

## Leviathan

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Characters:	<a href="#">Midoriya Izuku</a> , <a href="#">Yagi Toshinori</a>   <a href="#">All Might</a> , <a href="#">Bakugou Katsuki</a> , <a href="#">Tsukauchi Naomasa</a> , <a href="#">Hakamata Tsunagu</a>   <a href="#">Best Jeanist</a> , <a href="#">Midoriya Inko</a> , <a href="#">Okoyota Aki</a>   <a href="#">Bit - OC</a> , <a href="#">Tamakawa Sansa</a> , <a href="#">Iida Tenya</a> , <a href="#">Uraraka Ochako</a> , <a href="#">Aoyama Yuuga</a> , <a href="#">iida and aoyama are here for like. 10 seconds but fuck it theyll be here later</a> , <a href="#">Shigaraki Tomura</a>   <a href="#">Shimura Tenko</a> , <a href="#">Daigo Yatsuhiko</a>   <a href="#">Blade - OC</a> , <a href="#">Shinsou Hitoshi</a> , <a href="#">Kirishima Eijirou</a> , <a href="#">Aizawa Shouta</a>   <a href="#">Eraserhead</a> , <a href="#">Kaminari Denki</a> , <a href="#">Sero Hanta</a>
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# Leviathan

by [rest\\_in\\_rip](#)

## Summary

Izuku's only truly used his quirk once. He was four years old.

He took thirty-two lives that day.

Now, he's sworn never to let that power possess him again. Hiding the true nature of his quirk from everyone, he hides behind the thin facade of a useless, showy quirk, refusing any and all connection to the mysterious creature recognized in a few sparse news reports as the Leviathan.

Lies don't last forever, however, and one day or another, his world will have to come crashing down.

[discontinued]

## Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

- Translation into Español available: [Leviatán\[Traducción\]](#) by [JeyHamilton](#)

## **fear the weight upon your chest**

Tsukauchi Naomasa rubs tired circles into his forehead, staring at the flickering computer screen with a mixture of exhaustion and bitter acceptance. The monitor displays a number of websites, all restating the same information in different formats. They've been following Razorback for at least a month now, yet there's still absolutely no information on the villain. None at all. It's mindlessly frustrating, but Naomasa has to admit that whoever this is knows what he's doing.

He opens yet another webpage. This one is slid carelessly into the top right corner of the screen and has a condensed, organized look to it. It's probably some sort of nonprofit, Naomasa assumes. His eyes scrunch up at the corners as he forces his tired eyes to focus on the information present, although he's doubtful he'll find anything new.

Razorback, the website states. Status: Villain. Quirk: The ability to grow spines of an unknown material from anywhere on the skin. These spines can be removed or forcibly expelled with no damage to the host.

It's a rather mundane quirk, really, compared to some of the others. Naomasa's genuinely impressed that someone with such an ability has managed to carve out such a name for himself. Then again, it's relatively easy to carve something out with piercing spines and a butcher's knife.

Razorback has taken seven lives in the past month, yet his motives are strangely unknown. That might be the most frustrating part. Naomasa huffs. Villains who are on some sort of self-righteous killing spree and announce their reason for doing so usually inadvertently make it easier for the police and heroes to predict their next victims and set up traps accordingly. Either Razorback knows this and is purposely being quiet about it, or he's just killing without rhyme or reason. Naomasa isn't quite sure which is worse.

He groans and presses his palms into his eyes, his chair squeaking and rolling backwards. This isn't getting anywhere. He's just going to end up frustrated, and frustration won't get him anywhere. He's about to call it quits and turn in for the night when God himself intervenes, and his phone dings noisily. The noise is enough to drag him out of his tired stupor, and he unlocks his phone.

11:34 [Tsunagu] We have reports of a hostage situation nearby. It's been requested that you accompany me and assist in negotiations.

11:34 [Tsunagu] Sending you the location now.

Naomasa frowns, brow creasing into wrinkled lines. He types in a 'Be there in ten.' before hastily tidying up his workspace and turning off the lights of the office. He's the last one there; not an unusual occurrence in the slightest, but still tedious. A repetitive pounding sound reaches his ears, and he opens the front door of the office to find the dark world being soaked in a furious downpour. He can barely hear himself think over the deafening roar of the

raindrops splattering on the street, and he can't help the groan that crawls out of his throat. It's going to be a very long night.

He pulls on his trenchcoat and smooths down his hair before fastening on his hat, opting to go for a dead sprint through the rain. He shuts the door behind him, lingering in the shadowy underpass for a second before sprinting out into the rain. His boots splash noisily on the ground, and the rain is like a sledgehammer on his back. He almost falls under the force and wonders absentmindedly if it's the effect of some overpowered quirk. He figures its not.

He almost slips a few times but manages to make it to his car, absolutely drenched and shivering. His hands shake slightly as he starts the car, and he settles for venting his former frustration into flipping off the rain through the car window. The headlights flare to life, illuminating a million tiny specks rushing past in white sparks. Already tired of the sound of the rain hammering on the roof, he turns on the radio and pulls out.

It's nothing short of a miracle that he manages to make it to the location Best Jeanist sent him reasonably on time. Traffic is a nightmare, and Naomasa spends most of the ride focusing intently on whatever news is playing at the moment.

By the time he gets there, the situation has considerable worsened. The villain, who Naomasa has been told is nothing more than a teen in possession of some sort of helicopter blade quirk, has grown increasingly frustrated and has begun making threats. Naomasa takes a back road or two and manages to make decent time.

He doesn't bother trying to avoid the rain at this point. He's going to get soaked either way, so he just ignores it bitterly as he runs to where a crowd has clustered around a narrow alley. He spots Best Jeanist at the front of the mob and shoulders his way through the cluster of people, eyes trained on the alley. As soon as he stumbles to a stop next to the pro hero, he's already talking.

"How's the situation looking?"

"See for yourself," Best Jeanist answers grimly, mouth pressed into a thin line. Naomasa presses one hand to his forehead like a visor and attempts to squint through the rain pummeling him from all sides. He can make out the fuzzy image of a what appears to be a teen with massive propeller type blades instead of hands. They're hunched over and appear to be yelling furiously, although Naomasa can't hear them above the noise. In their grip trembles the hostage; a... a tiny child. They can't be older than four, Naomasa realizes with a start. He can make out wide eyes and a mop of rain-soaked hair. They're shaking, and Naomasa jolts when his eyes land on the razor-sharp propeller blade pressed against the child's throat.

"Oh my God... Tsunagu, why didn't you tell me that the hostage was a child?" He asks, hands curling into tight fists. Part of him wants to rush in and save the kid himself, but it's not his place. He would most likely only end up making the situation worse.

He doesn't get a response, and based off of Best Jeanist's expression, he doesn't think he's going to get one. He swallows, mouth feeling dry, and turns back towards the the scene.

“What are his demands?”

“He wants a gun and some sort of transportation away from here with the promise that he won’t be followed,” Best Jeanist answers. “My guess is that he’s just some sort of petty crook acting out of desperation.”

Naomasa bites back a bitter remark, tongue burning with words as cold as ice. He swallows them, eyes narrowing slightly.

“We clearly can’t engage directly. He has too tight of a hold on the kid. One slip up, and...” He bites his lip. “We also, however, can’t afford to let him go unpunished.”

“We’re aware of the limitations. Midnight has been sent to try and sneak in from behind and knock him out, but we are unaware how the rain will affect her quirk.”

Of course. The damn rain. Naomasa curses under his breath. Just then, the propeller villain takes the opportunity to speak.

“Clock’s ticking, heroes!” He sneers, tone full of desperation. Naomasa’s not sure how he manages to hear it above the rain, but he does. “Choose. This brat’s life, or my arrest?”

To prove his point, he presses the blade further. Even from here, Naomasa can see the way the kid goes deathly still and the beginnings of a red stain.

“Tsunagu, we need to go, *now* -”

He never gets to finish that, because all of a sudden the night lights up in a blinding flash of green and an explosion of dust and smoke. Naomasa’s pushed backwards by the force of the blast, although he doesn’t lose his footing. His eyes snap to Best Jeanist’s, hoping desperately that this was some plan of his, but there’s no recognition in the hero’s eyes. Uncertainty and fear claw at Naomasa’s gut, and he turns back to the flickering cloud.

That’s when he hears it. There’s a horrible, shrill scream that starts out high-pitched and slowly warps into a bellowing inhuman roar. It’s deafening, like the roar of a jet taking off but amplified a hundredfold. Naomasa presses his hands to his ears, squinting through the rain. What the hell is going on?

The question is quickly answered when the smoke dissipates in the rain. There are a few bright flashes of electric green that light up the alley with a sickly radioactive light, before *something* crawls into view. Naomasa’s heart immediately lunges into his throat, and he can hear his pulse pounding in his ears like the wing beats of a startled bird.

The thing is massive, easily close to the size of the buildings its next to. It’s impossible to make out details in the downpour, but he can see a massive mouth filled with glittering teeth the size of his arm. The creature is curling upwards like it’s swimming through the air, curling in lazy spirals towards the sky as if gravity doesn’t exist. He spots six legs kicking and pushing at nothing, each tipped with curved claws glistening in the green light.. Massive fins spread out all over its body, from its back and head, and a tangled wet mane blankets the back of its head and runs all the way down its spine to the tip of its long, swishing tail.

Suddenly, the creature halts in its ascent and bends over, moving as if in slow motion. Piercing green eyes glowing like neon lights land on the crowd, and the beast cocks and snaps its head wildly. Its many legs go from leisurely treading the air to kicking and clawing at a frenzied pace, and the beast unhinges its jaw to its maximum potential and roars .

No, it's not a roar. It's a horrible, gutwrenching, earsplitting *scream* .

The frozen quiet that had been suspended over the crowd of spectators abruptly shatters like broken glass as people around him wail and shout, desperately trying to escape. Naomasa can only watch in mute horror as the beast swings its head from side to side as if looking for something, screaming again and again. Then, in one clean sweep, it twists in midair like a coiled spring and slams its fin-tipped tail into the nearest building, smashing through it in a cloud of smoke and debris.

Naomasa lunges out of the way as chunks of brick and cement start raining down in clusters, looking around for shelter from what he fears might soon become an unstoppable rampage. He spots an alcove across the street and moves to sprint towards it, but is stopped by yet another scream that sends ice shooting through his veins and freezes him in place. The creature swoops over his head, close enough for him to touch and knocking him over just by the force of the action alone, and smashes into the buildings across the street. Its eyes are wild as it thrashes and claws at anything and everything. Every now and then it will disappear into the smoke, only to emerge in a flash of green lightning and a piercing scream.

From his position sprawled on the ground, hands and sleeves soaked, Naomasa has an unobstructed view of the creature swooping and shrieking, destroying anything it touches like a horrible disease. He feels almost sick; where had the thing come from? What was it? Was it a quirk?

His radio buzzes and fizzles from where it is clipped onto his pocket, and he fumbles for it with one hand while trying to keep the rain out of his eyes.

"This is Tsuragamae," he hears a staticky voice on the other end bark. "What the hell is happening down there?!"

Naomasa presses down on the button and prepared to respond but cringes as he's cut off by yet another twisted scream. As soon as it fades, he holds the radio close to his mouth and tries to shield it from the rain.

"The alley that the hostage situation was in suddenly exploded and... this... *thing* came out," he chokes out for lack of anything better to describe it as, eyes blinking furiously as rain pounds on his back. "It's some sort of floating serpent the size of a building. It appears to be crazed and is currently going on a destructive rampage. Extensive damage. Extremely."

He hears Tsuragamae bark something indistinct before there comes a more crisp, "We're on our way." The radio then dissolves back into static.

Naomasa jams it in his pocket, staggering to his feet and straining his eyes to catch sight of the creature in the distance. It's left a sickening trail of destruction the likes of which he's

never seen before, even in all his time as the chief detective of the police. The amount of destroyed buildings and smoke hurts, and he's not sure if he wants to see it in the light of day.

His attention is abruptly captured when, quite suddenly, there's silence. The creature is gone, Naomasa realizes. Vanished into thin air. The only sign that it was ever here is the trail of shattered buildings and dust that it left.

Naomasa stares, wide-eyed, his breathing coming in heavy puffs that turn to smoke in the flickering light of a bent streetlight. That's where he stays, alone on the street in the pouring rain, until the rest of the police force arrives.

They search for months, but nothing is ever heard or seen of the creature dubbed "Leviathan" ever again. There was nothing, and there is nothing. No registered quirks to date are even slightly similar to what he saw that night. Eventually, they give up, hoping that the Leviathan's debut was a one-time occurrence only.

Naomasa should have known that he wouldn't be that lucky.

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Izuku wakes up to the sun shining on his face in blinding bands, and he squints and groans. Swatting at the light like a cat does nothing to ease his predicament, and he eventually settles for sitting up. His head is still groggy with sleep, and he shakes his head to clear it and looks around. Clothes are strewn about in the floor in crinkled heaps, and the wall is covered in dozens of posters. All-Might, mostly. Who can blame him? All in all, the room is tight and dusty and calming, and Izuku spares himself a minute to just bask in it.

And then the minute is over, and Izuku pushes himself out of the bed with a sigh, resisting the urge to hurl himself back in as he's greeted with an unpleasant wave of cold. Nope. Can't do that. As tempting as the thought is, he can't be late to school again.

Izuku pulls on his uniform and heads into the bathroom, picking up the toothbrush off the counter. He pipes a thick dollop of toothpaste onto it and jams it into his mouth, brushing a bit slower than usual. While he's at it, he takes the opportunity to examine himself in the mirror, checking himself up and down. He feels relaxed, but his body- no, his quirk- doesn't always agree. This time, however, it seems to have calmed down, and isn't displaying any of the usual 'accessories' that come with any sort of emotional agitation. Izuku's honestly pretty relieved to not have the beginnings of a spinal fin trying to sprout from his back and tear a hole in his uniform again. It's been a while since he's been relaxed enough to not let any of the Leviathan slip through the cracks and make itself known on his body. He raises his eyebrows at himself in the mirror and laughs at how stupid he looks before rinsing off his toothbrush and heading downstairs.

The kitchen is warmer than his bedroom, which comes as a bit of a relief. He's not sure if it's just him or if it's thanks to his quirk, but his room always feels absolutely frigid. It drives him insane.

"Morning, Mom!" He says with a soft smile as he grabs a piece of toast off a plate, not even bothering to sit down. She clearly hadn't heard him coming, and spins around, wide-

eyed.

“Oh! Izuku, honey, you scared me,” she breaths with a laugh, and he can’t help but wince a little. As soon as he does, he feels his feet shift a little bit, and claws try to wiggle their way to the surface. In one quick practiced motion, he squashes the emotion, and the sensation fades. It’s nothing, he half tells himself and half tells the Leviathan, even if he isn’t sure if it can hear him. His mom was easily spooked, but most mornings he remembered to make some sort of noise to indicate his presence.

“Sorry, mom,” he says awkwardly. She rolls her eyes and pats his head with a huff.

“No need to be sorry. Now sit down and eat before you're late for school!”

Izuku does as she requested, eating quickly as his mom sits down across from him

Midoriya Inko is a small woman with the same dark green hair as Izuku and a dazzling smile. She’s sweet and understanding and everything in between, and Izuku would do anything for her.

The meal passes in relative silence. It’s normal. This isn’t a tight, empty silence. This silence is calm and comforting, a wordless conversation between mother and son that passes between like the breeze on a summer day.

Having finished up, Izuku grabs his bag from where it was loosely hanging by one strap on a chair and slings it over his shoulder, stretching.

“Alright, mom, I'm gonna head out. See you later!” He says, opening the door with a satisfying *click*. The knob is worn and familiar under his hands, slightly scratched from days when the Leviathan had managed to push claws onto him for one reason or another. He’s glad today’s not one of those days.

“Bye, honey! Stay safe!” She called after him. Izuku smiled and pushed open the door, immediately buffeted by an unruly gust of icy wind.

“Don’t let the cold in!” He hears from the kitchen, and he can’t help but laugh to himself a little bit as he shuts the door. The cold swirls all around him, whistling and puffing in a quiet melody. Izuku blinks as it bites at his eyes, but shakes away whatever emotions that might bring. He doesn’t need to sprout fins from his head just because he’s a bit chilly.

Just as he thinks that, he feels a faint prickling at the back of his head. Izuku rolls his eyes so hard they almost go back into his head and tries to convey, ‘what did I *literally* just say’ directly to his quirk. It doesn’t work, and if anything only speeds up the process. Izuku’s frustration only grows with his inability to stop the blue-green fins from sprouting out of his head like sails, and they respond by growing faster.

That’s why Izuku shows up to school, face slumped in resignation, with two sets of frilly fins poking out from his hair that look like someone took a pair of scissors to the edges of them. His eyes are habitually trained on the floor as he enters the classroom and sets his bag

down next to his chair, but that's not enough to avoid the piercing gaze he immediately feels once he does.

"Oi, Deku, what's up with the fans?" Katsuki barks, tone begging for a response. Izuku's gut instinctively tries to clench up in fear, but he shuts it down just as quickly. He's been dealing with this for years. There's no need to be afraid.

"Hey, you useless brat. I'm talking to you," he hears again. He responds by wordlessly sliding into his seat and training his eyes on the board, taking care to wipe any and all emotion off of his face and slip it into his pocket for later. He can feel the stare on his head growing increasingly infuriated even from here, and he mentally sighs and prepares for the worst.

Sure enough, not even a few seconds later, a pale hand slams down on his desk and is immediately accompanied by a few crackling explosions. It's not enough to actually damage the desk, but it will leave soot everywhere that will stain all of Izuku's physical classwork black.

"Oi, you deaf? Those ugly ass fans kill your hearing?" He hears, although he wishes that the fins did negate his hearing. It would save him from having to deal with this bullshit again. He continues to stare at the wall ahead of him, hoping that the bell will ring soon and drag Katsuki away from him.

Katsuki, now undoubtedly pissed, grabs one of Izuku's upper fins and yanks, *hard*. It sends a spike of pain shooting through his head and down his spine, but Izuku manages to lean into the pull a bit to negate the damage. All the while, he keeps a bored, indifferent expression on his face. He's not sure how much of it is to put off Katsuki, and how much of it is to keep the Leviathan from trying to manifest.

At least it appears to be working a bit.

Katsuki growls wordlessly, face contorted into raw anger. One hand snaps out, locking around Izuku's jaw and twisting his head painfully so that they're looking each other in the eyes.

"I'm talking to you, you good-for-nothing lizard," he spits, teeth gritting together. Izuku feels his own mouth shift and knows without seeing that his own teeth are sharpening and twisting. Preparing. He forces whatever emotion is causing it out, before raising his eyebrows at Katsuki and stating flatly, "Piss off."

Katsuki looks like Izuku just pissed in his drink. "What the fuck did you just say to me?"

"You heard me," Izuku responds just as monotonously, probably going to earn a beating later for his actions. He's taken enough by now that it doesn't phase him.

Katsuki draws back a glowing red fist, and Izuku wonders if he's going to throw the first punch then and there, but the teacher picks that moment to open the door and stroll to his

desk, eyes immediately scouring for and finding Katsuki. As expected, he does nothing about the actual situation, and simply clears his throat.

“To your seats, please,” he says, and his voice is low and disinterested. Katsuki hisses and draws a finger across his throat as he leaves, and Izuku ignores him.

They’re choosing their futures today, Izuku registers somewhere. He’s not actually listening, instead far more focused on whatever his head’s locked onto at this point. He doesn’t expect any attention. Ever since the incident ten years ago, when he used his quirk for the first time and subsequently *killed thirty-two people*, he’s made a point of keeping his quirk ambiguous and unnoticeable. He’s doing a pretty good job, actually. Most, if not all of his classmates think that his quirk is just some kind of flamboyant body modification that’s not actually useful for anything, and he’d like to keep it that way. Nonetheless, the fins annoy him to no end because they’re just *too similar* to the fins of the Leviathan that had been caked in blood and dirt on that infamous day, and if someone makes the connection...

In his agitation, he barely notices Katsuki challenge the teacher over something stupid, like, ‘grouping him in with the rest’ or whatever, or the way his hands thicken and curl into claws.

“You’re trying out for U.A., aren’t you, Katsuki?” He hears the teacher ask. There are a few startled gasps and murmurs that follow, but Izuku isn’t really sure why they’re surprised.

“Hell yeah, I am. Even aced the mock exam they set up. You all can bet your asses that by the time we’re out of school, I’m gonna be a better hero than All Might himself!”

The rest of the class is in awe of his confidence. Izuku wishes he would quiet down.

“Come to think of it, isn’t Midoriya trying for U.A. as well?”

Izuku has never wanted to disappear more than he did in that moment. He settles for fixing the teacher with a poisonous stare as the room’s attention slowly but surely switches to him, like a targeting system locking on. There’s silence for a moment, and then the class bursts into mocking laughter. “Frilly little Izuku? No way!” He hears among the cackling. “He’ll get killed in the exam!”

He only shrugs, not bothering to fight back. It’ll be over soon, and then they’ll all forget about it, and he can leave. He doesn’t know why they care, anyways.

And then, over the noise, he hears a familiar, threatening growl. Oh, *boy*.

“Deku!” A split second later, Izuku is pushed backwards by the sheer force of Kacchan slamming his hand onto his desk. “How dare you claim that you’re on the same level as me, you worthless brat!” He spits the words like Izuku had said he was going to U.A. to purposely infuriate him, and Izuku swears he can see smoke coming out of the other boy’s ears. It wouldn’t be surprising.

“When did I ever claim anything?” He asks flatly. This earns him an explosion to the face, searing his nose and cheeks as he grits his teeth and does his best not to respond. His

quirk grants him somewhat of a temperature resilience to both cold and heat, but even that's not enough when he's being blasted from three inches away.

"Listen, Deku. You're just an ugly, weak scarecrow with a failure of a quirk. You could never be a hero. How dare you try to compete with the likes of me?"

"I'm not trying to compete with you, Kacchan," Izuku says.

"The exam is impossible for someone like you," Kacchan snarls. "Don't waste my time."

"I'm not wasting anyone's time. You're the one up in my face. If you ask me, I think you're the one wasting mine."

The class falls uncharacteristically silent, and Izuku knows without a doubt that he's crossed a line. He can't bring himself to care, really. He just keeps on throwing out emotions as soon as they appear and tries to prevent claws on his feet from poking through. After a short while, however, the silence becomes unbearable, and he sighs and turns to look at Katsuki.

He's smiling, like this is some big game and he's just won the grand prize. Izuku supposes, in a way, that he has; he's more or less handed Katsuki a good reason to beat the shit out of him on a silver platter. Too late to take it back now.

"We'll see who's a waste of time when you're wasting away on the ground, *Deku*," Katsuki croons, crossing the room to slide back into his chair with more elegance than he's normally capable of. Izuku almost responds with "Great! Looking forward to it!" but he saves that kind of direct sarcasm for after school.

The day passes in an unremarkable blur after that. Most days do, really, when the only thing he has to look forward to is an afterschool beating. Today's especially hazy considering that he's fully aware that today's ass-kicking is going to be extra painful.

Why can't he just keep his mouth shut and stay out of trouble for once?

With an impressive lack of finality, the last bell rings, and Izuku starts packing his bag. Unsurprisingly, he doesn't get far, and the worn yellow backpack is ripped out of his hands and flung onto the floor.

"So you really think you're on my level, huh?" Katsuki sneers, suddenly mere inches away from his face. Izuku wants to say that he didn't imply anything of the sort, but bites his tongue and instead gives Katsuki a bored look.

"I guess I'll just have to teach you what my level looks like, then."

He senses the punch before he sees it. His quirk is reptilian in its nature, and he's particularly susceptible to heat signatures. Katsuki's habit of warming up his hands before swinging makes it almost laughably easy to step out of the way, which he does. Katsuki

stumbles a step, but has already pivoted and swung his leg in a wide arc into the back of Izuku's knees.

He visibly grimaces, and a few blotchy scales appear on his arms, but he doesn't buckle. He simply walks forward, reaching down to pick his bag. Katsuki predictably uses this opportunity to jump on his back and grind his face into the tile of the classroom floor.

Izuku grits his teeth, wincing when a particularly sharp canine that was definitely not there before scrapes against his lip. His emotions are beginning to slip from his grasp. He needs to reel it in before Katsuki can figure out that he's not as weak as he's led everyone to believe or- god forbid- connect the dots and realize that Izuku is a horrible creature and a *murderer* and a *monster*.

Katsuki's smart, Izuku will give him that, but not even he's smart enough to connect the two pieces with the lack of hints Izuku's left. This calms him down a touch, and he hears his teeth squeak as they shrink a bit closer to what normal teeth should look like.

He lets himself go limp and still, his face smashed uncomfortably against the cold tile. There's silence, and then he feels a sneaker carefully nudge him. He doesn't respond.

"Fuckin' coward couldn't even take one hit," he hears Katsuki gloat, before there's a telltale zipping noise and a bark of laughter.

"Hero Analysis for the Future. Number *thirteen* ." The last bit sounds almost incredulous. "Like *hell* he's gonna need this. Besides, I'm sure he won't miss one little nerdy book if he has *twelve more* . Goddamn."

He hears a popping, and then a crackling, and the smoky smell of burnt paper fills his nose. It takes all of his self control not to jump up and let the Leviathan go wild for a bit, and all he does is lie there motionless on the ground while *months* of work go up in flickering flames.

He hears laughter, then the click of a lock, and Katsuki tosses the book out the window like it's worth absolutely nothing.

"Honestly, if he had any brain at all, he would've thrown himself off of a bridge or something a long time ago," Katsuki says flatly. There's more laughter and then- *finally* - they leave.

Izuku counts to fifteen, just to be sure, before groaning and letting himself get off of the floor. His nose aches faintly where it's been smushed into the ground for the past five or ten minutes, but he ignores it and all but stumbles to the window. He peers out, and sure enough, there's his book; it's drifting serenely on top of the small pond on the school's campus, drenched and waterlogged where it isn't coal black.

Izuku's hands shake from where he's clutching the window frame, and he's aware of his own breathing as his senses slowly but surely become more refined. His arms and legs prickle as their muscle mass increases slightly and they're coated with a layer of dark, almost black teal scales. Two thin fins start to poke through his lower back, one on either side.

At the same time, his movements become ever so slightly further away, somehow as if he's not the one controlling his own body, but is merely a spectator.

Izuku growls, and the inhuman snarl that leaves his throat is more than enough to get him to immediately close off his frustrations. He's losing control. He can't lose control, not here.

He closes his eyes and breathes. In, and out. In, and out. In, and out.

The Leviathan's attributes slowly but surely disappear, scales vanishing back into his skin and fins curling back towards him until there's nothing left. Once they're all gone, he lets out a breath he didn't know he'd been holding. He's back in control.

Izuku huffs and grabs his backpack off of the ground as he leaves the classroom, heading down the hallway and out the door. Once outside, he circles back around to the back where the fountain is. The book is probably demolished, but it won't hurt to check to see if anything's salvageable.

Surprisingly, most of it is. Katsuki's explosions only really burnt the cover and the first few pages. The rest of it's uncomfortably wet and will most likely dry into a wrinkly mess, but there's minimal ink bleeding and most of his notes are still legible. To him, at least.

