to look down at it to try and make sense of what had happened. It must have been his quirk, he concluded. "We can't turn anyone down right now. If you aren't good enough I'll just have to teach you," he said, then walked toward the others sitting on the bench. He mouthed the word 'weirdo' then looked at Ojiro, who shrugged. Mirio had begun talking, loudly at that, about them which drew curious looks from the three who had been ignoring them up until that point. They had to already be on the team, he mused, because each of them wore what he presumed was a Yuuei baseball uniform. White and striped in blue, with a patch of the red letters on the shoulder.

"Newbies," one of the boys, who had long, sanded brown hair that hid a pattern on his skin, said. It was as if someone had rubbed him raw with rope burn. The girl next to him put one hand up as if she as being dictated by a script but said nothing. "That brings us back up to nine, right?"

"Assuming they can play, Tito," the dark haired boy sitting on the other side of the girl, said.

"They've got spunk," Mirio said, grinning again and making a single fist-pump. "They're exactly what our team needs."

"And by that you mean they exist and are here right now, to fill the gaps in our team," he said and rose to meet them. There were no obvious marks of his quirk on his body like Tito. "It's Utiwa Sakikawa, I'm in the second year general class."

"Torenagi Riley." He motioned to himself, then next to him. "And Ojiro Mashirao, first year heroics one A."

Utiwa's eyes narrowed. "I hope you live up to the expectations I have from people from heroics, then. It's Mirio's last year at Yuuei, so we need more fresh blood." He looked at Mirio again, who had been whispering to the girl. She had dark hair as well, but more than the usual. In addition to being pigtailed it looked like it was sucking in the light, the edges of each strand was thick and bent some part of the air around it, as if being distorted. A fine mist-like effect.

"He's heroics too?" His own ignorance was so painful it might have made him wince.

Tito gave him a look of surprise. "Seriously? You didn't know? He's like the biggest deal in this school," he said and came up beside while Utiwa giving him a shove. "Just goes to show, I suppose. I'm Tito Kah No Miwa Kasami, but you can call me Tito for short, I'm from the same class as Utiwa. I'm glad your two heroics classes are so eager, never would have had a full team without all of you."
Ojiro grunted in surprise. "Our sister class signed up too?" he asked, folding his arms. An odd gesture, but perhaps he bore a grudge as he had from the festival and their antics.

"Yes," the girl said, causing the two boys to look over their shoulders. She was looking down, with her hands on her knees, when she did decide to stand she did it with a posture that did not deviate an inch, and her turn marked by the flash of eyes that went on forever, for they were as black and glassy as a black hole. "One B graciously volunteered us two souls, Jurouta Shishida and Kousei Tsuburaba. As Kasami said, it is most fortunate as we lost six of our members due to resignations, graduations and illness since the beginning of the year, it did not bode well." She had used the most formal pronunciation and terms for the one B students, acknowledging them as equals. He hadn't even noticed himself giving such designation to Mirio, but he had. Those honorifics often slipped his mind as they naturally swerved into his speech. A good thing, really, because around his friends the terms dropped like rocks. It was fortunate they didn't mind.

"Jurouta," he repeated, having almost missed the name. That was Kuroiro's classmate, the bestial looking guy, who had been a in that bathroom too when he'd broken Kuroiro's hand. He wondered why the two 1-B students weren't here, before he recalled. They were in the TDL right now.

"He pitches like an animal," Mirio said.

"That's because he IS an animal," Utiwa said, annoyance spreading. "Besides, even with all that strength Kousei is much better than he is."

"Be quiet," the girl said with some intensity, though she had no eyes the ever spanning darkness did an admirable job in enhancing her glare. She moved around the side of Utiwa, who had been adequately shushed, and came up to him and Ojiro. "The other student on our team is Tamaki Amajiki, who is from Mirio's own class."

"And he isn't here, as usual." Utiwa spat having regained his sense of diatribe. "Guess I shouldn't be surprised, he'd be terrified meeting one person, let alone two of you. Should have seen him when that one B duo turned up, it was like a squid trying to escape a predator."

Tito shrugged. "He'll show up when he needs to."

"Tch. Half the reason he's on the team is because of Mirio," Utiwa said under his breath. "Maybe more than half. I bet he'll be glad if we get a tenth, then he can be on reserve again."

"And your name is?" Ojiro asked the girl before Utiwa could continue his rant.

"Chikuchi Togeike," she answered, her face settling into what might have been a permanent pout. If she had a class, she did not want to give it, however he remembered her from somewhere. The general department with Shinsou, if he had to guess, but he wasn't sure. "If you two have any qualm with one B students I do suggest leaving them at the door. We have requested the same of all our members, it is a natural thing for a competitive school such as Yuuei."

"Got it," he said, and Ojiro nodded.

"Perfect," Mirio said, swinging one of the bats up into his hand as he did before pointing it out at the field. "Then let's see what you can do."

[Yuuei's Campus - Outside the Support Sector - 3:52 PM]

The iron filings disappeared into the bin beside him and he wiped his hands on his trousers, the place he had chosen to practice was an abandoned hallway near the furnace. Just a few minutes before he
let himself get overwhelmed by whatever was inside the inferno. Now he had done just that, so he stood with only his phone and wallet on him as he had come here straight after the baseball meet. He'd need to go again next week Wednesday though later in the afternoon, and on Monday during lunch of the first day if Mirio called for it. Supposedly they wouldn't have classes on Saturday next semester, though the reason for that hadn't been given them explicitly. Either way if Mirio had the whim it'd be texted in advance which was fine with him. They hadn't done much to prove themselves all things said and done, he assumed that would come when their entire team could meet up including Blood King, who managed the team, and those 1-B students. Jurouta, he chewed his lip at the name.

He dismissed the thought as he headed toward the corridor that would lead to the heavy heated air, which was more intense than last time he had gone. It wafted at him as he opened the door, threatening to burn his palms. The place wasn't empty this time, four or five support students walked around sections working on strange gadgets. His doubt of how many there were was from the fact two of them looked the same and mimicked every action, like a clone. One of them held a cord like device, like an abseiling rig and the other the long end of it that would be hooked at the top of whatever you wished to climb. He passed them by, careful not to get jumbled up in their experimentation and found the back of the furnace once more.

The chain in front of him burst back just as he was about to move it, and a device was pushed into his face or at least close enough that he startled. He jumped back a step, then recognized it. It was his helmet only different, sleeker, the visor part had been removed and it looked more like a collar. The only reason he knew it was the same was because of the scope button which had been repurposed for something else.

"Hatsume?" he said as he pushed the pseudo-helmet aside to reveal her face, which was glinting a massive grin.

"You're here," she said.

He cocked his head. "I'm here." His speech was more uncertain than hers.

"You're not meant to be here!" Her grin turned into a perplexed smile, like she wasn't sure where the person she actually wanted had gone. She shoved him aside and turned this way and that, with the less-than-visor under her arm.

"Uh, Hatsume?" he asked and rubbed his head.

"My dramatic reveal is foiled again. Next time." She turned back and walked past him under the chain, which he followed through. The rest of the costume wasn't there, like he'd been hoping it would be. She only had the helmet, or whatever it could be classified as now.

"How is it going with my costume?" he asked, walking up to her table and reaching for the visor which she had now placed down.

She slapped his hand away and gave him that neutral glare of hers. "My baby isn't finished yet."

He rubbed his hand. "And when is it going to be finished?" Granted it hadn't even been a week but the others modifications hadn't taken nearly as long. There was also something specific he wanted to ask about, namely regarding the gloves and his new technique and the ability to adjust when the gloves worked. It was kind of important, as the idea had only come to him this morning.

"Take this," she said and handed him a single object, a glove, his shredded glove but as it was before the incident happened. No, it wasn't, it looked similar but rather than having just lines at the cuff
extended into the palm and on top of the knuckles. He turned them over then looked at her, she
motioned to him to put it on so he did, slipping his hand into the fabric. It was tight but stretchable for
the most part, which meant it sat form fitting to his hand. It didn't dissipate his tremor, that he had
kept from his practice outside, it must not have been done yet. He was in luck.

She nodded and tugged it from his hand, then mumbled to herself something he couldn't understand.
He tapped his foot and found himself unsure what to do. She had heard his question, so she didn't
want to answer it. It'd be done when it was done, he guessed was the real answer. His head felt hot
and not just from the heat, frustration simmered it. The chain behind him clanked and he turned to
look, Power Loader.

"Torenagi," he said.

"Sir-" Before he could finish the sentence the side of his head pricked with pain. Hatsume had
turned a full one eighty in her eagerness to display the helmet again, smacking him with the side of
one of her gloves.

"Sir!" she yelled, not giving a damn about the pain she had inflicted. He nursed the wound as he
watched her bring the a-helmet-but-no-longer-a-helmet-helmet device to the man. A good name, he
should stick with that.

Power Loader took it and spun it in his hands, then he nodded. "Fine work, but isn't this going to
make the neck a bit inflexible?" She took the helmet back and pulled on either side. The plastic
substance pulled apart and sprung back together as if it were elastic, only the centre column at the
back of it stayed rigid. "I see," he said, then looked at him. "I'm guessing you came here in hopes of
getting an update?"

"Yeah," he answered, grimacing. "I also wanted to go over something specific with the design."

Power Loader gave him a curious look, a single slant narrowness of his eyes becoming visible as a
light above hit him. "And what might that be?"

He glanced at the glove again, back on the table. He rubbed his head, Power Loader had designed
the glove, maybe he could just ask him. "Is it possible to slow down the rate at which the gloves
dissipate the effect of my quirk?"

He folded his arms, then cocked his head. "It is."

"Is it too late to include that now?" he said. "I'm working on my special move, but it doesn't have
enough oomph. I think it's because I keep hitting the limit my body can take. I'm sure I could get
there eventually on my own but." Power Loader shrugged, then walked past him and toward
Hatsume, who had already gone back to working on the helmet. He took the glove he had worn
before and brought it back. He held it up and turned it, on the palm there was a set of two plates each
that he hadn't noticed prior. "Sir?" he asked.

The man appeared confused as he looked up. "I figured you asked for it to be this way," he said,
pointing at the plates.

"What do you mean, Sir?"

"She already fulfilled that request is what I mean. The plates on the palm work in a similar way to
what you described. Put it on," he said as he handed it over.

"Um," he said, feeling stupid as he slipped it on and felt no difference.
"Do this." Power Loader held up his hand and touched the part where the two plates would be with his pinky and ring finger. He mimicked the motion. A chill overcame him, dissipation of his quirk left his fingers numb in the glove like he'd stuck them in a freezer. "See?" the man said. "The more fingers you use the faster the effect should be, it isn't done yet but Hatsume was quite vocal about getting this part right the other day."

"Hmm," he answered. He was sure he hadn't described it to her like this, the only thing he had mentioned was wanting to choose when to get rid of the effect. Like an off and on switch. Could she have extrapolated his request from just this? It seemed unlikely, unless she had guessed at it or found some other way to observe his usage of the quirk.

"I'll try and hurry her along, see if you can have some basic version of it by the weekend. It'll need further adjustments regardless whether it's ready or not."

He took off the glove and handed it back. "Thanks, Sir," he said and checked his phone again. There was a message, from Tsunotori. He opened it, it read **Free now - waiting at dorm.** He locked the phone then looked up at Power Loader. "I have to go." He looked at Hatsume, but she wasn't sparing attention for anything except the helmet, so he gave Power Loader a gesture and left.

He expected his luck to be shoddy enough that he wouldn't find Tsunotori in the lobby of the identical alliance building, and that was indeed the case. He texted her as he stumbled around the disorientating right section in which he had expected her to be waiting, perhaps she was still in her room. It all looked so similar but in a blue decorum rather than red, but compared to 1-A's dorm it was silent. It was weird to think that in some other reality he might have ended up in this class instead, rather than 1-A, just out of pure chance. If he hadn't gone to USJ with 1-A then would Janus have targeted him at all? Yes, he probably would have just found some other opportunity in the confusion of the attack where nigh every teacher had come to save them. Or, he would have gone after Ojiro.

He crossed the border of the room that separated the dining area and kitchen and sat down on a stool. His new teammates were somewhere in this building, and he assumed they already knew he was on the team now. How would Jurouta react? He'd made good with Kuroiro and from what he knew of Jurouta he was nothing if not respectful, if you respected him in turn. Kousei on the other hand, he didn't know anything about him other than that he had the guts to fight Bakugou, if not the skill to succeed at it. He'd need to get along with both of them if this was going to work, Mirio had implied that he was the kind of captain who wanted them to do more than just meet up once a week to bat a few times then part ways. He was a leader, the confidence told him that, and from what he had been informed Blood King had a hands off approach, trusting the captain to manage it for the most part.

"Ohohoho, so this is how far one A's arrogance has grown, presuming to invade our personal space any time they please."

He groaned as he turned his head left. "I'm here to see Tsunotori, Monoma. Do you know where she is?" She hadn't returned the text yet, but it had only been a minute.

"Hoping to lead her down some dark path, are you, villain boy?" Monoma flourished his hands as he walked up to him. He must have come down from the boy's side stairs and seen him. To be fair it was weird to find him here as their classes didn't mingle much, if at all, outside necessary things.

"I don't know what you're talking about," he answered and turned back to his phone. Nothing yet. He looked back at Monoma, continuing to feign nonchalance should be enough to make him stop.

"Hmph," he said and puffed out his chest and stood a strange way, as if to seem taller. It didn't work, really. He didn't have a face to make it have that effect. He did manage to look as if he was about to
burst though, like some kind of water balloon.

"Monoma what are you doing stalking around the girls side again? It's creepy, not chivalrous,' Kuroiro said. He had walked around that same corner Monoma had, louder.

"I'm sure Sir Monoma has a noble explanation for his actions," Jurouta said, obviously displeased by what he'd caught Monoma doing. Had this not been his first time? He looked at Monoma who had become a slight shade of purple.

Monoma lost his temperament and regained it just as fast with a grin, standing on his toes but not enough to make it obvious to anyone but him. "I'm a ward, gentleman, there is nothing creepy about it," he said and waved a hand behind him. "I found this despicable one A villain skulking around our dormitory and I'm letting him know he isn't welcome here."

He cursed under his breath but kept himself still. The ridiculousness of it was making him irritated, rather than the insult, he looked at Kuroiro and Jurouta, who had only then taken notice of him. "I'm here to see Tsunotori," he said.

"She isn't here," Kuroiro answered. "In fact, I'm sure she went over to your dormitory a bit ago by what Kinoko was saying." He chuckled, as if realising something. "Don't tell me both of you went to the opposite places?"

He scrunched his face. "Could be," he muttered. It was possible, and he refused to feel stupid for it, so he changed to a smirk instead. They should have been clearer. "Thanks," he said and rose in an eager motion. He didn't really want to be around three people, two of which he was sure, by Jurouta's scowl, antagonized him and one that only mildly accommodated him.

"Wait," Kuroiro said, causing him to halt mid stride. "You joined the baseball team right?"

He bit the inside of his lip again and nodded. "How did you find that out?"

"Mirio informed Kousei and I," Jurouta answered for him. "So it is true then, Torenagi." He slipped the name as if were grinded from granite slab, rough, like he didn't even want to say it. It was a belittling thing that stung.

"Guess that means you're going to be around us a lot more," Kuroiro said. "What a pain."

"No Yuuei team needs someone from one A, let alone someone like him," Monoma said.

Kuroiro scowled at Monoma. "You should watch your back," he said while slanting his eyes back at him, then shrugged. "I don't care personally, but if someone gives you trouble let me know. I'm sick of all the petty rivalry between our classes, and I think I'm pretty convincing," He looked at Monoma again, twisting his hand. Monoma stepped back, face widening. Something about Kuroiro frightened him, though he could not himself say what. He'd never seen Kuroiro actually fight, nor use his quirk. It could have been because of that. Now he kind of wished he had seen it during the trial of bravery, he'd only heard few other screams and supposedly Kuroiro's had been one of the ones inducing them.

"Same to you, then," he said as he glanced at Jurouta once more, who'd folded his arms and gone silent with nothing left to add. Before it could become awkward he made for the door as quick as he could. His face was just shy of burning under the attention of the three, he wasn't sure how he'd held it together. Next time he'd make sure the person he was trying to find was actually where they said they would be.

An embarrassing trudge of a few yards later he ended up back at his own dorm. He pulled the door
open and instantly knew he had found her because he caught whispers of her name coming from the front left of the area. He looked around the corner, abandoning his shoes again as he had done at the other dorm. Tsunotori, as he saw her horns first, was sitting with her back to him in one of the couches alongside a few other people, Uraraka, Tsuyu whom were not unusual to find, were bunched up next to her. There was also Kirishima who was grinning alongside a rather cheerful Kaminari on the opposite couch to the girls. Midoriya, to his surprise, was also there and looking more confident than usual in one of the two arm chairs, the other had Todoroki in it, his indifference a stark contrast to the rest of them. It was crowded, he had to admit, it was unusual to find seven people here and now eight if he counted himself.

"Ah, yeah, I am very..." Tsunotori paused. "I am prepared," she finished the sentence as if having found words to grasp at, any that conveyed the meaning.

"That's great, I'm still a bit nervous about it," Uraraka said, she had her hair tied up in a bun and was fiddling with the pin that held it that way. It had a cracked coral colour, the same as the ones Momo used on occasion, she must have requested her to make one. Or borrowed it, he supposed, it wasn't like Momo made everything anyone wanted.

"I'm still wondering what kind of things they'll be testing us on," Tsuyu said.