Izuku lets out a bitter sigh of relief as he tries to squeeze a bit of the water out. It doesn't do much, but he still holds onto the book like a lifeline as he makes his way off campus. The walk home isn't a long one, but his wet hands are shivering by the time he's hardly halfway there. He knows it's because his hands are still wet from the pond, but that's not going to stop him from being bitter around it.

He opts to hold the soggy book in one hand and tuck the other into the collar of his uniform, squeaking when his cold hand touches his collarbone.

He's so caught up in this that he almost doesn't hear the muddy, frothing voice echoing around him as he passes through the underpass. Keyword; almost.

"Well, how convenient. Hope you don't mind if I borrow your skin, kid!" Someone gurgles, and suddenly he's surrounded in a thick, goopy liquid the color of vomit. It's churning and twisting and- Izuku inhales sharply, *alive*. It's the sludge villain. The one from the news. Just his luck.

It doesn't take long for Izuku to realize that he could very easily die here.

"Shit!" He yells, eyes going wide as the first sparks of fear begin to take root in his chest. "H-help!"

"Woah! None of that, thank you kindly." The villain cuts him off, and suddenly, something is flowing down his throat and up his nose and oh my god the sludge villain is trying to *get inside him*. That's when Izuku's tight hold on just chest loosens, and the fear he's been restraining rushes in like arctic water.

He starts flailing and kicking, doing his best to scream despite the ooze muffling him. His brain starts to fill with fear and adrenaline, and he can already feel the Leviathan twisting inside him as it makes itself known.

“Almost there! It’ll be easier if you don’t struggle!” He hears. Izuku’s lungs burn, and he tries to breathe desperately. He succeeds in inhaling a bucketful of villain-slime and desperately tries to cough it up to no avail. His struggling began to fade as his vision blinked in and out. Oh god, oh god, it wasn’t supposed to end like this, *it wasn’t supposed to end like this*.

Suddenly, he feels a roar rumble to life deep inside of him, and it’s not the slime villain he’s afraid of anymore. He tries to suppress it, to fight, but his strength as gone.

If he’s going to survive this, he doesn’t have a choice.

He feels his quirk flare to life before it shows, but when it does, it moves faster than it ever has before. In seconds, he’s covered in scales, and fins burst from his back and his head. His teeth grow into fangs, and his hands and feet curl into claws. A finned tail bursts from his spine, swishing and swaying and sending up dirty clouds with each stroke. The more it progresses, the more Izuku’s aware that he’s losing himself, but he grits his teeth and fights it. It’s like trying to hold onto sand as it drains through his fingers, but he’s not going to quit. He’s not going to lose control.

“What the hell? What kind of-” The Leviathan hears, but Izuku forces himself to pay no mind. On instinct, he opens his jaw as wide as it will go, and the slime villain eagerly rushes to cram himself in. Instead, however, Izuku lets out a horrific, twisted scream that’s far louder than anything something of his size should have been able to produce. The force alone sends the slime villain flying out of its would-be host in a spray of ooze, eyes wide as they splatter across the ground.

“Holy- What the hell are you?”

Izuku drops to all fours, eyes glowing a bright radioactive green. His fingers are clenched white knuckled as he can feel his strength being sapped. His gaze is fading, as his control loosens.

The slime villain is crawling away, eyes narrowed accusingly. Izuku turns to stare at it, breathing heavily, and it gurgles something equivalent to a curse. He can’t last much longer.

“How d-dare you assault me?” he growls, and it comes out much lower and rougher than it should. He tries to make it sound braver than he feels.

“What the hell *are* you?” The slime villain gurgles. That urge overcomes him again, and Izuku opens his jaws and screams once more, paralyzing the offender in their place before stalking forward on broken, puny limbs not made for walking like this.

A noise catches its attention, however, and his fins flare outward.

“Who-” He forces out, trying to stand, but something smashes into the ground at the entrance of the underpass, and he hears a bellowing cry;

“Texas smash!”

A blast of wind sends both Izuku and the slime villain flying, rolling to a stop. In a blur of color, the newcomer rushes forward and scoops the slime villain up, ignoring their furious screams. They then turn towards Izuku, and without wanting to, he snarls. His eyes won't focus right, and he can't figure out who the figure is or *where he is*.

He's hanging on by threads at this point. It's a miracle he's still in somewhat of a control at all.

“Don't go near it!” The slime villain screams. “I- I tried to possess some kid and they turned into- that thing, it- it's not human!”

Izuku's breath stutters as his gut twists and he squeezes his eyes shut. They're right. He isn't human. He's a monster.

A hand presses against his back, and Izuku's eyes snap open wide. The Leviathan thrashes at the sudden touch, and he lurches back like he's been burned, shaking. He can feel his tail hitting the ground, but it doesn't feel like it's his.

The last grains of sand are running through his fingers.

“Young man,” the figure says, and he's taken aback by how low and *calming* their voice is. He grits his teeth and clutches at the ground, breathing heavily and forcing himself to be *still*, dammit.

“D-don't...” He tries to warn them, but his voice comes out in a gravelly inhuman growl. No, no, *no*.

“Can you look at me?”

He forces his eyes upward, ignoring the way the ground is swimming and rolling. The figure is standing above him, crouched. They seem *familiar*, but he doesn't know why.

“Can you breathe?”

Breathing? Yeah, he can do that. It'll be hard, but...

He forces himself to suck in a deep breath, and then let it out. Another, then another. The panic recedes from his system, and the Leviathan slowly but surely begins to wither.

As soon as it weakens even a little bit, he reaches in, grabs on, and *takes back control*.

His vision goes a frothy white and he's dimly aware of his eyes rolling up into his head as he smacks into the pavement.

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Izuku opens his eyes only to be immediately assaulted by a wave of pain so overwhelming that he almost vomits, eyes going wide. He can't breathe. No, that's not right. He can breathe. He could always breathe, but the Leviathan is-

The Leviathan. Is it- Where-

Izuku raises his hands and flexes them. They move at his command. He's in control, and his hands are perfectly human.

He gasps, wrapping his arms around himself, shaking. The Leviathan was almost in control. He survived the attack, but the *Leviathan was almost in control*. He's never been that close without losing it entirely.

He looks around, eyes wide, for the destruction, but there is none.

"What...?" He whispers to himself, gazing at the untouched stones. It's okay. He didn't do anything, just defended himself. He was still in control.

"Oh thank *God*," Izuku half sobs, covering his eyes with his hands and sinking to the ground.

"Young man," an oddly familiar voice asks, and Izuku is suddenly very aware that he is not alone. The figure. They're still hear. "Are you okay?"

He jolts like he's been slapped, scrambling away from the voice. Who is it? What... What did they *see*?

His horror triples to the point where his tail reforms to cover his face when he realizes the person who saw him was no one other than *literal All Might himself*.

He's staring, wide-eyed and shaking, and more and more parts of the Leviathan are appearing. No, no, this *can't happen, he needs to calm down* -

"Woah there! I didn't mean to startle you. Are you alright?"

Izuku squeezes his eyes shut, inhales, and exhales. The Leviathan fades.

"What happened?" He asked. He's dimly aware of fighting off the slime villain before All Might shows up and almost losing control then and there, but it's foggy and grainy, like he's watching it through an old-school film reel.

"I believe you were attacked by this here slime villain who managed to evade my grasp earlier. Sorry about that."

"No- I- I know that, what..."

"You appeared to be some sort of frilled reptilian humanoid. Is that your quirk?"

"...That was it?"

"That was all I saw, yes."

Izuku only very narrowly avoids thanking whatever God there is right then and there, and just gives him a stiff, jerky nod. He didn't recognize the True Leviathan. He doesn't know.

"Thank you for, uh, saving me."

"Just doing my job!" All Might stands up. "Glad to see you're okay. You were acting pretty strange there towards the end."

Izuku stiffens and his heart skips a beat, but All Might doesn't seem to notice.

"That's a pretty impressive quirk you've got there as well. With some practice controlling it, you could make a fine hero, you know."

Izuku blinks, eyes wide. He can be a *hero* ? *All Might* thinks that he can-

All Might doesn't know *what he is* , or *what he's done* .

He smiles, but it feels forced. "Th- thank you very much." He stops, before shyly adding. "And! Uh, can I get... your autograph?"

"Already done!" All Might winks, and then he's gone, and Izuku's left to drop the facade and hyperventilate until he's borderline on Leviathan territory once again.

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It takes him at least a solid ten minutes to pull himself together. *He almost let the Leviathan take control. He was so close. Literal All Might showed up and saw himself almost become the Leviathan. What would he have done if he knew?*

But All Might didn't realize, and it's okay. It's okay.

The sun's going down, he realizes, and he forces himself to stand on shaky legs. His book is on the ground in the corner, and he picks it up and clutches it like a lifeline, white-knuckled. He needs to get home. His mom's probably worried sick.

He heads out of the underpass a bit faster than he usually walks, but he doesn't want to be there. It reeks of the Leviathan's scream and the slime villain's gunk, and he worries that if he stays there any longer, he'll snap.

He takes one of the more crowded roads this time, hoping the sheer number of people will bring him some sense of anonymity. It does, and it's incredibly calming. No one pays him any mind here. They're all too focused in their own little worlds.

There's less people around as he walks further, which he doesn't really worry about. It's getting darker. There's bound to be less people.

That's when he notices the crowd of people all clustered around an alley on the opposite side of the street. There's smoke rising from it in massive billowing clouds, and the sheer amount of noise coming from the spot suggests a villain attack.

Izuku's brain screeches at him to *ignore it* and *keep walking* , but before he knows what he's doing, he's crossed the street and is fighting his way to the front of the crowd. There's heroes everywhere, but none of them seem to be intervening with the situation. Most are trying to combat the growing fires or just working crowd control. He twists and turns, trying desperately to see around the people around him the heroes ushering them back, but he manages to catch a glimpse.

His world broils and shatters.

# **pick apart this hopeless mess**

## Chapter Summary

Nobody is having a good day.

## Chapter Notes

shoutout to my awesome beta reader @uglybeanshit for fixing my shit grammar !

So the reaction to this fic was... frankly overwhelming. I really didn't expect my shitty borderline crack fic to get quite this much attention, but here we are, so I guess we're gonna keep this show rolling until it ends or my motivation runs out!

(update schedule is going to be spotty, just a warning)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Katsuki isn't having a great day. It had picked up a little bit after he watched that shitty useless nerd lying on the floor and burned his useless notebook, but then it went straight back to not great. Actually, screw not great. It went *to hell*.

He'd been walking with a few of his annoying lackies, talking about something unimportant while the two practically kissed the ground he was walking on. They agreed with whatever he said, but he didn't care and just kept on talking.

And then, in a crash and a cloud of smoke, this guy had appeared in their path. Katsuki hadn't paid him much mind at first; he looked like just any other quirked citizen.

He was tall and lean, with short cropped hair and a bit of stubble, eyes hidden behind flashing sunglasses. His mouth had been creased into a frown, which had suddenly and ominously vanished when Katsuki had felt the man's eyes fall on him.

"Hey, kid!" He'd asked, swaggering towards Katsuki like he owned the place, which was enough to earn a few crackling sparks on its own. "You training to be a pro hero someday?"

"You bet your ass," Katsuki hadn't been able to help but smirk as he moved to shove past the man and maybe 'accidentally' shoulder him a bit.

“Perfect,” he’d heard, and in a blur of sound and motion, he’d found himself at the end of the alley with a very large, very sharp blade pressed to his throat. That’s where he is now, eyes wide and hands clenched at the way the stranger was chuckling.

“What the fuck-” He hisses, only to be cut off by his own throat contracting with a choking noise- *traitor* - as the blade is pressed just a bit closer to his quivering throat.

“Please, do spare me the chatter,” the man says, having the audacity to sound *bored*, of all things. Katsuki does his best to spit and pretty much fails miserably, but doesn’t let any of the sheer rage he’s currently housing slip from his gaze.

“Jesus, you’re a feisty one, aren’t ya?” The man hums. “Tell you what. We’ve got a bit of time ‘fore the big boys get here and I can get to business; guess I can entertain you for a bit. What’s your name, kid?”

“Go to hell.”

“Nice to meet you, ‘Go to Hell’. You can call me Blade.” He laughs. “Man, I thought I had the edgiest name, but looks like I got one-upped by some blondie from downtown. Got any siblings, maybe named ‘Piss off’ or ‘Exit the Vicinity’?”

Katsuki manages a pissed off garbled noise, torn between shouting every bit of profanity he knows at this guy and not answering him. He fails at both, and it’s *infuriating*.

“Mm.” Blade nods thoughtfully as if Katsuki had just given him a plain answer. “That’s what I thought. What’s your quirk, ‘Go to Hell’?”

And Katsuki thought getting called *Kacchan* was annoying.

“S’called none of your fucking business,” he snarls, eyes narrowed. Once again, the man takes it without question.

“None of your fucking business, huh? Seems like a weird title for a child’s quirk. What’s it do?”

Katsuki has no idea if this guy’s trying to be funny or if he’s actually just that much of an idiot.

“Exactly what it says on the tin, fuckstick.”

“Tsk. I told you, it’s Blade. Not a lot going on upstairs for you, is there, ‘Go to Hell’?”

“I hope you choke.”

“Unlikely. Now, you’ve probably figured out mine by now, so I’m not going to bother explaining it.”

Katsuki’s eyes narrow a bit, and he looks down. There’s still a long blade being forced against his throat, but this time, his eyes follow it.

The blade is attached at the base to three others, protruding from under the man's jacket where a hand should be. It looks like some sort of fan-blade, Katsuki thinks numbly. Fantastic.

"Impressive, ain't it?" Blade croons, and Katsuki hopes he burns in hell.

Just then, he hears the sound of sirens and yelling, and two pro heroes stop at the far end of the alley, backed by a few cop cars' worth of policemen.

"This is Kamui Woods, Death Arms, and the Musutafu Police department. You are in violation of multiple laws, including public quirk-usage and hostage-taking. Please stand down." Someone yells.

"Oh, finally," Blade sighs. "Was beginning to think they wouldn't show. Looks like they just couldn't help but come save the poor little pro-hero in the making from mean old me."

He laughs, and Katsuki can't *wait* to watch this dude rot and maybe take a piss on his grave.

"No thanks!" Blade calls, this time addressing the heroes directly. "Really, boys. We all know I didn't kidnap a 'poor, innocent' child for shits and giggles. You didn't even stop to hear my demands." He clicks his tongue. "Improfessional."

"Very well," a single voice says, and a figure Katsuki doesn't recognize steps out from the crowd. He's dressed in a simple trenchcoat fluttering in the wind and a hat, and from what Katsuki can see, his face is calm and composed. "What are your demands?"

"Oh, it's him," Katsuki hears the man mutter to himself before he murmurs, "Hm, what do I want?" Katsuki's pretty sure that despite the act, the villain knows exactly what he wants and is just toying with everyone here for kicks or something.

"How does 1,700,000 yen and transport out of this city sound?"

The negotiator seems to consider this for a bit. "1,700,000 yen, you say? That's quite the sum you're asking. If you don't mind me wondering, what do you intend to do with that money?"

To Katsuki's surprise, Blade only laughs in response.

"Trying that trick again, hm? Really, Tsukauchi. I'd have thought that by now you'd've learned not to underestimate me."

So this isn't the negotiator's- Tsukauchi's- first rodeo, but it isn't Blade's either.

The conversation between them continues for a bit longer, Katsuki feeling the blade press closer and closer to his throat. He wants to thrash and scream and slug this guy until he stops breathing, but he knows that even the slightest movement would end up with an unfortunate shade of red on the ground.

His attention is captured by Blade's tired sigh, and he straightens up and forces Katsuki to do the same.

"Tsukauchi, I truly enjoy these little chats, but I have a schedule to meet. I suggest you meet my demands, or we might end up with some... *Unfortunate* casualties."

Katsuki's eyes blaze. "Unfortunate my- *gggk!*"

The blade is now definitely pressed against his throat, drawing a thin line of red across his skin. Kacchan morbidly feels like he's a canvas being painted on by an artisan. An artisan who specializes in blood.

"Do you *ever* shut up?" Blade mutters, looking down his nose at him. "*Really* . It was rather amusing, at first, but *now* -"

That's when they hear it.

A sound rips through the air, twisting and writhing its way across the alley and clawing its way into Katsuki's ears. He can't describe it, but if he tried, he'd probably settle for saying it's something similar to a mixture of nails on a chalkboard and a horrible roar, stretched tightly into an ear-splitting *scream* .

The noise fills his ears and blankets his head with flickering noise. He feels like he's underwater. Everything's muffled, his ears are ringing, he can't see, he can't move, and *he can't breathe*.

What is this?

Out of the corner of his frozen vision, he manages to lock onto the sight of a similarly paralyzed Tsukauchi, whose face is contorted into something akin to recognition and *horror* .

Katsuki is hit by the realization that whatever just happened is somehow much worse than his previous situation. Great!

He's only just entertained the thought when a green and black blur flashes across his vision, lunging over him. Just as suddenly, he can breathe, and the blade around his neck is gone. He stumbles to the ground, one hand coming up to rub at his neck where it stings. It comes away coated with shiny red.

His brow furrows, and his mouth parts slightly as he turns to see what exactly just happened.

The scene before him is not what he expected to see.

Blade is on the defense, hair windswept and jacket askew. He's bleeding from a horrid, ragged gash across his collarbone, and his breathing is shaky and labored. Where his blades had once been still they now spin wildly, a deadly sharp circular blur that reminds Katsuki of a particularly murderous ceiling fan. His sunglasses are gone, eyes wide, and Katsuki swears he can see terror swirling within them.

He's about to ask what just happened, as if Blade's going to answer, when that question as well is answered when that same blur lunges from the shadows with a frothy, guttural roar.

It's not human, Katsuki realizes with a sinking feeling in his stomach. His first reaction is to jump in and join whatever it is in beating the shit out of Blade, but even *he* knows that getting involved right now is a Bad Idea, with a capital B.

Blade looks so much different than he did before. The cocky, relaxed villain that had only just held Katsuki captive is gone; in his place is a narrow-eyed man who's trying too hard to defend himself from all sides as the thing bounces and ricochets off of walls like a pinball, swiping and slashing and roaring. Katsuki catches a glimpse of a frilly tail splattered with blood as it swings through the air and hits Blade's face with a deafening crack. Blade, however, is somehow mostly unphased, and takes the opportunity to slash at his attacker.

There's a horrific, pained screech that does not sound human in the slightest, and Katsuki thinks he's going to be sick. This isn't like him. He shouldn't be afraid, dammit. This... Whatever this is shouldn't scare him.

But it does.

A glance behind him proves he's not the only one.

Everyone- citizens, policemen, and pro heroes alike- is frozen in silent horror, not wanting to move and risk attracting that thing. No one moves to help Blade. No one moves to run.

Katsuki thinks that the dead stillness is scarier than whatever's behind him.

He turns back just in time to see Blade land one more solid hit on what's most likely the thing's head. The creature crumples like soggy cardboard, landing with a thunk in a tangle of limbs. Blade's- well, blades- stop spinning for a second, and the tips are coated in blood.

Katsuki can't help but feel pity for the thing as it squirms and convulses on the ground like some sort of disgusting organ, keening and hissing in pain. Blade looks conflicted, but a second later his propellers start spinning again, and he raises them above his head.

Blade is fast, but the thing is faster.

In the blink of an eye, it cracks its tail into Blade's stomach, scrambles to its feet, and disappears up and over the building behind it.

Just like that, the spell is broken. The pro heroes are moving towards him, people are running and scrambling away, and the police are taking notes, but Katsuki's just... standing there.

The rest of the night passes in a dull blur. Katsuki's dimly aware of being carted away from the scene. He barely listens as the pro heroes check him for injuries, patching up his neck while telling him how brave he was.

He's definitely more focused on Blade, who's uncharacteristically quiet as he's arrested and loaded into the police car, which means he doesn't miss the quick, grim look that the villain and the Tsukauchi guy share.

Yeah, something is definitely up.

The heroes hovering over him only let up for a second, but it's long enough for him to spring up and make his way over to Tsukauchi, ignoring the surprised and commanding yells from behind him. Tsukauchi doesn't see him at first, but Katsuki plants himself firmly in the policeman's path and makes direct eye contact. Try ignoring him now, bitch.

"What," he hisses. "The *fuck* was that?"

Tsukauchi blinks at him owlishly as if to say, *who is this lost child and why is he questioning me*, but ends up only biting his lip and turning away. Katsuki isn't going to take that for an answer.

He skids into Tsukauchi's path again, this time undeniably startling him.

"Don't think I'm dumb, old man. I saw that look you gave ceiling fan fucker. *You know something*. You can fool them, but you can't fool me. What the fuck was that?"

For a second, Tsukauchi almost looks impressed, but then, his eyes go dark, and he looks away.

"Bad news," he says quietly, and that's the last Katsuki gets out of him before being dragged off by two frustrated pro heroes.

"Now, what's your name, kid? We're gonna need to call your parents..."

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Izuku wakes up in the middle of god-fucking-knows-where, and the first thing he feels is pain. It's surrounding him, drenching every molecule of his body in agony. It's like he's been dissected, and all of his organs and veins have been replaced with magma and hot rocks.

Izuku's hands scrabble for a hold he can't find, yet he somehow manages to flip over and empty the contents of his stomach onto the ground.

He stays there for a while, shaking and heaving while bile drips from his lips, filling his mouth with a bitter, acidic taste. It's after a few minutes of this that the smell starts getting to him, and he forces himself through the pain that wracks his small frame and stands up.

This doesn't work, as his legs shake and buckle, and he promptly gets a face full of sand.

Wait. Sand?

No. No fucking way.

Yes fucking way, the universe says, and Izuku looks up and is greeted by the beach. It's the same one, his mind blankly notes. Of course it is.

For a second, Izuku's four years old. He's scared and shaking because *the big man with sword hands tried to hurt him and then there was smoke and cold and pain and now he's here on the beach and everything hurts and he just wants his mom and-*

He forces himself to suck in a breath, hands clenching around fistfuls of sand. He's not four anymore. He's not alone and afraid and probably responsible for at least a few deaths.

Actually, he can cross that last one out, he thinks to himself bitterly.

His limbs are still shaking, but the pain has subsided a bit. Well, not subsided, really. More of relocated to a few specific areas. One is, unfortunately, his face, and the other is his arm. He reaches out tentatively and brushes a spot just above the bridge of his nose, only to hiss and recoil sharply when a bolt of pain springs from the touch and scurries across his body in a fizzled ripple.

His fingers are dripping with a dull crimson, and he's suddenly very aware of the fact that he can taste iron on his lips.

He takes a deep breath and looks around. The beach is the same one he woke up at after it happened so long ago, but at the same time, so different. It's covered from horizon to horizon in mountains of trash, containing everything from tires to entire fridges, all scrapped and abandoned.

Izuku can't help but wrinkle his nose, immediately regretting it when his face flares up in pain, but it seems that this trash will serve its purpose.

He half walks, half stumbles across the sand, feet dragging awkwardly like he's never walked on them before. The beach is dark, but the full moon lights it up like a spotlight, blanketing the area in a ghostly glow. He's dimly aware of the crash of the waves against the shore as he limps towards a shiny, almost glowing sheet of scrap metal.

Sure enough, when he stands over it, he can see his reflection clear as day. He suddenly wishes he couldn't.

His face looks like it's been cleaved in two. A thin but deep slash, oozing the same blood that's splattered and smeared across his whole face, runs from above his left eye, down over the bridge of his nose, and ends under his right eye.

He stares, a strangled noise escaping his throat as a few drops of blood slide down his nose and splash on the metal in neat red droplets.

He's never going to be able to cover this up. He's going to show up to school, and everyone's going to look at him, and they're going to *know*.

Izuku feels the panic rising in him, feels the Leviathan churning to meet it, and he crushes it. There's no use in panicking. Panicking won't get him anywhere; in his few years of his anything but quirkless, torturous existence, that's one thing he can say he's learned.

He doesn't know what happened. He never remembers. He can only hope that no one saw him.

What about Katsuki...?

He doesn't matter. He's probably fine. Izuku had felt the way the Leviathan had reared in his chest and screeched at the sight of the villain who started it all on that fateful day years ago, and he hadn't been able to stop it, but he'd known that it would go for that man and *only* for that man.

Izuku can't help but hope that the Leviathan hadn't killed him.

He forces the thoughts out of his mind and opts to focus on the other source of pain, the one on his arm. He grits his teeth and peels the tattered remnants of his uniform off from where they're stuck to his blood-soaked arm, ignoring the sting and scorch of pain as he does. After a few long moments, he succeeds, letting the now unattached sleeve drop to the ground with a wet noise. It makes his stomach roll, and for once, he's glad he doesn't have anything to throw up. The rest of the top part of his uniform soon follows,

He forces himself to look in the makeshift mirror again, this time pinning his attention on his forearm. The angle's weird, but he manages to peer over his shoulder at the wound.

If he thought the scratch on his face was bad, this had to be *hell*. The gash is deep; three serrated marks like ragged claws tear up his back from the back of his shoulder down to the center of his waist, caked in dirt and sand and leftover shreds of fabric. It oozes a fountain of thick, dark blood, and Izuku's no doctor, but he knows that if he doesn't get a doctor within minutes he's probably going to *die*.

But if he gets a doctor, they'll take one look at him and one look at the news, and probably just let him die. He isn't sure if he'd rather just bleed out here than face that.

Besides. He knows his mom can't afford a doctor's appointment, let alone whatever surgery he'd be forced to undergo to try and save his life. Even if he wanted to survive, well...

Izuku's head is beginning to feel oddly light, and he rubs at it a bit before slowly sinking to the ground. His back falls against the cold junk metal and stings like hell, but he finds that he can't bring himself to care.

His vision begins to swim, heaps and piles of trash floating aimlessly across a black, starless sky. It's almost calming, in its own way, and he can't ignore the way a contented sigh escapes his lips.

The blackness is almost comforting as it rushes up to meet him.

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“You’ve got to be kidding me, Sansa,” Naomasa says, resting his head in his hands. It feels heavier than usual, and frankly, he wouldn’t be surprised if it was.

They’re back in his office and are supposed to be filling out paperwork regarding Blade and his crimes, but he can’t shake his attention from what he saw. From the looks of it, neither can Sansa.

“I guess I figured that it had to come back sometime. It didn’t make sense for something like that to just... Show up one time and then never again,” the cat officer sighs, rubbing his face with one hand. He looks at Naomasa from his spot resting against the wall, eyes heavy and mouth curled into a frown.

“At least it was smaller this time.”

That’s another detail Naomasa doesn’t quite get. He has no doubt that what he saw was the Leviathan- there’s only one thing that he knows of that can scream like that- but it was... Different. It wasn’t the massive, serpentine monster he’d seen before. Why was it different this time? He’s certainly not complaining, but...

“I guess the question is... Why now?” Sansa asks, stopping his train of thought before it runs itself off the tracks.

“It attacked Blade before, correct?” Naomasa thinks out loud, rubbing at his chin. “It clearly has some sort of vendetta against him.”

“I understand that, sir. My question is... Why now? By no means is this the first hostage situation Blade has been involved in or responsible for. Why didn’t it appear at any of the others?”

Naomasa doesn’t have an answer. He doesn’t have any answers, if he’s telling the truth, and it’s exhausting.

“What information do we have on the Leviathan?” He asks, leaning off of the desk and turning to look at Sansa. In the flat, flickering white light of the office, the cat looks almost ghostly, and Naomasa can see he’s not the only one who’s tired.