Midoriya looked at her, his hands shifting forward on his knees as he spoke. "They must have a system for quantifying heroic ability," he said, moving one of his hands to his chin and his voice becoming quieter, faster. "Power, speed, helpfulness as parameters? Maybe guts or lack of hesitation or would they compare us to existing heroes? Or maybe a judging system like the Q.S.U.M.M. or objective witnesses. That'd be impossible, they'd all have to be impartial and..."

"You have zero chill, Midoriya," Kaminari said.

"Maybe you should have less," Todoroki said. "Then you would be better off in class, too.'

"Man, what do you know? I'm going to ace that license test, they'll be shouting my name like I'm the next big thing you just watch."

"The day people hail you as the next All Might is the day I eat my shoe-" Kirishima stopped, as he realised, then pointed. "Yo, there is the man of the hour. Told ya all you needed to do was wait."

Tsunotori turned over her shoulder and her expression softened. "Hey," she said, immediately reverting to her native language. "You made it."

He returned her something astounded. "I made it? I thought you were the one waiting for me, didn't you get my text?" he said.

She glanced down and smiled as the message blinking on her phone. "Woops," she said, tilting her head at him. "Sorry, I promised myself I'd answer it more but I got kinda caught up in the moment."

He winced. "It's fine but I didn't really mind going there if you were more comfortable around your own class building."

"Oh I mean, I didn't want you to run in with Monoma just in case so I figured this was for the best."

"The only reason I ran into him is because I was looking for you. Forget it." He shrugged a shoulder and moved around the couch, glancing at the rest of them in acknowledgment. Kirishima moved over, allowing him to sit, and Kaminari gave him a harsh nudge in the rib as he did.

"So this is the girl you're interested in is it?" Kaminari whispered.
He flushed. "No," he spat. "I'm just helping her." It was something he could guarantee, he'd had crushes before and this wasn't in the same vein. At all. He focused adamant on his thought the other night. Quirk, training, special moves, his father. His father? No. License. That was right.

Kaminari grinned. "So you are interested in someone, just not her, good to know. I knew you weren't so innocent back when I saw you together at the bus."

"So Kaminari was right for once?" Kirishima asked him, equally quiet.

"Shut up, both of you," he snapped and delivered a very inconspicuous but point-making rap of the knuckle to the duos thighs.

"Hey, what did I do?!" Kirishima said.

"Damn man, that hurt. Doing stuff like that is just going to confirm my suspicions." Kaminari chuckled and chucked a hand around his shoulder. "Come on then, spill."

He ignored him and looked back at Tsunotori, switching back to English. "We won't get much done here, if you wanted help with Japanese then we should go to the library or something."

"I'm fine, this is fine," she said.

He raised a brow. "You sure?"

"I am, we can talk about tutoring some other time." She looked down and away. "My class doesn't do this kind of stuff often, it's refreshing even if it's hard to understand." She made a glad expression, like she'd been waiting for something like this, however it didn't look earnest. It had to feel isolated, he realized, it was one thing to study here but entirely another to be studying without proper grasp of the language. Simple things became a chore, difficult ones became impossible.

"I see, alright, here it is then," he said and tried to stop himself feeling the sombre implication of her words. It was hard to imagine 1-B was like she described when they had people like Kendou and Tetsutetsu. Jurouta's expression came to mind and it occurred to him now that the boy didn't just dislike him, it wasn't so simple, it could have been something bordering hatred. He sank back into the couch in earnest. If this was truly all she wanted, then it was fine. He did already feel exhausted, so if he had tutored her he mightn't be the best shape he could be with Cementoss later.

"...Alright, now back to the regular scheduled programming," Kaminari said. He really hadn't understood much of it at all, it was kind of pitiable. The others around shared uncomfortable looks, except Todoroki.

"So who's figured out their special move yet?" Uraraka said, her voice plush with fake cheer. It snapped the rest of them out of the gloom that had been created, especially Tsunotori.

Kirishima wiped his thumb across the front of his nose. "Well, real men don't brag but-"

"My move is twenty times better Kirishima," Kaminari interrupted and raised his hand. "It's gonna blow you all away when I show it off at the license exam."

Kirishima snorted. "Dude, everyone already knows what your special move is."

"No wayyyyy, I was holding back." He gave a taunting laugh, like he couldn't tell if Kirishima was serious.

Tsuyu croaked, as if to hide a chortle of her own. "Just like you were holding back in the Sports
Festival, against Ashido."

"Oh yeah, I remember that," Uraraka said, throwing her fist forward. "And then she got you right in the sweet spot with that sick punch!"

Kaminari grimaced. "Hey, it wasn't that one sided."

"Strange how you didn't get a nickname like Sero after that happened," Kirishima said.

"He didn't get nearly as annihilated as Sero did," he said, recalling the ice spire. It was still one of the biggest displays of raw quirk power he had seen, discounting some of what All Might did. Todoroki shifted and folded his arms, causing Midoriya to look at him.

"Something wrong?" Midoriya asked.

"It's nothing," he said after a moment. "Just trying to think of what exactly they would have called him. I think it would be different since he acted overconfident. Perhaps premature discharge kid or something like that."

"Hmm," Midoriya said. "Heroic crowds are tough. I think they would have gone with something snappy like flattened battery."

"That one is particularly bad," Todoroki said, glancing at him. He reached toward the table, where'd he set up a drink and took a long, elegant swig from the plain stone cup, a hint of the amusement he was trying to hide hung at the corner of his mouth.

"I swear I'll shock everyone in this entire dorm if you two don't knock it off." Kaminari's fingers began crackling as he held his fist up to them.

"Not this time Raiju boy," Kirishima said as he reached over the back of Riley's neck and slapped Kaminari hard on the back of the head before he could react.

Kaminari's electricity dispersed and he turned on Kirishima who was caught up laughing. "Think you're funny, huh?!" He jumped, half vaulting, mostly falling over him in an attempt to attack Kirishima.

He grinded his teeth, taking note that he had chosen the worst place to sit again, then he pushed Kaminari off him with one hand and swatted away Kirishima, who had started to retaliate, with the other and growled. "If I was Bakugou you wouldn't think twice about jumping all over me every damn day. Stop or I'm going to create some new doorstops." His annoyance ceased at the sound of laughter across from him, Tsunotori. She'd been watching the entire display wide eyed until now.

"You guys are too much," she said, her laugh turning into fitted giggles.

"We aim to please," Kaminari said, grinning and letting go of the collar he'd seized.

He smirked to himself, taking note of the shared expression among them, perhaps he didn't appreciate them half as much as he should have. When it was like this the thunder in his mind didn't dare to rise, for it probably knew while he was immersed like this it had but the tiniest chance of taking control.

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[Yuuei's Campus - The Training Dreamland - 7:17 AM Friday]

He kicked himself off the stool so that he landed a few feet from it, upright next to Kirishima, then he
rolled his neck and took a note of the time and the day. Friday. No class, waived today in favor of one last push in their training. He turned to Kirishima, who was still looking around and waiting for Kaminari. Bakugou had stormed off earlier, a good call.

"Come on dude, let's go," Sero said. Kirishima looked down at his phone in response.

"He'll catch up on his own," he himself said this time. "You know how he is, probably up to no good."

His friend sighed and put the phone away. "True enough," he said. "I guess I'm just reluctant to let him goof off since the exam is tomorrow."

"If he fails it'll be his own fault," Sero said.

"He was bragging about his special move before. I'd say he has better chances than half of us right now," he said.

Kirishima gave him a look, stretched. "Yeah, sure, I'd believe it if he wasn't bombing every theoretical class. I mean, I'm not good at that stuff either but at least I try, you know?"

"Oh, we all know you try, there there," Sero said, patting him like he was trying to soothe a child. Kirishima gave him a prompt punch in the shoulder.

He shrugged at them both. "Then how about, 'I want to go, now, because I need every second I can get.' Is that a better reason?" His friend grinned and Sero chuckled.

"Alright, alright," Kirishima said and began walking toward the exit.

Finally. Thirty minutes wasted just like that. The past two days had gone as quick as if they were liquid being poured into a drain, and discomfort wracked his body from Recovery Girl's help. He'd been as diligent as he had become, all through the time he'd had, but it meant little, the improvement was too small. He'd made a three second immobilization into a four second one and had enhanced the effect as a result.

He opened the door for the three of them after finding his shoes. It wasn't a great day today, but manageable. There were dew drops still holding to grass and water stuck in the lipped fronds that would topple if you quaked the floor too much near them, the rest of the overnight rain had dissipated in a sodden rise that left the ground touched by silhouettes of its existence here and there. They looked like holes in the earth, deep pits that had a suspicious resemblance to the oil substance All for One had used, but he knew he was just being silly comparing it.

"So did you guys name your moves yet?" Sero asked.

"No," he answered. Ectoplasm had implored him to, as it would make it easier to use. He agreed but a name had escaped him.

"I did, but it's a secret," Kirishima said. Both his own and Sero's interest brought glances toward him.

"Go on then," Sero said.

"No can do my dude."

"You can't say you've named it and then not tell us, that's just cruel."

"You'll hear it when the time's right." He folded his arms up above his head, only to knock the water
of one of the trees hanging over them loose which caused it to drop like a payload into his shirt. He cursed, but as luck would have it there were only a few sprinkles.

He snorted. 'Well, that's what he gets,” he said to Sero, who nodded.

"Man, whatever." He waved his hands in annoyance.

They crossed the courtyard leading to the tunnel, and he huffed a bit, soon they would have a full schedule in earnest again. It was almost the beginning of the next semester so there'd be a type of introductory ceremony too. There wasn't much to determine past that, he guessed whatever came next depended on this license. Midoriya's ramblings had kind of set him on edge about it, as did natural anticipation, they could test him on so many things just on their own whim. Then came into play his situation. He tightened his hand but stopped himself halfway. Enough of that. The world became dark, the tunnel greeting them.

"Still no news about your costume, Riley?" Kirishima asked.

"Nothing." He frowned, then sighed. "And there's no way I can go to a heroic license exam without a costume."

"Well," Sero said. "True that. You'd look kinda stupid if you were the only one."

He glowered at that, then tried to throw the emotion away with little success. His making of a special move had one fundamental problem. It wasn't grand, exciting or tenacious as much as he desired it to be. His passion was there, his discipline backed it up but that was a problem; his idea of a special move was one that came with a bang not a fire being built up stick by stick. It was probably why he was so resistant to Ectoplasm's insistences. It didn't feel like he imagined a special move should. Did it need to?

"My first special move was much easier," he said. It had been, Unilateral Subduction, though he hadn't realised it at the time or recognized it was a special move in all sense of the word. "It just kind of happened by accident, when I was at my old school."

Sero gave him a blank look. "Good thing the rest of us have instruction manuals to go with our quirks, I can just look up my special moves in the index." Kirishima laughed and he himself reddened.

"I didn't mean it like that."

"Oh I know," Sero said. "Speaking of your old school, if it was as horrible as you made it out to be how did you ever get them to arrange a transfer here of all places? I figure they would have blocked all attempt at that kind of stuff."

"They couldn't," he answered as they stopped. They'd reached the cusp of the TDL, where the changing rooms were. He didn't need them but they did. "They still have to act like a heroics school even if it's a sham."

He put his hand to his chin, giving him a confused look that exposed his spotless square white teeth. "Doesn't make much sense to me even if you put it like that."

"Well, the only reason it worked is because I got one of the teachers on my side. Then I convinced my mom that I could do it, though I think she only agreed because the schools I was looking at were in Japan. I didn't live close to home, only my dad's parents, so living near to my mom's relatives here was better in her book." And, well, Japan was meant to be safer. There had a sort of catastrophic incident on the west coast recently, involving a villain who had a more than a fair amount of control
over genetics. It had been resolved but the media had called it a fluke.

"It sounds like that school has it all backwards then," he said, dropping his expression. "I bet by making it tough they only caused everyone to be more determined."

"Maybe." He shrugged. "But I doubt it." Three more years there would have something else, his year, who had been at the very start of the third, had already been disparate in size so he couldn't imagine how sparse those above were.

Kirishima gave him a pat on the arm. "You got here, so who knows?" He smiled, then looked at Sero nodding him toward the changing rooms to which he then turned. "We'll meet you inside once we're ready," he said, looking back at him.

"Got it." He broke apart from them but wasn't sure why it mattered, it wasn't like they were training together. Kirishima was probably trying to reassure him or something, he'd been doing that a lot lately.

He walked further ahead, after hearing the clang of the locker room door shut behind him. The ringed columns that made up the entrance tunnel always reminded him of some kind of airplane hanger where a fighter pilot might zoom through and roll over him at any time. He smirked at that as he reached the lip of it, a large mouth with a red arrow marking it as an entrance. His eyes hurt against the bright glare of the TDL and he took a second to adjust, before he heard a clap of rapid footsteps behind him. Kaminari, he thought, and turned.

"Finally decided to joi- Hatsume?" He blinked at the girl, she wasn't actually running but the machine at her hip that worked as a sort of gliding mechanism made it sound similar. She looked exhausted, but gleeful as she swung the case at her side up at him almost like it weighed nothing.

"It's done," she shouted, despite being less than ten inches from him. The tunnel echoed it, like some announcement.

Before he could say anything she chucked the case into his chest, making him gasp. No, it hadn't gotten lighter. He held it before she dropped it, then he undid the clasps. He couldn't change in the tunnel itself, that would be strange, but he could at least take a look. As he set it down the lid gave way, revealing cloth that didn't look all that different. The body and top were much the same, his cleats were as well however he noticed they weren't actually cleats anymore; instead his shoes now had indents on the bottom for grip instead. The gauntlet was the same, not that he had expected it to change.

"You got rid of the helmet?" He looked up at her. It was a questionable choice, but that wasn't why he had asked. Curiosity, mainly, for what he found in the case wasn't even classifiable. It was a sort of clip, that attached to the collar of the top and the back of the neck.

"Yep," she said, having bobbed down to her knees with her hands resting upon them. She was still covered in grease and oil smudges, which was strange considering the costume shouldn't have needed things like that. "It was, problematic." She frowned.

"Problematic?"

"Everytime I tested it-" She pulled up her hands and made the motion of something blowing apart.

"I see," he answered. Yeah, he didn't want that. The gloves he found next, and they were much the same as he had seen in the shop with those strange plates on the bottom. He looked up at the expectant girl. "Thank you," he said.
She cocked her head, like that wasn't what she wanted. "Put it on, come on, then I can show you how it works!"

He took the case and went back to the room Kirishima and Sero had gone into, they had been taking their sweet time but it was just for the same reason as before. Kirishima was having trouble putting his bands on and Sero was laughing at him as he was doing it. They paid him a look of surprise as he showed up, then at the case.

"It's done?" Kirishima asked, dropping his right band, which fell back to its default position, swinging from his waist.

He nodded. "It's done." Though he was acting calm he wasn't, he even struggled to put on the easy parts like the gauntlet. The top and pants had been adjusted for height, which he hadn't noticed, he was definitely glad for that as it would have been ridiculous if it didn't fit after all Hatsume's work. That might have been why he didn't see it in the shop, she would have let other support members do that part to save her time. He did eventually get it all on, except for the collar.

"Here," Kirishima said, grabbing it as he tried to do it himself. "I think it goes on like this."

It didn't, he found out as his neck pricked in pain, making him wince. "Dude," he said.

He chuckled. "Sorry."

"Let me do it," Sero said, snatching the device. He did get it, on the first try no less. It fit snug, beginning at the base where the costume met his neck, hiding the seam where skin would have poked through. It ended at his hairline, with the rest of it not going all that far around, when he looked in the mirror he identified it as a kind of guard. At closer inspection he saw it shared the lines his gloves did, inbetween the parts of the carapace that was flexible. He wasn't sure how Hatsume had tested her devices, but he hoped she had been thorough as large gashes of plastic and metal in his skin were a real possibility if this went wrong.

"Looking good," Kirishima said, resting his hand on his shoulder.

"Think so?" he asked, touching the scar that ran up the front of neck to his cheek. Even in heroic guise it was visible now for the world to see, that had always been something he had taken comfort in not being the case.

"I'll agree with him just this once," Sero said. "Though maybe you should grow your hair out a bit, then you'd get that real overlord-type look going."

"Huh," he said, then rubbed his head then shook it. What was he doing? He should be testing it. He stretched his fingers, mimicking the usual motion, then decided otherwise. It was better he didn't do it in here, let alone when he hadn't received specifics. He looked back at Kirishima who had begun fumbling again, though this time he managed the strap rather quick, three loops and a Velcro bit with a lace.

He opened the door to the locker room, expecting Hatsume to be there but she wasn't. "Damn," he said, looking left into the TDL. He hoped she had gone there, rather than back to her workshop. The light of the TDL hit him again, less so this time. No sign of her in here either, he noted, at least not in this section of it.

"Why don't you just give it a go?" Sero asked.

"He's right, that's what a man would do."
He was itching for it. So he did, he raised his hand and pointed it at the first thing he saw. A pillar of stone, a remnant from someone else's training. He closed his eyes, just for half a second to get a feel for it again, then opened them as the key word struck through his mind. The effect was immediate, the pillar tore in the middle, collapsing in on itself as it compressed. He held it for as long as he could trying to work up as much of a tremor as possible, it became violent by the time he stopped, as it did and as he finished his compression he took his little finger and touched one of the plates. The tip of it became cold, then soon did his arm and the rest of his body.

He held up the arm, showing Kirishima. "No tremor," he said, his joy at the fact becoming a grin.

"I'm sure you can do better then that," Sero said.

He tried, this time aiming for a solid cement rock that wasn't as big as the pillar but far more stable, it had been indented into the ground by some large force that had thrown it there. There were several like it, and he could see the direction that they had been tossed from was uniform. They all originated from a place where a table had been set up, and empty boxes of donuts lay strewn along with bags of sugar. Satou wouldn't mind if he destroyed these, surely.

He focused, no closing of the eyes necessary this time. What he did do was keep his little finger and ring finger on the plate as he began to use the quirk. It made him think it wasn't working, just for a second, until he felt the hum of it rather than the tremor. His arm held still as the rock shook and cracked. He held it, just as he had before, then pushed it. He willed his quirk as he put his middle finger to the first plate as well. The floor cracked, then thoomed in around the rock with a crunch, throwing shards of cement at it in a burst that left pockmarks on the floor where it been ripped up. Dust in the air zipped down, colliding and smashing with the rock as that itself also fell apart, it had a calamity of lines that each added to its newfound identity as a pile of cement pieces and rubble.

"Packs a bit of punch, doesn't it?" Kirishima said.

"I was still expecting a bit more," Sero said, frowning. "Where is the Torenagi ice spire equivalent, huh?"

"It's amazing," he said, ignoring Sero and lowering his hand. His gloved hand did tremor but it relieved itself just a few seconds later. That... that, hadn't just been a compression, it was like he hadn't hit the wall he usually did where losing his concentration could be fatal. If he did this with two hands, not just one, then it'd be insane by comparison.

"Of course it's amazing, I made it after all." He turned and found Hatsume less than a foot away. Her sneaking skills were uncanny, if anything. She grabbed his arm, then the forearm and turned it over. "Good news," she said.

"Good news?" He repeated.

"You didn't explode. That's good news."

"That," he said, looking at Kirishima who gave an awkward chuckle. "That's definitely good news." Despite what she'd said he'd garnered a certain giddiness. It was exactly what he'd wanted.

"Look here," she said, pointing at the underside of the gauntlet. "There wasn't a good place to put in a monitor for how much of your quirk it's drained so I had to put it there." The place she indicated had a sort of black screen, that had only just now lit up. Red lines picketed a set of numbers, which were like a digital clocked. It read 19.54%, which then ticked down by 0.17% after a half second and another 0.17% after the same interval.
"What happens if it gets to a hundred?" He had done quite a bit but the amount the number had gone up by kind of worried him.

"Hmm," she murmured. Then gave him a flat smack on the shoulder before moving both her hands to her waist. "I have no idea. You probably explode, like I said, but don't worry I'm sure you'll find out eventually."

"Risky, I like it," Sero said, grabbing the gauntlet too. "If it broke you'd have a real guessing game on your hands."

"Let's hope that doesn't happen," he said.

"Yo," Jirou said, coming up to their group. "What's up?"

"We're looking at the upgrades Riley got," Kirishima answered.

"I can see that," she said, now close enough to see the finer details too. She had supposedly upgraded too, but he couldn't tell what by just looking. "That means your special move is all done and fantastic now, I take it?"

"Uhh," he answered. "I didn't get to that yet," he said, refraining from doing the neck touch he tended to do as he didn't want to dislodge the new piece on accident. "I guess I should-"

"One more thing," Hatsume said, pointing at the very neck piece he had avoided. "Don't let that part get damaged."

"What does it do?" Kirishima asked.

She smirked. "Patented secret," she said. "But think of it like a shock absorber."

"Shock absorber," he said. "That's pretty damn cool."

"And soon it'll be all over the market with my personal logo on it," she said. "After I finish calibrating it, at least." She looked back at him, and he knew what she was getting at. He was already looking for an Ectoplasm clone. He could have tried Subduction, but after that compression he was eager to try what he knew it would come down to in the end.

"Sir," he said, walking up to the nearest one which had been pre-occupied with Kouda. Several large beetles clung to it's forehead and clothing but he paid them no mind even as they crawled, gnawed and nipped.

"Torenagi," the teacher said. "You need a copy, I presume?" He was looking him up and down, considering that it would have been obvious. He nodded nonetheless and the man quivered, as if sending a signal, however he then puked instead. This one had been the real one, and he was just letting Kouda's quirk ail him like it was nothing. He didn't fear insects but even he found the idea of it unnerving. The original turned back to Kouda, and the clone went with him a short distance away. On any given day the man had about twenty of these things running around, so making one more probably wasn't a big ask.

"I see you've got your costume back," Ectoplasm's clone said.

"Yeah," he answered and looked over his shoulder, just to reaffirm they were still there. He'd put on something spectacular this time, he was sure of it.

"And did you name your move?"
"Not yet," he answered.

His eyes narrowed, not by expression of his face but by the downturn of it. "Find one now," he said. "It's the right time."

He didn't answer but instead placed his hands where they needed to go. As he did so he kept an eye on the gauntlet, it was down to eleven percent. He touched only two fingers to the back of the neck, the rest on his glove, and the same with the forehead. His skin became cold beneath the, along with his arms. He took a deep breath, then concentrated.

It came as a well, a seizure of eager motion from both his arms as if they had been mended and allowed to run like fresh piping. He pushed harder, his right side humming and left side piercing yet his mind remaining unaffected. He was lucid, so further he went. Light headedness came next, this he fought by letting out the breath which he'd been holding, which bought him time. His teeth didn't chatter. His mind did not stumble. Duplicity ran through him, connected in a way it couldn't have before. His mind, clear now, came upon a word. That word. He recalled it from the book, which was now visible to him as if the pages had been photographed, it had been a section related to his quirk and natural phenomena. A term for rock rifting and rubbing against one another. It was also a term for conflict, for two opposing sides that could not see eye to eye in how to rule the world they inhabited.

"Schism," he uttered, as it came to him. That was it. His quirk, his dual sides, running against each other like the sharp sides of a saw crossed and bared like teeth. Ripping, tearing, rearranging but never hurting one another. His quirk, his special move. Schism.

"A worthy name," Ectoplasm's clone said and the air stilled, he could hear nothing except the rush of the quirk.

The knife bled through his arm, a divine allure masked by distinction as he felt the quirk heave an anchor to shore. It left from him into Ectoplasm, who gasped like he'd been punched in the throat. It bounced as it traveled between compression and decompression, through his skull. It swept and lunged and ravaged the man like it had done to him. He saw the man's face seize, stop seizing, begin again over and over in endless contortion. The quirk hit the ground as it sought a way out of the man, it did not shatter the surface but glazed it, the concrete shaded over as imperfections in it's lustrous skin zig-zagged into new formations. The wave of it halted three feet around them, forming a bleached space of cement mural-ed in impossible patterns. As he let go Ectoplasm's eyes had grown dull, and he stood in awkward, jarred motion. The clone fell to the floor, frothing and then melting away as it did.

"Schism," he said again. He couldn't forget that word.

Chapter End Notes

*I do not own BNHA. OC material is my own.*
[Hosu — Takoba National Stadium — 8:02 AM Saturday]

The bus came to a stuttering halt as if it were an old man who had walked a thousand miles and still had no end in sight, its steps creaked as he got off behind Aizawa, tailed by Kirishima. His friend had been eager to be the first out and thus had insisted they sit near the front, and it wasn't like the rest of them had the mind to disagree. It was better than Iida's ordained seating which no one had indulged him in this time. Now that he was here he was kind of glad, as the place in front of him stood as grand as it had been described.

It rivaled in scope the building they had used for their previous examination, the Beetle Box as it was called, and resembled a spiral conch shell with a thin and pointed tip rising from the top of its head. Behind that was a stadium of sorts, with a rim tarnished in deep green and barred with peculiar five inch thick steel railing. It had windows all along it that were uniform like the sockets of a harmonica. At the bottom, leading out onto the parking lot in which they had arrived, was a courtyard lined by a smattering of gardens and trees that accompanied a brick red walkway.

He stepped between the low stone pillars placed at the edge of the parking lot to get to it, and to where Jirou had passed him, before tugging on his tie. He hadn't undone it like he would have because of Iida, who had seen him trying to do it and swatted him. The point of that was that they were not alone, even now other busses were arriving, and the class rep wanted them to put on their best faces to greet them. He didn't want to get harassed so he had gone along with at least that much, just until now when Iida couldn't keep an eye on it. It fell loose around his neck and he breathed deep in relief, he'd be in costume soon anyway.

"It's crowded," Jirou said, letting out a wide-faced pant. "Now I'm the one getting nervous."

"Takoba stadium really is something else," Midoriya said, nodding.

"It's daunting," he said, then rubbed his neck and looked around for Kirishima, he could use some of that guys ego right now to even Jirou out. When he did spot him the boy was a considerable distance away and he looked far too busy giving Bakugou shit. The latter had been rowdy throughout the ride, but had quieted down once they had gotten closer. Not unusual. Beyond them he saw another bus that must have parked since the time they'd gotten off, it was tinted in black and red but no one had disembarked yet.

"We've got this," Kaminari said. "Right, Mineta?"

"Got what now?" Mineta said, swiveling his head at him, then back. His eyes were on someone in the distance, from a different school with a distinct, low cut uniform. "Look at that, Midoriya, isn't that just the best?"

Midoriya looked where he did, then took a step back. "H-hey, um." He put up his hands a bit, as if unsure.

"Come on, any man should be able to appreciate that." Mineta threw a look at him, which he didn't answer and so was reinforced with a frown.

"Please focus," Iida said. "Let's funnel to the stadium in an orderly line and-"
"I wonder what we'll have to do. I wonder if I can get a license…” Mineta said, he looked down from where he'd been staring, then at the stadium.

"Mineta," Aizawa said and groaned at him. "There isn't time to wonder, go and get one."

"Oh- uh, definitely," he answered.

"If you guys are able to pass this exam and get your provisional licenses you won't be mere eggs anymore, you'll become chicklings on your paths to semi-professionals. Do your best," the teacher said.

"Yes, Sir," a number of them answered, with Kirishima the loudest. "Come on, everyone gather around, if we're going to do it then we might as well do it properly." He beckoned the rest of them in, then pumped his fist. "Ready?"

"Ready for?" Ashido asked.

Kirishima toughened his face as if he couldn't believe she even needed to ask. "The motto Ashido," he said, which cleared up her confused look.

"Oh, right!" Hagakure said then also pumped her fist like Kirishima had.

"Plus-" Kirishima shouted.

"ULTRA!" a deep voice, much louder than Kirishima, shouted behind the red head causing him to jump and the rest of them to turn. It was a tall boy, who had gotten off the earlier bus. He had a black cap on, and sharp slanted features.

"Inasa, don't insert yourself into other people's huddles," another boy from the class said, causing Inasa to freeze up. The one who had spoken was short but had a calm, ridiculing truth to him, mimicked in his rigid stance. A girl who stood to his right was aloof by comparison, wide eyed, unconcerned and on the verge of floating into space.

Inasa continued to freeze, then, as if to destroy whatever entangled him he threw his hands up and slammed his head downward. Not just to the edge of his knees, but all the way down so that he impacted the floor. "Please, accept my humblest apologies!" he yelled the words again, so they came out as a proclamation, rather than an offering.

"What the-" Kirishima said.

"Who is this guy and why is he so ridiculously pumped up?" Kaminari said.

"It's like I'm seeing a Kirishima and Iida hybrid or something," Sero said.

"Wait a minute, those uniforms," a boy beyond the strange class said. "I guess it's natural those two schools would go at it before the exam."

Ashido perked up at the statement. "Aren't they from that other school?"

"What other school?" Uraraka asked.

"The one out in the west of Hosu." She nodded, as if assuring herself she was right.

The class murmured then Bakugou stepped in. "Shiketsu High School. As U.A is to the east, Shiketsu is to the west."
His teeth set at that, this was the other school they'd had in mind. He recognized the uniforms now and wasn't sure how he hadn't before as he had looked at their webpage dozens of times. The choice, he recalled, had been close and they had filled out both application forms. The fiasco with getting the documents there had resulted in U.A., and also because it was the school his mom knew most about and he had found, by a smidgen, more reputable. He looked back at the downed boy, he had blood running down his forehead from where he had smashed it. Leina had gone to this school, it made more sense now why she was the way she was.

"Sorry, I jus' wanted to try an' say it just once!" Inasa swung up, not even wiping the blood from his forehead. "Plus Ultra."

"Let's go, Inasa, Camie," the previous boy said, pushing his purple hair aside, pinning it back under where it had slipped from under his hat.

"Sheesh, like, we don't always have to hurry, ya know Shi-shi?" the girl, Camie, said. He ignored her and kept walking, just past him and the others while giving them a glance as he passed. A few months ago he might have shuddered at someone who acted with such prestige, such measured step. It would have been too much like that man. "Hey, like, ignoring me, that's rude!" she said and jumped after him, hand waving like she was trying to flag down a taxi.

Inasa's smile broadened, as if he hadn't heard his schoolmate. "I myself, I mus' say that I love U.A. It's the utmost honour to be able to compete wit' you all at U.A. I wish you the best." Then, he turned, and marched after Camie and that boy… Shi-shi, it sounded ridiculous, as well as the rest of the Shiketsu students. There were only five of them.

Kirishima pouted, then said, "He ruined my rallying cry. I'd been saving that all week."

"Yoarashi Inasa," Aizawa said.

"You know him, Sir?" Hagakure asked.

"His crazy enthusiasm, and his quirk, he is the kind where everything you heard him say would come out as heroic." He shook his head at Hagakure. "In the same exam you all took, that is to say last year's entrance exam, he came in as the top score but then declined his offer of admission for some reason. There is no doubt that he is strong."

"He loves U.A. but rejected his admission offer? What kind of backwards thinking is that?" Sero said.

"He's weird, no doubt," Ashido said, nodding.

"Weird or not, he's the real deal. Watch out for him," Aizawa said.

"Eraseeeeee!" a woman shouted. "Eraser, is that you?" The teacher turned to look at her, and his face darkened at the sight of the strange woman. She had a pirate's bandana on, and a tight corset like dress with ballooning pants and, he smirked a bit, smiley faces on the buttons. She was striped throughout, like a clown.

"That's-" Midoriya said.

"The smiling hero-" Ashido said, a rare glee encasing her face. She had a tendency to get excited, but this was like she had been made an impression upon a time ago that only came to fruition now.

"What is it?" Aizawa interrupted them, walking up to the woman who grinned at him.
"Let's get married!" she said.

"No thanks."

"No thanks?! Good one!"

"Your humor is as dry as always, Joke."

"That's Ms. Joke. Her quirk is 'Roaring Laughter,'" Midoriya kind of said and mostly whispered in a quick informative whirlwind. "As the name implies she makes anyone laugh uncontrollably. It's the best kind of quirk for suppressing villains."

"If you married me, Eraser, we could start a family filled with unbearable laughter and joy."

"That doesn't sound joyful to me."

"Cruel!" she said.

"You guys seem pretty close," Tsuyu said.

Ms. Joke waved a hand to her mouth, like she was whispering. "Our offices used to be as close as siblings. We'd help each other out, rescue each other, it was a relationship built on mutual love."

Aizawa groaned. "Untrue."

"Is she Shiketsu's teacher? She doesn't seem like it," Ojiro said.

"No," Momo said as Ms. Joke's actual class lined up behind her. "Ketsubutsu Academy. They're not as well known as Shiketsu and U.A. but they are not lacking in good heroic candidates. It looks like there's several hundred schools here today, and a few specialised independent heroic tutoring programs, such as Kyōdō Institute and Shikiri High."

"Come meet the U.A. students, second years," Ms. Joke said, beckoning a few of them forward. At the forefront stood a black haired boy and a girl with sharp teeth, behind her a disinterested boy with long black hair and last of all a villain from Mortal Komb- He stopped the thought. The lizard-like boy definitely looked like he belonged in it but so did half of U.A., so that wasn't really fair.

"It's really them," the boy in front said.

The sharp toothed boy beside him nodded. "All the people we saw on T.V."

The long haired boy moved his face, then his eyes, but the movement was incredibly slow. Before he could raise it to them he gave it up and spoke instead. "Trying for a provisional license already? That's hasty, but I suppose it is as expected of them."

"My name is Shindou," the first boy said as he took, then wrapped and squeezed Midoriya's hand. "It must have been rough with all the trouble at U.A. this year, right?"

"Ah," Midoriya said. "Err-"

Shindou dropped the grip, then flitted from Jirou to Kaminari and through the rest of them. "It must have been stressful, but I bet it built your resolve to become heroes to the fullest, didn't it? I believe that all heroes need that kind of fortitude."

"He's so cool and straightforward, that's kind of refreshing," Kaminari said.
Shindou nodded then stopped in front of Bakugou. "And the one at the center of the Kamino incident, Bakugou Katsuki. You have an exceptionally strong spirit, it's our privilege to stand alongside all of you today. We'll do our very best." He offered his hand to him.

Bakugou smacked it out of the way. "Screw off, shit-face," he said. "The words you're saying and the look on your face are entirely different."

"Hey man, don't be rude! I'm sorry for his impoliteness." Kirishima butted in beside Bakugou but he knew what the guy was getting at. It was irksome, presenting a competition like this with a two-faced lie. He walked up beside them, Shindou's shadowed face confirmed the thought. That was a forced smile, unlike Inasa's. Malice, ill-will, they all expressed themselves in his unflinching hint of a sincerity.

"It's alright," Shindou said, looking at Kirishima then turned the other way to look at him. "It's just proof of his spirit." He raised his hand again. "And you, it's nice to meet you too." He didn't swat the hand like Bakugou had, allowing the boy to squeeze his as he had the others, he wished he had because following it he didn't quite let go, and instead caught him by the wrist and lifted up the sleeve, while twisting it to turn it upside down. "So they are all real, here I thought it was just an over dramatization."

He gritted his teeth and forced the boy to let go of him. "Take a picture, it'll last longer."

Shindou looked up and smiled. "Well, there have been enough of those already, wouldn't you say?"

He grunted at that, there wasn't really a way to reply to that without breaking the peace further. Shindou turned away, having seen him beaten, and returned to his class.