“Almost nothing, remember? The closest thing we have to a visual is a blurry image or two,” the cat replies, sinking down the wall a bit further.

Naomasa remembers, but it doesn't hurt to ask. He bites back a sigh and turns back to the stack of paperwork on his desk.

“Well, let’s finish this up, and then we can put some resources into getting what information we can into finding out who or what ‘the Leviathan’ is.”

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Izuku's not sure what's more surprising. The fact that he wakes up in what appears to be a bed, or the fact that he wakes up at all. Frankly, he's not quite sure if he's dead and heaven is just some sort of weird... White room.

It's painfully plain. All of the walls are unblemished, pristinely white, and the floor is made of shiny tile. A window on the far end is covered partially by a pale blue curtains, and light is flooding in from where it's not. The whole place smells like rubbing alcohol and vinegar, and Izuku isn't sure if he likes it.

His arm feels weird and puffy, and he looks to his left to see a number of what appear to be IVs and other drips poking into it. He moves it experimentally, carefully noting the lack of scales or claws, before looking over. His other arm is bandaged tightly to the point where he can barely move it.

He's not complaining, really, because he quickly discovers that attempting to do so hurts like hell.

The IV hand moves slowly up and brushes his face, coming into contact with a number of bandages and wraps covering his face. He blinks.

He's in a hospital.

His first reaction is to jump up and panic, but doing that won't do any good. He needs to stay calm. He needs to figure out how he got here and how much the staff know.

He takes a deep breath, emptying himself of the panic and fear and worry and replacing it with a blank impassiveness. He doesn't know where he is or what happened, but showing resemblance to the Leviathan is definitely not a good idea. Not now, not ever, really.

The door slowly opens, and he can't help but flinch as someone who's most likely a nurse peeks in. Her eyes meet his, and she scurries over with a quiet, "Oh! You're awake!"

She starts doing something with the IV bags, and Izuku takes the opportunity to steel himself and get some answers.

"Where am I?"

"Musutafu General Hospital," she answers, not looking up to meet his gaze. "You were in quite the condition, young man. I'm rather surprised that you're up so soon."

"So soo... How- how long has it been?"

"You've been under for three days, I believe."

Izuku barely holds back a surprised shout, eyes snapping open wide. *Three days?* Where's his mom? Is she okay?

Don't panic. It's okay.

"H- how did I get here?"

She looks thoughtful for a second, before giving a light huff. “A young man brought you in. Said he found you on the beach, and to call if you woke up.” She pauses. “Actually, would you like me to call him?”

Izuku has absolutely no idea who she’s talking about. He doesn’t have any friends, and none of his classmates would bother trying to help him. Maybe that’s why he slowly nods, trying not to let his face betray his confusion.

“Okay. I’m going to send in the doctor, too, and he’s going to ask you some questions. Do you think you can answer them?”

He nods slowly. Questions? Do they not know who he is?

He can use that to his advantage, then. If they don’t know who he is, they can’t see his quirk and connect him to the Leviathan. It’s a long shot, but he’ll take anything he can get.

She gives him a soft smile before leaving the room, closing the door behind her. Izuku takes the brief silence to figure out what he’s going to say. He’s been lying his whole life. He can do this. He just can’t let them know what his quirk really is. What are they going to do when they realize he can’t pay? What’s he going to do? He tries not to think about it.

Carefully, he strings together a story that he thinks will work. He’s not Midoriya Izuku. He’s Kuroki Hayashi, an orphan living on the beach. Hopefully, they won’t be able to track him from just that. Hoping is all he can do.

No sooner than he’s done it, the door opens, and a man in a white coat steps in. He has dark, curly hair, and a soft smile ringed with stubble. There are bags under his eyes, but they’re mostly hidden .

“Good morning, young man. How are you feeling?”

“Alive,” Izuku shrugs before he can help himself. It’s the truth. His body’s mostly numb, anyways, and whatever feelings he had before are gone. But he says it with too little emotion. He’s got to put on a good performance if he’s going to get out of this without consequences.

He forces an expression of trepidation onto his face, hoping the doctor doesn’t catch it.

The doctor lets out a slight puff of air that Izuku takes to be a laugh before pulling up a chair. He has a notepad in his hand, and Izuku knows that he’s here to question him.

“My name is Dr. Shigetaka. What’s yours?”

“K-Kuroki Hayashi, sir. Thank you for saving me.”

The man nods thoughtfully, scribbling something down on the paper. “You’re quite welcome, Kuroki.”

He rests the notepad on his knee before looking up at Izuku, gaze tinged with curiosity.

“Your injuries were quite extensive when you arrived. You were suffering from multiple lacerations and deep-flesh wounds, as well as blood loss. Would you mind explaining how you attained these?”

Izuku nods, opting to twist the truth a little. “Yes, sir. I was walking on the beach when a man showed up and attacked me. I don’t know who he was, but he had, um, blades for hands, I think? Or something like that. And he tried to get me to go with him somewhere, but I punched him in the nose, and he got mad. He c-cut me up with his hands, and... I can’t really remember much after that.”

The stutter and fear in his voice is something he left behind a long time ago, but he calls on it to help his performance. He’s not Izuku, who’s used to mind-bending fear and the knowledge that there’s undoubtedly a price on his head; he’s poor, orphaned Kuroki, who’s been attacked by a mysterious villain. If he spoke with his usual trained indifference it would raise suspicion.

“Blades for hands, you say?” Dr. Shigetaka says pensively, wrinkling his brows a bit. Izuku nods. The doctor sets down the pad again and pulls out a phone from his pocket, typing something that Izuku can’t see. A moment later, he turns the phone around to show a mugshot of the man that started it all. The way Izuku’s breath catches isn’t acting. At least they caught the guy.

“Is this him?” Dr. Shigetaka asks, and Izuku nods furiously.

“Y-yes, sir. That’s him.”

Shigetaka hums thoughtfully, eyes narrowing a touch, before he puts his phone back and writes something else down on the sheet.

“Okay, Kuroki. Do you have parents or a guardian we can call to come answer for the rest?”

Izuku does his best to look like the question is painful, and squeezes his voice. “No.”

Shigetaka raises an eyebrow. “I’m sorry?”

“M-my mom and dad d-died a while ago. I live on the beach.”

This certainly gets his attention, and Izuku’s suddenly very aware that there’s no turning back. He’s now waist-deep in his lie.

What is he going to do once they’re done with him? They’ll try and put him in the system or a foster home, no doubt. He’s got to get out before then. But how is he going to escape a hospital unnoticed?

Wow, he really didn’t think this one through, did he?

Dr. Shigetaka mutters something else before standing up, smiling faintly, although now it’s definitely more forced. “Alright, then. I believe that’s all, Kuroki. Thank you for your compliance. Now, I think you have a friend who’s here to see you.”

He waves as he leaves. For a minute, the room is quiet, yet Izuku feels choked. A friend who wants to see him? Who could that possibly be?

The door opens, and Izuku blinks.

It's definitely not anyone he's ever seen before, he'll say that much.

The boy that steps into his room is tall and wiry, with tanned skin not unlike Izuku's. He has a head of pepper-grey hair that covers the upper half of his face and could rival Izuku's in messiness, uninhibited by things such as physics or gravity. What's uncovered of his face is mostly taken up by the huge circular glasses perched on his nose and his wide, toothy grin.

"Beach kid! You're up!" He says in an accent Izuku doesn't recognize, practically springing over to the side of the bed. Izuku blinks, overwhelmed by the sheer energy in the movement. Beach kid? Is that him?

It makes sense, seeing as whoever this is most likely found him bleeding out on a beach, but he's not quite sure how that makes him feel.

"U-uh, yeah, I am." He gulps, feeling gray eyes trained on him. "S-sorry, do I know you?"

Grey hair ponders this for a second, index finger tapping on his chin, before shrugging. "Well, technically, no, but I seeing as I saved your ass, I think you should."

He taps one hand on the side of his head before curling his fingers into a gun. "The name's Okyoita Aki, but you can call me Bit, if you want."

Izuku stares as he slowly waves with his good hand, trying not to look as awkward as he feels. He fails.

"Uh, nice to meet you... Bit?"

Bit grins, and Izuku is painfully confused as to who this kid is or why he'd like to be called *bit* of all things. Before he's even aware of it, Bit's talking again.

"I've seen that face before. I call myself Bit because I make things out of bits and bobbles I find. It's like my legacy." He winks, and Izuku can't help but laugh a bit at how seriously he says it.

He goes to respond, then pauses, staring at Bit curiously and chewing on his lip. Bit meets his gaze, raising an eyebrow.

"Yeah?" He asks.

"Why?" Izuku blurts before he can stop himself.

"...Why what?"

"You... You found me on the beach, right?"

“Uh, yeah. You were pretty fucked up, not gonna lie. I thought you were dead.”

Izuku’s not sure what to say to that, so he just asks his question.

“Then why’d you... Bring me here?”

Bit stares at him like he’s just asked if the sky was green.

“Wh- because you were literally dying? Alone on a beach in the middle of the night? What else would I have done with you?”

He says it so incredulously that Izuku has to remind himself that most people in real life don’t look down on him as a stupid, mumbling nerd with a useless quirk. That’s Katsuki’s influence. It feels strange to think about.

“S-sorry, I’m just not used to... Uh, never mind,” he tries to say without sounding pathetic. Bit lets out a garbled noise.

“Are you implying that the people you hang out with would have let you die?”

*If we’re talking about Katsuki, he might have been the one to finish me off, really .*

“Uh- I mean...”

“You hesitated. That’s fucked up, dude.”

Izuku really has no idea how to respond to any of this, so he just kind of goes silent.

Bit realizes that he’s not gonna say any more on the subject, and taps his fingers on the side of the bed with a clacking noise.

“Anyways, didn’t catch your name.”

Izuku flinches. “Oh! Yeah, sorry, I’m, uh, my name’s Kuroki Hayashi. Sorry.”

Bit raises an eyebrow. “Okay, Kuroki.” His eyes lock onto Izuku as he says it, and whatever he’s looking for, he seems to find. Suddenly, he checks behind himself and leans down, and Izuku freezes as he whispers, “try and come up with a more believable name if you’re gonna lie, though.”

“Wh- How?” Izuku can’t help but squeak, voice strained. Bit laughs.

“When you’ve been around, you can recognize fake names. These folks might not be able to, but I do.” He leans back, tapping on the rail on the side of Izuku’s hospital bed. Izuku’s suddenly wondering just exactly *who* this kid is, and what he’s gotten himself is.

“Although, I gotta ask, why?” Bit adds, snapping him out of his thoughts.

“Wh- why what?”

“The fake name.”

Izuku bites his lip, trying to figure out what to say. He doesn't know anything about Bit, and his brain is warning him not to trust the guy, but... What else can he do? As long as he keeps it vague, the truth won't hurt. Hopefully.

"I... My mom and I don't have a lot of money, and she doesn't know that I'm..." He gestures to himself with a bitter huff. "I don't want her to have to worry about it."

Bit cocks his head slightly. "Oh. That'll do it, I guess. So, what'd you come up with?"

"I... said that I was an orphan."

Bit stares at him for a minute, before snorting and shaking his head. Izuku can't help but bristle a bit, but forces it down and settles for raising an unimpressed eyebrow. Bit fixes him with an amused look, resting his hands on the rail of the bed.

"Ah, the good old orphan trick. What are you gonna do when they try and put you in a home?"

"I'm gonna try and be gone before then."

Bit raises an eyebrow so high that Izuku worries that it might float right off of his face.

"And how are you going to manage that?"

Izuku opens his mouth to respond, but closes it and slumps a bit, looking away. How *is* he going to get out of here? He can't just walk out, and he doesn't have any other options. It's not like he can jump out the window. He's really dug his own grave here, hasn't he?

"That's what I thought. I'll tell you what, beach boy. You seem like an interesting kid, so I'll help you out." Bit says.

Izuku's head snaps around to look at him just in time to catch the second part.

"For a price."

Of course, he internally sighs, but the offer's too good to refuse. He wonders what the price is. Bit can't ask for money; he knows Izuku doesn't have that. What else could he want?

"Alright, I'm listening," he says, and Bit lights up.

"I told you I make stuff out of bits and bobbles, right?" Izuku nods. "Well, most of my materials are junk from that beach. Right now, I'm getting ready to try and start on some... bigger projects. However, the things I need are too big for my noodle arms to lug over to my house." He waves his thin arms around to accentuate the point, and Izuku can't help but snicker. He glares, although it's more amused than anything, and finishes, "That's where you come in."

"You want me to help carry beach junk down to your house," Izuku summarizes thoughtfully. "...What if I'm not strong enough?"

“That’s for you to figure out,” Bit responds.

Izuku mulls it over for a minute. He’s not weak, exactly, especially when he’s using his quirk, but he might not be strong enough to carry some of the bigger pieces. Still, he *needs* to get out of here before the doctors either put him in foster care or figure out he’s not who he says he is, or *worse* ...

“I’ll do it,” Izuku says firmly, despite having no idea *how* exactly. Bit’s face lights up like a kid on Christmas, grey eyes sparkling.

“ *Great* !” He says a bit too loudly, before wincing and lowering his voice. “How soon do you want to get out of here?”

Izuku bites his lip. “Uh... As soon as possible, but not before my wounds heal up for the most part.”

“Oh, yeah. Forgot about that.”

“Yeah, me too. It’s not like I have a huge ass bandaid across my *entire face*,” Izuku deadpans without thinking, before jumping and rushing to apologize. To his surprise, Bit is actually... Laughing?

“Oh, I *like* you,” he grins, and Izuku can’t help but grin back.

## Chapter End Notes

aand I join the Izuku Gets a Scar Club, because let's face it, everyone knew it was coming.

(To those of you who don't like OCs, don't worry! Bit's going to be pretty important for a little bit (ha ha), but only until the entrance exam.)

Another note; I've noticed a lot of you comparing this story to Daymare. To answer your questions; yes, I have read Daymare (and thoroughly enjoyed it! I'd highly recommend it if you haven't already seen it.) but no, it is not the main inspiration for Leviathan. Although I'd like to believe most of my ideas are my own, I may unintentionally overlap with Daymare. I really don't want to copy Inquisitor's work, so if you think some parts are getting too close, please tell me, and I will change them!

Feel free to ask questions about anything you don't understand, and I'll do my best to answer them if I can.

# tread this road i've walked alone

## Chapter Summary

Izuku gets home, for better or worse

## Chapter Notes

I'm sorry this took so long writing is hard man

Shout out to IchigoQuinn for beta reading (an early version of this, which was scrapped due to plot holes oops) !

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

‘As soon as possible but not before my wounds heal up for the most part’ turns out to be about a week later. Izuku swears it’s the slowest week of his life, and he’s lost track of all the doctors and nurses that have come through at one time or another. Many of them have had healing quirks and are to thank for his... Not exactly speedy but faster-than-usual recovery.

He’s been talked to about his past and has explained how he’s ‘lived in a back alley somewhere for the past few years’ too many times to count. He’s getting pretty tired of the act, really. It’s been so long since he’s acted constantly afraid and wary, and he hates it.

Bit visits three times, and they’re the only relief Izuku has from being Kuroki. He’s quick to discover that Bit is very different from... Basically anyone he’s ever interacted with in his life, especially the people at his school.

He thinks back to the second time Bit showed up, when he’d been caught in a mumble storm about how the pro hero Icicle’s quirk worked to the point where he didn’t even hear the other boy come in. When he realized that Bit was there, he’d jolted and apologized, only to trail off when Bit paused from where he was scrawling *notes* on a sticky note with a pen to prompt Izuku excitedly to keep going.

“I can use this! What else do you know?” He’d asked excitedly, and Izuku had slowly but surely trodden back into his explanation of Icicle’s quirk and how it affected not the direct temperature of the air, but the vibrations of the atoms around him, meaning that with proper use, he could do far more than just lower temperature.

They’d spent the rest of the visit talking about assorted quirks, and Bit had pulled out a few little machines he’d made to show off. With Izuku’s understanding of quirk physics and

Bit's knowledge of... Pretty much everything else, he's pretty sure that they'd give any other human being a headache.

He'd been hesitant but had carefully revealed his name and details about himself to Bit. In return, he'd learned tidbits of information about Bit's own life and family.

"My mom's from Kyoto, and my dad's from Jaipur." He'd said, grinning. "Mom can move metal like a magnet, and dad can conduct electricity without feeling pain. My quirk's kind of a mix of the two!"

"What's your quirk, then?" Izuku had asked curiously. Bit had clapped his hands together and said, "I'm so glad you asked!", even though he probably would have explained it either way.

Bit's quirk was called Battery, which meant his veins acted as a closed circuit. By tapping into that, he could use his own body as a battery that could power or charge small devices, although it did involve poking things into himself and tired him out. Izuku had gone on to excitedly explain all the uses and limitations that such a quirk could have, while Bit somehow managed to scribble down all of the information he vomited up.

Bit had also asked about Izuku's quirk, but he'd just given a quick, abridged answer before moving on. It wasn't... Technically a lie. Well, it was, but it was the lie he told everyone.

"Basilisk," he'd said. "It lets me, uh, grow reptile parts under stress."

It was the truth, but it wasn't all of it. Thankfully, Bit had seemed to sense his reluctance to think about it and moved on.

Izuku just didn't want to worry about his quirk for a while. He'd seen reports of what had happened on the news, seen the shaky camera recordings of a humanoid creature screaming and attacking the propeller handed villain- Blade was his name, right- like a horrible beast.

He just didn't want to deal with it for now.

During the third and last visit yesterday, Bit had given him a small canister that he'd described as a 'grappling hook in a Pringles can' and had proceeded to explain how Izuku could grapple out of his third story window and escape.

"This feels... Very James Bond," Izuku had said, examining the capsule in his hands like it might explode. Knowing Bit, even to the minor extent he did, the possibility was rather likely.

Bit had shrugged. "So what?"

"And... If I fall and die?" He'd asked slowly.

Bit had only grinned. "Try not to."

That's why Izuku's currently peering out the window at the alley far beneath him, clutching the canister in his hands tightly as he gulps.

The night is cold, icy wind sweeping in through the open window and sending chills down his back. He's going to have to move fast.

"Please don't kill me, Bit," he mumbles, zipping up the thin jacket Bit snuck him over his hospital gown and leaning backward out of the window. Once the edge of the roof is in sight, he unscrews the lid of the metal can and presses a hidden button on the side.

The force of the hook shooting out of the can very nearly sends him toppling out of the window, and it's nothing short of a miracle that he doesn't fall to his death. A second later, he hears a clatter and feels the line catch as the hook sets.

It's all Izuku can do to hope that it doesn't come loose as he slowly leans out of the window, gripping the canister with one hand and the line with the other. His shoulder is still bandaged, but by now he can actually use his hand. Moving it hurts, but he'll have to manage.

It's pitch black as he presses a button and the canister slowly lets out more line, buzzing as it and Izuku descend into the darkness of the alleyway. His hands are sweaty and he's shivering, but he keeps his grip on the line as tight as he dares.

He sighs with relief as his bare feet touch the cement of the ground. It's cold and gritty against his skin, but he can't find it in himself to care. The Leviathan tries to make itself known, but he crushes it before it can and clicks another button.

The spokes on the hook retract, and it whizzes towards the can as the line recoils with astonishing speed. Izuku grunts as the hook hits the inside of the canister with a thunk, the impact making him almost drop the thing. He manages to keep his hold on it and quickly screws on the lid, doing his best to stash the thing in his pocket as he moves to run down the alley.

He's shivering by the time he manages to wind his way to the beach without being seen, which involves avoiding streetlights and ducking into alleyways when necessary. The cold is gnawing at him like a pack of rabid dogs, and he's not sure if it's thanks to his reptilian blood.

He can hear the crash of the waves and the whistle of the wind when he arrives, the thin paper gown billowing around his legs as he scours the coastline for Bit's lanky figure. All he can make out in the pale blue light is a stretch of sand, glittering white in the moonlight, and piles of garbage that reach towards the sky like jagged mountains.

"Beach boy!" He hears before he succeeds, and Bit appears in his vision, waving one hand above his head. Izuku tries not to slip as he makes his way across the trash-littered sand, his face splitting into a grin to match Bit's.

"You made it! Told you that thing would work! How was it?" He asks excitedly as Izuku pulls the canister out of his pocket and hands it over.

“I didn’t die, so that should be answer enough.” He says, and Bit rolls his eyes and gently cuffs the side of Izuku’s head.

“Come on, smartass, give me something I can work with.”

He knows what Bit means. He wants constructive criticism, and not, “It fucking sucks.”

“Well,” he rubs the back of his neck, eyes landing on the canister. “When I shot it out, it almost knocked me clean out the window, so...”

“So something to negate the kick a bit. Got it,” Bit says, examining the device with an impressive amount of scrutiny. “Anything else?”

“Can I ask why you made a grappling hook out of a Pringles can?”

Bit shrugs in response, fiddling with a screw that Izuku hadn’t noticed before.

“Why *not* , you know?”

“...That’s not...” He starts but shakes his head. More often than not, Bit just does things *because* . Besides, the thing did get him out of the hospital and away from whatever bills and questions he couldn’t afford.

“I mean... Thank you.”

“No need to thank me,” Bit says, winking. “I held up my half of the deal. Now, it’s your turn.”

Izuku’s mood drops, and he looks around the beach. There’s... So much garbage. Heaping tons of it. It’s also the dead of night, and he’s shivering and worn to the bone by his escape through the city.

“...Right now...?”

“Yup!” Bit says with a cheeky grin, and Izuku goes to give some sort of protest when he’s abruptly cut off.

“I’m kidding, beach boy. It’s like... Midnight, and you’re in a paper gown.”

Izuku must have let his relief show on his face because Bit snorts and nudges him with one hand.

“Come on, did you seriously think I was gonna make you shovel sandy trash in the middle of the night?”

Izuku shrugs, and Bit shakes his head.

“You are unbelievable, have I told you that?” He says, and Izuku gives him an amused look.

“Yeah. A lot.”

“Can’t stop the truth.” Bit shrugs, and heads away from the water’s edge, beckoning. Izuku stays where he is, frozen in confusion. Bit turns around after a few seconds, looking at him strangely.

“Come on. What are you waiting for?”

“I-I’m just going home.”

“You’re coming to my place.”

Not the answer he was expecting. This wasn’t something they discussed. Bit had said that he would get Izuku out of the hospital and meet him at the beach. Izuku had assumed he’d just walk home from there.

“I- What? Why?” He stutters before swallowing his confusion and attempting to portray it through a facial expression.

Bit turns back to him, crossing his arms, and his telltale grin is a dead giveaway that he’s already thought through some possibility that Izuku hasn’t even considered yet. It’s not that Izuku isn’t smart; he can analyze quirks and come up with plans in seconds. But escaping a hospital and getting home unnoticed isn’t exactly in his area of expertise. He’s a bit curious as to why it seems to be Bit’s.

“You’re going through all of this trouble to make sure no one knows you were at the hospital, right?” Bit asks.

“Uh- Yeah.”

“What happens when you show up to your house in a hospital gown?” As if to accentuate the point, Bit gestures to the pale blue paper gown that’s currently billowing around his knees.

“I can get you clean clothes and a shower,” Bit continues. “It’ll be like you were never there.”

Izuku has to admit that he’s right, as usual.

“...Are you sure?” He can’t help but ask. Bit snorts.

“Would I have said it if I didn’t mean it?”

Izuku doesn’t exactly have the answer to that, but he takes it as a yes.

“...If you insist,” he answers meekly, and Bit rolls his eyes and huffs.

“Now let’s get going. If my friend gets hypothermia and dies on my watch- Well, then that... Wouldn’t be good.”

Izuku's too startled by the fact that Bit referred to them as friends to laugh at the wording of that statement, and he only realizes that there's a pair of jagged, blue-green fins peeking out of his hair when Bit starts snickering at him.

Shaking his head and ignoring the way his fins flare out, refusing to be hidden, he crosses across the sand and takes his place at Bit's side.

They fall into light-hearted conversation as Bit guides them through the city, laughing and talking about obscure quirk-related things that most people probably wouldn't consider a conversation topic. It doesn't feel like Izuku's only known Bit for a little over a week. His presence at Izuku's side just feels... Natural, in a way he can't describe.

Bit guides him in the opposite direction of his own house, strolling down the streets with his hands in his pockets like walking down the street in the middle of the night with a scarred kid in a hospital gown is the most natural thing in the world.

Izuku takes advantage of the situation to memorize the route he'll probably have to cart trash along, taking notes on the buildings around him and the turns they take. Bit's quiet humming helps soothe his nerves a bit, even after he realizes it's All-Star.

"It got stuck in my head, okay?" Bit shrieks upon being called out, ignoring Izuku when he points out that the song is *centuries old*.

Bit's house is thankfully pretty close. It's a house, which is pretty impressive in its own regard, even if it looks the same as every other building in the area.

Bit bounces up the porch steps and opens the door as the light switches on, most likely motion-activated. He raises an eyebrow at Izuku, who lingers hesitantly in front of the steps.

"You coming?"

"...Your parents, will they mind...?" Izuku asks, painfully aware of the way his fins flatten themselves against his head. He settles for internally scowling and trying to squish down whatever emotion is causing it.

Bit shrugs. "I doubt they're awake. Even if they are, don't worry about it. They know about you."

"...Do they know you broke me out of a hospital?"

"...Not *exactly*, but they know you're my friend who got hurt somehow. They won't mind you, trust me."

Izuku waits for a second longer, but at Bit's insistence, he heads up the steps and into the house. It leads into a narrow hallway, with pale yellow walls and cold floorboards lit by a single flickering bulb fastened into the ceiling.

He looks around, taking it all in as Bit leads him down the hall to a slightly-ajar door, pushing it open and stepping in without a sound. He flicks on the light, and Izuku flinches as he's temporarily blinded by the sudden brightness.

By the time his eyes have adjusted, Bit is already digging through the dresser on the far side of the room. It's not exactly a huge distance; the room is rather small, covered in blueprints and posters of assorted bands. The bed in the far corner is mostly unkempt, and Izuku can make out an array of wires and metal scraps scattered haphazardly across it.

His bare feet curl into soft carpet, and he looks down. The floor is blanketed with thin white carpet, populated by an assortment of metal springs and wires. He takes special care not to step on them, backing up carefully.

His attention travels up to the ceiling, and that's when he notices how the room is lit.

Instead of a normal light, the room is illuminated by a strange pattern of glowing wires that zigzag out from the center of the ceiling in strange, rune-like patterns. He's about to ask about it when he catches motion out of the corner of his eye.

He barely snaps out of his stupor in time to catch the clothes that Bit throws at him, which otherwise would have hit him in the face.

"Bathroom's behind you if you want to shower. If not, there's something to get you out of the paper dress," Bit says, collapsing onto the bed and sending a small clutter of electronic parts bouncing to the floor.

Izuku looks up at Bit, then down at the clothes again.

"...Are you sure?"

"Yep. Get dressed. I get cold just looking at you."

Izuku can't help but huff at that and goes into the bathroom to change. Showering doesn't feel right; he can do that when he gets home, so he settles for just changing.

Bit's clothes are a touch big on him; the sweatpants are bunched up around the ankles and the shirt hangs loosely over his shoulders, but they're infinitely better than the hospital gown, which goes into the trash can.

He does rinse his face off in the sink, rubbing his hands over his eyes and sighing. Curiously, his eyes flit up to the mirror. It's the first time he's seen himself, he realizes. His eyes latch onto his own face, and he's struck by how different he looks.