"Watch out for him," he said in a hushed voice to Kirishima and Bakugou.

"Huh?" Kirishima answered, and Bakugou's eyes narrowed. "He was just curious, I don't think he meant anything by it."

He shrugged in return. "I don't care about that." He didn't, after he had removed the tape it wasn't like that kind of thing hadn't happened once or twice, however this wasn't the same. "I knew plenty of guys like him back home, they'd throw you under the bus if it got him five bucks."

His friend gave him a confused look at the expression. "Hmm, if you say so," he said, then shrugged.

"Can I have your autograph, Todoroki?" the girl from before said.

"Who are you again?" he asked.

"You can call me Tatami."

"If you want I can give you my autograph," Mineta said, to which she responded with a large snort.

"Meeting other people outside U.A. like this is weird, isn't it?" Jirou said. "Makes you think like…"

"Like we're famous, right? I guess it's like this for U.A. students," Kaminari said.

Momo nodded. "It's best we don't lose that momentum."

"Enough," Aizawa said. "Go follow the signs in the main hall and get changed. After that head to the auditorium"

"You too, kids, we'll head to the info session after." Ms. Joke said to her class before looking back at
Aizawa. Doubt wedged as her grin faded, she looked again to make sure they'd left. "You didn't tell them, did you Eraser?" she asked but the man, pragmatic and indifferent, did not respond.

[Takoba National Stadium — Auditorium — 8:23 AM]

Murmurs floated up the stairs as he rose up into the audacious space. It held within it what must have been a thousand, perhaps two thousand, all in costume. They had been ushered into a box, like the type you would use for trapping an animal, and at the far end he could make out a podium through the back of heads. There sat a single man, surrounded by two guards, and two more men also dressed in suits and ties standing to either side. The one on the right had a distinction to the other, a white folded napkin-esque handkerchief was stuck in the breast pocket and he wore a green steel visor that pulsed red every few seconds. He wasn't looking at anyone in particular but instead down to the floor, with a curved smile emerging as the result of that. A pro, he assumed.

"And I thought there were already a lot of people outside, this is like… two times lots," Jirou said.

"Like a gazillion times lots," Hagakure said. Only her gloves told him she was was even there, and they now had blackened tips at their white ends. He didn't know what those were for but it did make him curious. Later, he thought, and looked ahead. It was hard to see as much as he wanted of the podium but hearing might as well have been enough as there wasn't much of the man to begin with. He looked like he was about to doze off.

"I sure hope we'll all be able to get a license," Uraraka said.

Satou folded his arms, then rolled out his neck. "I don't think it's going to work out that way," he said. "There isn't anywhere close to a thousand new heroes entering the field each year."

"He's right, at the current rate it's impossible for there to be this many. The heroic market is oversaturated as it is," Momo said.

"Perhaps it is merely a fluke of perception," Iida said. "Japan isn't as large as it appears. How many professional heroes would you say emerge each year in America, Torenagi?"

"I don't know," he answered, it wasn't like he paid attention to that stuff. "I don't think it's anywhere close to this many though."

"It's about the same as Japan," Midoriya said. "Despite the larger active heroic population the rate at which people become pros remains relatively stable from country to country, at around ten percent of amateurs transitioning to paid heroic work. However there is a streak of vigilantism going on in both the U.S.A. and the U.K. that isn't monitored well."

"Hmm," he answered, then shrugged. "I can't say anything about that, Leineif City had very little vigilantism but it isn't a fair comparison." Though, despite that, it was safe to say that if someone were mugged, attacked or robbed they would defend themselves with or without quirk. His grandfather had a license to carry and had a collection locked up in the house, which he'd shown him once or twice. He'd never seen him actively shoot or use them, which made sense as his grandmother had insisted the weapons were only intended for hunting deer and rabbit. Deer hunting or not, a gun was a viable enough defense against the majority of would-be villains.

A yawn was the first thing to be uttered from the man at the podium. "Why did I have to do this again? All I wanted to do was sleep," the man said. "Just my luck." His speech, while formal, flitted as if he were inebriated. Unlike his cohorts his suit was messed up and stained like he'd fallen asleep on his dinner. "Well, err, let us get to it then," he said and coughed.
"Who is this clown?" someone near him asked.

"That 'clown' is one of the people who decides if you're repeating this exam again next year idiot," another one answered.

"My name is Mera," he said. "I am from the Heroic Public Safety Commission. My favorite type of sleep is nREM sleep, so there you have it. I've been so busy I haven't been able to get any, so I might be kind of irritable today, I can't even get any right now because I'm talking to you. There are uh, 1540 of you… 1540, that's a lot isn't it? Today's public is one that screams for regulation of the heroic market, asking that heroes strive not for recompense, yada-yada. After the Stain incident it is necessary our regulations become more precise and uh." He waved his hand to them then rested on it. "Well my point is, that there is too many of you. As such we'll be having an elimination round to whittle down your numbers." He rummaged beneath his desk then pulled out a disk, and a ball. "I'm sure you can guess, right? So I don't need to explain-" He yawned again, and the man with the visor gave him a hint of a look, the tiniest squirm. "If you insist, but for the record I would rather be sleeping, Nivuto," he said to him then shook his head, and then gave his cheeks a strong slap.

"Here is how this works. There will be three disks per person, you need to place them somewhere on your body to act as targets. In turn you will get six balls each to try and land a blow on a disk that isn't your own, the one who lights up the third pad on someone else's costume will be credited with a takedown." He dropped the disk, and it rolled on it's side, then rolled some more, then fell off the desk entirely. It might have clunked and echoed but it had been caught one sixth of the way down by the visored man, who placed the disk back on the desk, then turned and walked back to his position. "Thank you, I'm just, you, well, you know," he said and put his head to rest forehead first upon the desk, from where he then waved his right hand up without looking, as if to direct them. "Point is, there's always a point, you have to get two takedowns to proceed, first one hundred are through, Capiche?"

There was a silence through the crowd, then a sweeping whisper. "One hundred people? That's like, less than ten percent of us."

"Try five percent."

"I know who I'm going for, it's obvious isn't it?"

"You can say that again, they're practically begging for us to take cheapshots."

"I don't like the sound of that," Jirou said, in a hushed tone.

"Neither," he answered. He had dreaded the possibility, but the looks were making it obvious. His class was in the center of the room, as they had entered last, which made it worse. Eyes were knives, words took to the air like conspiracy with each second. It was gathering around them, distinct and ravenous, he glanced Midoriya; this was how the cavalry battle must have felt.

"It's natural," Momo said. "Think about it. It makes sense now." Despite her words his heartbeat rose, just a tad, in his chest as he watched men pass through the crowd and hand out the markers and balls. He soon had his, and found they were extremely sticky on the underside. The Six balls to accompany it were easy enough to store and he refused the pouch the man had offered him, that would be too obvious. He instead put four in where his phone would normally be, he'd locked that up as told, and two at the back of his gauntlet where the gap allowed him to hide them.

"Beurk," Aoyama said, rather blurted out, in a twisted accent. He was still deciding where to put his pads, but each time he was about to attach one he hesitated.
"I feel kind of shoehorned here," Kirishima said, who was behind him next to Kaminari and Bakugou. He had managed to put one of the target pads on the band at the front of his costume but it didn't stick well, so he'd had to put the other two elsewhere, one on his waist and the other on the inside of his thigh. "Could't they had made it stick to skin, too?"

"You deserve the disadvantage," Kaminari said. He'd gone with the two on front, one behind his back strategy, not a great one but maybe with a quirk like his it could pay off.

"Hey-"

Bakugou raised his nose into the air, then spoke in a snide tone and a shit-eating grin. "Shitty hair and a shitty costume."

"HEY-"

He smirked, then looked back into his hands at the three disks again. The best place to put these... there really wasn't one as long as he didn't put them together. The first he put on the left side of his chest, below his heart, the second on the right slant of his waist and the last one on his left leg, this one the same as Kirishima had it but angled further inward. It'd be a hard target to hit if he was moving.

The microphone the man had used earlier crackled as he spoke again. "Now as you might have guessed, you know, as anyone might guess." He wiped his face and raised his head, then continued with emphasis on each word. "As. You. Might. Have. Guessed, we're not going to have you blast each other to bits within proximity to myself and my associates here. No, rather you'll have five minutes starting now-" The man raised a hand and clicked a button on the edge of the desk. "-Go and find suitable terrain, I believe there'll be plenty of variety for each of you."

The hole in the floor through which they had entered rose beside him and sealed to become a flat surface. Then, steam released from it's edges, as well as the edges of the box they had been put in. The indented lines on the outside of the room shuddered, then separated. Following that each of the four walls that made up the box itself collapsed outward, revealing clear sky. The roof would have fallen on them, had it not been cleverly attached to two of the walls, which tore the plate apart and sent it vaulting outward like an unfurling carpet. When it was all done silence hit them, then murmurs again, and finally a rush of shouts.

He was too busy turning and inspecting his new surroundings to indulge any such emotion. Right in front of him was a mountain with a path that spiraled around it to the top. At the base to the right of that was a river, which divided it from a city that loomed taller than the mountain did. Three large highways tangled between skyscrapers like twisted hair, forming a skirt among their looming figures. Leading out from the edges of the city and following all the way around the edge of the space to the bottom was an expansive forest complete with dirt underbrush. Compared to those three distinct areas the rest was closer to a wasteland, with concrete sticking up in round slices like broken dinner plates and random bits of metal poking this way and that. They were in the center of it all, and it turn it was all equally intimidating. The only thing that told him that they were still in Hosu was the spectator stands fringing the entire affair, though they were too far away to make anyone sitting in them out.

"We need to stick together," Midoriya said. "Torodoki-" he spoke the name only to watch as the boy promptly ignored him and sprinted away.

"Sorry, Midoriya," he shouted. "I can't show off my skills in a crowded place like this."

"This isn't a field trip, seeya losers," Bakugou said and turned from the back of their group toward...
"Hey wait idiot! Where are you going?!" Kirishima yelled after him, he turned back to him then cocked his head toward Bakugou's direction. "Come on dude, he'll do something stupid on his own." Without waiting for an answer Kirishima turned back to where Bakugou had gone and chased. Kaminari followed him, but Sero did not.

He hesitated, looked back at his class then at Jirou. "I should go after them," he said.

Sero reached out a hand at him. "You too, Riley?"

He shrugged back. "If I get overwhelmed by this many people I won't be able to fight back. I also want to help them pass if I can, um," he said, then trailed off.

"Screw that. I'm not getting pulled into his antics this time," Sero said.

"It's stupid, but if you gotta," Jirou said. "We'll be alright, go."

"You better make it through," he said with a nod, then turned and ran past Satou, to where he could only just see Kirishima's hair bobbing up and down. He took note of the point where his friend turned left, into the city, the third row of buildings down.

He followed the path Kirishima had taken. The dirt became concrete beneath him and he crossed over the river between the mountain and the city, which was more like a canal. He counted the streets and turned into the one he had noted. It was empty except for three distinct sets of dirty footprints. He followed them down four rows until he ended up at a main street, where they ended abruptly. He wasn't sure where to turn next, as there was nothing to lead him. He turned back to where he had come and then heard a shout above him. It was Kirishima's voice, yelling a name he recognized, Bakugou's name. He wasn't sure how they had made it up so far so quick but instead of figuring that out he looked for a way up himself. There was, to his luck, a set of stairs that connected to an elevated railway system. He climbed that and made to a sort of boarding ramp. He had about a minute left, if he was counting correctly.

He looked left down the tracks, where there were ringed arches of steel that would have served as a way to provide the railway power. For him they would provide a few more yards of height, enough that he could reach that highway he had heard the shout from. If he was in luck then not many others would have reached a place so far into the city yet. The tracks, which they hadn't gone as far as to actually put into use as an obstacle, were still tight and liable to trip him, so he took his time to cross them until he pass the first of the arches. It wasn't close enough to the highway, so he proceeded to the next one along. Halfway to it he looked down by accident and had to take pause to deal with the height. He had to be higher than three yards and if he fell, well, he didn't want to think about falling.

An alarm sounded, and that almost put the height to the test. He reached the second rung just as it ended, and clung to it. When he was sure he had his footing he looked around. No one looked to have followed him, not that it surprised him, but that didn't mean they couldn't be above him already like Kirishima had been. He did hear some voices below now and was glad that his strange attempt at following was helping him in some form of subterfuge. He climbed up the rungs at the side of the arch until he was at the top of it. Even at his full height the cement ridge was just a tad too high to reach so he braced himself, bobbed down and jumped, catching the underside of a steel outlet and using that to drag himself up the side of the highway.

The easy part was over, now he had to be vigilant because the highway itself was a place of crevices, rubble and other well covered areas which he knew he himself would find ideal to ambush someone from. That wariness stirred an annoyance in him and so did too the fact that there was no sign of
Kirishima and the others. They must have moved on in the time it had taken him. He was tempted to shout but that would be as good as forfeiting himself. Perhaps he'd be better off taking it slow and landing what ammo he could on those engaged with others, this was a test of speed and not his use of quirk really, a lot of people might have already begun passing just through throwing skill and timing alone.

He reached into his pocket and took out one of the balls, and then proceeded to walk right down the highway. He rolled it in his hands as he ducked underneath some rubble, the rubber ball didn't feel hard to throw, if he inched up the density just a bit then they would be the same as a baseball. The other side of the rubble was just the same, and he looked back it as if to check he hadn't accidentally turned himself around. The gap was incredibly small from this side and he wasn't sure how he had fit, if he had been wearing his old helmet he would have gotten stuck or had to climb over.

He turned back, and looked up ahead. A long ways ahead, further into the city and near a stop in the highway that split left and right was Kaminari, a still running Kaminari. "Just my luck," he said, but nothing actually left his mouth.

He let out a grunt of frustration, then cursed. "..." The sound left his throat as nothing. He coughed, nothing. "..." He tried again, silence. Then he tried a sentence, or something else that involved his voice giving out on him now of all times. Nothing came. *What the hell?* He thought, seeing as it was the only avenue left. He took a step, only his foot didn't go forward. He looked down to see it had been tethered to the concrete by vines, thick green leafed ropes that had sat about half an inch above his foot so he wouldn't be aware. They snapped shut on his foot, nailing him there.

"Fortunately, here I thought we'd have to wait until one of them fell behind," a voice behind him said. It was muffled, and when he turned he could see it was because the girl standing there had a hand covering her mouth. Across her body were the same vines that binded his foot.

"..." He tried to talk again but nothing came. That hand, a quirk, he realized. This girl must have been tailing Bakugou, Kirishima and Kaminari when he'd blindly walked into her path. "..." Damn it. It was a natural thing to try and talk again, and a jarring realization that, no matter what, he could not.

"Don't bother, I won't allow you to call those three for help, Torenagi Riley," the girl said as the green vines lacing up her body quaked. "I'm afraid you've found yourself a bad match up against us. He's all yours, Luto." The vines, which he now realized weren't actually part of the girl's costume, sprung from her body and coalesced. His foot became loose again, then re-tightened as the feeling spread. The vines were going up his leg toward his chest. He rolled against it, but it was like they were made of thick twine.

"It took a lot of study to remember your quirks, some of them were easier, like yours."

The vines that had left the girl finally became something resembling human. Massive arms, limbs, body and a head, all made of vines. They parted, revealing a merge of green and pale skin beneath covered in moss, purple flowers and leaves. His quirk was his costume, in all ways, and it left him bare from chest to foot but for a thick smock of vines from his waist to his trunk-like feet. He raised his hands and the speed of the vines that had started on his foot increased. They wanted to entangle his arms. Specifically, his arms. He grabbed the green ropes mid flight as they tried and pushed his quirk into them which tore them apart and allowed him to stumble out of their grip entirely. The act left behind a green residue on his clothes but he ignored that and aimed at the girl covering his mouth, if he could get rid of her then taking out her part-

His legs, where the green residue sat, erupted in a second wave of vines across his leg and lower body, forcing him to drop his hand and the ball in his other. They merged together as he stepped
backward, oozing from his leg like slime. This time it wasn't just that they moved fast to try and grab him but they also brought with them an image of Luto's face, inches from him. The boy punched him in he shoulder as he emerged and pain made him squirm as he fell back. Following the blow Luto did not give chase, instead preferring to stand monumental before returning to a pose of indignant and statue-like rest.

"A quirk that requires an immense amount of preparation is a liability in battle. Our school recognizes this unlike yours, hence why we fight in duos," the girl said, shaking her head. "Luto, we should aim for the disks, rather than disabling him. There isn't time for us to play games with how few people are allowed to pass."

"Yes," Luto said and the vines around his hand boiled. He held a ball there, the fist he had used to punch him. He looked down at his own chest, the spot where he'd hit him was actually where the disk had been. It had now become a deep red. He'd been hit. It let out a low beep.

"You managed to think that far ahead? I don't give you enough credit sometimes." She chuckled. Luto grunted then raised his hand. As soon as he did the places where the mold still stuck to this costume tingled again. He thought on the gauntlet on his right hand and watched in silence.

He saw how it happened this time, as vines emerged Luto disappeared from where he stood and reappeared in the whirl of green next to him. The process only took parts of a second, as close to teleportation as one could get. He released the gauntlet and it roared at Luto, only to miss. Luto wasn't there any longer but he was sure he had been, there was no doubt. Before he could contemplate the disappearance of Luto he realized the edges of his vision were creeping in, then total darkness hit him. He was left with nothing but sound. The girl, he thought, but before he could react to that he heard a scrape of sound on the concrete behind him. The girl laughed as he ducked forward. Pain, hard sweltering wood hit him on the lower part of his back. He rolled, coming to a halt a few feet away. He'd done so mainly to mitigate the blow, which had worked for the most part.