He's still freckled and wiry, with weird proportions and green hair that won't stay down, but now there's a line of pale skin that crosses his face. It's stark, contrasting vividly against his tanned skin and dark eye bags like a warning sign.

He wipes his face off and heads out of the bathroom, tying the jacket he'd been wearing during the escape around his waist. When he gets out, Bit has moved to the floor and is lying spread-eagled with his legs tangled in his bed sheets.

Izuku stands there for a moment, not entirely sure how to react. Thankfully, Bit spots him and scrambles to his feet.

“How are those working for you?” Bit asks once he’s standing again, fixing his shirt. Izuku rubs the back of his neck, laughing awkwardly.

“They’re.... A bit big,” he offers.

Bit snorts. “Well, it would make sense, seeing as you’re... Four foot? Four and a half?”

“Five-four,” Izuku answers defensively, although he can’t help but somewhat mirror Bit’s grin.

“Well, are you ready to go?” Bit says, deftly changing the topic. Izuku nods, tangling his fingers in the fabric of the shirt. It’s a soft cotton, and even if he feels a bit awkward wearing it, it’s much warmer than what he was wearing before.

Bit flicks the lights off, and Izuku glances up just in time to watch the light of the glowing pattern on the ceiling retract until it’s nothing more than a glowing speck in the center.

“What is that?” He asks as he follows Bit back outside. “The- The light thing.”

Bit grins and claps his hands in the way that proves he’s just been waiting for Izuku to ask, skipping onto the sidewalk and launching into an elaborate explanation that takes up half of the walk to Izuku’s house.

After that, discussion tapers off into a comfortable silence. Bit isn’t humming All-Star anymore, for better or worse, so the only noise is their footsteps on the pavement and the whoosh of passing cars.

That is, until Bit says, “You know, you never did tell me what happened to you.”

Izuku pauses, fins flaring open a tad as he turns to look at Bit. “...What?”

“How you ended up on the beach. Y’know, half...Dead.”

Izuku hesitates, fins folding up like paper fans. He knows he can tell the truth, but he’s not sure *how much of it*. If he tries to flat-out lie, Bit will probably be able to tell. But he can’t tell him the truth.

His mind, ever helpful, offers him a vivid picture of Bit’s cheery face contorted in horror as the word ‘leviathan’ leaves his lips.

He decides to offer the same story as he did to the hospital people.

“Well, it was a villain attack,” he starts. “He had... Blades. Helicopter blades, instead of hands, and he was trying to get me to go with him, but...” He laughs mirthlessly. “I did something really stupid, and he decided that I was gonna pay for it.”

The last part’s not technically a lie; letting the Leviathan loose was the stupidest thing he possibly could have done. It’s nothing less than a miracle that it didn’t completely take over him and kill a bunch of people. Nonetheless, he knows that he couldn’t possibly have

prevented it; the Leviathan saw the man, reared forth, and Izuku had been powerless to stop it.

The thought terrifies him. Or, at least, it would, had he not suppressed it a long time ago. It was a one-time scenario, and the blade man is in jail now. He won't lose control again.

At least, that's what he tells himself.

Bit stares at him thoughtfully, storm grey eyes glinting in the yellow glow of the streetlights. Izuku's sure he's going to point out a flaw in his story, some facet of his lie that he didn't think through, but he just says, "Huh." and that's that.

They arrive at Izuku's building shortly after that.

He peers up at the dim apartment building, searching for the window that he knows belongs to him. He finds it with ease, having memorized it a long time ago.

Through the curtains, he can make out a dim glow, which means his mom is still up. There's no putting that off; he'll have to face her and have some sort of alibi ready.

"So, what are you gonna tell your mom?" Bit asks, standing under a streetlight next to him. His hair is waving in the light breeze, tinted with a golden glow. Izuku's shoulders slump, and he chews his lip.

Izuku subconsciously reaches up to trace the space where the slash had been, trailing his fingers across his face. He's lucky to have both eyes, but it'll be impossible to hide it from anyone, let alone his mother.

What *will* he say?

"Want me to go up with you?" Bit asks.

"I- Why?"

"She'll want to know where you were for the last... Week or so, right?"

"...Probably?"

"Then say you were at my place."

It's a pretty solid alibi, actually, but it brings forth a question that Izuku's been meaning to ask.

"How do you just... Know all of this?"

Bit stops to look at him, cocking his head ever so slightly and sending a gentle ripple through his silvery hair. "What do you mean?"

"It's- It's like you've thought of everything, and you could tell when I was lying, and..." Izuku trails off, wringing his hands awkwardly. It's been bugging him the whole time, but

he's never really thought about asking it.

To his surprise, Bit only laughs. "I tend to overthink stuff, which can be both a blessing and a curse."

Izuku may not be on Bit's level exactly, but he's been lying for the better part of his life. Lying about what he is; about what he can do. Maybe it's for that reason that he gets the feeling that Bit's not telling him the entire truth.

But Bit didn't question him further about his quirk, so he returns the favor and says nothing.

"As for the scar... I'm not sure, Mido," Bit continues, before pausing. "Do... You mind if I call you that? I know we like.. Just met, but-"

"No, it's fine." *Mido* . A nickname that's not meant to hurt. Bit doesn't want to hurt him.

At least, until he figures out what Izuku *is* .

No. He's hidden it from everyone this long. One more person isn't going to make a difference.

"I don't... I don't know. I'll say I got attacked by a villain, and even if it means she'll never let me go outside again, she won't question me too extensively."

Bit snorts. "If you never go outside again, how are you gonna help me lug trash around?"

Izuku raises an eyebrow. "Well, since my friend was so kind and let me stay at his house for like... A week and a half, I'm gonna help him with a project."

He immediately locks up as soon as the words are out of his mouth. He'd called Bit his friend. Last time he'd done that, the kid had run away from him as Kacchan had blasted a hole through the front of his shirt.

But Bit isn't like Kacchan, not in the slightest, and he leans back with an impressed grin.

"That'll do it. Anything else we need to figure out?"

Izuku thinks for a second, before shaking his head. "I- I think that's it. And..."

He looks straight ahead, ignoring the ripple that shoots through his crest fins. "Thanks."

Bit blinks at him, before laughing and shaking his head. "I already told you, you don't-"

"Not just for getting me out of the hospital. Just for... All of this." He chews his lip and looks at the taller boy out of the corner of his eye.

"...And for being my friend."

Bit stares at him, and for a second Izuku's positive he's going to scoff and say, "I'm not your friend," but he only rolls his eyes and rakes a hand through Izuku's hair. Izuku squeaks and steps back, but Bit ignores him and laughs.

"You absolute *sap* . Come on, let's get this over with."

With that, he's dragging Izuku up into the apartment building and opening the door for him with a polite, "After you."

Izuku sighs and threads his way down the hallway and up a few flights of stairs, coming to a stop in front of the door leading to his apartment a few minutes later. He's hesitant; how will his mom react? Well, he has a pretty good idea, but it's still not certain.

He knocks on the door.

There's a shuffling and the patter of footsteps, and the door swings open.

Izuku's struck by how *tired* Midoriya Inko looks. Her usual cheery expression has been replaced by something akin to exhaustion, and there are prominent bags under her eyes. Her hair is unkempt, hanging off of her head in loose strands, and her eyes are missing that usual spark that Izuku's so accustomed to seeing.

That is, until they land on him.

For a second, it's like someone paused time with their quirk. His mom's staring at him, frozen and wide-eyed, and he offers an anxious grin and the weakest of waves.

Then it's over, and she's barreling into him and wrapping him up in the tightest hug he's ever had. He's dimly aware of the fact that she's crying, and he presses his face into her shoulder and finally lets himself relax.

"Zuku, m-my baby..." She chokes out, before pulling away so she can see his face, chin wobbling. "Where have you *been* ? I've looked everywhere for you- I-I called the police, but none of them had seen you and- Oh my God, what happened to your *face* ?"

Izuku, who had formerly been paralyzed under the verbal assault, winces at the last part and wills his mouth to work as his mom traces a feather-light touch across his face. He knows what he looks like, and he wishes he could hide it from her.

"I-I got attacked. By a villain. On the way home," he stutters out, chewing on his lip. "I don't know who they were, but they just... Appeared, suddenly, and then..." He trails off before his gaze snaps onto Bit, who's smiling at the whole exchange.

His mom notices him too, turning hesitantly and shooting glances back at Izuku like she thinks Bit's the villain. He realizes they're both waiting for him to say something.

"M-Mom, this is Bit. He, uh, helped me and let me stay at his house while I was... Out of it." It sounded better in his head, but she buys it.

“You must be Mrs. Midoriya,” Bit says, picking up where he left off effortlessly. “You’ve got quite the kid, you know that?”

It’s the right thing to say, and his mom’s gaze softens as she chuckles to herself.

“He’s really something, isn’t he?”

Izuku sputters, blushing slightly and attempt to convey betrayal through his gaze. It slides right off, and Bit simply winks. Despite his tactics, it’s working.

“Well, in that case...” His mom mumbles. “Thank you. Thank you so much for taking care of my son.”

“Uh- Well, actually,” Izuku jumps in, seizing the moment while he can. “Since he went through all the trouble of.... Keeping me alive, I’ve offered to help him with his project.

His mom turns to face him, and he sees Bit snort behind her back and mouth *Real tactful*. He can’t react while his mom’s focus is on him, but he hopes Bit knows what his reaction *would* be.

“What project...?” His mom asks, a trace of worry slipping into her voice and threatening the precarious setup. Izuku needs to fix that, and pronto. At least, this time, he can tell the truth.

“Well, you know the beach near here? The one that’s covered in trash?”

She nods.

“Well, uh, Bit uses that trash for parts, and he wants me to help carry it back to his house.”

She looks pensive, chewing on her lip in the same way Izuku does.

“When?”

“Uh, a-after school every day. I’ll still do my homework, I promise.” He gives her a placating smile, hoping she won’t try and stop him.

She looks hesitant, but says, “...If you’ll be safe.”

It’s a yes.

“Thank you!” Izuku says, relaxing a bit. He won’t be grounded for the next year. Although, he’s not sure what grounding would do. It’s not like he has any friends that he can...

But he does have a friend now, doesn’t he?

Behind his mom, he sees Bit grinning him and giving him a thumbs up, and he smiles slightly.

-----

The night passes quickly after that. His mom invites Bit inside, but he declines and says that he really should be getting home. She then offers to drive, but he once again shakes his head and says that he lives nearby.

After Bit leaves, his mom's all over him like a mother bird, asking if he's okay and if he's hurt anywhere else. He's hesitant but shakes his head. Hopefully, he can hide the huge scar on his back.

Hopefully.

After that, he heads upstairs to shower for the first time in what feels like years. He's in there for at least thirty minutes, scrubbing off whatever dirt, blood, and sand is left over from his escape and letting the water rinse away his anxiety about the whole thing.

What if the doctors come looking for him? What if he has to go to jail for escaping the hospital, or lying about his identity, or...?

He's not going to worry about that. He can't, or he might grow a tail and accidentally knock all of his shampoo over again.

So he does what he does best, and as he gets dressed and ready for bed, he crushes his emotions into a tiny ball and tosses them over his shoulder. He's out like a light the second his head hits the pillow.

## Chapter End Notes

It's d o n e

I'd say I'm sorry about Bit but A. I really fell in love with him, and B. It's a cheesy half-crack fanfic. I can do what I want. If it's not meant to be, then may God strike me do

# stitched between these things i've sown

## Chapter Summary

The months leading up to the entrance exam.

## Chapter Notes

i went to post this and literally as i clicked new chapter ao3 went down

that may have been some sort of divine sign but if God wants to stop me he'll have to kill me with his own two hands

ALSO!!!!!! WE HAVE FANART????????? HOLY SHIT????????????????????

ok fuck its not letting me link it properly but its on my blog [here](#) !!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It's been a relatively calm day at the office, which is somewhat of a rarity these days. The police force almost always has their hands full; they might not always be the ones fighting villains, but they are the ones that get to take them into custody and deal with all of the paperwork.

So far, there haven't been any villain attacks; at least not in the province that the office Naomasa works for is in, so he's relaxing in his office. Well, not exactly relaxing, but the past few weeks have been taxing, and he needs all the rest he can get.

There's an impressive variety of papers spread out on his desks; reports, new connections that Blade may have, the mix. He's been pouring over them for hours, so he's allowed himself a slight break.

Naomasa's reading the news on his phone, swiping through story after story when a knock on his door effectively grabs his attention. He straightens up in his chair, turning it to face the doorway and composing his face into one of pleasant interest. He doesn't know who's knocking, but he has a pretty good guess.

"Come in," he calls, turning off his phone and setting it on the stack of papers lying not-entirely-neatly on his desk. The door opens with a creak, and sure enough, it's the intern working under Sansa who's stopped by a few times already today.

“Mr. Himura,” Naomasa greets. The intern, a young man in his very early twenties with dull brown hair and an X-Ray quirk, looks a bit unsteady. He’s clutching a manilla folder with a few papers sticking out and chewing on his lip anxiously.

“Hello, Detective Naomasa. Sansa sent me with a report on the, um... Leviathan, I think.”

Naomasa, who had expecting information on a newer villain going by Arachnophobia, sits up, interested. Himura shuffles forward to hand him the folder, which he sets on his desk with a soft smile.

“Thank you, Mr. Himura,” he says, and the intern nods jerkily.

“Y-you’re welcome, sir.” With that, he’s gone. Naomasa can’t help but frown; most new interns are a bit awkward, but Himura seems especially skittish. He has no problem fulfilling tasks, but his interactions are... Odd, to say the least.

He’d asked Sansa after running into the officer at the coffee machine- *“Naomasa, please. What is that, your third cup today?”* - but he hadn’t gotten any answers. Sansa was just as perplexed as he was and said that he would look into it.

Still, Naomasa knows Sansa’s busy; he’s been called into some case regarding... a child escaping a hospital, or something of the like. It sounds almost too strange to be true, but Naomasa’s long since stopped questioning what happens when quirks are involved.

Naomasa decides not to mull over it too much and turns to the folder, a mixture of concern and curiosity swirling in his head. It’s light; there isn’t much inside, which doesn’t exactly come as a surprise. Nonetheless, it’s more than they had before. He opens it to a report and skims it almost instinctively.

The paper states that, using what little footage and eyewitness accounts that exist regarding the Leviathan, experts have identified it as some sort of transformative-type quirk not before documented. It’s supposedly reptilian in nature, although this, like most other information, is unconfirmable.

Naomasa’s already seen most of this information before; it’s all they’ve had for the past ten or so years. He’s stared at it over and over on those long nights when he can’t push the Leviathan’s green eyes out of his head.

Naomasa’s seen a lot of things, many of which would make most men cower in fear, but he doesn’t think he’ll ever be able to forget the events of that night.

His eyes settle on a paragraph devoted to the Leviathan’s supposed relations with Daigo Yatsuhiro, better known as the recently apprehended villain Blade, and he dives back into the paper with renewed interest.

Naomasa’s seen Blade a few times throughout his career, and almost all of them have been related to hostage situations. Blade seems to have a thing for taking hostages. It’s morbidly interesting; after how disastrously the villain’s first hostage attempt went, Naomasa

had assumed that he wouldn't have to worry about any more hostage situations. To his surprise, that seemed to be all Blade did. Even more surprising; he was pretty damn good at it, too, considering he hadn't been caught until now. He'd even taken to calling Naomasa by name whenever the detective had the misfortune of being sent to deal with him, which was both concerning and somewhat amusing.

What concerns him, though, is the knowledge that Blade has something to do with the Leviathan. Before, Naomasa could have chalked up the Leviathan's appearance at Blade's debut to sheer coincidence. Now, the evidence is indisputable; the Leviathan has only appeared twice, and both times have been related to Blade.

Blade, the paper states, has been confirmed to be twenty-eight year old Daigo Yatsuhiro, who reportedly disappeared eleven years prior at the age of seventeen.

Naomasa blinks, realizing that at the time of the incident, Daigo had been only eighteen, before he continues.

An interview had been conducted in which Daigo was questioned for intelligence regarding the Leviathan's identity or his relations to it. Daigo had expressed distinct anger at the mention of it and had rebuked it, refusing any and all connection to it. He'd said that he had no idea who or what it was, only that it "liked fucking with him".

There's a transcript of the interview beneath, and Naomasa's genuinely surprised and almost in awe of the amount of language that Blade uses when talking about the Leviathan. He knew they certainly weren't friends, but...

He skims the interview, finding nothing truly helpful, before setting the report aside and looking through the rest of the folder.

It's a mix of incredibly blurry, low-quality pictures, transcripts of eyewitness accounts, and the other shreds of information they have on the Leviathan.

Naomasa sighs, staring at the paper and rubbing his forehead. It's... not much, but it's better than what they had before.

His mind can't help but wander, and he thinks about the Leviathan screaming as it slashes Daigo's neck. He wonders who the Leviathan is when it's not wreaking havoc; if there even is anyone beneath the scales and bloodstains at all.

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"I- Am- In- Hell," Izuku announces in between wheezes, legs wobbling beneath the weight of the rusty engine gripped in his arms. Ahead of him, Bit snorts, hefting an only semi-destroyed microwave beneath one arm.

"Come on, Mido, we're almost there!"

"I regret ever agreeing to this," Izuku groans. His legs are oddly cold; either from exertion or the layer of dark green scales coating them like armor. Normally, he'd be far more

concerned about the Leviathan's vice-like grip on his legs, but its strength is the only thing keeping him from being crushed at the moment, so he grits his teeth and ignores it.

It's a chilly afternoon; not nearly as cold as the night Izuku stumbled half-bleeding down the beach, but cold enough for the breeze to slip through Izuku's uniform and prick his skin. Even if he's shivering a bit, he can't help but be thankful for it. It makes the bruises on his face and arms hurt a little bit less.

Turns out Kacchan hadn't been too thrilled about Izuku's return; not exactly the epitome of surprising, but still painful. He'd wanted to know everything; the scar, where Izuku had been, the whole spiel. Izuku hadn't answered him and had unsurprisingly paid the price. He'd ended up battered and exhausted by the time he'd made his way to the beach, even if he wouldn't tell Bit why.

Now, Bit is having him haul an entire car engine all the way down to his house, which is a good ten-minute walk when he *isn't* hindered by slippery car parts. Izuku knows it could be worse; there aren't many people around to gawk at his oil-spattered arms or definitely not-human legs, and he certainly didn't miss the way Bit was eyeing the rusty refrigerator back at the beach with longing, but he still feels closer to death than he's ever been. Other than the time he *literally* almost bled out, of course.

He almost stumbles over a crack in the pavement and hefts the engine with a grunt, trying to keep it from slipping out of his hands.

"What do you need this for anyway?" He asks, doing his best to catch up to Bit without falling over. Ahead of him, Bit ponders for a second before answering.

"Multi-purpose drone."

"I- What would you need a *multi-purpose drone* for?"

Bit shrugs and continues onward. "You never know," he says as if that's an ample explanation.

Izuku's whole body feels like it's on fire, but he keeps walking. According to Bit, it's only a little while more, and if he wants to be a hero and make up for what he did, he'll have to work harder than this.

He feels the Leviathan churn inside of him and the scrape of claws on the inside of his shoes, and he moves a little bit faster.

Izuku almost cries in relief when Bit says, "Here we are!" He doesn't trust himself to put the engine down, seeing as he might not be able to pick it up again, so he just awkwardly wobbles behind Bit as he opens the door.

To his surprise, the door opens to not an empty hallway, but a person.

It's a woman; tall and thin, much like Bit himself, with long, gleaming hair that looks like it's made out of strands of pure silver. Her eyeliner is sharp enough to kill a man, and her

sharp face is turned into a frown.

“What in the-” She starts to say, but stops when her eyes land on Izuku. Her voice is sharp, with an air of power to it, and Izuku would probably be impressed if he wasn’t in the process of being crushed into the ground by the weight of a rusty engine.

“Hi, mom!” Bit chirps, waving with his free hand. “This is Izuku! He’s helping me get parts!”

Izuku can’t exactly wave, but he stutters out a strained, “H-hello.”

He’s never exactly met with anyone’s parents before, other than Kacchan’s mom, once or twice. He’s not sure what he’s supposed to say.

Mrs. Okyoita stares at them for a second, before rubbing her face with one hand and shaking her head.

“You must be the ‘Midoriya’ kid,” she says, and Izuku nods awkwardly, not sure if that’s good or bad. Mrs. Okyoita glances at him with a raised eyebrow before sighing. “Good lord-Aki, what have you roped this poor boy into?” She steps aside to let them pass into the house. Bit bounces in, leaving Izuku to stumble into the doorway and try to keep the engine from drizzling oil all over the floor.

“This way!” Bit calls from down the hallway, and Izuku turns the corner just in time to see him open a door and trot down a flight of stairs.

Fantastic.

Izuku’s too focused on just *getting* to the staircase to notice Mrs. Okyoita’s steps behind him until there’s a thin hand on his shoulder, steadying him.

“I’m sorry about him,” she says quietly. “He can be a bit... Overbearing.”

“No, it’s fine,” Izuku says, shifting his grip a bit and preparing to hopefully not fall down the stairs. “He’s great, actually.”

Mrs. Okyoita breathes a laugh, and out of the corner of his eye, Izuku can see her shake her head.

“Are you sure you’ve got that? It looks heavy.” She asks, and Izuku swears he sees her hair glow slightly. It must be related to her quirk; magnetism, right?

“I-I got it,” Izuku answers. “I carried it this far. I’m not giving up now.”

This earns him a more open laugh, and Mrs. Okyoita disappears from view.

Distraction gone, Izuku begins to make his way down the stairs. It’s slow going; every step makes his legs burn like they’re being doused in Pro-Hero Endeavor’s fire, and he’s doing his best not to fall.

He feels his pants shift, and a second later, there's a thin, fin-tipped tail coiling around the handrail. He's almost thankful, but he immediately reminds himself that it's a tail responsible for at least four deaths.

But he can't force it away because then he'll fall down the stairs.

He settles for attempting to push down the part of the Leviathan that's giving his tail its telltale fins. Without those, it's just an inconspicuous lizard tail.

To his surprise, the tail obliges, and the fins flatten themselves against his scales and vanish. Izuku pauses for a second, confusion almost overthrowing his thin veneer of control before he focuses and returns to his task.

What feels like ten minutes later, Izuku's standing on the basement floor, breathing heavily. Behind him, his tail swishes across the floor in tired arcs, rubbing across what must be tile.

"Over here!" Bit calls from the far side of the room, gesturing to an empty spot on the cluttered work table in the center of the room. Izuku makes his way over and, with a solid thunk, sets the engine down.

Bit laughs at him when he sighs and rubs his arms, exhausted. The fire in his limbs has tapered off into a dry numbness, and he leans against the wall.

"Nice tail," he hears Bit comment, a note of surprise in his voice, but he's too tired to respond. Something inside him twists at the thought, and he crushes it down. Yet the feelings in his gut linger, swirling around like storm clouds, so he inhales and blows them away. With them, the Leviathan's scales fade away until he's just his regular, human self.

Bit's basement isn't that different from his room, really, except even more futuristic-looking, if that's possible. Every inch of the walls is painted navy blue and covered with tools or shelves, save for the one across from the entrance, which is covered almost entirely in a glowing holographic screen. Izuku's impressed until he realizes it's displaying Bit's Netflix history, which consists mostly of the latest sci-fi movies and the Power Rangers series.

The shelves are home to a variety of devices, both finished and not, as well as spools of red and black wires. There's more than one case of a device looking like it's about to fall onto the floor, teetering over the side haphazardly. It makes Izuku a little bit uncomfortable.

The ceiling is lit by a sprawling tangle of lights, blanketing the room in a warm glow. It almost resembles some kind of glowing spider-web weighed down by glowing specks of dew. It's not quite as spectacular as the creation lighting Bit's room, but it's certainly something to look at.

Well, not *directly* at, Izuku thinks, rubbing his stinging eyes.

The table in the center is barely visible under the array of blueprints and spare parts covering it, but it appears to be made of some sort of sturdy metal. Out of the corner of his

eye, Izuku spots the infamous Pringles can grappling gun lying on its side amidst a pile of bolts.

“I think this’ll be enough to power it,” Bit says, inspecting the engine curiously. It’s oozing thick, dark oil all over the table, but if Bit notices, he doesn’t care.

“Great,” Izuku deadpans, slumping against the wall. Bit pokes at the engine for a little while longer, before stretching and springing back over to the door.

“Come on, don’t just sit there, we gotta go!”

Izuku, who has by now curled up into a slumped mess on the floor, looks up and raises an eyebrow, stepping on the dread rising in his stomach.

“Go where?”

Bit shoots him a wink, and Izuku has a feeling he already knows the answer.

“To get more supplies, of course!”

Izuku buries his head in his hands and groans. Bit laughs.

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From there, Izuku’s life falls into a simple pattern. He wakes up, goes to school, runs from or gets beat up by Katsuki and ‘friends’, lugs trash around with Bit, studies and does his homework, and goes to bed.

As tiring it is, Izuku wouldn’t go back to his former life for the world.

Eight months have passed, and even if Izuku occasionally can’t feel his legs, there’s no denying the improvement he’s made. At first, he’d been forced to loosen his grip on the Leviathan to haul the trash around, but now, he can do it on his own. He can drag fridges through the sand, heft engines with ease, and hold a light-hearted conversation, all without the Leviathan. It gives him a sense of control that he hadn’t had before, and it’s great.

Even better than that, he’s not alone anymore.

At the moment, he’s collapsed in one of the beanbags living in the corner of the basement, trying to breathe in between fits of laughter as Bit jumps up and down on the worktable, clutching a microphone made of scraps in one hand. Bit’s custom speakers are cranked up to the max, and Izuku can feel the music pounding in the walls.

Bit pauses to catch his breath, and Izuku takes the opportunity to yell, “Hit it, Fergie!”

Immediately, Bit flawlessly launches back into his rendition of Fergalicious, yelling the lyrics at the top of his lungs as Izuku howls with laughter. He’s not sure how exactly Bit hasn’t crushed any of the appliances on the table yet, but it’s the funniest thing he’s ever seen, so he’s not going to stop him.

Someone else, however, is.

The music is loud, but Mrs. Okyoita is louder, and Izuku almost falls out of the beanbag when she yells, “Aki, other people have ears!”

Bit looks offended on a personal level and turns the music down until it’s what a normal person might consider loud. Izuku makes eye contact with him for a second before falling right back into uncontrollable laughter, ignoring Bit’s indignant shriek.

“I’m glad my misfortune is funny to someone,” Bit says flatly, although there’s no actual malice behind it, and he’s doing is best not to grin.

“How,” Izuku starts, but has to take a second to breathe. “How do you know all the words to that?”

“Are you implying that you *don’t* know all of the words to Fergalicious?” Bit gasps, slapping one hand across his chest in mock horror.

“I- Certainly not to *that degree* !”

“A shame, Mido. A shame.”

“It’s *200 years old*, Bit!”

“No excuses!” Bit yells.

Izuku rolls his eyes and slumps further into the beanbag. He’s about to close his eyes before he catches a telltale shuffling sound and hears Bit shriek, “For Fergie!” He opens his eyes just in time to be nailed in the face by a pillow.

A year ago, Izuku spent his Friday nights curled up in his room, alone, nursing bruises and burn marks and looking up reports of heroes on his phone. He’d stay in his room, alone and silent, writing until his hands ached and he drifted off into restless sleep.

Now, he’s yelling a war cry as he chases Bit around the cluttered basement, wielding a couch pillow like a bat while Bit tries desperately to escape and laughs his ass off.

Izuku isn’t thinking about the Leviathan, or what he is. He’s not thinking of Bakugou or his insults, or of his classmates’ jeers.

He’s just alive, and it feels good.

-----

Katsuki notices the change. It’s absolutely bizarre. Ever since stupid Deku got that ugly fucking scar that he won’t talk about, he’s been... Different. He still flinches when Katsuki slams his desk and tries to get the truth about his uselessness through that thick fucking skull, but he doesn’t ever cower. He doesn’t even look afraid in the slightest.

Deku doesn't go straight home anymore, either, and the thing about that is that Katsuki *can't fucking figure out where he's going*. He drills Deku about it almost every day, shouting and blasting him with explosions that make the other kids inch away, but the damn lizard just shrugs. *Shrugs*. As if this is all some big game to him, and he's trying to make a fool out of Katsuki.

Well, it doesn't matter. *He* doesn't matter. Katsuki's gonna get into U.A., and he's gonna show Deku that that damn dream of his is absolutely fucking stupid.

-----

"So," Bit says. "U.A., huh?"

Izuku's brain immediately starts coming up with things along the lines of '*I probably won't make it in, but it doesn't hurt to try*' or '*what of it?*' and he has to remind him that he's not with his class. Bit just wants to know.

"Yeah," Izuku says, rubbing his hands on the cement of the wall beneath him and letting his legs dangle over the side. It's dangerous, but he can't bring himself to care.

Bit first brought him to this place months ago; it's a hotel that went out of business years ago and hasn't been repurchased since. It's a huge, empty building on the corner of the street near the beach, and most people don't bother going into it unless they're drug dealers or police sent to investigate.

The stairwell, however, remains mostly untouched and presents roof access to those brave enough to climb all forty stories. It's an undeniable workout, sure, but nothing Izuku can't handle at this point. Bit isn't quite as lucky, but he survives.

In exchange for braving the climb, he's presented with a perch above the city that allows him to see Musutafu spread out for miles on one side and the rippling sea on the other. It allows him a clear vantage point from which he can just watch the world without fear. It's become a sort of safe place, even when he's not with Bit.

"How'd you find this place?" He'd asked, and Bit had answered with, "I needed somewhere to test a parachute," and hadn't elaborated at all.

It's late, and the city has already begun to light up to fight off the darkness. Neon lights and glowing billboards cast colorful glimmers of light on Izuku's shoes as he sits on the edge of the building, wrapped in the night sky and ambient noise. Bit sits at his side; the silver-haired boy isn't as bold as to let his legs dangle over the side, but he's still resting cross-legged at the edge.

"I've heard their entrance exam is hard as hell," Bit says. His glasses glitter in the light like a kaleidoscope, and his wild hair drifts around his face in ghostly wisps.

"Makes sense, seeing as it's the top school in the country," Izuku muses, leaning forward to rest his head in his hands. Beneath him, a taxi honks as it passes by, sparking a cacophony of car horns in response.

“You’ve got your sights set on the top?” Bit asks, although it’s more of a statement than a question. Izuku hesitates for a second, but he shrugs and tangles a hand in his hair.

“Not... necessarily. I used to, but...” He coughs and swallows awkwardly. “Now, I just want to be a hero. I want to help people.”

*To make up for what I’ve done.*

“And getting into U.A. is the best way to do that,” Bit surmises with a raised eyebrow. “What kind of hero are you going to be?”

He doesn’t ask what kind of hero Izuku *wants* to be or *dreams* of being. He asks Izuku what kind of hero he *is going* to be. It’s a simple gesture, but it sends a spark of pride through Izuku’s question.

Until the Leviathan stirs inside him, and he remembers the weight on his shoulders.

“Underground, probably,” Izuku says. It’s something he’s thought about a lot; if he’s going to be a hero with *his* quirk, media attention isn’t something he really wants. If he can just be a hero and save people pseudo-anonymously, that’s what he wants to do.

“Underground,” Bit echoes curiously. “There aren’t a lot of underground heroes these days.”

Izuku shrugs again. “Not necessarily. They’re just not in the spotlight. There’s a handful here in Musutafu, actually.”

“Really?” Bit asks, perking up. “Like who?”

“Well, there’s Bluelight, Firebird, uh.... Blackjack...” He trails off, wracking his brain.

“Eraserhead?” Bit offers with the faintest of grins.

Izuku snorts. “Ah, yes, Eraserhead. The favorite.”

“Don’t dock him; he’s a badass,” Bit says defensively, narrowing his eyes. Izuku swats his arm lightly.

“I never said he wasn’t; he’s my favorite, too-”

“I thought that was All Might.”

“- *other* than All Might, but you’ve heard me talk about him enough.”

Bit raises an eyebrow. “Is there a limit to how much stuff about Eraserhead I’m allowed to hear?”

“Yeah,” Izuku answers with a mischievous grin. “Or the government will show up at your house and take your bird.”

“Not Present Mic!” Bit gasps, and Izuku stifles a snicker. He’s known about Bit’s incredibly loud cockatiel for months now, but the name still makes him laugh every time.

“The resemblance is uncanny,” Bit had said when asked about it, and though he’d tried, Izuku couldn’t find an objection to that.

“I don’t think they *could* take him,” Bit says thoughtfully after a moment, and Izuku cocks his head.

“What do you mean?”

“I- I mean... He doesn’t have a quirk- he’s a *bird* - but he can be pretty damn loud. Not quite as loud as the *actual* Present Mic, but... He’s close.”

“So you’re implying that your bird could scream loudly enough to chase off government agents?” Izuku deadpans.

“You’ve met him. Tell me I’m wrong.”

Izuku doesn’t have an answer for that.

“Yeah. See? Don’t underestimate the power of Present Mic.” Bit says, and Izuku rolls his eyes and grins.

“I’m not, trust me. He’s screamed in my ear enough to make a point.”

“That means he likes you,” Bit says.

Izuku ignores that and leans back a bit, resting the palms of his hands on the cool cement behind him. A wind rolls over his knuckles and through his hair, and his grey scarf flaps in the breeze.

“Anyways,” Bit says. “What do you know about the entrance exam?”

“There are two parts to it, I think. One’s a written exam, and the other’s a practical.”

“Practical?”

“Where you have to... Show how your quirk can be used, I guess.” He’s not entirely sure. The U.A. practical exam is pretty watertight in terms of information getting out, probably so nobody can cheat.

“As in fighting?”

“...Maybe?”

“I’ve never seen you use your quirk to fight,” Bit says. “Can you?”

*Shaky footage of the Leviathan lunging and screaming as it slashes at Blade in fury.*

“Y-yeah, I think so.”

He knows he can use the Leviathan as an offense, and possibly a defense, but it isn't that simple. He can't just let loose and let the Leviathan take over. Not only would he be captured or killed immediately, he would risk hurting the other examinees. And that's something Izuku won't do.

He's lucky there's no solid footage of the incident with Blade; even after digging around, the best he could find depicted him as a screaming black-and-green blur. That means no one can recognize him if he just uses parts of his quirk like always. Still, if he goes too far, someone's bound to make the connection.

He's gotten better at controlling his quirk, which he's grateful for. He can use a little bit more without risking losing control now, too, but he still isn't sure what all the Leviathan is capable of.

He's written what he knows down in a journal, actually. Not his hero journals; he's not a hero. Not yet. This journal never leaves his room and stays in a shoebox under his bed. If anyone found it, it wouldn't be good. He'll need to look over it again before the exam.

"Well, in that case, I don't think you have anything to worry about," Bit says, jolting him out of his thoughts, and Izuku looks up.

"What?"

"You said you can use your quirk to fight, and I don't think you have to worry about the written exam, so you're all set."

"I don't think it'll be that simple, but..." He sighs and turns to Bit, who's watching him with a curious expression. "Thanks."

"Just stating the obvious," Bit shrugs with a grin, and Izuku can't keep the smile off of his face.

They turn to the streets below, where blinking lights and noisy cars blend into a painting of the city. The sun has set completely by now, and the sky is a flat expanse of navy blue. The city's glow rises over the horizon like an eternal sunrise, painting the sky with a slightly yellow. It's peaceful; a moment of relief in a busy, dangerous world.

And the peace is abruptly shattered by Bit saying, "I should build a jetpack."

Izuku blinks at looks over at Bit, who's peering down at the streets below with a thoughtful expression.

"Bit, *no*," he says, recognizing the face immediately.

"Bit, yes! Think about it!"

"I *am*, and that's why I'm saying no."

"If I built a jetpack, we wouldn't have to take the stairs."

“You’re right because we won’t be able to when you *end up in the hospital* .”

“Have some faith!”

“I *had* some faith, and then you tried to build a drone out of a car engine. That I had to carry.”

“First of all, you agreed to that. Second; what’s wrong with the drone?”

“It- It *exploded* , Bit.”

“A minor setback.”

“It took out the mailbox.”

“I never liked that mailbox anyway.”

Izuku can’t help the laughter that bubbles up inside him as Bit effectively deflects every criticism directed at his creations, and almost doesn’t notice when Bit gets up.

“Wait, where are you going?” Izuku asks, surprised. Bit doesn’t turn around, jogging towards the door.

“Bit?” Izuku asks again, inching away from the edge of the building and standing up slowly. Bit opens the roof access door and stops in the doorway, turning around with a shit-eating grin.

“To make a jetpack.”

“Bit-,” Izuku starts, but Bit disappears down the stairwell. Izuku, tasked with preventing Bit from blowing up either his garage or himself, sighs, gets up, and sprints after him.

## Chapter End Notes

This is mostly a filler chapter, even though it was really fun to write!  
Next up, at long last, we've got the entrance exam! Best of luck, Izuku!

(On the topic of Himura: don't worry, he's not secretly evil or being blackmailed. He just can't turn his quirk off, which is really awkward with a desk job. :P )

# burning faults and bleeding fears

## Chapter Summary

The entrance exam.

## Chapter Notes

happy Friday! I hoped to get this out by the weekend, and I did! :)

ALSO CHECK OUT ALL THIS [FANART!!](#)

And shoutout to tanzytechgem for beta reading! (Like 3 times lmfao) Love you tanz!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

In what feels like the time it takes Izuku to blink, the next two months pass. The U.A. Entrance Exam grows closer and closer, looming over him like an insurmountable mountain, and he busies himself with studying for the written part of it and helping Bit with his latest creations.

Before he even realizes it, it's the night before the exam, and he's supposed to have fallen asleep at least two hours ago.

It's not that he hasn't *tried* to sleep. There's just an excited buzzing in his chest that seems more than content to keep him awake. It hums loudly, spreading excitement and anxiety throughout him like the tide washing over the sand, and Izuku buries his face in his pillow and wills it away.

After a while of tossing and turning restlessly, he gets up and turns on his lamp. If he's going to be awake, he might as well get something done. Crossing the room to his desk, he yawns and rubs his eyes as he rummages around in the bottom drawer until his fingers close around an uncharacteristically clean notebook.

This notebook is smaller than the others; it could easily fit in his pocket if he ever dared to take it outside. It's pristine; its Moleskine cover is clean and unmarred except for the words 'Quirk Notes', which are scrawled hastily in faded sharpie.

Izuku swallows and sits down in his desk chair, setting the book on his crossed legs and rubbing a hand through his hair as he opens the first page.

The notebook he's devoted to his own quirk is rather empty, really. There's just not much to say, other than, appearance: lizard, uses: killing people.

Still, he's written down what he can. The first few pages are covered in pencil scrawlings of what he can do. Izuku ignores the notes about the Leviathan's abilities and focuses on what he himself can do, which is more or less just manifesting physical attributes.

Still, his eyes are drawn to the section under the Leviathan's aspects labeled 'connections'.

He's aware of mutations in which a child's quirk is nothing like their parents', but he's never heard of something of this caliber. He'd thought that he was just different until he'd considered it for a bit.

His mom's quirk allows her to float small objects towards her, and from what he's seen, the Leviathan levitates instead of walking. On the other hand, his dad's quirk is fire-breathing, but he hasn't seen anything that proves the Leviathan can. He's honestly somewhat thankful.

It's a train of thought that's led him to believe that his quirk is a severe mutation of his mom's, albeit in a strange way. Maybe someone on her side of the family has some kind of reptilian quirk?

He sighs and moves on. As interesting as it is, it's not important.

The next few pages are sketches; a few are accurate, such as scaly hands or fins, but others aren't; there's a vague drawing of a finned, serpentine creature with a mouth full of razor-sharp teeth based only off of a blurry, rain-splattered video he found floating around online. Izuku stares at it for a second before flipping the page hastily. He has to focus on what *he* can do, not what the Leviathan can do.

The most frequent trait that pops up is easily fins, followed by teeth, claws, and other things. He realizes he's never really attempted to purposely *use* the Leviathan. He's only ever tried to keep it from showing. He doesn't really know if he can.

Chewing on his lip, Izuku raises a hand and stares at it. In the dim glow of the lamp, he can make out a perfectly human hand; soft and tanned, with freckles scattered across it like stars and short nails.

Breathing slowly, Izuku wraps his other hand around the arm of his chair and squeezes. He'll have to figure this out if he wants to use his quirk for the exam.

All his life, he's kept himself permanently tense, staying taught and in control. Not physically, exactly. It's difficult to put into words; it's like he's always mentally holding himself together with fraying ropes. It's the only way he can keep the Leviathan from snaking through him, prying control from his tired fingers and wreaking havoc.

Now, for the first time, he relaxes a touch. It's not much; he simply releases his hold on his hand ever so slightly.

The effect is instantaneous. The Leviathan pours through his hand like a river of magma, blasting through his control and filling his hand with an icy thrashing. He watches, eyes wide, as his hands shift from soft and small to sharp and jagged in an instant, a layer of thick, near-black scales speckled with almost luminescent green dots climbing over his hand like a flood. His fingers itch as his nails curve into obsidian blades, gleaming in the yellow light.

He feels the ropes go taught and has to force himself to breathe, flexing his hand- claw experimentally. It's just a claw; he can still control it.

Hesitantly, his hands still trembling, he reaches over and scrapes one nail down the side of his desk. It cleaves through the wood with ease, leaving a pale line not unlike the one plastered across his own face.

Izuku swallows and grits his teeth, reaching out and tightening his hold on the ropes. He closes the hole he made, breathing carefully as his hand tingles and the Leviathan slowly drains away. Scales fade into his skin, and black nails shrink and flatten out. After a second or two, his hand is back to normal, and the straining against the ropes is gone.

Izuku lets out a breath he didn't know he'd been holding and slumps forward, resting his head in his hands. So he can use it. It feels strange, but as long as he doesn't try to manifest too much at once, he should be okay.

He hopes the exam doesn't involve fighting people; he knows that if he wants to be a hero, he'll have to use his quirk in that way eventually, but he's not sure if he's ready.

Izuku closes the notebook and sets it back in its place, sliding the drawer shut and turning off the lamp. As he settles into bed, he thinks about U.A. Even if he makes it in, what would they do if they realized they had the Leviathan as a student?

He forces the thought away and closes his eyes, tossing and turning for a while more before drifting off into a thankfully dreamless sleep.

-----

Izuku wakes up to his alarm shrieking at him in short intervals, buzzing. Blearily opening his eyes, he yawns and pulls his hands out of the warmth of the blanket, craning his head to stare at the digital clock. It's 6:00. The exam is in three hours.

He has half a mind to hit the snooze button and go back to sleep, but then he'll just be tired during the exam. Stretching and licking his chapped lips, he rubs his face and stares up at the ceiling.

It's still dark outside; the light from the streetlight is the only thing illuminating his room at the moment, spreading its orange glow over the walls in thin bands. Izuku looks around, his eyes still adjusted to the darkness, before sitting up in bed and sighing.

Feelings swirl in his chest like the gentle breeze before a storm, sending a chill up his spine and rousing the Leviathan into struggling. Izuku sweeps them aside as he pulls the

covers off of himself, inhaling sharply as the cold pounces on him almost immediately. His toes curl into the icy floorboards, and he ignores the bite in his feet as he turns on the light.

He throws on a t-shirt and a paint-splattered pair of sweatpants, opting to go for a jog to wake himself up. Pulling on his sneakers, he checks the weather on his phone. It's unsurprisingly cold out, and he grabs a green hoodie from where it's draped over the back of his chair.

His mom is still asleep when he slips out of his room, silently making his way to the cluttered kitchen. Her job is at 7:00 on weekdays, and she usually wakes up around 6:30. He hopes he'll be back in time to see her before the exam, but he can't promise anything.

The kitchen is even darker than his room, but he knows his way well enough to not bump into anything. At least, that's what he thinks to himself before promptly walking into the corner of the counter.

Now nursing his bruised side with a bitter grimace, Izuku opens the door and steps through. He makes his way down the stairs, trailing his fingers over the beaten walls and humming quietly.

It's even colder outside, he realizes as he steps out onto the sidewalk. The city is still dark, but lights are starting to come on and the sky is tinged with a faint purple.

Izuku jams his phone into his pocket and zips up his jacket, turning onto the street and breaking into a jog. He knows the path he'll take like the back of his hand, even if it's not a long one. He doesn't want to totally tire himself out before the exam.

As Izuku runs, the city rouses itself from a dreary silence. Cars start passing him more frequently, and he passes a few early-risers who squint at him like he's out of his mind for going for a run so early in the morning. He ignores them, focusing on the pounding of his feet on the sidewalk and the cold wind sliding through the threads of his jacket.

Eventually, Izuku turns off of the sidewalk, and the rough, flat ground turns to uneven sand. He stops, sliding a little as he does, and takes a moment to catch his breath.

The beach is thankfully empty, both of people and trash. Izuku surveys it curiously as he reaches down and undoes his laces, icy fingers fumbling awkwardly with the thin string.

He takes off his shoes, leaving them in the sand a ways up the beach. The sand is cool and crisp as it slides over his feet, and he leaves a trail of footprints behind him as he trots down to the shore.

He wades out into the ocean up to his ankles, shivering at the icy wave that washes over him. The cold water laps at his feet, stained a faint pink by the rising sun. It makes his skin tingle and go numb, but he doesn't care. It feels nice.

Izuku sighs and sticks his hands into his pockets, staring out the horizon. A gentle wind sweeps through his hair, sliding green curls into his face, and he smooths it back with one hand.

“So,” he says, his voice a whisper barely present above the wind. “This is it, huh?”

No one answers, simply because there is no one to answer. He’s alone except for the seagulls drifting lazily overhead and the occasional passing car. Izuku takes a deep breath as nervousness and fear churn in his gut, and he lets himself think about the thing he’s been avoiding focusing on.

It’s today. The thing he’s fantasized about for years, the U.A. Entrance Exam, is actually here. He has one chance not to fuck it up.

It doesn’t feel real, really. Maybe the true panic hasn’t set in yet, Izuku thinks somewhat amusedly. He’ll be competing against the best of the best to join the best of the best.

But he needs the U.A. reputation if he wants to be an underground. There aren’t many, and if he wants to be recognized as one, he’ll need the renown that U.A. offers.

A particularly large wave rushes over his feet, drenching the cuffs of his sweatpants and spraying his face with the stinging smell of salt. Izuku shakes his head to clear his thoughts, rubbing at the scales he can feel sprouting under his eyes, and steps back onto the dry sand.

The ocean ebbs and flows just beyond him, and for a second he takes solace in the fact that it doesn’t care what he is. The ocean has seen him at the lowest of his lows; it’s here he found himself the first time it happened, all those years ago, and it’s here he awoke the second time. Yet it still washes over his feet and whispers to him like it does any other.

Izuku sighs and heads home to get ready for the exam.

-----

U.A. is even more terrifying up close.

Izuku has to pause for a moment to take it all in, because *holy shit*. It’s huge, jutting forth from the ground like some great mountain. It glitters and gleams in the sunlight like its windows are made of diamonds, perfectly reflecting the blue sky above, and Izuku can’t help but wonder what it looks like inside.

If he wants to find out, he’ll have to make it that far.

Swallowing whatever fear he’s feeling, he takes a deep breath and starts walking. There are people all around him, talking and laughing. He can’t tell what most of their quirks are, but he knows that he might have to compete against them.

The thought makes him slightly sick; he’s going to have to use the Leviathan to hurt and destroy things, the thing he’s feared doing for most of his life. He’s spent so long ignoring it and trying to fend it off that the thought of actually using it just feels *wrong*.

But he’ll have to if he wants to become a hero and make up for what he did.

Izuku’s so caught up in his train of thought he almost doesn’t catch the familiar scratching sensation at the inside of his shoes. He glances down, eyebrows dropping as he

recognizes the itch of his feet turning into claws, and attempts to find whatever emotion's causing it.

This turns out to be a mistake, and Izuku promptly trips over his own feet and hurtles towards a face-full of cement and embarrassment. He can't hold back the startled yelp that escapes his throat and squeezes his eyes shut, bracing for impact.

It never comes.

Izuku slowly opens his eyes and finds himself suspended above the pavement, hovering in place. It feels like gravity has suddenly let go of him, and if someone bumped him, he would just go drifting off into the atmosphere. He's weightless.

"Sorry! I didn't mean to use my quirk on you without asking, I just figured it would be bad if you tripped!" A voice says, breaking him out of his thoughts, and he blinks as a pair of hands guide him into a standing position.

As soon as his shoes touch the ground, gravity returns in a fierce wave, and he almost falls down again. Once he's regained his balance, he turns around to see who helped him.

It's a girl, probably his age. She has curly brown hair, which is short cropped and curling around her face like a halo, and her eyes are practically glowing with excitement.

"I'm so nervous," she admits, wringing her hands with an anxious smile. "You probably are too, huh?"

Izuku nods quickly, not entirely sure what to say. She smiles and waves a hand, turning to jog towards the gates.

"Well, bye! Good luck!"

Izuku shakes himself out of his stupor just as she passes through the doors, and he's dimly aware of the fact that he never even said thanks.

Whoops.

Izuku shakes his head and ignores the scales prickling around his ears, heading into the building. It's not hard to find the auditorium, mostly because it's more or less the place everyone is going.

Izuku follows the student in front of him- a tall boy with dark blue hair and probably some kind of lightning quirk- into the auditorium. It's massive, just like the rest of U.A., spreading out an unfolding flower. As Izuku gazes on the rows and rows filled to the brim with excited competitors, he's reminded of a coliseum more than anything.

He finds a seat near the back next to a short girl whose eyes are hidden by thick black bangs. She turns as he sits down in the desk and looks him up and down- well, he's not sure exactly what she's doing since her eyes are covered- before turning back to the center of the auditorium.

Izuku follows her gaze and spots the stage right as a thin man he's seen a few times in pictures prances up to the microphone like an overly energetic deer. He snags the mic stand with a practiced vigor, leans in close, and screams, "**WELCOME!**"

The sheer force of the sound alone almost knocks Izuku out of his seat, and he slams against the wall behind him with a startled cough. All around him, indignant murmuring seeps out of the crowd and hovers above the seats in an annoyed swarm. Izuku blows out a long breath and adjusts his position, rubbing his ringing ears.

"**WELCOME TO MY LIVESHOW!**" The man Izuku knows can only be Present Mic continues, although the sound is thankfully quieter this time around. "**EVERYBODY SAY HEY!**"

This is met with more or less absolute silence, and the girl next to Izuku with the bangs stifles a laugh into her hand.

Present Mic pauses, waiting for a moment, before realizing that it's hopeless and continuing undeterred.

"**I'VE GOT SHIVERS DOWN MY SPINE TOO, LISTENERS!**" He yells as if that's why no one is responding to him, and Izuku raises an eyebrow at the fact that he refers to the real live people he's addressing as 'listeners' like he's still on his radio show. Technically, they are still listening to him, but that's not exactly how the word is generally used.

"**ALL RIGHT, EXAMINEES! I'M GONNA GIVE YOU THE LOW-DOWN ON HOW THIS'LL GO DOWN! ARE YOU READY?**"

This is also met with tense silence, which Present Mic promptly fills by screaming "**YEAH!**" at the top of his lungs.

Izuku has a flashback to a similar-looking bird of the same name acting the same exact way and barely muffles his snort. Bit's gonna get a kick out of this, he knows it.

Present Mic then launches into a detailed, albeit loud explanation of the test. It goes something like this; they've been sorted into one of seven testing grounds, at which they'll have ten minutes to get as many points as possible. Points are obtained by defeating 'villains', which are large robots with three different difficulties and respective point-counts.

Izuku breathes a sigh of relief, realizing that he's not going to have to fight anyone.

"Excuse me, may I ask a question?" Someone a few rows in front of him asks, and Izuku's just as surprised as Present Mic that someone's actually participating.

"On the handout, there are clearly four types of villains listed! Such an error would be the height of embarrassment for a top-tier national academy of U.A.'s caliber!"

Izuku has to take a moment to process all of the professional wording this person just used in the span of five seconds, and wonders just who the hell it is.

“Moreover!” The black-haired head that he presumes is the speaker twists around, pointing at someone behind Izuku. Izuku turns to check behind himself curiously, before looking back and realizing quite suddenly that the person is pointing at *him* .

“What’s with you? Yeah, you, curly-haired kid!” He says, and Izuku feels every set of eyes in the auditorium shift to settle on him. He instinctively shrinks down in his seat, fighting back the scales trying to clamber up his face and embarrass him further.

“Can’t you stop laughing for a second? You’re distracting!” Black-hair accuses, and Izuku’s not sure whether to be upset about what’s happening or impressed that black-hair managed to hear him at all.

“If you think U.A. is some pleasure jaunt, then leave this place at once!” Black-hair finishes with a glare, and Izuku forces his gaze downwards onto his prickling hands.

“S-sorry,” he says, although he knows it’s too quiet for black-hair to hear. The silence of the auditorium is quickly filled with giggling and whispering, and Izuku wishes that Bit had let him die on that beach.

Thankfully, Present Mic rushes to his rescue.

“ **OKAY, OKAY! THANKS FOR THE SEGUE, MUCH APPRECIATED!** ” He says, and black-hair sits down, evidently satisfied with making Izuku’s life hell.

Present Mic then goes on to explain that there is, in fact, a fourth type of ‘villain’, one he calls an ‘arena trap’ and insists is worth zero points. He says it ‘rampages when crowded’, and Izuku can’t help but think of the Leviathan doing the same. He grimaces and swallows the thought, focusing on what Present Mic is implying. A few broader statements follow, before the pro-hero finishes with, “ **NOW LET’S MOVE TO THE MAIN EVENT! “PLUS ULTRA”! AND MAY YOU ALL SUFFER GLADLY THE TRIALS TO COME!”**

Izuku’s not sure he likes the way that the statement is worded, but he doesn’t think much of it.

That is, until he arrives at the ‘replica’ that might as well be its own self-sufficient city.

Izuku feels fins prick at his ears as he takes in the sight, wide-eyed. It’s filled with towering buildings, all arranged in a labyrinth reminiscent of the city streets he walks every day. Finding robots to fight in here is going to be an absolute nightmare, he knows it.

He hears mumbling among the other contestants and turns to survey them. There’s quite a handful that’s been assigned to the same testing center he has; no Kacchan, thank god, although he suspects that’s only because students from the same schools aren’t allowed to be in the same center.