"…" he tried to speak, if only in reflex. Then waited for the inevitable beep. It didn't come, he had avoided the part of the blow that mattered. He pushed himself to his feet and felt his foot graze an edge of stone that extended both ways from him. The highway barrier.

"He's hurt now, but do be more accurate," she said.

He swerved his head at her, she was still in the same spot as she had been. He had moved a few feet, that meant less than two and a half yards separated them. He heard the scrape where he had been thrown from, without sight to hinder him he didn't have much of a choice but to notice it. He grabbed at the railing behind him then backed up against it as close as he could. Luto was slow, strong and slow. There wasn't a point slipping into the stance just yet. The vines tingled, but he kept his head pointed toward where he'd heard the voice. He'd only get one chance at this, he knew, as he thought on the gauntlet again.

He heard the sound and the crackling of Luto's movement before he felt the sensation in his leg from the vines being activated. The presence of Luto as he arranged and materialized simmered on the skin and ear as irrefutable proof that he had appeared to the right of him. He punched in the direction like a mad man, trying to force Luto to repeat his trick. When he struck air he knew he had, so he kicked off the stone barrier and jumped as far forward as he could, punching the gauntlet at the girl and releasing it at the same time. She was as blind as he was, even a mere attack like this might work.

His vision returned and he caught his footing, then he dashed forward and hooked the girl from where she stood to the ground. His throat, that also came back to him. He muttered a phrase just to make sure. She grimaced at him as he let the quirk drain into her arms. He would not allow any more
of that annoyance. They fell to the floor as heavy as a bucket of bricks. There was a smell of gasoline around him, a breath of the artificial city. An anger, too, an ever present anger, that he fought out of the way. Now was the time. His body felt covered in mold, it mixed with the gasoline, it tinged his tongue and crawled up his nose. He stood, rolling his shoulders as he did, before turning to Luto and dropping into his stance.

"Luto," she said. "This is our year, we can't keep getting held back like this, do you hear me?" He watched Luto's response to the words, to gauge his reaction. Then he brought his attention back on the gauntlet. Despite the cover of vines Luto's face did betray emotion, a kind of, sunken look and a tremor as if he wanted to run. Luto glanced at the girl, and reached toward her as if unsure. "You can do this Luto, you're stronger than I am. You took pity on me back then, so please. Take him out and you can pass, with my points."

"I... Nasaki," Luto said and froze. His eyes growing less apprehensive, his limbs losing their tremor and dropping. He was truly giant, an aberrant specter torn from earth and soil, yet he looked so unsure. It was an uncertainty that he had grown to know stemmed from lack of experience. An itch overcame his entire body as Luto stared him down. He fought against it, erring to not react to anything but where it might arrive. Luto disappeared. He heard the crackle to his left. No. Behind him. He threw his hand and caught an inch of vine as it appeared. He grabbed the shoulder of the boy next as the rest came into existence. Hand moved to neck, other to head and finger to plate. His quirk ran as quicksilver, his hands clenched together. He had him right where he wanted.

"Schism," he said. His quirk moved in his palms, in his shoulders, through his body as it funneled through Luto to the floor he stood upon. The large boy quivered, then, disintegrated into leaves as if he had never existed to begin with, all that remained was a stray cast of leaves drifting away. He backed away, past the girl's body, unsure where Luto had gone, and then to his horror, the world went dark again. The girl, he thought. But, he'd used his quirk, there wasn't a way that she could have even moved let alone used her own one. As if to compound, as if to contradict him, sound faded away too. He had no idea where he was until he felt a tremendous slash on his back that must have been a vine across his body. He cried out only to hear nothing, to see nothing. The floor hit him hard, and a stinging sat where Luto had punished him. He felt for the ground, his hand met a rock which he used to pull himself up. He expected Luto to come for him again but he didn't yet, the refractory period for his quirk must not have been up. As he stood there the world was nothing but a void to him, nothing at all, except for touch, smell and taste. He hated being unable to hear himself breath, to only have feeling to judge with, but it was his own fault for underestimating the girl. He tensed, and relinquished, he licked his lip if only to taste the air. Then he focused on his gauntlet, again, one more try.

The taste of mold and vine in his mouth caused the re-emergence of Luto to become a cocktail of remaining sense. Though he could not see he could feel him. He released his gauntlet to the right which sent a shuddering through his body. Rather than attack where he had shot his gauntlet he spun and dove into whatever was there, even if it could well have been nothing. His hands dug into vine and bark that made up the frock. His quirk tightened his arm with the burden of decompression as he put as much into it as he dared before Luto could move again. He punched his shoulder forward into the spot he'd touched and then pulled his leg back, becoming one with a motion he'd practiced countless times before the festival. He aimed it lower, causing his foot and shin to connect with the skin. It seemed like an eon before the flesh buckled and toppled. He didn't hear Luto groan and fall, but felt the rumble of concrete inches from him a he hit it. Then, he raised his hand.

"Release your quirk," he shouted. "Or I'll break something." Nothing happened and he ground his teeth, annoyed, even more so because he knew what the sting on his waist meant, which was the same as the one on his chest had been. One hit, one more hit and he was out. "He's precious to you isn't he? If he gets seriously injured from what I do next the blame will be on you."
"Leave Luto alone you bastard," she said as sound and sight came back to him. He relished in it, felt the anger draw away. It had come close there, ticking, taking advantage of the cage he'd been placed in to shout his name. That, that had probably been what had helped him ward himself from losing focus on the situation. He wasn't sure if he would have actually compressed Luto, who now rested at his feet, but he was damn near close. A place like that, a quirk like that, it was liable to break mind before ever helping break body.

He dropped his hand, then turned and walked over to where the girl still laid, for his own peace of mind she had to be the first to be taken out lest she put him back in that hell. On approach he noticed the skid beneath where her arms now lay. It wasn't just limited to that, there were cuts on the underside of her arms and rough scratches on her fingers which now rested either side of her head. In the dust it looked like someone had tried to mimic a morbid snow angel. He swallowed hard as he knelt down beside her with one of the balls he'd hidden behind his gauntlet and touched the first of her disks. It gave out a short beep.

She paid the sound no mind but for a closing of her eyes, as it ended she looked back at the sky. "It's always the same. All of you, you stupid privileged…" She bit down on her lip when she saw his expression and he touched the second disk. "What's the point?" She grimaced, then said, "I couldn't even help one of us pass. If I had a better quirk. Then, then."

He couldn't see the third disk, so he grabbed her by the shoulder, lightening only that part so she couldn't try anything. It was when you thought you'd won you were most vulnerable, when you let your guard down. He still felt as tense as if he were fighting, Aizawa would kick his ass if he lost for some stupid reason now. Ko, well he wouldn't be able to face Ko's lesson-like chiding if he got knocked out monologuing. He found the third disk, touching that and causing all her disks to blink red repeatedly. One down, one to go. It'd been faster than he'd imagined, but just as tough as he'd been promised. He stood, then heard a step. A set of steps, behind him, near Luto.

He turned, expecting to see the vined boy standing and ready to fight him again. Only, it wasn't, it was two others close to the downed body. His disks did not blink red yet, so they hadn't gone as far as to take them from under him. The two which had intruded both had short, bowl-like black hair and baggy bronze colored costumes on that were missing a sleeve each. The lack of sleeve exposed a quirk, malformed reddened hands on opposite sides. It was softening and pulsing red, like bubbling, heated metal.

"Lucky, lucky, Luto," the first twin said.

"He is lucky, isn't he?" the other one answered.

"Yes, lucky indeed. Nasaki wasn't."

"Yeah, Nasaki wasn't lucky this time." He took a step back as the two walked past Luto's resting body and approached, this was bad. He had no hits to spare, no chips to bargain with in taking them out.

"Lucky for us, lucky indeed."

The second one grinned. "We'll make quick work of him then take both their points, Nasaki can't fault us for that."

"No, she can't fault us, not at all."

"Yes, can't fault us at all, she would do the same."
"Damn." He heard the girl curse. "Damn it all," she said and tried to move her head but couldn't. "I guess this is where it ends for both of us, Luto." She looked up at him. "At least I'll know you're out too, you won't be able to get the better of them like you did us, you ass." He glowered at her and her insult then tensed the gauntlet on his right arm while taking another step back.

"You should listen," the first one said.

"She is right, he is right. You should listen, and you should run."

"It'll be more fun if he runs."

The second one looked at his twin. "It will be, won't it?" He gave a cruel grin.

There was no getting out of this, he realized, and left the girl on the ground where she was. His back searched for a piece of concrete to use as cover but there was nothing near big enough down the path he had been following Kaminari. He kept his eyes on the duo despite the situation and retreated further. If he could get them in the right spot he could just collapse a single spot beneath them long enough for him to go and grab Luto's points.

"A trap," the second twin said.

"A trap?"

"A trap. He thinks we'll fall for a trap."

The first twin laughed, a hideous kind of amused madness. "A trap!"

"How splendid."

His heart sank and all he could do was move further away. These two knew his quirk too. And the girl knew them. Same school, that was the only conclusion. He looked left, then down. Collapse the ground under himself just to escape? No, stupid, his mind dismissed it. There would be people down there and he'd hurt himself badly. It was only luck he had gone this long without seeing others anyway, probably because of that head start he'd taken.

"It's time. It's time," the first twin said and raised his hand. His balled, red fist, became the haft and head of a mallet.

"It is time, yes it is," the second twin said and touched the mallet where his brother did. It bubbled as he merged with it and grew in size until it was bigger than either of them, as big as a gallon drum. They waved it upward with effort, slamming it down behind them and cracking the concrete. It dragged and they sped up, a step in sync, a run became a dash and they jumped into the glare of the sun. The hammer swung high over head, then it came down, fast, too fast, too strong.

"Sugar Rush!"

Instead of hitting him they careened sideways, down at an angle, crashing into the low barrier wall of the highway before crumpling against it. Immediate unconsciousness came for them both, and he looked, up trying to follow the object that had hit them, to determine if it was friend or foe. It wasn't, he found, an object at all, or even an enemy. It was Satou, in all his red-eyed sugar-hyped fury. He lifted the twins from where he had tossed them, then smashed them into the same barrier for good measure.

"Satou," he said trying to stop himself from falling out of shock. "What are you doing here?"
"I guess it isn't obvious," he answered. "You and the others were followed by pretty much that entire school of symbiotic student Momo mentioned." He took one of the twins and pressed all the disks, then the other one. His own ones then emitted an overriding green light and a high pitched tone. "I figured I'd even the odds, and maybe get some of your guys's leftovers. Lo and behold," he said holding up the second twin by the arm, then dropping him. "Guessing Kirishima and the others ended up ditching you somehow? Figures, same reason it took me so long to get here, those guys are fast when they want to be."

"But I mean, how did you-"

"Haven't you got bigger things to worry about?" He pointed back to where Luto, and by extent his point were, with his costume's pink thumb. "It's already been a while since the event started."

"Right," he said. "Right," he repeated, making the words more real in his mind. This was a competition, he needed to hurry. He walked past Satou toward the two, only to find that Luto had risen in that short time and now sat near the girl he had downed.

"Careful," Satou said, though he knew and made his approach step by step. He slowed further when he came within ear shot.

"Don't apologize to me," Nasaki said but her voice trembled. "It's my fault. You already have a point, you should try to pass, I can… I can always come back next year. Or the year after that."

"Do not lie to me," Luto said in a low hum, a low moan that knew something. "We said we would… pass together. That is the way of it. That is… how we decided it."

"It doesn't always work out like that Luto, some things are more important than silly, stupid promises."

"It is pointless to pass alone for a person like me… Nasaki. That is not… what I wish."

He decided to go for the cautious route, reaching for Luto's shoulder, just a quick use of the quirk would give him the chance. A low groan left the boy, just as he was about to do so. He crumbled, vanished into the floor, only to erupt beside him in the spot he had collapsed in before from the kick he'd taken in the stomach. Immediate binding followed as Luto seized his hand, in which he'd had a ball primed, and wrenched it toward his own frock.

"Hey," Satou said, taking a step toward them.

"Stop," Luto said, his eyes smoldering through his vines at Satou. He swiped the hand and ball both across his frock, hitting all three points in a row. He vines reduced, crumbling and letting him go. There was an erroring sound as his frock lit up red, and his own points green. His face, now pleased, turned back to Nasaki and sat down again.

"It is done. We try again next year, together."

"Luto," she said, on the verge of sobbing.

"We are... a team. Both, or none."

A large screech emitted across the arena, a type of harrier siren. "The first round has ended, all remaining competitors please stand down." He stood still as he heard it, trying to figure out what had just happened to no avail. It didn't feel as if he had won, yet his clothes claimed otherwise. He gritted his teeth, closed his eyes and let it go. Nothing had to go as planned, he didn't have to win alone or in style as that wasn't the point of any of this. However, to be given a victory in sacrifice,
that did irk him.

Chapter End Notes

*I do not own BNHA. OC material is my own.
Riley knew his annoyance must have clung to him as a cloak, thicker than even Tokoyami’s, as Satou and his walk back to the entrance of the stadium was one of dreadful silence and heaving awkwardness. He allowed it to be not because he enjoyed it but rather as, in the same way one might let a tea bag steep for longer than it needed to, he allowed his mood to do the same. It would be better this way as he knew where he had erred now and a little bitterness could go a long way. Blowing his trump card in the first fight had been the least of it, his arrogance was his major concern. The thought of it sat like a spectre and irked him in line with the cold sweat underneath the plate on his neck. If Satou hadn't come, well that would have been that, and in that way it was also as simple as that. So he let the tea steep and let mood have it's way right up until the winding path of city street ended and eventually the tangle of trees fell away too and they were left staring at the edge of the arena.

Ahead of them was a room marked 'Antechamber' in thick bluish letters. It had been pointed out to them and in front of it was a crowd of increasingly rowdy and restless ex-competitors struggling with some concept he could not make out until he had pushed, rather than made, his own way to the front of them. What was blocking their way into the room was a man, well not just a man but that man with the visor, Nivuto. His eye pulsed a similar dull red as it had before and he had a hand upon it. His expression was different, torn apart like someone caught between apology and slight amusement at the sight in front of him. The student at the head of the pack, who appeared to be the source of the commotion, was a stocky boy of sickly complexion who had rough brown hair with ringlets strung through it like those that made up the loops of earrings. Riley mused at what he should do but read the mood and said nothing. Better to get a perspective on it all before he grossed any unnecessary humiliation. Satou must have found similar conclusion as he folded his arms and halted movement just to his right with watchful eyes.

It took almost no time for their inaction to pay dividend and with a leap the brown haired boy catapulted a few steps forward and said, "This is bullshit," in a hoarse voice, grazed from evident yelling prior. "You can see right here, I have three pads lit up." As if to demonstrate the already obvious fact he pulled on the studded jerkin he wore. The three plates on it were indeed green although unlike their own they were blinking in and out like they had broken at some point. Some others shared his predicament, however most had been bleached a pale red.

"Attempting to deceive me is pointless," Nivuto said before flourishing an arm to the right. "Those who do not meet the requirements, please exit through one of the wings on either side of the stadium."

"Anyone who had the guts to become a hero should be allowed to at least try," a girl mumbled behind them.

"Yeah, why wouldn't they want more heroes now that All Might's gone?" A quiet but stout chorus of agreement stemmed from that, and the tension rising in the crowd made his neck prickle in anticipation.

"Let's separate from the crowd and go in," Satou said just within earshot, to which he nodded, however before they could the brown-haired boy stepped toward Nivuto once more. "Let me
"I disagree, your pads were lit up only after the time limit had expired," the proctor said as he lowered his head, leaving only a glowing edge of red visible on his visor. The boy paused as if caught in a trance. "It would not reflect well on your prospective career if you were to cause a disturbance, I suggest you choose your next action carefully."

The boy rung out his hands and continued watching Nivuto. Just as he was about to take another step toward him Nivuto's raised right hand twitched the slightest amount, causing the student to hesitate. He looked back over his shoulder at the rest of them, and seemed to reconsider. An annoyed grunt left him and he turned left, toward where the tunnel was. "Next year," he vowed under his breath as he and many of the others who had been causing trouble followed leaving only him, Satou and a few others behind.

"I guess it solved itself," Riley said.

"I don't know what that guy was trying to achieve," Satou answered and made his way toward the door. As they approached Nivuto raised his head. He did not look them in the eyes but rather he scanned their bodies in an almost absent fashion. Once he was apparently satisfied he dropped right his hand, which had remained poised and poignant up until that point and used his other to touch the darting visor. Hostility had vanished but what remained was a kind of repugnance, as if he was still deciding whether to look down on them or not. A smirk slipped onto his lips, slighter than the dust in the air and proving provocation was just a natural state of being for him and that any less smugness would be alien.

"Um," Satou said in an unsure stumble at the vicious display. That was nothing Riley could blame him for as this proctor had such a mix of superiority and utter abhorrence that he wouldn't wish to be there if he didn't need to be.

"What are your names?" Nivuto asked as he pushed his hands flat to his sides and backwards like some kind of butler.

"Rikidou Satou."

"Torenagi Riley." His throat became parched as he said it, making it sound scratchy.

Nivuto gave an inclination of a nod before he spoke again, his visor pulsed in time with the motion of agreement. "That is enough. You are admitted." Riley noticed that you could, if you strained to try, see his eyes behind the visor. They were a deep tint of scarlet without irises, like a hazy pit of nothing, which only made him that much more unnerving. The man averted his gaze, stepped aside and allowed them to pass. It was an awkward motion to be sure but one he answered by moving by as quick as he could into the hall beyond.