As he takes in the group, his eyes land on a familiar head of curly brown hair, and he sees the girl who helped him earlier standing a little ways away. She looks focused and determined, and Izuku wishes he could have some of that courage for his own.

He's distinctly reminded of the fact that he never thanked her, and trots over to do so. However, hardly a few steps in, he hears footsteps behind him and a hand claps down on his shoulder.

Izuku can't keep the Leviathan from scaling all the way up his arm, and he clutches it with his still-human hand as he scrambles away, wide-eyed.

It's black-hair. Of course it is. His face is curved into a frown, and he opens his mouth to say something.

Izuku recognizes the slight stutter in his speech and the sudden widening of his eyes as they trace the line marring Izuku's face; it's one he's seen a million times before but can never seem to ignore.

Black-hair immediately composes himself, face taking on a professional mask.

"Who exactly are you?" He says curiously, although it has a dangerous edge to it that reminds Izuku of some of Kacchan's taunts. "You didn't come to obstruct your fellow test takers, did you?"

Izuku's not exactly sure how going to talk to someone gave him that idea, but he's distracted by the eyes he feels settle on him once more. Everyone's whispering, looking at him curiously. Izuku realizes with a start that they've all already written him off.

Whatever. Nothing he's not used to.

Izuku forces his hand to return to normal, turning away from black-hair without answering and heading towards the start line. Right then, however, his eardrums are blasted by a voice yelling, "**AND START!**"

The voice says something else, but it's drowned out by the pounding of footsteps that follows the contestants around him taking off into the maze. Izuku hesitates for a moment before gritting his teeth and following.

The city is detailed, he thinks as he follows the other examinees. It's a borderline exact replica of the real one, down to the bushes and lines in the cement. His feet pound on the road in time with the footsteps ahead of him, and he keeps his eyes peeled for robots.

He has half a mind to let the Leviathan seep into his legs; he knows doing so would grant him a speed boost that might let him overtake the other contestants. However, he doesn't want to lose control over something so minor. He keeps his legs as they are.

Right as he's starting to second guess himself, he hears an odd grinding noise. It sounds like the scrape of metal against gravel, and he pauses to search for the source of the noise. It immediately reveals itself when, in a cloud of smoke and rubble, a single-pointer robot smashes out of a nearby building and locks its glowing red eye on him.

This is it. Here he goes.

Swallowing, Izuku focuses and lets the Leviathan pour into his arms, filling them with a writhing, broiling energy. His brain immediately panics, screaming at him out of habit, but for the first time, he ignores it. He trembles as the Leviathan floods through him like a virus, cursing his weakness. He'll have to get used to this if he wants to pass.

When he's done, his hands feel like they're made of steel more than bone, and he braces himself as the robot shoots towards him.

It's upon him almost immediately, swiping with a metal-plated limb. He jumps backwards, stumbling awkwardly out of range, before lunging forwards with a wild yell.

His hand slams into the metal and he digs in his claws. At least- he tries; his claws only slide down the metal with a painful screeching noise, leaving behind white scratches but no actual damage.

Izuku has a split second to realize that, to his horror, his quirk is absolutely *useless* against the robots before the single pointer grabs him by his jacket and hurls him into a nearby building.

He hits the wall with a crunch and a pained yell, slumping down and shaking as the robot rounds on him. The Leviathan rushes over him, but he manages to suppress most of it except for his already-formed claws and the fins that sprout out of his matted hair.

The robot shoots forwards with the screech of tires on asphalt, and he barely has time to cross his scaly arms in front of himself and brace for the hit.

It comes, but not in the way he's expecting. Instead of a hulky robotic arm punching him into his next life, he's hit with a shockwave of heat and scrap as the robot explodes in a smoldering flash. Bolts and metal bits hit him in a volley, but most thankfully bounce painlessly off of his scales. Looks like his quirk's useful for something, at least. Immediately after, however, a thick sheet hits him, pinning him against the wall and knocking the air out of his lungs. As he struggles, he notices a silhouette in front of him, and he looks up.

When the smoke clears, he sees another person standing a ways away from him. They're lanky with long blond hair, which is swept back into a surprisingly intact hairstyle. Around their waist is a thick belt, studded with a large glass circle that appears to be steaming.

"Nice team-play there!" They announce in an oddly accented voice when they see him staring. "Nevertheless, it seems we shall not cross paths again!"

Before Izuku even has a chance to respond to that, they're gone; practically skipping away and shining like a glitter palette.

Izuku shakes his head and focuses on the task at hand; getting himself out from under the debris. He presses his back against the wall and grits his teeth, pushing with both the strength he obtained from hauling around robot parts and a touch of the Leviathan's. His arms burn, but the metal groans and topples away, freeing him from his prison.

As Izuku stops to breathe, a mechanical voice announces that he has six minutes left. His head snaps up, and he freezes. Six minutes? It's already been four?

What's the point? A traitorous part of his mind whispers. His quirk is useless against the robots. Even if he finds more to fight, he'll just end up getting crushed again and again.

Still, Izuku thinks, flexing his claws and pressing against the slowly increasing strain on the ropes. He has to try.

It doesn't take long to find the main area; destroyed robots litter the ground in heaps that remind Izuku of the scrap-covered beach, and still more meet their feat at the hands of the other examinees. He hears some yell out their scores as they strike down another foe.

*28 points .*

*45 points .*

It's almost ironic, he thinks as he stands there, watching the robots and contestants weave around each other like they're performing some kind of deadly dance. He, the Leviathan, with a death count beyond measure staining his conscience, can't destroy something when it actually matters.

He doesn't know why he's even surprised.

Still, he throws himself into the fray again and again. He takes on a three-pointer, breathing ragged and hot against his lips, only to be slammed against the ground and tossed like an unwanted ragdoll. He lunges at another one-pointer, swiping and slashing for all he's worth only to be punched in the gut with enough force that he thinks he hears a rib snap.

He's trying his hardest, yet he can't do *anything* .

Izuku can't help the frustrated snarl that escapes him as his teeth sharpen and he feels fins poke at the backs of his arms and legs. The thrashing and churning inside of him is getting stronger; every time he gets weaker, the Leviathan grows more insistent on leeching away control. He can't let it happen.

As he heaves and shakes, pressing his clawed hands into fists with enough force to pierce the leathery skin of his palms, he prepares to dive after another robot. He can't give up. He can't-

There's a tremor and then a massive explosion.

Izuku and the other contestants freeze and look up in horror as slowly, each movement punctuated by the creak of metal and the groaning of gears, a massive robot emerges from a now-destroyed building. It towers above them like a horrifying goliath, eight red eyes glowing like those of a spider about to descend on its prey.

Izuku wonders for a split second if this is how the people who saw the Leviathan for the first time felt, and he promptly feels a little bit sick.

He wonders why Present Mic never mentioned this robot; it's gotta be worth a ton of points, right? Why wouldn't he-

Then he realizes that he *did* .

The towering mechanical monster above him is the zero-pointer.

Izuku should have known U.A. would do something like this.

All around him, the examinees that aren't paralyzed in horror are already running off to find robots worth fighting; why would they bother with an unkillable one for no points?

Izuku swallows, fighting images of a giant, building-destroying creation of hell not unlike this one from his mind and turns to do the same, fins rippling in determination.

That's when he hears it.

His fins flick as they're met with a low, pained groan, and he freezes where he is. His head snaps around, eyes scouring the rubble left by the emergence of the zero-pointer for the source of the noise. There; not far from him, and not far from the zero-pointer, he spots a small shape.

It's the girl who helped him before; she's trapped under a hunk of concrete, shaking and wheezing. Her face is twisted in pain, and she's clawing desperately at the cement beneath her, trying to fight herself free.

For a second, Izuku sees himself; pale and bloodied, leaning against the frame of an abandoned car, coughing up his lungs while blood seeps into the sand around him.

His choice is made before he ever has the chance to make it.

Izuku's brain *screams* at him as he hurtles past the girl, scales coating his legs and turning his pumping steps into long, leaping strides. He sees her out of the corner of his eye as he sprints towards the zero-pointer; she stops to stare at him, wide-eyed, asking the same question that he himself is wondering.

*What the hell are you doing ?*

Izuku's chest burns as he tears his way across the road, claws scraping against the asphalt where they've split through the ends of his shoes. His ears are ringing, and the Leviathan is twisting and shrieking inside of him in a frenzy, but he doesn't care.

He doesn't know what he's doing when he suddenly cuts to the side and throws himself at the nearest building, claws digging into the cracks in the cement as he hauls himself up the wall. He doesn't know what he's doing as he scurries up the side of the building like an annoying insect, sweat dripping down his face in rivers as the zero-pointer takes one giant step towards crushing the nice girl, then another.

He doesn't have a clue what he's doing when he presses himself against the building, braces, and then *pushes* , leaping off of the side of it in one clean arc.

For a second, time slows; Izuku sees himself, drifting through the air right in front of the zero-pointer's massive face. His claws are scratched into nubs, and his arms and legs feel like they're made of lead.

What grabs his attention, however, is the Leviathan; or rather, lack thereof. There's no straining against him; he's weightless, just like he was when the girl he's fighting so hard to save made him so.

It's strange; he's spent so long fighting against the Leviathan, cramming it down into a cage and trying to shout over its roar, that he can't remember what it feels like to not. But now, as his limbs feel light as air and the pressure on the back of his mind is gone, he realizes that he never wants this to end.

Then there's a feeling. He can't describe it as anything else, really; it's like the liquid form of a whisper, shooting through his veins and filling his head with a single thought that he can't put into words. He knows what to do and how to do it, and at the same time, he doesn't.

Izuku opens his mouth, meets the eyes of the zero-pointer, and breathes.

The burning in his limbs shoots through him, flooding his body with fire and pooling into his throat. From there, it blasts through his mouth and past his teeth in a brilliant beam of white lightning that makes the air around it crackle and pop and cleaves through the head of the zero-pointer like a hot knife through butter. The electricity glows with a radioactive green luminescence that gives Izuku the faintest feeling of déjà vu, and it fills the arena with the booming crash of thunder as it fizzles off into nonexistence. Izuku's mind fills with static in a way that feels like someone's pouring a bag of sand into his head, and he's distantly aware of a strange sensation in his throat. What is at first staticky numbness then splits open like a greying cocoon, releasing a tidal wave of pain that sloshes across his face.

A distant part of Izuku's mind thinks; *well, there's the fire-breathing* .

Then Izuku's falling; slipping through the air like a well-shot arrow, hardly even flailing at all. Above him, he sees the zero-pointer tremble and creak to a stop before exploding in a firework of sparks and metal, scattering bolts and wires every which way and splattering the nearby buildings with debris the size of cars.

Izuku, however, is more focused on his mouth; he can't move his lips, but his throat and face are filled with a white-hot pain that fills him like a mold. He tries to scream, but his vocal chords are useless, if they're still anything more than ashes at this point.

The Leviathan is back, churning and twisting inside of him, but he can't get himself to focus on it and crush it down. His control is shot, and there's absolutely nothing he can do as he plummets from above towards a gruesome fate as a stain on the street.

As the gritty cement rushes up towards him, he squeezes his eyes shut and waits.

Instead of an impact, however, there's a whoosh and a solid slap against his cheek. His eyes snap open as the pain races through his face; it's nothing compared to the inferno in his

mouth, but it's enough to make him gasp and cough up a few sparks.

Then he realizes he's weightless yet again. He spirals through the air, coming to a stop a few inches above the pavement, where he drifts aimlessly.

Then it's over, and he falls the last few inches and hits the ground with a crunch. He lays there, wheezing and gasping. Each breath feels like it's made of magma and brimstone, but he forces himself to not stop. He's aware of tears flowing down his face, running over his blackened lips and scorched neck, and there's nothing he can do to stop them.

But out of the corner of his eye, he sees the girl staring at him. She's panting and exhausted, but she's okay. She's okay.

At least he did something right.

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Ochako is trapped.

The last thing she'd seen was that- that *thing* bursting out of the wall in front of her, deadly and menacing, before a hunk of concrete had fallen over her and crushed her like a flimsy piece of cardboard.

Now, she can see the same robot slowly stomping towards her, feet growing closer and closer to crushing her. No, no, *no*. She can't die here. She needs to become a hero- no, she needs to stay around for her parents. She can't die here. *She won't die here*.

Ochako groans and screams in frustration as her fingernails scrabble uselessly over the asphalt beneath her. She strains and paints, trying to push herself up, but the cement weighing her down is too heavy, and she can barely move it.

She tries to twist around her arms and use her quirk, but her hands are pinned in front of her. No matter how she struggles, there's no way she can find a way to touch it.

She's desperate as she yells and pushes at it desperately, cursing her own weakness. Why won't it *move*? Why can't she get up?

Then there's a blur of movement just beyond her, and for a split second, Ochako locks eyes with the boy from before.

She hadn't thought anything of him when she'd used her quirk to keep him from tripping not an hour ago. He'd just been another person she could help, so she had.

Then she'd seen his face; cleaved in two by a thin white mark that contrasted sharply with his dark freckles. Beyond that was a pair of green eyes; deep, like a forest, yet weighed down and pained by something Ochako couldn't understand.

She'd known that he hadn't just been anyone. But she'd been so nervous about the test, she'd run off before he could even say a word.

Now, though, she knows that he's far more than 'not just anyone'. She can only watch as he tears down the road with inhuman speed, running *towards* the thing rather than away. Why? What is he doing?

Then he clammers up the wall with breathtaking ease, lunges off of it, and fires a glowing thread of lightning that branches out like a tree straight into the mechanical monsters head.

Ochako watches in shock as the robot groans to a stop, no longer in danger of crushing her like a bug, and then *explodes* in a plume of red and orange light. It sends spots dancing across her vision, and she rubs her eyes with the back of one sweaty wrist before looking up again. Among the debris hitting the ground all around her like meteors she spots a familiar shape, and gasps when she realizes what it is.

It's the boy; he's falling, plummeting towards the ground with no signs of stopping. If he hits the concrete at that speed, he'll die, and nobody can help him. Nobody, that is, except Ochako.

She has one chance, and it'll hurt like hell, but she *has to* . She can't mess this up.

As the scarred boy falls towards her like an angel cast into hell, she pulls her hand back and slices it through the air with more force than ever before.

It collides with something soft with a resounding *smack* , and Ochako pours her quirk through the connection and siphons away its gravity with practiced precision. As she pulls her hands away from what she realizes is the boy's cheek, she watches in horror as he continues to fall. No, no, *no* -

He stops, coming to a rapid halt a few inches above the ground, coughing up sparks and groaning but very much alive.

Ochako breathes a sigh of relief and presses her fingers together, whispering, "Release."

Nausea hits her immediately, flowing over her like a sickly tidal wave, and she promptly loses her breakfast all over the cement in front of her. Her whole body is shaking, either from exertion or overuse of her quirk, but she can't find it in herself to care. She wheezes for a moment, swallowing the acidic taste in her mouth, before looking up.

The scarred boy is lying on his side on the ground not far from her, shaking and coughing. His back is to her at first, but then he rolls over, and Ochako can see his face.

It's horrifying, quite honestly; Ochako doesn't know what lightning or fire-breathing quirks are supposed to look like, but it can't be *this* .

His neck and the lower part of his face are charred black and flaking off, and his face is twisted into what Ochako can only describe as horrific pain.

"Oh- oh my god," she manages to say over the weight crushing her and the tightness in her own throat. "Are you okay?"

Scar boy doesn't respond, but he looks up, eyes searching desperately. They land on her like searchlights over a dark ocean, and his expression loosens a little bit. Ochako swears he tries to smile, but he can't seem to do it.

She tries to speak, but can't.

“ **THE TEST IS OVER!** ” Present Mic announces suddenly, and scar boy's face suddenly goes blank. His eyes go wide for a moment before squeezing shut as he curls in on himself with a pained groan.

Ochako's vision is then obscured as the other examinees rush over to examine the exploded remains of the giant robot and the charred kid lying on the ground. She can't focus on what they're saying, but their excitement quickly turns to horror when they realize what scar kid's quirk has done to him.

“I-Is he gonna be okay?”

“What kind of quirk *is* that?”

“It's crazy powerful, you've gotta give him that.”

The rest of the replies follow a similar suit as the examinees talk amongst themselves, and a brave few step forward to poke scar kid on the shoulder. Ochako wants to yell at them to *not do that* , but her throat is sealed shut.

Eventually, a few students notice her and run over, beckoning the others and shouting. Together, a few of them manage to heft the cement off of her, grunting and groaning all the while. It hits the ground with a solid thunk, and she wheezes a thanks and sucks in a few lungfuls of dusty air. Her arms feel like they're made of molten lead, but she's just thankful to be alive.

Thankful to *someone* , to be exact.

Ochako half walks, half crawls towards the broken shape of the scarred boy and stops, unsure what exactly to say. *Thanks for saving my life? I'm sorry about your face?* What-

“Thanks,” he rasps before she can figure it out, and it takes her a minute to figure out what he's said; his voice is absolutely destroyed.

“No, no, thank *you* ,” she insists before she can overthink it. “I would have *died* if it weren't for you, I- I-”

“I'm glad you're okay,” he whispers, and his voice is like sandpaper as his eyes squeeze shut in pain. Ochako doesn't know what to do- should she call an ambulance? Surely U.A. has *something* prepared.

They do, in the form of a tiny lady in a hero costume, who hobbles towards them out of the crowd. She's wearing a white lab coat, and her grey hair is held up in a tight bun. Part of her face is covered by a translucent purple visor, which she appears to have no trouble seeing through.

“Go home, lads, I’ll take it from here,” she says, handing what almost looks like gummies to a few of the nearby examinees, who awkwardly stutter out their thanks.

“That’s Recovery Girl,” Ochako hears a nearby examinee whisper excitedly. “She’s a mainstay here at U.A.- and the reason they can do things like this!”

Recovery Girl comes to a stop in front of scar kid, looking him up and down curiously. Ochako doesn’t know what to tell her.

“I- He-”

“Hush,” Recovery Girl says, although it’s less of a command then a soothing word. “He’ll be okay.”

As she leans over scar kid, her eyes crease underneath her visor and her expression turns almost concerned.

“You inflicted this much damage on yourself with your own quirk, huh?” She murmurs so quietly Ochako almost doesn’t hear it, and then she leans forward and kisses his forehead.

Ochako stares in confusion, wondering what’s going on, when suddenly scar boy’s skin seems to start glowing. His burnt, cracked skin slowly melts back into a solid mouth and neck, and moments later, it’s like nothing ever happened.

Scar boy freezes, and his eyes slowly flutter back open. He looks up as one hand slowly reaches up to brush his chin, rubbing over now smooth skin in surprise.

“Wh-” He starts to say, but winces as his voice comes out in a gravelly whisper. Recovery Girl tsks and gently baps him on the head with her syringe-shaped walker, shaking her head.

“I healed you for the most part, but you shouldn’t try to talk for a little while. You’re lucky to still have your vocal chords; give them a rest.”

Scar boy looks at the ground and nods, although he looks oddly relieved. Maybe because he’s no longer in brutal pain, Ochako thinks.

“Now you, young lady,” Recovery Girl says, and Ochako blinks and looks up right as a pale pair of lips press themselves against her forehead.

It’s like someone has squeezed the light out of the sun’s rays and poured it over her; the pain vanishes like someone rubbed it away with a chalkboard eraser, replaced by soothing relief. The bruises on her back and the cracks in her nails disappear, and Ochako can’t help the sigh that escapes her.

Recovery Girl chuckles lightly and moves on to other students as scar boy stands up, although he’s wobbly. Ochako follows, hovering hesitantly at his side and unsure whether or not to offer help.

“I’m okay,” he says when he notices her watching, and his voice is hardly a sandy whisper. Ochako watches the way his face crinkles into a pained smile, and she can’t help but think how *wrong* it looks.

“She- Recovery Girl told you not to talk,” Ochako says awkwardly. Scar boy rubs the back of his neck sheepishly, but he doesn’t try talking again.

Ochako’s wondering if she should just leave when she realizes that he still doesn’t know her name, and he doesn’t know hers.

“Oh!” She blurts, and scar boy flinches and stares at her, wide-eyed. “I- We never got each other’s names!”

He relaxes a tiny bit, and Ochako can’t help but wonder what he thought she was going to say.

“I’m Uraraka Ochako,” she says with a wave. “You don’t have to tell me yours, but-”

“Midoriya.” He cuts her off, before going wide-eyed and taking a step back. Ochako doesn’t bother telling him not to talk again.

“Nice to meet you, Midoriya,” she says with a smile. “I hope we both make it in.”

He nods, and Ochako knows that even if she didn’t pass the exam, she’s done something right today.

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Ochako’s almost to the gate when she overhears one of the boys in her testing area talking to a cluster of people near the wall. She almost doesn’t pay any attention to it, but then she hears ‘lightning’ and ‘destroyed the zero-pointer’ and maybe slows down and starts listening a bit more closely.

“I feel kind of bad for him, though,” the one in her exam is saying. “He destroyed the zero-pointer and saved some girl, but he still didn’t get a single point.”

Ochako’s eyes go wide, and she freezes. Midoriya didn’t get a single point? How is that possible? He destroyed the zero-pointer with a single hit! How could he not have-

She thinks of Midoriya’s face, charred and smoking as he cringes and coughs. He couldn’t have used the lightning breath before; it’s pretty clearly a one-time use.

She’s still thinking about it when she stops at the gate, entrance ticket still clutched in her sweaty hand. The outside world beckons, telling her to leave the fantasy she’s in and return home.

Ochako thinks of her 28 points, and how useless they would have been if she was nothing more than a splatter on the bottom of a giant robot’s foot, and then she thinks of a boy with no points who sacrificed everything to save her.

She turns away from the entrance, striding purposely back into the building. There has to be something she can do.

## Chapter End Notes

Some Ochako action! Finally, I've been waiting for her.

I split from canon slightly with her and Izuku, but it shouldn't cause any major differences. (Other than the obvious "deku" spiel.)

Thanks for all the support!

# bring to life these rusted gears

## Chapter Summary

In which Toshinori speaks his mind, Bit and Izuku make a new friend (but not in the way they might have hoped), a familiar face makes a return, and a week of waiting comes to a close.

## Chapter Notes

guess whomst

thank you to tanzytechgem for beta reading!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“You seem rather thoughtful.”

Toshinori looks up from where he’s been carefully tracing his finger around the rim of his steaming cup, blinking in surprise. Across the table from him, Naomasa is watching him with an amused look. Toshinori wonders how long he’s let his mind wander.

He smiles and rubs the back of his neck, blond strands of hair sliding into his face as he chuckles awkwardly.

“Something on your mind?” Naomasa asks, taking a sip from his mug of coffee. Toshinori decides against commenting on the fact that it’s almost two in the afternoon and that the cup is still steaming, instead settling for answering the question.

“Yes,” he admits. It’s the truth; ever since Nedzu allowed him to watch the Entrance Exams, he’s been lost in thought. It’s bothered him. It won’t do him well to be distracted in a fight.

Nonetheless, his mind still keeps straying back to the stringy, green-haired boy from the underpass.

“Mind if I ask what’s captured your attention?” Naomasa asks, leaning back in the booth. Toshinori can’t help but glance up and around before he answers.

The café he’s offered to meet Naomasa at is a small one; not many people come here, and those who do usually pay no mind to the thin, scraggly man who seems to appear out of nowhere. Toshinori finds he somewhat likes the quiet; not that he doesn’t enjoy the fame and

prestige he's awarded as All-Might, it's just nice to relax every now and then, even if it goes hand-in-hand with the guilt gnawing at his stomach.

There's no one else in the cafe right now other than an elderly woman in the corner who's staring at her phone as she sips her coffee. She doesn't appear to take notice of either Toshinori or Naomasa, so he sighs, leans forward, and explains.

He doesn't mention every detail, but he does his best to recount the encounter he had with a particularly nasty slime villain and a strange, terrified boy with a reptilian quirk. He talks about how the boy had seemed so *frail* then, which was nothing less than what Toshinori would have expected from one who had been through such an ordeal.

But then he tells Naomasa about how he'd watched the same boy, now stronger and bolder, demolish the massive zero-pointer at the cost of his own safety to save a girl he'd likely never met. He talks about how he'd seen the boy as he left, shoulders low yet eyes sparkling with victory.

He also mentions the boy's thin scar that reaches across his face like someone once tried to sew him back together, a mark which was certainly not there the last time Toshinori met him.

Naomasa listens raptly as he talks, his focus wavering only every now and then when he glances down to take a sip of coffee. He lets Toshinori prattle on and on until his thoughts are spent, spread across the table for all to see like cards in a game.

"It's odd. I just can't seem to get my mind off of him," Toshinori finishes. It *is* odd; he's seen plenty of astonishing individuals and strange quirks, but this boy just seems to strike a chord with him.

"Well," Naomasa says after a while of pensive silence. "Could he be the one?"

Toshinori has to take a moment and think about it. He's wondered about it, asking himself if the reason his mind refuses to move on from the boy is that he could possibly be the next holder of One for All. It's no simple decision; he'll have to get to know the boy far better. He can't imagine it will be too hard, seeing as he'll be working at U.A., but he'll have to be careful.

"I don't know," he answers, and it's the truth.

Naomasa nods, finishing off his coffee and staring out

"It's a start," he says, and Toshinori can't help but agree.

From there, the conversation passes into something more lighthearted. Toshinori lightly scolds Naomasa after he tries to order another coffee, and Naomasa responds by calling him a hypocrite. A part of Toshinori's mind still lingers on the strange boy, but the rest finally lets go and lets him enjoy this brief moment of peace.

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Izuku sighs, rubbing his face as the crashing waves throw another cloud of salty spray into his face. Beyond where he's curled up on the sand, the sea paces up and down the shore like a worried animal, reaching out with sweeping curtains of blue and trying to brush the tips of his bare feet.

The moon is only just rising above the horizon, alone in the darkness except for a few wispy clouds. Izuku knows his mom will be worried, but he doesn't want to think about it right now.

He crosses his arms behind his head, laying down and training his eyes on the ghostly glow of the moon. It's full tonight and brighter than he's ever seen it.

Izuku likes the moon; it's not as valued or appreciated as the sun, but it does its work nonetheless. It doesn't ask for a reward when it climbs the dome of the night sky each evening, and it doesn't worry when people thank the sun for what it does.

In some abstract way, it reminds Izuku of underground heroes.

Thinking about heroes revives the pain in his chest as his test score flashes across his mind's eye; not a single point, and not a single hope.

Izuku grits his teeth and tries to swallow the thoughts that swim up from the darker part of his mind.

*Did you really think the Leviathan could make it into the hero course of all thing? Have you forgotten what you've done?*

*How could you protect others from villains when you can't even protect them from yourself?*

Izuku lets out a gurgled yell, and he can't tell if its distortion is thanks to Leviathan or the current state of his throat. His hands clench up, sore fingers digging into the rough sand. The thoughts refuse to stop.

*You don't have the right to stand alongside them.*

*You don't deserve to be a hero.*

*You don't deserve anything.*

"I know I don't deserve it!" Izuku screams, breaking out of the spiral of thoughts. His throat feels like it's made of hot rocks and burns like he's swallowed magma, but he doesn't care. "That's why I'm going to *earn it*!"

Today he learned that his quirk could be used for good. He bent his quirk to his will, and he saved a life.

He doesn't deserve to be a hero yet, so he's going to prove himself to everyone; to the people he killed, to the world, and to himself.

Midoriya Izuku is going to make up for what he's done, or he's going to die trying.

Izuku stays where he is, breathing heavily with his eyes squeezed shut. His lungs expand and compress like a rusty billow, and each breath sounds more like a wheezing sob than a noise a normal human should make.

There's no way he possibly got into the Hero Course, but he has a pretty good chance of making General Education. Izuku's seen rumors online that heroes have gotten transferred into the Hero Course from there after forcing themselves into the spotlight at the Sports Festival. Izuku will just have to be one of those people.

He sits up, shaking sand out of his hair like a dog. The sea curls around where his heels are pressed into the sand, the tide having reached up in the time he's been lying here. It's still warm, and Izuku dips his hands into it the next time it drifts up to him. The water runs over his hands, and as it recedes, it takes the darker thoughts with it.

Izuku gets to his feet, wiping off his sandy hands on his shorts. The ocean wind rustles his hair, whispering a quiet goodbye, and Izuku turns and heads away from the beach.

The walk home is short most days, but Izuku moves slower than usual tonight. His mom already knows about the test; he filled her in before disappearing into his room for a few hours. She tried to offer pity at first, but gave up after a while and told him that she was always there to talk.

Izuku had slipped out of his room while she was watching the news and headed to the beach, desperate for some isolation. He'd left a note to make sure that his mom didn't think that it was going to be a repeat of what had happened ten months ago, but he knows she'll fuss over him nonetheless.

He pauses to kick a lone soda can that's lying on the sidewalk, sending it flying into the street. As it clatters across the ground, he hears a sudden shout.

"Get back here, you piece of shit!"

Izuku turns to the direction of the noise, blinking in surprise as the Leviathan begins to wake out of anxiety. Sprinting towards him, glasses askew and hair blasted with smoke, is Bit.

'*Bit?*' is all Izuku has time to think before Bit slams into him with a yell of surprise, knocking them both to the pavement. They hit the ground hard, and Izuku grunts as his bruised back grated across the rough cement.

"Oh, fu- Mido!" Bit says, and Izuku opens his eyes to see Bit crouched over him.

"I- I didn't see you there, sorry--"

There's a furious yell, and Bit ducks as a bottle flies at where his head has just been and shatters at the pavement.

Izuku tries to ask *what exactly* Bit's gotten himself into now, but his throat protests painfully. He swallows and clambers to his feet, rubbing the back of his neck as the Leviathan swirls inside of him threateningly.

Running towards them is a man, clearly enraged. He doesn't look like any sort of villain Izuku's ever seen, which is good, but it doesn't make the current situation any less terrifying.

The man is heavily built, with a thick beard and short hair, which Izuku notices is partly scorched off. He looks back at Bit and takes note of the palm-sized capsule in his hand, connecting the pieces himself.

"Come on, Mido!" Bit yells, waving one arm, and Izuku turns to see him running down the street. He hesitates for a split second before racing to follow as the man picks up the kicked soda can off of the ground and slugs it at him.

As soon as he takes a step, the Leviathan roars to life inside of him. He can feel the hum of electricity deep inside his chest, and the straining in his gut is suddenly overwhelming.

Izuku stumbles as the Leviathan howls inside of him, sending a wave of scales clambering up his arms and turning his hands into curved talons. Still, he keeps running, pressing down on the fear that's managed to worm its way into his chest.

He catches up to Bit quickly, torn sneakers pounding on the cement. His legs are still sore from the exam, and he's exhausted, but he can't think about that right now. Behind them, the man howls and seethes in anger, likely mourning his worsened hairdo.

"Get back here, you little rat!" He yells, and Izuku is distinctly reminded of Kacchan.

Izuku's mind flickers to life like an old computer, presenting a solution that should have made itself known ages ago. He's run down this street to escape Kacchan a million times before; he knows how to lose someone.

Izuku grabs Bit's arm, careful not to tear his shirt with his claws, and pulls him along as he ducks into a narrow alley. Up ahead, there's a chain-link fence that's relatively easy to jump if he gets the momentum, and beyond that, there's a dark street with dozens of good hiding places.

Izuku increases his speed and jumps, swinging up and over the fence. Behind him, Bit pauses and stares at him in momentary awe before hoisting himself up the wires and dropping down to the other side with precision that Izuku can't help but think looks practiced. Izuku doesn't stop to look back, tearing down the alley onto the street. He grabs Bit and drags him around the corner, scanning the area before choosing to duck behind a bush. Bit crouches beside him, breathing heavily and ignoring Izuku's poignant stare.

"It was an accident-" He starts to whisper before going silent a second before the man bursts out on the street. Izuku's almost impressed that he managed to climb the fence.

"Where'd you go, brats?" He says. He's unsurprisingly met with no response. Then, however, he starts making weird sniffing noises.

The realization hits Izuku right as the man peers over the top of the bush with a devilish grin.

“Bloodhound,” he says, and Izuku realizes he’s talking about his quirk. “Let’s me smell you wherever you go.”

Izuku barely jumps out of the way as the man swings one fist at his head, sliding across the pavement on all fours. His head pounds, and the Leviathan sweeps through his legs. He hears them crack loudly as another joint twists itself into place, and the static in his ears grows louder. He’s still exhausted from the exam, and he wonders how much longer of this he’ll be able to take.

He doesn’t know what to do. Does he fight back? Would he be arrested for using his quirk to attack someone, even in self-defense?

The thought of ending up in the police station makes him sick.

The man has long forgotten him and is focusing on Bit, screaming bloody murder about a laser. He takes a step closer, and Izuku doesn’t even think; he just starts bracing himself, ready to jump between the two.

“Hey, could you hold this? Thanks!” A new voice asks, and Izuku stares as a styrofoam takeout box has dropped into his hands.

He looks at the box blankly for a second before his eyes flit up to find the newcomer. Next to him stands a boy; not much older than him, but taller and strongly built. His short blond hair is stuck up in a somewhat unruly cowlick, and his face is split into a beaming grin.

“Sorry if this gets awkward!” He warns, and Izuku doesn’t even have a chance to puzzle out what *that* means before the stranger is between Bit and the angry man.

“Excuse me, sir,” he says in a chipper voice as if the older man isn’t trying to burn him into the ground with a glare. “What seems to be the issue here?”

“That brat lasered all of my hair off!” The man snarls. Behind the blond-haired person, Bit slides to his feet and stands up rod-straight.

“You walked in front of my lightsaber,” he accuses, and Izuku has to take a minute to figure out what he means.

“You have a lightsaber? Like the ones from Star Wars?” Blond hair asks curiously, turning to watch Bit. Izuku wants to warn him; once Bit’s found a fellow connoisseur of century-old movies and memes, he’ll talk for hours.

As he’d been expecting, Bit’s face lights up.

“Yes! You know it?”

“Of course!” Blond hair grins, and it practically lights up the block. Izuku’s reminded momentarily of All Might. “Who doesn’t?”

The answer to that is Izuku, apparently.

“I swear to god,” the first man growls, seething at either being cut off from his victim or ignored. Suddenly, he pulls back his arm and swings it around in a surprisingly quick right hook.

Izuku’s not fast enough to cry out. The man’s arm hits blond hair’s head-

And passes right through.

Izuku stares in shock as the man, evidently surprised, loses his balance. Quick as a shot, blond hair spins around, grabs the man’s arm, and holds it in a vice-like grip.

“I can’t arrest you since I’m not on patrol, but I *can* report you to the authorities,” he says, and his tone is more threatening than it was before. He must be a pro-hero, Izuku realizes. Oh, shit.

“Who do you think you are?” The man snarls, trying to wrench his arm free to no avail.

“Togata Mirio,” blond hair- Togata says. “You might also know me as Lemillion- the hero that’s going to save a million lives!”

The man still looks furious, but Izuku can see flecks of surprise and fear in his eyes.

“Fine,” he spits, and Togata lets go of his arm. With that, he trudges off, muttering under his breath about stupid kids and going to shave.

As he leaves, the roar in Izuku’s ears grows and grows until it makes his legs wobbly. He tries to keep his expression passive as the man rounds the corner and disappears from view. His footsteps echo off into silence, and the man is gone.

The Leviathan’s churning suddenly becomes subdued; the change almost gives Izuku whiplash it’s so fast. The Leviathan goes from screeching and tearing at the ropes to curling up; still poised, but calmer.

Izuku lets himself relax a little bit, confused but still thankful.

“Now!” Togata says suddenly, and Izuku realizes that *they’re* probably going to get in trouble too.

He points at Bit, who looks at the accusatory finger blankly.

“You really should be more careful when handling lightsabers. I’ll let you off with a warning this time, though, alright?”

Bit doesn’t even try to contradict him; he seems more excited about the fact that Togata knows what a lightsaber is. Izuku can’t help but be impressed; he hadn’t known until Bit had forced him to watch the movies it was from.

“Yes, sir!” Bit salutes, and Izuku elbows him in the side. This earns him a shit-eating grin that should not be on the face of someone who almost got their nose broken by a pissed-off adult.

“And thanks for getting me out of there,” Bit says, and it takes Izuku a minute to realize that he’s addressing him. “I’m usually better at that, but he caught me off guard.”

“Can I ask why you were carrying a lightsaber on you?” Togata interjects, and Izuku can’t help but be grateful; it’s the same question he’d been wondering but unable to ask.

“It’s... not *exactly* functional, yet,” Bit admits. “I needed something to regulate the heat output, and the lady who owns the department store down the block sometimes gives me discounts if I show her what I’m working on.”

Togata nods, although he clearly doesn’t understand exactly what all of that means. “And you made it yourself?”

“Yep!” Bit grins. Izuku rolls his eyes.

“Well, thanks for saving our asses,” Bit says. I’m Okyoita Aki, but you call me Bit.”

Togata blinks at him. Izuku catches his eye and shrugs, nodding and hoping he gets the message.

“Well, Bit,” he says. “My name is Togata Mirio!”

Bit waves, and there’s a moment of silence before he looks at Izuku curiously. Izuku realizes painfully late that he’s supposed to introduce himself.

“I-I’m...” He starts but cringes as it comes out sounding like sandpaper. His throat doesn’t feel much different.

Bit’s surprise is evident on his face, and he opens his mouth only to be cut off by Togata.

“Hold on,” Togata says, looking at him carefully. “Fin things... Lizard quirk... Did you take the U.A. Entrance Exam today?”

Izuku nods, surprise rising in him. Togata knows? How?

Togata’s grin grows. “You’re the kid that blew up the huge robot with your lightning breath, right? Nejire was telling me about you!”

Izuku slowly nods again, face colored by shock. Someone was talking about him? *What?*

“Hold on, he *what*?” Bit cuts in, looking at Izuku like he’s grown another ear. Izuku can’t blame him.

“Nejire said they let her and Ryukyu mentor watch the exams. She said that the lightning apparently did something to you. Is that why you can’t talk?”

Izuku stares, still flabbergasted. Why is this probably-a-pro-hero talking about *him*? It seems... Impossible.

“What the *fuck* ,” Bit says, catching the attention of both of them. Togata lightly scolds him for language, but the reprimand slides right off.

“You- You can *breathe lightning* ? Holy- Why didn’t you tell me?”

Izuku tries to convey *How was I supposed to fucking know I could do it?* Through a facial expression. It doesn’t work.

“Your name, though...” Togata continues, puzzled. “I don’t know if Nejire ever-“

“This is Midoriya Izuku,” Bit says, scrubbing a hand through Izuku’s hair. “Professional lizard and future underground hero.”

Izuku squawks, which results in a coughing fit as he tries to pry Bit’s fingers out of his hair. He still can’t help but grin a bit, even if it feels traitorous.

“Underground Hero!” Togata says. “So that’s why you’re trying to get into U.A. I think there are a few people in my class who are going to be underground heroes.”

Izuku stares. Togata’s in U.A.? He thought he was already a pro-hero.

That reminds him of a question he’s been meaning to ask, although it also reminds him that he doesn’t know how to ask it. He chews on his lip for a second, before attempting to gesture his words. This falls flat, and he sighs and awkwardly does his best to mime a hand going through his head. Togata watches him curiously before a lightbulb seems to go off.

“Oh! You’re wondering about my quirk, right?”

Izuku nods hastily, somewhat proud of himself for getting the question across and ignoring Bit’s amused look.

“It’s called permeation,” Togata says, before glancing behind him. “Actually, I’ll tell you about it on the way to... Wherever you’re going. I wouldn’t want you to get hurt under my watch!”

“I’m going home,” Bit offers with a shrug, glancing at Izuku curiously. Izuku nods, although the thought of being walked home is somewhat awkward. “So is Mido. My house is on the way to his.”

“Alright!” Togata says with a grin, and he spends the rest of the walk to Bit’s house explaining his quirk- he can just *pass through things, holy shit* - and weathering the barrage of questions Bit shoots him on Izuku’s behalf.

Then, in a blink, they’re at Bit’s doorstep. It feels like they arrive too fast; Izuku wants to keep walking. He likes Togata, with his smile that radiates warmth and safety and his exuberant way of talking.

“This is my stop,” Bit says. “Thanks for all the help, Togata. And *you* -“ He points an accusing finger at Izuku, who raised an eyebrow. “*Text me.*”

If there's anyone who would be interested in Izuku- no, the Leviathan's sudden development of lightning abilities, it would be Bit.

Izuku's not sure if he'll have enough energy to do so, so he shrugs. Best not to make any promises.

Suddenly, Togata makes a noise of realization and proceeds to offer both of them his phone number. Bit raises an eyebrow but accepts, punching it into his phone. Izuku hesitates, but Togata grins and says, "Don't worry, it's because I like you, not so I can report you to the police."

*He wouldn't be so nice if he knew what you'd done.*

Izuku frowns, banishing the thought. He's going to make up for it. He's going to earn the second chance that his lack of recognition has offered him.

He adds a new contact to his phone and labels it Togata. It's one of very few, but he can't help the excited glow that rises in his chest.

"Good night!" Bit calls, and Izuku looks up, to see him waving from the door. He waves back, hoping Bit doesn't blow anything else up.

The walk to Izuku's house is short and painfully quiet. Izuku wishes he could talk. Still, Togata doesn't seem to mind. He seems content to stroll at Izuku's side, the reclaimed box of takeout under one arm.

It's nice, this silent companionship. It makes him feel like he's someone who deserves it, if only until his doubts eat away at his momentary confidence.

He can't help being distracted, though; the Leviathan almost burned through his grip. He almost lost control, and in front of Bit. The thought of Bit seeing him for what he is, what he's done, makes him sick. As cruel as it feels, lying like this, he won't let Bit know.

He owes Togata for that.

When they arrive at Izuku's house, he turns and rubs his neck, staring up at Togata.

"Uh," he forces out, wincing at the sound. "Th-thanks."

"You're welcome!" Togata says. "Don't force yourself to talk if it hurts you, though."

Izuku nods, feeling a bit sheepish. Togata gives him a thumbs up.

Bidding Togata farewell, he opens the door to his house, expecting the instant barrage of motherhood that usually follows such an escapade. Sure enough, his mom is there in an instant, worrying over him and berating him over being out so late. He awkwardly sidesteps her questions, partially thanks to his inability to verbally answer them. As he talks, he realizes he can feel the emotions he felt earlier returning to settle over him in a dark cloud. He sighs, deciding to go to bed and hope sleep drags him out of his misery.

Once his mom releases him, he manages to convey an awkward goodnight and pads off to his room to get ready for bed. As he walks by the mirror, he realizes his fins are still fully spread, waving slightly.

He squashes the feeling and pushes the fins down until they disappear.

When he settles into bed, he pulls his phone onto his chest and squints at the brightly glowing screen for a bit. Exhaustion tugs at his limbs, singing a quiet song of rest, and he sighs and opts to weather Bit's wrath and tell him tomorrow. He opens his text messages with Bit, rolling his eyes at the contact name he'd set and typing out his message.

**Izuku [9:46]**

ill tell you about the exam tomorrow okay

Im really tired

**10000 degree knife [9:48]**

okay but you better give me all the details

you can breathe lightning?? what the fuck????

**Izuku [9:49]**

apparently?

ill tell you tomorrow

good night

please don't blow anything up while I'm asleep

**10000 degree knife [9:50]**

sleep well dragon boy

also no promises

Izuku snorts at the new nickname before sending a text to Togata before he forgets about it.

## Izuku [9:52]

this is midoriya. thanks again :)

With a sigh, Izuku settles into the bed, plugging in his phone and resting it on the nightstand. Almost as soon as his head hits the pillow, the day's events and exhaustion weigh him down and drag him into a blissfully dreamless sleep.

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The room is small, with bland, white walls lit by an occasionally flickering fluorescent light. The floor is a similarly tasteless white tile, which is splattered with dust and grime that's accumulated over the years. The room's furniture isn't much better; there's a rickety old cot, a barren shelf, and a toilet in the far corner.

The only break from the monochrome emptiness is a single window, barred to prevent possible escape. Beyond the glass is inky blackness that sharply contrasts with the white.

The bed squeaks shrilly as Yatsuihiro sits down on it with a poorly disguised grimace and crosses his legs. He stares blankly at the tile beneath his feet, mindlessly watching nothing at all.

In the ten months he's been here, he's somewhat run out of things to think about. The first few months had been okay; he'd had things to mull over to pass the time. Now, though, his head just feels empty, almost like someone's drained it.

Some nights he'll find that he can't sleep at all and he'll end up staring at something for hours while his mind shifts in uncomfortable circles. He hates it. He hates it here.

It had started with an accident; he'd been young. He'd been stupid. Robbing a grocery store was like level one, and he hadn't even been able to pull that off. He'd been scared out of his mind as he'd grabbed that kid from the crowd, and then everything had gone to shit.

Fuck guardian angels; that kid had a guardian *devil*. How else could he fucking explain what had happened?

But the incident had brought an epiphany. When he'd held his shaking blades inches from that kid's throat, the police couldn't do anything. He'd had the upper hand, and it had made him feel powerful.

After that, it was simple; snatch some unsuspecting dumbass, get some cash in exchange for them, and get out. Sure, it was like walking through a maze of tripwires, but he knew where to step.

The incident with the annoying brat with a sharp tongue should have been just another tally in his list of endeavors, but no. The guardian devil had been there. Yatsuihiro knew that it was

the same creature that had attacked him the first time, except condensed into a smaller, more human form. He'd barely gotten a good look at it. The damn thing moved so fast.

Then it had disappeared, leaving him to get thrown into a jail cell and left to rot.

Yatsuhiro clenches his fist; something he can't usually do, thanks to his quirk. It takes focus, but he can change his blades back into oddly metallic hands for a short while. He's gotten better at it since he's arrived.

The door at the far end of the room creaks slightly, and Yatsuhiro looks up. Usually, the guards don't bother him this late; he's supposed to be asleep.

For a moment, there's silence, and Yatsuhiro wonders if he's finally losing his mind. Then, there's a strange noise, and the door begins to change.

It starts near the handle; the shiny white paint begins to crack like dried soil, before turning a lifeless grey and cracking off in thin flakes. Beneath it, Yatsuhiro can see the same thing happening to the door itself. The grey spreads with a strange fizzing noise, enveloping the door like a disease. Within minutes, there's nothing left except a mound of dust in the doorway.

Yatsuhiro looks up from the floor and stares at the stranger now standing there. They're dressed in simply a black hoodie and jeans, one elbow propped against the doorframe nonchalantly. Their skin is deathly pale, more ghostly than human, and their eyes are concealed by a horribly tangled mess of sickly blue hair.

"Daigo Yatsuhiro?" the stranger asks, and Yatsuhiro stares in disgust at dry, chapped lips.

"Who are you?" He says, cutting straight to the point. He honestly has no fucking idea who this person is; they're definitely not a guard, and he's never seen a prisoner who looks like *this*.

The stranger's face curls into a catlike grin that is far too wide for Yatsuhiro's taste, and he barely keeps himself from wrinkling his nose. If the stranger notices, they don't react.

"So it *is* you. You're more boring in person."

Yatsuhiro bristles, both at the insinuation and the complete avoidance of his question, but he keeps his face neutral. He needs to find out what's going on.

"You're not here to talk," he says. "What do you want?"

"Skipping through my dialogue, huh?" The stranger says to themselves, before addressing him. "To get you out."

Yatsuhiro pauses, a bolt distrust flashing through him.

"At what price?" He asks, because nothing in this world comes for free; not the lives he's ransomed, and not his own.

“We think you could be useful,” the stranger says, as if that explains everything.

“We?”

“The League of Villains.”

“Never heard of you. What do you want me for?”

“Let’s just say we’re planning something. Something big.” The stranger grins. “And we know what you’re capable of. You could be very helpful.”

Yatsuhiko knows that agreeing blindly to anything is like stepping directly on the tripwire. He lets his hands shift back into blades with a metallic screech, flicking them to get them spinning slowly.

“What are you planning?” He asks.

“You’ll find out when you agree,” the stranger muses, and Yatsuhiko notes that he says when. He knows that he has the upper hand and that Yatsuhiko is at the disadvantage. He hates it.

“Well? Clock’s ticking.”

“Help with your plan is all you want?” Yatsuhiko asks. The stranger nods, and something under that mess of hair gleams in the pale light.

“Fine,” he slowly says. It’s stupid, but it’s his only option for the time being. He’ll find a way to bend this man sooner or later. He’ll get out. He always does.

The stranger’s face splits into a grin, dry skin cracking.

“*Perfect*. My name is Shigaraki. Welcome to the League of Villains.”

When Shigaraki leads him out of the white, empty cell, trotting like the pretentious showpony bastard he appears to be, Yatsuhiko doesn’t look back.

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Izuku stands in a dark alley lit only by a single, flickering streetlight. Beyond the frail curtain of yellow light is pitch blackness and utter silence; not a single car drives by, and no people can be seen or heard.

Izuku knows how this goes.

He’s dreaming again. It’s been a few months since he’s had the dream; he shouldn’t be surprised, quite honestly, that it’s come back now. Still, he can’t help but be disappointed as well as curious as to *when* he fell asleep.

His mind is foggy. He knows who he is and where he is, but memories outside of the dream are blurred and distorted like he’s watching them through frosted glass. Izuku squints and

gropes through his mind, trying to figure out where his sleeping self is, but he can't seem to remember.

Izuku sighs and looks around. It's the same as always; crumbling brick walls, dirty cement, and unnatural silence. The streetlight casts sharp, ghostly shadows across the wall and his face, and he swallows and steps beyond the alley and onto the sidewalk.

The streetlight flickers once, and then again, and Izuku knows it won't be long now. It never is. He's almost thankful, because he knows the waiting is the worst part.

His fingers find the cold metal of the streetlight, and he grasps at it like a lifeline. It feels so *real*, even if he knows it's not. He wishes it didn't.

He hears a fizzing, popping noise above him and wraps his arms around the streetlight right as its bulb explodes into a shower of sparks and a blanket of darkness.

Just like that, with striking finality, the world is black. He opens his eyes, closes them, and opens them again. There's no difference at all; either way, all he can see is nothing.

Beneath his fingers, the streetlight begins to tremble. It's not easily noticeable, but by now Izuku knows the pattern, and he knows what's coming.

He presses his forehead against the cold metal, reminiscing about the one thing that he knows is there. Beyond the streetlight, nothing is certain; as far as he knows, if he takes a single step, he might just fall into oblivion.

The vibration in the metal turns to a hum, and the ground begins to wobble beneath his feet. A noise drifts into his ears; distant and keening, like a mournful, broken howl.

Izuku squeezes his eyes further shut, not wanting to look up at the rapidly approaching pinpricks of green that he knows are there.

As the rumbling grows louder, so does the roar. Within moments, it's louder than anything Izuku can describe, and he loops his elbows around the streetlight and presses his hands over his ears.

The wind rushes past him, trying to peel him off of the pole like he's some kind of particularly stubborn barnacle. Izuku shakes as it increases in speed, threatening to rip him off of his perch and throw him into the abyss.

And then the wind stops, and he's alone in the silence, and he wishes that the wind would come back because he *knows* what comes next.

With a piercing scream that splits Izuku's skull open like a geode and sends his brain scattering across the ground in crystalline fractals, it's upon him. He can't move; his bones are locked in place, as if someone paused time. He can't open his eyes, he can't breathe, and he can't even scream.

He knows it's in front of him. He can feel it, in some sort of strange way; he feels its aura of torment and pain, and he knows that if only he could move his leaden limbs, he could escape

it.

But he can't, and he's powerless as the scream comes again. His arms splinter and break like thick tree limbs bent too far, and his grip on the streetlight vanishes. His legs scramble for purchase, but sure enough, there's nothing. He doesn't know why he always forgets.

In the last fleeting moments of the dream, his eyes flicker open, and he stares into the many glowing eyes of the Leviathan.

Izuku barely chokes back his terrified yell as he sits straight up, almost falling off of the couch. He grabs onto the nearest pillow, fingers gripping at the fabric. His hands start to tingle, and he pulls them away before his claws can tear through the stuffing.

His heart hammers in his chest, and he takes a few deep breaths to calm himself. It's not real. It's just a dream.

Someone saw that, though. Someone saw what he just had to live through, except it was very much real.

He crumples up the fear that threatens to boil over and throws it over his shoulder, relaxing slightly when the Leviathan stops trying to pry his grip open and settles uncomfortably in his gut. With a sigh, he squeezes his eyes shut and settles a bit further into the old, squeaky couch.

At least for a moment, before the calm is abruptly shattered by the kitchen door flying open and his mother shouting, "Izuku!"

He sits up like he's been shot, scrambling to his feet and twisting around. His mind's already running rampant, weaving hundreds of possibilities into a tapestry of futures.

His mom stands in the doorway, breathing heavily. Izuku doesn't see any injuries, which is good. Her face is filled with what he recognizes as fear and... excitement?

His eyes drift downwards and settle on the thick envelope in her hand, pale, crinkled, and emblazoned with the U.A. logo.

Oh.

"It's here! It came, honey!" She says, offering him the envelope as he carefully makes his way towards her. Fear and disappointment swirl in his gut as he slowly reaches out and takes the letter in trembling hands, the Leviathan's claws digging into the paper a little too harshly.

He already knows he failed. Why does he even need to bother opening this at all?

He swallows, staring at the envelope.

*There's always General Education. Besides, this is U.A. Maybe there's more to the test than they're letting on.*

“Th-thanks,” he says, flashing her a worried grin before turning tail and disappearing into his room. Part of him feels bad doing it, but he’s just... Not ready to let her see.

He clicks the door closed behind him, shaking hands setting the envelope down. His eyes momentarily flick down to the thin pale lines marring the wood of his desk, and he thinks about the same marks engraved into robots that threw him effortlessly to the side.

He focuses on the envelope, careful to keep his breathing even. He’s not sure how long he stares at it, willing it to open up for him so that he doesn’t have to do it himself. He doesn’t really want to see it, really. He doesn’t want the finality that seeing it entails.

But he knows he can’t put it off forever, so he swallows, reaches out, and tears it open.

Instead of the airy crinkle of paper he’s expecting, he’s met with a different noise; a dull clunk. Months of hanging around Bit nearly sends him shooting out of his chair and ducking for cover then and there, but he forces himself to stay still.

It’s a metal circle, not much larger than the palm of his hand. Izuku has no idea what it is, if he’s being honest. He was just expecting a letter.

He pokes at it with one finger and almost jumps out of his skin when the top half of the circle spins upwards and a brightly glowing holographic screen pops out.