Inside he found an immediate stench and a detrimental volume of noise. It was that of close to a hundred people stuffed into an unreasonably tiny room after just doing the equivalent of a high intensity workout. It made him uncomfortable, just until he saw his class anyway, standing in a circular clump. They had chosen a spot near the center, where a table had been set up underneath a set of monitors that currently showed a black screen. Similar monitors lined the blue walls of the rectangular room in a pedantic fashion, each exactly the same distance apart and far too numerous to be considered cost conscious. Satou and him shuffled toward the group, with Jirou being the first to take notice.

"You made it," she said, stating the fact with an unusual loudness, as to draw everyone else's attention.
He nodded. "Yeah."

"Almost thought you hadn't passed man," Kirishima said as he rapped him on the shoulder with a knuckle. It left a dull pain that he rubbed away.

"If Satou hadn't come I wouldn't have," he said, much to the boy's bewilderment.

"That's not true man," Satou said before Kirishima could.

"It is." He pulled his lips tight, annoyance flared which he pushed down. Truth, realisation, next time he'd do better.

"Dude-"

"Just drop it Kirishima, he's made up his mind," Jirou said.

"True, that," Sero said. He and the others, disparate as they were, had only just taken notice of their arrival, chatter had been leaving them too preoccupied.

"Torenagi," Uraraka said. "And Satou, which just leaves-"

"Todoroki," Kaminari finished for her.

"I'm sure he'll make it," Midoriya said.

Iida nodded, then peaked a look through the crowd at him. "Did you see him heading over here by chance, Torenagi?"

"I didn't," he said while glancing at Satou who then shrugged as well.

"We have absolutely nothing to worry about, I'm sure," Iida said but his face spoke a different story, all tight and wound up as it was. The reaction brought out an annoyed snarl from someone behind Iida, Bakugou. A snarl was where it stopped, rather than belittle Iida's concern he turned away.

"Still, I'm surprised so many of us passed," Momo said.

"Yeah, it's kind of a surprise," Ashido answered.

"Don't you think it's a bit early to celebrate?" Tsuyu said. She had in her hands a couple of cheesy looking pastry rolls she had fetched from the large table they were standing at. The sight of it made Riley's stomach growl, he made a step to reach for something similar then stopped himself. Eating something solid might just make him feel sick with how much of his quirk he had used. Water, he needed water, although he earlier scratch had withered away it still felt sore. As the conversations diverged back into idle chatter he found a bottle and managed to empty it in one go.

"Thirsty?" Kaminari gave him a kind of half disgusted stare as he wiped his mouth of stray droplets.

"You aren't really trying to give him a hard time over that now, are you?" Jirou said.

Kaminari gave a sly grin. "I mean, I just didn't think it'd be so hard on the great and venerated Torenagi."

"I'm sorry to disappoint you," he answered, tossing the empty bottle into a bin located beneath the table's edge. His fingers felt withered and had begun to ache, whatever came next couldn't come soon enough or he would begin to feel it in full force. "Doesn't look like it was easy for you guys either." He gave a point at the large bruises tapering Kirishima's shoulders and one yellowing scuff
on Kaminari's cheek. Bakugou, he concluded fairly quickly, had nothing obvious to show.

Kirishima returned a pained expression. "It would have been over quicker if Kaminari had just shocked the bastard the moment he saw him instead of showing off."

"Hey, I saved your asses," Kaminari said.

"Just because we gave you an opening man."

"You're both just riding on my fucking coattail anyway so what does it fuckin' matter? Just shut up," Bakugou said, turning back from what was a momentary dissatisfaction. It hadn't escaped his notice that what Bakugou had been watching was the door. It was kind of outlandish to even think Todoroki would fail at something like this, he had to admit. It was, he mused, far more outlandish to think Bakugou would care on little bit whether Todoroki passed or not, yet here he was thinking exactly that. This was still a contest to him, somehow.

"You can't tell me to shut up when you got taken down by that guy too," Karminari said.

"If I didn't have you two shitheads there getting in the way I would have blown him to pieces."

Kaminari responded by rolling his eyes as if attempting to liberate them from the back of his head. "Suuuuurrrre you would have."

"Just shut up."

Kirishima chuckled then looked away from the pair. "You sure you don't wanna tell us what happened with you and Satou?" His words were dismissive in tone which made Riley smirk, almost. He was definitely learning to play him hard, probably from Jirou.

"I was ambushed and then," he said before pausing. Being blunt would serve best. "I messed up pretty much everything and that's all I'm going to say about it." He wouldn't indulge his friend too much with the humiliating details.

Kirishima gave him a wide expression. "Fair enough," he said while waving a finger side to side. "I don't think you would have liked our opponent any better, he messed up like fifty other guys before we got him."

"Fifty?" It sounded ridiculous, not to mention petty considering the passing requirement. He guessed Kirishima was just exaggerating.

"It was that purple haired guy who was with that dude that curb stomped his own face earlier, remember him?"

He did, considering it wasn't that long ago. He did not remember the name, other than the fact he was a Shiketsu student. Before he could carry on the conversation there was a commotion behind him as the door to the antechamber opened again, letting in three students. The first to enter was the very girl that had accompanied the Shiketsu student in question followed by the boy who, for lack of a better word, had indeed curbstomped himself and now wore a bruise to prove it. He did remember his name, if only because of Aizawa. Inasa Yoarashi. The third, and one that he could hear relieve a concurrent number of held breaths behind him, was Todoroki. He made a straight line toward them like he had already known before entering where they would be. Before Riley could say something Iida, of all people, pushed him just a bit to the side. A whole bit, primarily with his shoulder and without any of the care he often showed.

"Todoroki," he said. "Very well done, I expected nothing less of a model student such as yourself."
"You passed," Midoriya chimed in.

"Midoriya, Iida," Todoroki answered with a tilt of his head. "Uraraka" he added. A disconnected kind of expression hung off his face like he wasn't sure why they seemed out of tune at his arrival.

"We got kind of worried, just a for sec," Uraraka said.

"I never had a doubt in my mind," Iida shouted.

"Oh yeah, none of us did," Midoriya smiled and rubbed the back of his head.

"I had some business to settle, that's all." He glanced at the Shiketsu student out of the corner of his eye then dropped it.

"That makes everyone," Hagakure said. She gave Ojiro, who stood to her right, a playful shove and then Momo one as well on the opposite side. "Damn, we're pretty awesome aren't we?"

Ashido pumped her fist into the air. "You can say that again."

Before the two could continue their celebration the monitor above them crackled. A light shade of auburn graced it before it flickered to life. Onscreen was the chairman and a distinct red splotch that made the image fuzz to his right. The sensation hurt his eyes to look at and made the monitors crackle through the hall in displeasure.

"Nivuto, how many times have I told you not to look at the camera," the chairman said. "It's tiring, you know." Nivuto gave him a neutral look but his displeasure at the comment showed through as he walked off of the screen in a stout cascade of heavy steps. "That's better," the chairman said as he slouched back on the table. "Just because I'm stuck with you protecting me doesn't mean I need you hawking like you are, how am I supposed to get any sleep like that, huh?" He gave a sort of frumpled look up at the camera as if he'd just remembered it's existence and groaned.

Kirishima whistled. "And here I didn't think anyone was more of a sleepyhead than McSplody."

"Again with this shit," Bakugou said, causing Kirishima to snicker.

"You make it too easy," Sero said.

Kaminari tutted. "He could use that time on more productive things, like finding a girlfriend to cool his temper."

"Maybe if you slept a fucking normal amount you wouldn't be so shit at being a hero," Bakugou said. His head was bowed just an inch and Riley was sure, despite being unable to see it, that there was a vein bursting.

"Better watch your temper Ba-ku-gou," Kaminari said. "Besides the only thing I need to become a better hero is to stay away from you during trips. You nearly blew my head off during the training."

Bakugou returned a slim smirk, something hidden but still evident if you paid attention. "So that flailing shit you were doing was training, huh?"

"Flailing?" Kaminari yelled. "Even little kids know to stay away from electric sockets. Luckily for you the only reason I didn't shock the crap out of you was because it got cut short by those vil-" He froze. "Villains that- and…" the rest of his words trailed off, like he hadn't meant to bring it up.

"Whatever," Bakugou said, shooting a look over his shoulder toward a different class. His fist was
clenched around an inch of his costumes fabric at his thigh, but he'd turned enough only Riley could really see it.

"I know you must be relieved about passing but I suggest you pay the chairman the respect he deserves," Iida said as he took an uncomfortably close step to Kaminari's side. He had a glare, a bit of a lighthearted one, but still enough to make a point. What ruined it was the fact Mineta was riding on his head to get a better view.

"Sorry, sorry," Kaminari said as the screen flickered to a view of the city they'd just been in, rather than the chairman.

"Now, all participants, please take a look at this turn of events," the chairman's voice said over the picture.

A 'turn of events', it seemed, was a gross understatement. The city within which they had been, or rather everything in the area from the forest and roads and spires of rock, were in turmoil. Several of the skyscrapers had been tossed to the floor like an unhappy child had smashed them. Coils of smoke rose up between the debris and many of the highways now caked the streets below as if they were being used to assemble some demented puzzle. As the camera flickered past another demolished building he realised that each of the other monitors around the outside of the antechamber were displaying different things. Some, he could tell with immediacy, were focussed upon what could only be humans. Not dummies or imitations but real people both old and young. They were nestled like chicks fallen from a nest in hundreds of perilous situations. Some untoppled buildings swayed like vultures, houses threatened to swallow others and the ground shook with some unknown fury.

The sight brought a spike of urgency that he dealt with the rough instant it came to him. He knew these were actors but that hadn't stopped him last time. His eyes narrowed as the chairman's voice returned.

"I don't need to waste my time explaining, right?" the disembodied voice spoke. "Our civilians are in danger heroes, welcome to your second test. It's a trial of rescue, among… uh, other things." It felt as if he was giving them a blameless smile even if they could not see him. "Let's make haste then," he said and the antechamber door behind them opened once more.

[Tartarus - ? - 10:33 AM]

Tartarus. The word sat like an acidic film of acrylic upon Toshinori's flimsy tongue. Edges of it's claustrophobia had become ever present in his descent into the prison, much like it's older brother Alcatraz. Through thrice thickened windows to his right beckoned a city in dampened eternal hopelessness, with it's lights confirming only that he would never reach it. A bit much, even for a prison.

"All Might, please go ahead inside," the youthful guard said with a beckoning hand. He had a gun holstered at his right hip, a laughable form of defence against the monstrosity that made his skin prickle even through the walls still separating them.

He returned a nod to the guard. "Thank you," he said as he stepped forward. Before he could open the door, he was stopped by a hand on his shoulder. He already knew who it was, Naomasa.

"Remember, you'll only have a few minutes at most," Naomasa said.

"As you've constantly reminded me."

Naomasa almost chuckled. "Well, he is your worst enemy. Just don't tell him anything about what is
going on out there, I think that's a reasonable request."

Toshinori frowned at the words. If there was one thing he doubted All for One was then it would be ignorant. He probably didn't even have the capability to be ignorant with all those quirks. "I'll be careful," he said as he waved the hand off and Naomasa gave him a worried look. It wasn't misplaced, Toshinori wagered, as he hadn't so much as managed to force a smile on his face the entire morning in anticipation. It was because he was playing the part of the fool, a fool who needed answers and was willing to seek them out by digging through the mouth of a lion.

The metal door clicked in five places before throwing itself open at him and releasing a waft of nasty air which he deciphered was a sterilising spray of some sort. Despite that he tasted metal on his tongue just as soon as the door behind him closed and the next one opened. Dread hit him right then and there as he made eye contact, followed by cold, sweat, nausea and pain in his side. All for one. It was a terrible estrangement to see him in the half opal surface of the prison cell, all wrapped up in wires and tubes and with a million cameras pointed at him. He knew why just as well as he knew the back of his own hand. It was the taint of One for All at work, bending the very space around him and making it seem as if he was in full control. At that very moment there may as well have been nothing between him and the villain, like he had stepped into a field of radiation without a shred of protection.

"Funny, isn't it All Might?" All for One said before Toshinori could even sit. His voice was muffled behind the oxygen mask. "Or perhaps more fitting, that they would lock me away in a place that is a mockery of the prison used for gods. Tartarus."

The seat they had given him was uncomfortable and he did not ordain All for One with a reply as he pushed himself as far into it as he dared. His senses were drenched as he took in the man's vanity. He wasn't human and rather more like a wraith siphoning and imitating what dignity a real human might have.

All for One scoffed. "Untalkative? And here I was surprised you had come to seek me." He paused. "No, I suppose surprised is the wrong word for such a pathetic display."

"You won't be getting out of here, you know," Toshinori said in leaden tongue.

"Let's assume that to be the case. If so, what could you possibly want from me?" All for One tilted his head. "Perhaps you came at Gran Torino's bidding or to try and pretend like you're still some big shot hero. Is that what the costume is for?"

"You sure love to run your mouth don't you?"

"Hah. Humor me a little, won't you? It's been so long since I've had a proper conversation. All these guards provide is a smoking barrel. It is a rather stale affair."

Toshinori's eyes narrowed. "Where is Shigaraki?"

"I have no idea. Unlike you, I've already allowed my successor to walk on his own two feet."

He grimaced his jaw in response. "You made sure those other remaining villains escaped with him, what were you and Janus trying to do? What were you trying to accomplish?"

"Curious you would choose to waste your time asking about Janus," All for One said. "That man is an enigma to even myself."

"He helped you create the Noumu." Toshinori shuffled in his seat. "With the quirks you stole from countless innocents."
All for One gave a throaty laugh. "Stole?" His face widened like he was making a sick grin beneath the mask. "The very first of us were powerful. Powerful, but so very unrefined. The quirks they held were not ready for the world in their time so I took them. Many of them were happy to be free of such destructive abilities that they could not control."

"And you mock them by making abominations."

"The reincarnation of ideas is flattery in utmost form, All Might. Janus and I share that viewpoint and it is not something you could understand. Let me put it this way; in the same way an empty canvas represents possibility, so do these quirks. Now, if your questions are going to be so frivolous then I will divert the conversation to something more productive, number one hero." All for One's form convulsed as he struggled to get closer to the glass. "All I do is to accomplish my ideals. In the same way you wished to be the hero of justice, I am Hades incarnate; a king of evil."

"If that's the case, why pick a successor at all?"

The skin around All for One's missing eyes tightened at the question before he answered. "Do you really have to ask? You took away my ability to embody all the ideals I hold, yet if I were to spread my ideals and refine them, then is that not the same as living on through them? We are the same. When we see an end, we entrust."

He let out a long sigh and leaned back. "That is the way of humanity and I'm just trying to do what everyone else has already done for thousands of years."

"By sinking the world back into chaos?"

"Don't be so dramatic, All Might. Since the dawn of time man has killed each other, what makes these modern people so very different that this should change? The strong shape the world, that is how it has always been."

Toshinori glowered. "The strong should protect the weak," he answered with some reluctance.

"I care to wager that the strong only protect those who do not oppose them no matter which side you're on. The difference is some of us frivolous capes in order to justify our tendencies."

"Subjugation is not the same as protection."

"All Might," a speaker resounded throughout the room. "Three minutes is almost up, please vacate--"

"Wait. I have more to say," All for One said as he looked to the right, cutting off the speaker. He turned back and Toshinori felt the taste of rust intensify and his brow glaze an extra coat of sweat. "I thought the world would be pretty shaken up by the news of your retirement."

Toshinori grunted in response, so much for secrecy. "Did you?"

"Yes, in fact, I think I can guess," he answered and his face shadowed. "There must be a swelling of tides on both sides. The appeal of uncertainty as heroes devise a flimsy new world order with Endeavor at the top and the underlying growth of action as the outcasts of society emerge to center stage once more. Each of them will want to shape the world, all while you struggle in the dark to find Tomura. It must be frustrating."

He scoffed. "And if that is how it is, that would explain your lie of an appearance, now wouldn't it?"

"You're misguided if you think everything would fall apart so easily," Toshinori said, then bit his lip. This was a trap.

"Really? Is that so? In that case there is only one thing I want to know," All for One said. "Since all you can do it sit and watch as the world crumbles, helpless to stop it... tell me. How does it all feel?"
He chuckled as silence took hold. A second later Toshinori found himself rising. That was enough. "You seem upset, it tends to happen to those who have their feelings guessed correctly."

Toshinori tried to force himself to turn toward the door but couldn't. "You," he stammered. "Of all people, don't you go and presume you know everything. I understand your warped thinking. You want Shigaraki to kill both the boy and I, that's the gist isn't it?"

"And?"

He closed his eyes. If it was that simple then he already had an answer. He raised his fist and flung his cape over his shoulder as he turned away. "I will not let your designs come to pass. I will smash them to pieces." He gritted his teeth and spat the last sentence, "I will not let Shigaraki kill me."

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**South-Eastern Hosu - Red House Attic - 10:40 AM**

"Doesn't budge," Native said as he touched along the seam of the sealed door which had been warded by yellow police tape. The rest of the house had yielded nought of interest but for the remainder of a shattered camera lens and a few scraps of paper. All else had been removed, evidence or otherwise.

"I expected as much," Edgeshot answered, then looked back to the junior detective. "Please step back." Even though the comment was not directed at him Native chose to take it that way and moved back to where the junior detective was and they in turn both took another two steps back. There was a crunch beneath his feet but he didn't look at it, the red nature of the room made his head spin. An ironic twist, he supposed.

"Careful, Sir. It might be booby trapped," the junior detective said and shifted on his feet as he watched Edgeshot approach the door. He had initially assumed it would be the detective, Naomasa, that would join them however he had sent this man in his stead at the last second. A rookie, if he had to guess by his ill-fitting suit and second-guessing of a pro.

"I am prepared to deal with whatever situation arises," Edgeshot answered as he tore the remaining tape down in an ordered kind of annoyance. There were few things that made Edgeshot lose his temper but the man was not perfect, even if it wasn't obvious to anyone but Ko.

The hand on Edgeshot's right arm became thin as paper as he placed it up to the door then slid it inside the seam. It was amazing to watch it, as the seam had to be less than a millimetre in width. How would he deal with this kind of situation when he had his own agency to worry about? His quirk could be used to try and open it, or he could get a sidekick to open it. Sidekicks. His thought hung on the word. He still needed one or two more willing ones. He had Leina but, well, Leina wasn't a sidekick even if she offered to be one. Their talk had gone down a bad path. He'd never understand that woman's motives.

There was a click and he went back to attention. It was the distinct sound of a lock being undone. The door trembled, unsealing like some ancient Egyptian tomb and then gave to swing inward as Edgeshot twisted the handle. When they had tried it earlier the handle hadn't even moved, but now it was almost eager to let them inside. It was entirely red on the inside as well but darker, and far more spacious than one would have thought. Clotheslines hung overhead, and tubs filled with dried up gloopy liquid sat on tables. The red on the walls wasn't just a product of the paint this time. It was a dark room and was tinted as such.

"It has been ravaged," Edgeshot said as he bent over to pick up a picture, the only picture that remained.
"Recently too, by the looks," Native said. "Anything on that thing?" he asked, nodding at the picture.

"Not much, I am afraid." He turned it around, revealing it was nigh blackened, undeveloped, probably caused by it sitting on the floor for an extended period. There was a sheen of something round and metallic in the top right corner, like a bulbous metal cudgel but it was impossible to make it out with any real accuracy.

"I should inform Naomasa of this room," the junior detective muttered as he reached for his phone. "Take the picture as evidence," Edgeshot said, offering it to the detective. He had, as always, been careful not to touch it with his bare hands and had instead used those felted tips on the end of his gloves. The junior detective pocketed his phone and reached for it, only for Edgeshot to pull it away before he could make the mistake he himself had not. His mouth widened, as if he were planning to say something to the hero, only to realise his idiocy and take out a bag with latex gloves. Once he had one on he tried again, and Edgeshot let him take it. The junior detective stumbled over his own feet as he turned to leave, but kept his balance by grabbing at the frame of the red door. He waved his hand as he let go of it, the red now having smeared his fingers. The walls were somehow wet like someone had painted recently, which made little sense considering the tubs were dried out.

"A pain to have them hound us like this," Edgeshot said as he heard the click of the stairway door. "Ain't it always," he answered then walked as far into the room as possible. There were some curiosities that remained despite the picture being a falsehood. He knew Edgeshot had only given the junior detective the picture to keep him occupied.

"Red paint," Edgeshot said.

"To mark intruders, I reckon."

"And yet that only makes it more suspicious. This house was previously owned by a hobbyist photography studio, before it was used to masquerade a hiding place for whomever was spying on those passing toward that apartment where Torenagi lived."

"So you're sayin' there's a good chance they were using this room to develop the pictures they took of him?"

"No, I am not," Edgeshot said, almost dumbfounded. "I doubt they would make their own operation so inconvenient. This room would have held pictures in a previous life but the lock on the door suggests it's main use was to keep someone out should they come looking."

"Or in," Native mused.

"Or in," Edgeshot repeated. "Those Noumu that attacked during the Stain incident were anomalous to the previous as I'm sure you recall."

"'Cos one of em' had a recognizable set of quirks," Native said, nodding.

"The man to whom the acidic quirk was registered was never found, though the police would not conclude it on principle I think it is safe to say they are related due to the proximity of his residence to this house."

"So not only did it allow spyin' but it doubled as a place to run their damn experiments from?"

"In particular the experiments of one of the primary villains still on the loose, based on those
recordings."

"Doesn't get us any closer to findin' the villain though."

"I doubt any of the league will show themselves again for a time and in that regard, perhaps it is best
to focus on something else."

"You have 'n idea in mind?" Ko asked.

Edgeshot hesitated, a rare thing for him, and walked back to the entrance of the room before
speaking again. "There is a request I would like to make of you. That is, a request on behalf of my
own plans."

"What kind of request?"

"Investigatory," he said. "A certain hero has come to my attent-"

A loud crash rumbled through the floor and all semblance of conversation dropped in an instant.
Edgeshot turned the corner out of the room and flung the door to the stairs open, he followed as fast
as he could, which turned out to be a mistake considering how steep the steps were. He slid one
which made him come down painfully on his ankle. He cursed, and hobbled into the main shop
floor, where Edgeshot and, the junior detective from before. Several other officers who had been
standing outside, marking the perimeter, had also come inside. He looked to where they did, a spot
on the floor in front of one of the shelves that used to hold glass cases on it. It now had an indent.
Originally a carpet would have covered it up but it sat clear as day now.

"Did you see what happened?" Edgeshot asked, looking to each of the policemen in turn.

"It just sprung open like that when I went past to go back upstairs. I'm not sure what triggered it," the
junior detective said.

"No one suspicious approached just before it occurred?"

"No one suspicious has approached the building, Sir," one of the officers that had been stationed
outside answered.

"I see," the hero said and looked up. His thought must have been on the dark room, something that
they did. He didn't wait for the detectives prompt this time and bobbed down to it, taking the latch
attached to it's top and pulling. It thunked open and he heaved it to rest against the wall behind it. A
gut-wrenching stench rose from the hole, in which a staircase sat. It was the stench of death. Rotten,
absolute and unmistakable.

Edgeshot took a step down the staircase and was forced to cover his face at the stench despite
wearing a mask. Ko took his time following as he tested his ankle and by the time he and the junior
detective had made it down Edgeshot had already found a lightswitch. Unlike upstairs it didn't tint
everything red, he found himself thankful for that, but the stone and concrete which the yellowed
light did reveal was equally as disturbing as it was covered in thick shades of mold. It made his
stomach spin on itself as he was getting closer and closer to becoming overpowered by it. Death and
mold. It was wafting at them from across the room, from a bed, with a telltale lift of a human form to
it. Edgeshot took his time walking to it, this time with actual care of traps, bodies were not left
without reason. He erred to consider it warning or neglect that had left the body here, as the blanket
covering it was thrown back.

The junior detective gagged beside him at the sight and he too had a hard time not feeling the
pressure to vomit. Edgeshot did not turn from the rotting flesh, so he tensed his gut and tried not to
do so either. What Edgeshot had uncovered was a rather young man, with brown hair combed away from the malnourished face and glasses that had begun to sink into it. The striated white skin was bloated in several places and there were enlarged holes underneath much of the sodden shirt he had worn when he died. His fingers were digging into the bed despite the atrophy of muscle, the thin line of skin that remained on the bones of the knuckles indicated that he had died grasping at it with all he had left. There was a macabre inevitability to it, this man knew he was going to die. Painfully.

"Horrible, way ta' go," he said under his breath.

Edgeshot gave a nod and raised his hand in a silent prayer before turning to the junior detective. "Call Naomasa," he said. "I believe we have just located the man last known as Weiss."

Chapter End Notes

* I do not own BNHA. Oc material is my own.
Stone, metal and rock threw Riley a great distance, at terrible speed, backward over a mound of concrete as the wall next to him exploded in hypersonic sound. Paralysis swept through his body before he hit the ground making it impossible to brace himself. Then, all his momentum was gone like it had been banished from existence. He stopped still, and his sight swam back into focus, as the same hand that had saved him pushed him against a wall. Rubbing his eyes did little but make them sting as his gloves were caked in dust.

"Torenagi," Uraraka said through the sound of ringing. There was sweat spread across her brow and her hands were still in the release sign of her quirk.

"I-" he blundered. "I'm-" His tongue did not wish to co-operate as the sickness made rounds from tip of toe to the top of forehead. He shuddered then asked, "What happened?"

"You got hit." Uraraka pointed off into the distance but he couldn't see where. "I think the wall took most of that quirk he used for you but don't move too much," she said.

A monumental voice cast itself over the area, "Consider that retribution for denying my gracious invitation, young one!"

"My head is pounding." Riley groaned and he couldn't quite comprehend who had spoken. There was something he had been doing. Something important. He tightened his fist and threw it into the ground. The world re-assembled, the ringing became mute and his body became aware again, aware and full of pain. He looked back to where he had been and saw Gang Orca standing amongst wall now sundered with hundreds of his crew surrounding him, all of them wore the same Orca helmet that he did. Riley pushed himself to his feet and stumbled, grabbing on to a metal rung that remained from a now twisted fence.

"Take it easy," Uraraka said.

"Can't," he answered. "I need to go back there." He pointed ahead at a particular apartment building that stood out amongst the outskirt of the ruined city, near to the wall where villains where funneling out in all directions around Gang Orca. It still stood. Good. He took a step toward it.

"Torenagi, wait!" Uraraka said as a second wave of hypersonic sound cascaded and made them wince in pain. It had been aimed at a boy standing right next to Gang Orca, Shindou, the one who had twisted his wrist this morning. He fell to the floor like a corpse. "What a fierce quirk," she said. "If we get hit by that point blank we'll be out. Maybe we should head in the opposite direction, there's still plenty of people who need rescuing."

"We can't," he said. "There's at least two people in that building." He looked back at her and found a font of worry. She didn't want to go toward the villains. "Uraraka-"

Her face changed and she balled her fists. "You're sure?" she asked in a voice as rigid as stone.

"I'm sure," he answered. "Fourth story, second window from the left." It hadn't been his imagination, whomever had tried to evacuate the building before he had gotten to it hadn't been thorough enough.
"Then let's do it. I trust you." He became lightheaded at her sudden agreement but then begot himself with a nod and began to walk forward again, only for her to grab his arm by the shoulder. "But we can't rush in, there's too many villains in the way."

"Then," he said and his mind purred something close to pleasure at the next thought. "Let's make them move." He had the strangest urge to grin wide at the idea of fighting.

"Remember what Momo said." Her face narrowed. "We need to do what we can do in this situation and that means playing to our strengths. Neither of us is good at fighting this many villains at once."

Sense came through him and the urge went away. "You're right. I don't know what I was thinking." A different kind of nausea settled in him, which he ignored. "What's the plan then?"

"A distraction, of some kind."

"A distraction," he repeated and bit his lip. "Maybe if we-" He was cut off by a third hypersonic wave. It was accompanied by the shattering of ice as Gang Orca threw himself two streets toward Todoroki, who stood between several ruined buildings.

"You'll have to try harder than that to take me down," Gang Orca shouted at Todoroki and another student floating well above him. It was Inasa, the student from Shiketsu. Inasa twisted his hand and a tornado concaved upon Gang Orca in a coil, scattering his subordinates this way and that, however the pro rolled out of the attack and came to a standstill upright. His mask was twisted in pleasure like he'd taken a draught of battle lust.

"Perfect," Uraraka said. "Now is our chance to get to that building."

Riley didn't hesitate and bounded past the mound over which he had been thrown right toward the building. He heard Uraraka following him as he dodged pieces of collapsed trees and scattered debris. Their greatest enemy became the shaking of the earth as wind, ice and sound wrestled with one another but still they reached it in less than a minute.

The apartment building gaped down on them as they approached as if it were a beast sweltering with rage and infection. The fence surrounding it was warped and concrete slabs polka-dotted it's face like battle scars. Glass crunched beneath his shoes as he approached the main entrance, which was a gaping hole caved in by rubble. Claw marks ran across it, from the previous attempt to rescue whomever had been inside, but that meant it was now useless to try and enter through. He looked over at Uraraka, who had already begun to shuffle around the left side of the building.

"Maybe we can find a fire exit to climb," he said as he followed her.

"I don't think so," she said and pointed at a mess of steel that looked like the distinct remains of a seven story fire exit ladder that had detached and crumpled into the wall below it.

"We could try the right side, they might have a ground level exit on the back."

"These buildings aren't like those you would find in places like Hosu," she answered. "There doesn't seem to be any other entrances."

"Then, your quirk and mine. I can scale the building and latch on by the window."

"I've thought of that too but something isn't right about it, look," she said.

He did, and found that the whole section of the wall and only that section where the window and apartment would be was wholly unharmed. Not only that but two pieces of metal from the staircase
of the fire exit hung there suspended like they were not tethered to the ground, much like Uraraka's quirk. "It could be a trap," she said. "Not to mention if I send you up there and then myself, I might not be able to get the civilians there back down again."

That made sense, to him at least. "Then-"

She cut him off, "Trust me on this, we're probably better off making our own entrance right here."

Riley looked the wall up and down, it didn't look special other than bulging out further than the rest, though what significance that held was a mystery to him. He placed a hand upon it and glanced at Uraraka, but she looked absolute in her decision. This was where the hole needed to be. So, he let his quirk roll into the brick and mortar which made his shoulder seize up. The sensation dissipated as his costume took it.

"Stand back," Uraraka said and he did, there was a smile beneath her visor as she raised her right leg to about the level of left knee and then sent it forward in one solid kick. The brick went, and so did the mortar and then the plaster too and they were left looking into something that had to be a bathroom. It was dark and tiled, and there was a toilet that she had narrowly avoided destroying too. "I've always wanted to do that," she said and beckoned him to go inside first. He did, only to have Uraraka push him all the way through until they were both out of the bathroom and in what looked to be a living room half the size of the bottom floor of the residence. It had to be the section of the house that the owner used, as it took up much too much of the bottom floor to be a mere apartment.

"There should be a staircase if we go into the main entrance," Uraraka said and tested around in the dark. As if she had some sort of instinct she found the entrance door in one attempt out of the many doors available and soon they were both looking up a stairwell in the main hall beyond the collapsed door that had barred their way prior. It looked perilous beyond reason but half of that was because the only resemblance it had to a real apartment building now was that of a spiraling staircase. The concrete slabs they had seen outside went all the way across at some points and were the only sources of limited, spear-like shafts of light. Some of the slabs had found their path all the way down and they would need to climb over them to get up.

"Let's hurry," he said. "Fourth floor, second window from the left," he repeated.

She nodded and they began to ascend the stairs, which took copious time with the damage. "It looks like they have four apartments per floor," she said as they came to the first. "So the one we're looking for will either be apartment thirteen or seventeen."

"They looked like kids," he said. "I'm not sure how someone could have missed them."

"Gunhead told me it's pretty common for kids to get missed in rescue operations. He also said that's why heroes normally split up to make it easier to find them in situations like this."

"Native mentioned something similar," he answered. "But it was more about trying to kick that fight or flight response that you get when you're not used to being a hero." The second floor, as they reached it, had no second floor. There was a large gap between them and the next part of the staircase that would be impossible to gap without falling.

"I got this," Uraraka said and touched his shoulder again before saying, "Jump." He did, and with ease they floated across the gap and grabbed onto the wooden banister before landing on the next steps. Once they had gone up several she released the quirk again and he found strain on her face. She must have used the quirk a lot today.

"I didn't thank you for catching me," he said. "Or for talking sense into me. So, uh, thanks."
She nodded. "Thanks for making me look good," she said.

"Right." He gave a slight huff. Just like the sports festival again, he mused. As they reached the end of the third floor he looked upward and found there was a new predicament facing them. Whatever slab had demolished the second floor had been nothing in comparison to the third floor as the two twenty step staircases that led from the third floor to the fourth had been sheared away like necrotic flesh. Worse still, the culprit slab was still there and staring them in the face. It was lodged in such a way that it now showed them why they could not see much of the top of the building as only the tiny gap in the center still sat uncovered and even that was meshed by metallic rods that erupted from the slab itself. They had no real choice of what to do next.

"Float me up there and I'll twist my way through," he said. "After I clear it you should be able to get up as well." She nodded at him and he said, as he looked over the banister, "And uh, don't let me fall. Please." It was a multiple story drop onto what now looked more like a spiked pit than a bottom floor.

"You can count on me," she said. "Probably." She gave a pleasant smile under-toned by a hint of sickness, that caused him to fidget as she placed a hand to enable the quirk.

Riley let out a breath as he felt the weightlessness then pushed off the floor which brought him over the four feet gap faster than he intended. His hand latched onto one of the metal girder strands from the mesh as he almost flew past it. He pulled himself back and then concentrated, lowering the density of the girder and making it more malleable to his grasp.

"Hurry, Torenagi," Uraraka said in staggered breaths.

"Just a minute more," he answered and began to pull. The action, he found, was futile as he had no leverage to pull the perpendicular strands of metal apart, so he raised his feet and set them against the underside of the concrete slab. A glance downward gave him vertigo and he closed his eyes, focusing on the pulling of metal instead. The strands moved away bit by bit as he strained to twist them any way he could until they had folded to make a hole similar to a twisted cap on a bottle of milk. He reached into the hole and forced his way through, pushing his body up with both arms. As he did, the strange weightlessness left him, and his full weight came back. His foot began to slip beneath him on the underside of the hole as his arms struggled to get him all the way through the hole he had manipulated, which was now much less dense than before and in turn much less stable.

"Shit," he gasped as he fell and was forced to sink his hand deep into the concrete slabs top side with his quirk to keep hold. It cracked, displeased with the action and he felt the hole tighten around his waist as the slab and metal shifted closer together. He yanked on the handhold and then on a part of the fourth floor's remaining staircase's underside in order to pull himself up. There was a crunching sound beneath him as the concrete and metal enclosed like a noose around his legs before shunking closed like a metal door. His breath raced from him and was replaced with ceramic dust and dirt as he lay in a heap upon the top of the slab. He coughed and began to move as the slab sent out a reverberation beneath him. It wasn't finished fucking with him yet. He kicked his foot and rolled left, staggering on his feet and taking two steps before leaping toward the staircase. Ne'er he did so, did the slab break apart and slip, taking half the wall with it as it slid down further and began forming a tight plug of debris. His arms ached as he held on tight to the wooden railing and waited for sound to cease. It did, but for a few falling pebbles that rattled his nerves. Ahead, just a few steps up, was the fourth floor and an apartment marked seventeen, at the other end. It had to be the correct one as it was the only apartment that had it's door not flung wide open.

"Torenagi," he heard Uraraka shout in a muffled tone through the plug. "Are you okay?!"

"I'm fine," he shouted back. For the most part he was, albeit bruised, battered and not sure which
way up as anymore.

"The path you used is completely blocked off. I'll try and find another way through. You go on ahead!"

"Got it," he answered but caught himself looking down into the pit. This was a dilemma. If Uraraka couldn't make it up here then getting the kids, and whomever else was trapped within, out would be an issue. This would all have been easier if he had been able to enter from the outside but thinking about that was useless now, just as his standing here.

He took the last few steps toward the apartment and tried the door. It didn't budge and he could see by the skid marks on the floor someone had tried before he had and had been equally unsuccessful. The door, he realized, was just like the fire exit had been; suspended in space like it had been caught in stasis but unlike before it wasn't quite covering everything. He slid his fingers down the side of the door's frame to where the jamb was and held his fingers to it. Then he moved his hand off and concentrated, which caused that part of the door to compress and crumble away. The lock and the door itself remained without fault, so he turned his attention at the hinges and repeated the process. In some way he was met with success because as he touched the door it moved. It didn't fall but slid away like it wasn't able to move whatsoever without his influence. Behind the door, as he squeezed past the opening he made, he saw light. Estrangement came over him as the building definitely had no power but it wasn't like he would just imagine the fluorescence of the orange-ish glow emanating around him and illuminating the hallway. Just as the door had, it looked off. The light too, was suspended, removed from any reality. As he moved through it the light parted like a curtain around him and left behind a spot of darkness where he had moved. If there had been any doubt of quirk it was long gone, with the door and light both. Something else also irked him and it wasn't until he moved further in he knew what it was: a lack of any smell.

As luck would have it at the end of the hall was two doors and one open frame that led into the kitchen. Bogged down by lack of choice he went into the kitchen and saw at the edge of a table a spoon caught in a perpetual, lost balancing act. Next to it was a fork that had long relinquished that battle and vibrated as it hung in midair beneath the plate it had rested upon. He decided against trying to touch them, that wasn't the purpose of him coming in here. An ajar door at the side of the kitchen led into a living room where the light had not been on like the other rooms. He did find another door in there as well, on which he had to use his quirk again. This time it did work as he found that the space around both hinges and jamb impervious due to the stasis. It wasn't a locked door so he went back to the previous room and grabbed the third utensil that had been on the table, a knife. It fit well into the side of the jamb and pushed the mechanism backward, allowing him to open the door the same as any other but with more effort as the hinge fought against, rather than worked with, the motion. This revealed a final sort of room and it was at this point, that he heard a noise.

"Anyone in here?" he asked. No answer. In this room there was a light, and a closet and two beds. The light came from an extravagant lamp on one of the tables next to one of the beds as well as a night light across the room near the closet. There was another door there that seemed irrelevant now, likely to a master bedroom. He turned his attention to the closet and listened. There was something inside, breathing. He moved upon the closet door and touched his fingers to the handle, then stopped.

"Don't go any further villain!" a girl's voice came from within.

"Y-yeah, don't go any further," a boy said. They were both young from the sound, or at the very least somewhere in elementary school.

"I'm not a villain, I'm here to rescue you," Riley said. "I'm a hero," he added.

"No way, you don't look like a hero to me," the girl said. She must have been able to see him
through the slits in the closet door.

"Yeah, you're scary looking!" the boy said.

There was a shuffle. "I think I saw him on the news," the girl said to the boy in a quiet tone, then she spoke louder again, "Go away, this is your last warning!"

Riley took a step back and frowned. "You're in danger if you stay here. Come out, we need to leave right now."

The boy answered this time, "Mummy told us to wait right here until she comes back."

"Yeah," the girl said. "We don't need any help and there's no way I'd trust someone like you."

Riley looked down at himself and frowned. This wasn't working and he couldn't afford to waste more time. Whatever this quirk was wouldn't last forever, nor would it stop the entire building falling down around it. That, and Uraraka was relying on him right now. There was something he should be able to do if he really was a hero. Ko would do something and he knew what that something was, it was so obvious that he would feel stupid if he didn't try. He unclenched his fist and raised himself taller, forcing his whole body to relax. Then he tried something that wasn't a smile but wasn't a frown either, something confident. He couldn't be upbeat like Ko, or as cool as Edgeshot but what he could be was stern, rational and utterly absolute. In his mind he pictured what that might look like, and somehow his mind chose to embody that idea as Endeavor. Since that time of the hero killer's attack he still remembered it. It was a temperament that left no room for argument.

He settled on it, then opened his mouth to speak again, "Your mother is outside. She sent me to come and get you so don't make her wait."

"No way, you're just making that up," the girl said.

He shook his head, once. "You were brave doing what she asked but let me take it from here."

"Mum said-" the boy said.

"Children should behave and listen to heroes. Do you understand? Don't cause trouble for the people looking after you. Come out here, now." There was silence, and then the door to the closet slid open with a whine as the wheels fought the stasis. The girl inside threw up a finger at him as she was revealed.

"This better not be a trick," she said. She was around six, maybe, and the boy huddled in the corner of the closet about five.

"Heroes don't need tricks," he said and stuck his hand out to the boy. There was hesitation in his eyes but he took the hand and Riley hoisted him out and into his arms. "You're safe now." There was a nod and he took that as enough. He didn't pick up the girl, she seemed content to move on her own but, well, now he had another problem. How was he going to get out?

There was a tap on the window behind him, hidden by a curtain. He turned and moved to it and when he pulled the curtain away it floated off the rod it was draped on sideways, revealing the window whilst simultaneously continuing to float on nothing. The window tapped again as something hit it and then bounced vertically before floating into nowhere. It looked like a pebble. He leaned to look out and saw below three figures that were hard to tell apart as the remaining light in the room washed the image on the other side of the glass like he was looking through liquid. He frowned, then banished the unsightly visage again as he looked at the two children.
"It's his quirk," the girl said.

He looked at the boy. "Release your quirk, boy."

"But-" the boy hesitated.

"Do as I say." Talking like this was beginning to make him feel lethargic. It was like he was daring someone to disagree with him. It had the desired effect as the boy didn't decline and then raised his middle and pinkie finger. They were touching and reddened like some strain was upon them. He pried them apart and the stasis broke.

"Ah!" the girl squealed and Riley pulled both her and the boy close to him as several doors fell off their suspended places and crashing resounded from the kitchen. Two chairs fell over somewhere and a crash occurred in the stairwell with enough intensity to make the building shake again.

"It's alright," he said as the chaos stopped and the light that had remained around them died. "There's nothing to be scared of." He glanced back and used his spare hand to touch the window without moving his body too much, as the girl was still clinging to his leg. The window opened now without resistance and a heated air filled the room like a vacuum was being filled. He looked out of the window again, vision now uninhibited, and saw below that the three figure were ones he recognized. Momo, Shouji and Uraraka. They had cleared the rubble of the broken exit ladder away and were looking up at him.

"Terra," Momo's voice rang loud and clear through a megaphone that she held. He responded by waving a hand out the window, at which she continued to speak, "Uravity told us there were still multiple civilians trapped in this building. We've come to lend our aid."

Riley looked at Uraraka who nodded, she cupped her hands to her face and yelled, "I couldn't get through so, uh, I decided the next best thing was to get help!"

"Shouji," Momo said. "Deploy the life net."

Shouji nodded and spread out a tarp he had been holding in his hand. It was absolutely massive even for him but as luck would have it, he had way, way too many hands for that to be an issue. Momo took the opposite end of the net that Shouji couldn't hold and they spread it out. It looked dangerous from this height but he tried not to show that and instead looked down at the girl.

"Don't let your mother see you worrying like that," he said.

"I won't!" the girl answered and the building shuddered. This had to happen now or never as sweltering gusts from somewhere beyond the building across the street was still pelting them. He could hear ice and something else, like an uproar of a forest fire, as well as hypersonic waves beyond it. Before he could climb out of the window he already saw difficulties with the plan, he couldn't take them both with him at the same time and four stories was far from a safe distance with one, let alone two. Nigh had he opened his mouth to yell so did he watch as Uraraka put her quirk to use by jumping the distance to the fourth story window in one go, before climbing in.

"Uraraka," he said as she stood beside him. There was something daunting about her making the climb so trivial.

"Sorry, I know it's a bit of a mix-up but," she said, her breath heaving as she fought against the sickness. "This is the best I could do on short notice. I'll take one and you take the other one."

"It's perfect," he answered then said, "You got the exact right people we needed together so quickly."
"I'm a heroine, it's what I do," she said with a cheerful smile before turning to the little girl and bobbing down. The girl, to his surprise, offered no resistance as Uraraka raised her up. "You two first," she said.

Riley did as he was told and put one foot upon the windowsill before bobbing out his head with the boy still in his arms. A thought came upon him and he braced the boy's head with his shoulder as best he could. That was something he remembered from some old x-men movie, as to prevent whiplash. He looked down and grit his teeth. A drop was a drop and he was a hero, so he put on a brave face and looked at the boy in his arms. "Hold on tight," he said and threw himself forward out of the window.

"...Thank you all for waiting," Mera said. The man, whom they had all wrongly identified as the chairman and had thusly re-introduced himself as the speaker, stood atop a podium above them. "And for working hard. I know you're all eager and tired, wanting to get your result and all that but before I just wish to have a few words with you." The background to his speech was somewhat troubling as they had set up a massive monitor which upon it showed an endless array of squared and empty boxes.

"Just get on with it already," Kaminari murmured.

"You can say that twice," Kirishima said. "Man, making us wait an hour should be grounds for torture charges."

"Shhh," Iida said. Riley rubbed the crook in his neck and gave Kirishima a look, one of sympathy, he supposed. All he could be glad for was that he had been given the chance to change back to his uniform, as his costume now needed a bit of a clean.

"Ahem," Mera said. "To make this as simple as possible, the terms of our evaluation was one based on deduction of points rather than addition, which is to say we evaluated you based on the nature and quality of your conduct." The speaker shifted on the podium and glanced right, to where the proctor stood, Nivuto. They never seemed to be far from one another. "That's all I wanted to make clear really, so please look at the screen behind me. All the names of passing candidates will appear in a moment in alphabetical order."

The squares filled in with a hum and Riley felt his mind speed up. He had thought there would be more to the speech. He found two names first, as he scanned the list down from from top to bottom, Jirou and Kirishima. The further he scanned the further up his heart rate went until he finally made it to T, then To with Tokoyami and then one name beyond it. Torenagi Riley was up there, and his throat refused to form words as he read it twice fast, then one more time with each letter in succession to make sure and then a fourth time as he turned to Kirishima. He stumbled as Kirishima slapped him across the shoulder in perhaps the hardest way he had ever done before.

"We did it, man," Kirishima grinned, catching him before he fell. "I'm up there too," he said and his smile faded as he glanced to his right and shifted backward. "But..."

Riley turned back to the board as he saw. Bakugou was not up there. He turned back and also took a step back. Tyrannical, infuriated or demented, any way you cut it wouldn't quite put the anger that sat on Bakugou's face into perspective. "Ah," he said then shut his mouth as Bakugou glared at him.

"I guess you should have listened, huh Bakugou?" Kaminari said as he shoved an elbow into his rib. "Using all those rash words really landed you in some trouble."

Bakugou's eye twitched. "Shut the hell up. I'll murder you!"
"See? Touchy!" Kaminari laughed.

"So Torodoki and Bakugou both failed?" Ashido said.

"You got it right," Satou answered.

"I guess that means they just weren't cut out for the straight and narrow," Sero shrugged with an awful indifference.

"And thus the hierarchy crumbles!" Mineta said, only to have Iida grab him straight by both his shoulders and nudge him away from Todoroki.

"Torodoki, I'm so sorry," Momo said.

"Todoroki…" Midoriya nodded. "That sucks."

Todoroki answered neither of them, instead he looked down at another student who had smashed his head into the pavement between them. "I am sorry," Inasa said. "It was my lack of heart that caused yours and mine own failure. Forgive me."

"Cut that out," Todoroki said, his expression becoming something disheartened at the sight. "From the very beginning it was the seeds I sowed that reaped these results. I should thank you, because you were so honest in what you said that I think I have come to an important conclusion."

Inasa didn't look up and before he could say more the podium screeched and then came back to life with the speaker's voice. "If everyone has had a chance to confirm the results then let's move right along. Since this is an exam we will give you some feedback on how you did, which will be distributed shortly. Please read them carefully, they contain all the details of our scoring and I would hate to have you lose them." Several men began to move among the crowd as Mera had described, holding stacks of sealed envelopes.

"To all those who passed," Mera continued. "Your new position will grant you some extent of power equal to that of a pro. That is to say, you are able to act at your own discretion and with that every action you take will carry with it greater responsibility. Remember that."

"Torenagi?" A man in a black suit as he approached them.

"Yeah," he answered and the man gave him an envelope, at the top of which was written his name. He opened it as Mera continued to talk, something he half listened to as he read the letter inside the envelope.

"Seventy-five, huh?" Kirishima said as he peered at the sheet, he had yet to get his own.

"I guess it's right in the middle," he answered as he read the breakdown. As he had expected, it made it clear that his score had suffered most when he had let himself be caught off guard by Gang Orca's entrance and then his lack of action afterward until Uraraka's suggestion. If he had assumed that rational mind earlier, it could have been different.

"I got a seventy-six," Jirou said. "That makes me the better hero, doesn't it?" She gave a mean grin. "I do like the sound of that, Earphone Jack, the superior hero to Terra Alter."

Riley gave her a sideways look but Kaminari jumped in before he could respond. "Pfft. Superior hero just until the moment someone figures out a good set of earplugs can stop you in your tracks."

Jirou's face narrowed. "Yeah well at least my weakness isn't a shrub girl."
"Those spars we had with 1-B were bull, if we'd fought in the festival I would have knocked her out no sweat. How long do you guys insist on holding onto this for?"

"The rest of your natural born life if you're lucky, fuse box."

"Quiet," Mera said into the microphone and sighed. "I really should learn to make my closing statement prior to handing out results, but I digress. Young heroes. As all of you are surely aware our pinnacle of greatness, All Might, has exhausted all of his power. His position as the pillar of justice bred the peace you all know today. Now that those proverbial breaks on villainy are gone it is up to you aspiring heroes to re-establish this balance. Sooner rather than later you'll find yourself at the very core holding up our society so study hard, with zeal and diligence and become all you can be."

The speaker paused and shuffled again, then raised his hand in a strange waving motion. "And err, to those of you who didn't pass today."

Riley glanced at Bakugou, then at Todoroki. Neither of them moved an inch.

"Those of you who didn't pass," Mera repeated. "There is still a chance remaining for you all. After a special training course in March, there'll be a makeup test in April, where you will have a chance to obtain your license. I have no objection with you trying again as I believe you all have the potential to be exceptional heroes, I only ask you try your hardest."

The piece of paper in Bakugou's hand scrunched. "I will pass," he said under his breath.

"You're all dismissed, for now. Please rest well and continue to invest in your futures. Those of you attending the makeup course, I'll be glad to see you again soon." The man left the podium and then the crowd began to disperse.

"I'm glad it's all over," Jirou said.

Riley turned to her and nodded. "Yeah, I'm glad it all worked out." He touched his neck again, it was still sore.

"You alright, dude?" Kirishima asked and Jirou gave him a strange look too.

He let go like their attention had shocked his fingers. "I landed badly on that net Momo made, it's nothing."

"I do apologize, Torenagi," Momo said. "I hadn't thought to question why those nets had been made obsolete." She reached to her arm and it glowed, before a blue ice pack-esque packet appeared, which she put out toward him as she cracked it together between her fingers. He took it and it changed from room temperature to cold by the time he had pressed it to his neck.

"Thanks," he said. "I doubt we could have done much without something like that net though." At the very least those two kids, those actors, had been unharmed by the fall. As it turned out they did, in fact, have explicit instructions to barricade themselves as they had. He took a step toward the back of the hall to where the exit was before he was stopped by an irksome feeling that he had felt precipitate many a time on the back of his skull. Aizawa's eyes, watching him with a disapproving glare.

"Torenagi and Bakugou, come with me," Aizawa said. He was not alone, behind were two of the black dressed men, only one of them was actually a woman, a very tall one at that with blonde hair falling down behind her shaded glasses.

"The fuck?" Bakugou growled.
"Don't argue Bakugou. Iida, take the rest of the class back to the bus."

"Yes, Sir," Iida answered.

"What's going on?" Kirishima asked, there were several worried looks.

"Never you lot mind," the teacher said. "We'll be back soon. Now hurry it up, you two."

A set number of words now sat heavy in Riley's mind as he began to follow Aizawa and the black dressed commission members. Midnight's words, that was what they were. Villainous intent must be ruled out. The hero public safety commission was not done with him.

Chapter End Notes

*I do not own BNHA. OC material is my own.

A/N: Chapter is done. Next one should be on 27/10/2019. I'll be spending the next week correcting the story so you might see at least some improvement in terms of grammar, spelling and general confusion. Thanks for reading. P.S. While I said I would bring out 3.0 with this chapter I have decided to delay it rather than delay the chapter. It will be out when it is out, in the meantime I have updated chapter 1-4, with more substantial changes coming to chapter 1 later.

End Notes

*Written purely for fun and leisure. Hopefully someone enjoys it. Suggestions, fixes or feedback is appreciated.

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