The screen displays something akin to a loading sign, and while it hums, Izuku can’t help but stare in surprise. Holographic screens, even little ones, aren’t cheap- unless, of course, you’re Bit, and can throw one together out of a few cars’ worth of scraps- so the fact that U.A. has apparently sent one to every contestant is a bit of a shock.

He offhandedly wonders if he can keep it.

With a click, the message finishes loading, and the white background vanishes to show none other than All Might himself.

“Greetings!” He announces in a bellowing voice, and Izuku blinks at the screen and then at the envelope in his hands. Why is *All Might* onscreen? Isn’t this from U.A.?

“I am All Might!” All Might says as if Izuku doesn’t already know exactly who he is. “Here to announce your results regarding the U.A. Entrance Exam!”

Izuku can’t move; he just stares at the screen, unsure what to do.

“Your score on the written test was more than sufficient; well done!” All Might starts, his voice a bit granulated by the hologram, and Izuku can’t help but feel a flicker of hope in his chest.

“However, on the practical exam, you scored zero points, which is, of course, a failing grade.”

The hope is extinguished just as soon as it came, and Izuku feels a bit sick. He *knew* this was coming; why did he let himself get his hopes up? Of course there’s no way the *Leviathan*

could get into the top hero course in the country. Why did he even try?

“But!” All Might continues, snapping Izuku out of his thoughts. “See this!”

The screen abruptly changes with a mechanical vwap. Now, rather than All Might, it’s displaying another character he knows; a familiar head of curly brown hair and determined eyes, although they seem somewhat darker.

“...Uraraka?” Izuku whispers to himself, eyes wide. What is this?

“E-excuse me,” Uraraka says to another figure who Izuku figures by the outfit to be Present Mic. “Sorry to bother you, but... I was wondering about the boy in my testing area. Midoriya Izuku.”

Izuku stares.

“He- he saved me from the zero-pointer, but I heard from one of the other examinees that he didn’t get a single point. I...” She hesitates, but appears to steel herself and stares directly at Present Mic with renewed determination. “I want to know if it’s possible to share some of my points with him.”

Izuku’s pretty sure his jaw hits the floor, and he feels fins flare out of his head in surprise. He’s too distracted to deal with them. Uraraka’s trying to give him some of her points? *Why ?*

“You had no reason to rush headlong into such danger,” All Might cuts in from offscreen. “Yet you did, and to save someone from certain doom. That is, as you know, the essence of being a hero.”

“Midoriya saved my life!” Uraraka shouts. “ *Please* let me give him at least some of my points!”

“And the judges were looking for more than just points,” All Might says as the screen pans back to him. In the background, Izuku sees Present Mic amusedly ruffle Uraraka’s hair and tell her that she can’t share points, but that he doesn’t think it’ll be necessary.

“Do you think the heroics department would reject someone for just doing the right thing? Ha!” All Might laughs. “All of the judges agree, and they have selected to award you sixty rescue points!”

*Sixty rescue points.*

“And while we’re at it, Uraraka Ochako also received rescue points for saving you in turn! Forty-five rescue points! Which means...”

No, it’s not possible. *This can’t be real.*

“You passed! Welcome to U.A., Midoriya!”

Izuku stares long after the recording ends and the hologram flickers off. He stares until his eyes sting with exposure and start to water, and even then, he keeps staring.

After what feels like forever, Izuku laughs. It's a wet laugh, if anything, since by now the tears are flowing freely down his face.

He did it. Holy shit, he *did it* .

He used the Leviathan's power, saved someone, and *made it into U.A.*

Izuku breaks down into incredulous laughter, hiccuping and sobbing all over his desk. The Leviathan's fins wave in the air, flicking and wobbling, and for once, he doesn't care.

He did it.

He gets up so fast he almost knocks his chair over, sprinting over to the door and throwing it open. Sure enough, right outside, his mom is pacing worriedly. She jumps as he appears and looks him up and down, her expression immediately softening.

"Izuku-?"

He tackles her into a hug, throwing his arms around her and burying his face in her shoulder. She teeters for a moment, but regains her balance and hugs him in return.

"Izuku, wha-"

"I- I did it, Mom," he whispers. "I made it in."

There's silence, and then his mom's hugging him even harder and laughing and crying with him.

*He made it in* .

## Chapter End Notes

hooo boy im fuckin tired

the boys are back, mirio's here, and shit should hopefully start getting interesting soon. also naomasa... you dumb fuck

note: this chapter was extremely experimental. ive never written shigaraki or mirio before, and blade's perspective was new. pointers would be lovely, but please don't be outright rude!

also no indents this time because it takes like thirty minutes to put them all in and i just want to get this chapter up and sleep

# waves shall swell as cities grow

## Chapter Summary

Izuku's first day at U.A.. Nothing goes as planned.

## Chapter Notes

i went three weeks without so much as looking at leviathan and then spat all of this out in two days. Thanks, brain?  
(sorry for the wait!)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

As Izuku stands on the pavement, donned in a brand new uniform, he comes to a realization. If he thought showing up to U.A. for the *Entrance Exam* was bad, he should have seen himself now. As he stares up at U.A., windows shining with cloudy silver stolen from the overcast sky, he thinks he might pass out. His mind is running at a million miles an hour, telling him that he needs to hurry, that he shouldn't go, that he's taking advantage of U.A.

He shakes his head to clear his thoughts and, hunching his shoulders, forces his legs to carry him into the building.

Classroom 1-A. That's his classroom. That's where he'll spend the next year of his life, alongside the people within it.

Izuku, for all his nervousness, is excited. He's been waiting for so long to leave his cramped classroom in Orudera behind, to finally escape the fearful looks and sardonic snickering that followed him everywhere he went. He's opening a new chapter of his life, and he's praying to whatever God there is that it will be the one where his life starts getting better.

He stops in front of the door labeled 1-A in large block letters, hands hovering over the knob hesitantly. This is it. This is his new beginning, where he's going to atone for what he's done. He's going to help people. From here on out, he's not the Leviathan. He's Midoriya Izuku, on the track to being a pro-hero.

He opens the door and is promptly greeted with shouting.

Shouting isn't something Izuku's not used to. He's grown up hearing Kacchan screaming about this or that nearly every day of the past few years, so he can recognize when Kacchan's

trying to start an argument with someone too afraid to defend themselves. Oddly enough, it doesn't appear to be Kacchan shouting this time.

Izuku stands in the doorway and watches the scene before him, stomach dropping. There aren't many people in the classroom yet; there's a girl with long, spiky black hair that's sitting towards the front, a boy with an incredibly fluffy plume of purple hair who appears to be trying to fall asleep on his desk in the back, and two figures Izuku certainly hasn't forgotten; Kacchan and the black-haired boy from the Entrance Exam. Kacchan's sitting slumped backwards in his chair, feet on his desk, and black-haired boy does not seem too thrilled about it.

"Get your feet off of your desk!" Black-hair commands, gesturing at Kacchan, who is quite evidently unimpressed. "Don't you think that's disrespectful to your classmates?"

"Actually, I don't give a shit," Kacchan snorts, adjusting his sneakers loudly. "What school are you from, jackass?"

"I am *not* a- a 'jackass!' I am from Soumei Junior High School," black-hair answers, oblivious to the danger. "My name is Iida Tenya."

"*Soumei*, huh?" Kacchan says patronizingly, face curling into a sneer. "Seems we've got an *elite* here. How about you fuck off before I *end you*?"

"What nerve!" Iida says, looking rather offended. Kacchan doesn't appear to care, leaning back further in his seat with a grin. It looks more like a wolf baring its teeth than anything.

Izuku's about to slip in the doorway and try his best to avoid a confrontation when Iida's gaze locks onto him with startling finality. Izuku freezes, hoping that he won't come over, but he does, gunning straight for him.

"Hello again," he says. "I'm Iida Tenya from Soumei-"

"I- I heard," Izuku stumbles, eyes darting over his shoulder. Oh *fuck*, he does not want to make enemies this early off. "My name's Midoriya. Nice to m-meet you."

Ah, the return of the stutter. He can't say he's surprised, but the feeling of guilt and helplessness that accompanies it is far from welcome. The fear is welling up in him now, and he takes a moment to crush it.

Iida stares at him for a moment, eyes hidden behind the glare of his glasses. He's a good bit taller than Izuku- taller than Bit, probably- and Izuku feels like a mouse under his stare. He hopes Iida doesn't ask about his scar.

"Midoriya," he starts, and Izuku braces for the worst. "I must apologize for my previous behavior. You already understood the true nature of the practical skills exam, didn't you?"

"...No," Izuku says, resisting the urge to slide backwards. "I- I really had no idea what I was doing."

Iida stares at him blankly, and Izuku wishes that he has more social expertise. The only person that he regularly talks to in a friendly manner is Bit, and Bit isn't exactly your average, socially adept human being.

"Ah," he says. "Yet you still passed the test."

They both stand like that for a little bit, neither saying a word. A few more students enter the classroom, confusedly sliding around them or stopping to stare at Izuku's scar. Izuku wishes this conversation would end, but he doesn't know how to end it.

Thankfully, God seems to have had his fun, and the conversation is abruptly cut off when a familiar voice swoops in through the door.

"Ah, Midoriya!"

"Uraraka!" Izuku says, turning away from Iida quickly. It's partially because he's glad to be done with the awkward not-conversation, but also because he's glad to see Uraraka again.

"You made it in!" She says, beaming. Light flashes in her eyes; she's excited to be here, and her excitement is contagious.

"S-so did you!" He says. Her face lights up.

"So *that's* what your voice sounds like!" She says, looking at him curiously. Izuku's hit with the realization that the only time she's ever heard him speak is when he had just swallowed a bunch of lightning. Good times.

"Yeah," he laughs, rubbing the back of his neck. "I-I'd like to think it sounds better when my throat isn't thoroughly crispy."

She startles, and then she laughs. It's a good sound, he thinks, and it fills him with a strange feeling. The Leviathan making people laugh. What a concept.

But he's not the Leviathan here, he realizes. Like this, human and happy, he's Midoriya Izuku. For now, he's himself. Midoriya can make people laugh. Bit's howling laughter is proof of that.

He looks towards the now mostly-full classroom, catches Kacchan's withering glare, and turns back to Uraraka hastily.

"I'm super excited," she's saying. "I think today's the Entrance Ceremony, but-"

"If you're gonna be having friendship hour, do it somewhere else," a gruff voice interrupts. Uraraka and Izuku both freeze, and Uraraka turns around as Izuku peeks over her shoulder.

It's... Izuku's quite frankly not sure *what* the fuck it is. It's either a person with an ungodly amount of greasy black hair in a bright yellow sleeping bag or some sort of man-caterpillar undergoing metamorphosis. Izuku's not sure if he should be afraid or disgusted.

"This isn't the time for that," caterpillar-man continues. "This is the department of heroics."

He accentuates this statement by tastefully sucking on a juice packet that he appears to pull out of nowhere. Izuku lets his gaze flicker over to Uraraka, who looks just as baffled.

He's also distantly aware of the hubbub of the classroom behind him fading into dead silence as the caterpillar-man wriggles into a standing position. It's one of the weirdest things Izuku's ever witnessed if he's being honest, and he's friends with a boy who's probably tried to reverse-engineer God.

"Hm," Caterpillar-man says, surveying the class. His eyes are those of a hawk, and Izuku swears he can see a flash of dark red within them. "It took you all eight seconds to quiet down."

Speaking from experience, Izuku thinks that might be a world record. Caterpillar-man disagrees.

"Life is short, kids. You're all lacking common sense," he says, unzipping what proves to indeed be a sleeping bag and stepping out. He's tall, towering over the class like a giant, and his black hair hangs in tangled strands all the way down to his shoulders. He's dressed almost in all black- probably keeping up the aesthetic- and a pale, incredibly long scarf is wound loosely around his neck.

Is he a teacher? That means he would be a pro-hero, but he doesn't look like any pro Izuku's ever seen on TV or the likes. Izuku doesn't have a clue who this guy is. Thankfully, the question is answered for him.

"I'm your homeroom teacher, Aizawa Shouta. Get to your seats."

They do, and Mr. Aizawa stays at the front of the classroom, tossing his sleeping bag haphazardly to the side. As he does, he pulls something out of it, shaking it out roughly.

It's a uniform, blue and white, and Izuku realizes that the geometric pattern on it is actually the letters U and A. It's a uniform of some sort. What-

"Put these on and then head to City Ground A," Mr. Aizawa says bluntly, tossing it at the nearest student, a spiky-haired boy who very obviously uses generous amounts of red hair dye.

"...What about the ceremony?" Uraraka asks. Aizawa's expression doesn't even shift in the slightest.

"If you want to be heroes, we don't have time for frilly niceties. You all understand that U.A. has a reputation for its on-campus freedom. Well, that freedom goes for us teachers, too. Now get a move on."

The trek to City Ground A is a surprisingly short one, considering the size of U.A.'s campus. Izuku stares up at the fake city with a grimace for a few seconds before heading into the locker room. The P.E. Uniform he'd grabbed on the way is clutched tightly in his slightly scaly claw, and he's glad he's gotten better at getting the Leviathan to shut up.

The locker rooms aren't as large as he'd expected, so he scuttles off to a corner and makes sure his back is facing the wall. The scar on his face is enough; the last thing he wants is for his new classmates to see its counterpart.

"Hey!" Someone greets him as he unbuttons his uniform jacket, hanging it up from one of the spokes on the wall. He looks up to see hair-dye king waving at him in a friendly manner. His teeth- which are pointed like a shark's- are pressed together in a bright smile. He radiates energy like Uraraka does.

"H-hello," Izuku says, tripping over his words yet again. He slips into his uniform as hair-dye king trots over to him, already dressed.

"I'm Kirishima!" He says, eyes darting down to Izuku's face. "Sick scar. That looks manly as hell."

Izuku internally winces, but he does his best to smile and wave back as he struggles to put on the sleeves.

"Uh, thanks. I-I'm Midoriya," he says, changing the subject and zipping up the back of his uniform. He feels more comfortable now that the horrifying mark on his back isn't exposed, so he lets himself step away from the wall. "Nice to meet you."

"Nice to meet you too, dude!" Kirishima grins, thumping him on the back once before heading off. Izuku coughs in surprise, rubbing his shoulder and ignoring the tingling sting that the old scar emits. He'll have to get over that.

As he finishes changing, he learns the names and quirks of some of the other boys. There's Kaminari, who has bright orange hair and an electricity-based quirk; he talks to Izuku about his lightning, and Izuku makes a mental note to never introduce him to Bit. There's also Sero, who has a tape quirk, Todoroki, the son of number-two hero Endeavor, who has a split quirk that grants him both fire and ice abilities, Tokoyami, who is... a literal bird with a quirk that Izuku can't figure out yet, Shoji, with some sort of many-armed shapeshifting quirk, and Sato, who has enhanced strength when he eats sugar. Other than that, there are a few names Izuku doesn't catch; a strange, rock-faced boy who seems rather shy, some boy who skips off to change in the stalls before Izuku can glimpse him, and the quiet purple-haired boy, who still looks tired.

As he looks around, he accidentally meets Kacchan's eyes. He looks away, but it's enough of an invitation for Kacchan to come stalking over to him.

"*I told you not to come*," he hisses, grabbing Izuku by the front of his uniform. Izuku's hands fly up to clutch at Kacchan's arms, pushing desperately. Oh, God, he does *not* need this right now.

"Hey, leave him alone!" Kirishima says, attempting to pull him away. Izuku meets his eyes for a split second, trying to convey the danger that Kirishima's stepping into.

"Stay out of it, shitty-hair," Kacchan spits. Kirishima looks undeterred.

"Come on, dude, I'm not kidding," he repeats, pulling on Kacchan's shirt again. Kacchan finally lets go of Izuku's shirt to whirl around, hands sparking.

"Don't touch me again," he snarls. Kirishima looks him dead in the eyes.

"Don't touch him again, and I won't."

Kacchan stalks off to the far corner of the room, and Izuku slumps against the wall, scales blossoming around his eyes. God, shit. In front of *everyone*? Really, Kacchan?

"Hey, are you okay?" Kirishima asks, peering at him. Izuku nods quickly.

"Yeah, I'm good. Thanks."

"You're welcome. That was really uncool of him."

"It's nothing new," Izuku mutters mirthlessly, and Kirishima looks at him in confused horror but thankfully drops the subject.

He follows Kirishima out of the locker room, carefully keeping his eyes on the ground to avoid Kacchan's glowering stare. As he steps out, the light difference makes him shield his eyes, and he looks around at the glimmering city before him. It's the same size as the one from the Entrance Exam, and he hopes there won't be any giant robots from hell. Still, he doesn't know what this is.

A few minutes later, the entirety of Class 1-A stands before the city. Mr. Aizawa stands before them, hair waving faintly in the breeze. He surveys them, looking for something Izuku can't place, before his face slips back into neutral boredom.

"To establish the basic capabilities of your quirk, you all are going to participate in a race," he says. "Get from this side of the city to the other. Use your quirk. Anything goes, but do not attempt to hinder your classmates."

Conversation spreads among the class, excited words bubbling to the surface. So they'll get to use their quirks in a race. That's... Interesting. Izuku's not sure what he was expecting.

"This should be fun!" Uraraka says at his side. This proves to be a mistake, and Mr. Aizawa turns to look at her.

"Fun, you say?" He echoes, and Izuku catches something dangerous in his tone. "So you were planning to spend your three years here having a good time? What happened to becoming heroes?"

Uraraka turns a very pale color and tries to stutter out a response, but Mr. Aizawa beats her to it.

"All right, then. New Rule: the student who comes in last place will be judged hopeless and instantly expelled."

That, unsurprisingly, puts a damper on the whole situation.

“Our freedom means we dispense with students as we please,” Aizawa says, a catlike grin curling onto his face. “Welcome to U.A., Class 1-A. I expect you to do your absolute best. Ready?”

“Yes, sir!” Is the unanimous response, although some voices sound a good bit more terrified than others. Izuku’s head spins. He can’t come in last, or he’ll be expelled, huh? What a way to kick off the year.

“Go,” Aizawa grunts, and it’s so anticlimactic that Izuku almost *doesn’t* start. It’s only the pounding of footsteps all around him that jumpstarts his brain and gets him to move. Everyone heads for the city gate in one huge pack, a moving swarm of people and footsteps.

A few people in his class have a clear advantage, and they’re the ones who take an early lead. There’s Iida, who’s already off like a shot, Kacchan, who’s using his explosions to propel himself forward not far behind, and the tape-quirk boy, who’s using his tape to pull himself forwards. The rest of the class, those whose quirks aren’t suited for speed or the like, are simply running.

Izuku’s suddenly thankful that Bit made him haul trash around like a mule as he breaks ahead of the pack, running as fast as he can without exhausting himself. His feet pound on the cement, eyes trained on the street ahead. If he keeps this up, he should be able to secure an okay spot; enough to keep him from getting thrown out on the first day.

Still, this is U.A., and his gut is warning him that this is no ordinary race.

Sure enough, the ground begins to shake. It’s faint at first, a slight rumble, but then it increases in intensity. Izuku glances down at the ground, confusion welling up in him. The Leviathan churns to life, feeding off of the dread growing in his chest as the rumbling turns to a gritty scraping.

He glances up, and he realizes that the buildings are now moving.

A quick look over at the nearest building, which is sliding along the ground at almost the same pace he’s running at, reveals that each building is on a slab of concrete which is undoubtedly attached to some sort of track. All around him, the city is shaking and shifting like a broiling ocean of grey concrete and shining windows, cast against a dreary, overcast sky.

Izuku keeps his eyes on the road and keeps running, ignoring the prick of scales that runs down his legs. Soon, however, the road’s path is gone; replaced by a stream of constantly moving buildings that obscure his path to the goal.

He can’t lose his bearings, he realizes. If he does, now that the road’s gone, he’ll never find his way to the finish line.

His heart begins to beat faster, anxiety filling him like cold water. He doesn’t know what to do. He doesn’t know if he can do this. It’s only his *first day* - they’re supposed to be taught how to do things like this, not know off the bat. Still, this is U.A., and Izuku guesses they can do what they want.

The fear within him swirls dangerously, and he feels his legs begin to snap and shift. A cold, slithering sensation overcomes them, and Izuku doesn't need to look down to know that, beneath his clothes, they're no longer human. It doesn't matter; no one can see them, and he needs the help.

He keeps going straight ahead, his pace increased by his new bouncy leaps. His reptilian legs act as a sort of suspension, and he's able to tear across the ground faster than before. Beneath his feet, the road begins to move as well, sliding him slowly to the left. He changes his direction, angling himself towards the corner of the slate he's on. The tarmac of the road trembles beneath his feet, and Izuku has a split second to register what's happening before it begins to rise.

Izuku grits his teeth and presses forwards, leaping off of the asphalt towards a platform containing a tall building that's currently sliding towards him. He barely makes it, skidding across the pavement painfully before getting back on his feet and continuing forward.

It's like watching a broiling ocean, waves of steel and asphalt twisting around each other in terrifying waves. Sometimes the buildings crash together in a cloud of dust that almost resembles ocean spray. Izuku wishes it was the ocean; the ocean brings solace and understanding. This brings terror.

He keeps going, darting around buildings and street lights and trying not to get caught between colliding skyscrapers. It's a nightmare, he thinks. Nothing compared to the one he faces every now and then, but a nightmare nonetheless. So this is what hero work feels like.

Even if it is, even if he has to face this every day, if he can make up for what he did, it will be worth it.

A hum reaches his ears, distant and wailing, and Izuku peers over his shoulder. Something's coming down the street; it's too large to be one of his classmates, and the way it's moving across the ground is almost inhuman.

Izuku realizes with a start that it's a two-pointer robot from the Entrance Exam, one of the same ones that had hurled him effortlessly into a building. He knows better than to fight it this time unless he wants his throat burned up like a toasted marshmallow. *Goddammit, U.A., wasn't the moving buildings enough?*

The robot's gaining on him, it's metallic screeching becoming louder. Pincer-like hands reach towards him, gleaming in the pale light, and Izuku looks around for a way to escape. He spots two buildings heading towards each other, two goliaths set to clash, and he swallows the dry fire in his throat and runs.

The robot gains on him, and he lets it. If this is going to work, the robot's going to have to be right on top of him. God, this is a stupid plan, but what else does he have?

With a sudden burst of speed, he skims between the two buildings as they creep towards each other, tripping as they hit each other with a resounding crack behind him. The robot is crushed between them like a tiny, insolent bug, cracking and snapping loudly before exploding with a resounding blast. He's tossed across the cement like a ragdoll by the

shockwave, and by the time his head has cleared enough for him to get to his feet, he realizes he has no idea which way to go.

He's lost his way.

He spins around, heart beating in his chest, because *shit* . He *can't* lose his way. He can't be last. His dream can't end before it's even begun. He *can't lose this chance* .

Izuku's always been good at thinking his way around problems, so he lets his mind unfold like an old map, trying to find a solution. A memory drifts to the surface of his thoughts of himself, climbing a building like a slippery gecko, and he looks to the nearest building and runs. His hands shiver and shake as they twist into claws, and Izuku grits his teeth as the Leviathan's roaring grows louder. It's just his arms and legs. He can handle this.

Climbing isn't as easy as it had been when he'd lost control, but it's good enough. He digs his claws into the cracks in the cement, shoes scraping on the rims of windows, and hauls himself up as fast as he dares to go. The building he's on moves slowly forwards, carrying him in a direction he can only hope is forwards. By the time he's made it to the top, almost slipping once or twice- no thanks to the Leviathan screaming in its cage- the building has moved far from its original position.

The city spreads out beneath him in the same way it does when he's standing on the abandoned hotel with Bit at his side, although this time, it's confined and twisting. The building he's on is moving to the east; not away from the finish line, but not towards it, either.

He's about halfway through. He can see the finish line- or exit to the fake city- more than half of the city away, and from his squinting, he doesn't think anybody has made it yet.

The Leviathan hisses, curling around his spine and his throat, and part of him wonders if he should purposely come in last. It wouldn't be fair of him to take away a spot in heroics from someone who actually deserved it, would it?

He grits his teeth, shaking his head a little too forcefully to expel the traitorous thoughts, and moves towards the edge of the building. Not far from him, another smaller building is sliding towards him. If he times it right, he might be able to jump onto it without fucking up his legs too badly.

It's a stupid plan, clearly, but it's all he's got. Izuku backs up, watches the other building inch towards him with a gritty grinding noise for a few moments longer, and takes a running leap.

The building suddenly starts moving away from him, and Izuku has a split second to think *oh fuck* before he slams into the side of it and begins to fall. He flails, mind screaming as the Leviathan twists inside of him, and tries to grab onto something. Recovery Girl can't bring him back if he's *dead* , can she?

His hands meet something cold, and he grips with all of his might. His arms are almost wrenched out of their sockets as his descent abruptly stops, and he swings into cold metal, wheezing. His savior proves to be a fire escape, which he quickly scrambles onto and

descends in leaping bounds. His shoulders throb, and his chest aches, but he ignores it. At least now he knows which way to go.

He rounds the corner of the building, running as fast as he dares. His eyes are trained on the direction he needs to go. He won't lose his way, not again.

Izuku slams into something, and it's certainly not metal. No, this something grunts when he hits it and topples backwards, almost dragging him down with it. He barely manages to avoid tripping again, stumbling back to his feet and staring down at the ground.

It's the purple-haired boy from earlier, who looks a good bit more disheveled than before and is rubbing his head. His eyes lock onto Izuku, and they're icy and closed-off, like a blizzard ripping its way through a shut-down city. They're set into his face, punctuated by dark bags. Izuku wonders if he has nightmares, too.

"Sh- Crap, sorry!" Izuku says, holding out a scaly, clawed hand without thinking. He almost retracts it once he realizes how it looks, all oily dark scales flecked with glowing green, but he can't bring himself to do it.

The boy stares at his hand in surprise, and it makes Izuku's gut twist a bit. He thinks of those same hands, tearing and slashing at Blade's throat. The thought feels vile.

Izuku almost wonders if the boy is just going to ignore it, but then he slowly reaches out and curls his pale fingers around Izuku's cold, scaly claws. He's feather-light, almost scarily so, and Izuku pulls him to his feet without any trouble at all. He absentmindedly wonders if he's carried heavier microwaves for Bit.

"Are you okay?" He asks once the boy is back on his own two feet. This is met with yet another cold, calculating stare that seems to be trying to dissect him.

"Why does it matter?" The boy asks him carefully. Izuku blinks at him.

"...Because I ran into you...?" He tries, eyes crinkling with confusion. "I- I don't..."

Izuku's not sure how to respond; he's been met with cold stares more times than he can count, but that's always been because of Kacchan. This... He's not sure what he's done to this boy, but he doesn't have time to figure it out.

"Are you okay, though?" He asks again. The boy doesn't answer him this time. Izuku knows that he should just keep going and that the boy *obviously* doesn't want to be near him, but his mouth moves before he has the chance to.

"Do you know the way to the exit?"

The boy's mouth twists into something not unlike a snarl, and he looks at Izuku almost angrily. Izuku resists the urge to take a step back, remembering a similar face adorning a blond-haired boy. This kid won't attack him, will he? No, he can't. Aizawa's rules.

"No," he says, and the way he says it entails an unsaid *what of it ?*

He's defensive, Izuku realizes suddenly. He doesn't know *why*, but it's obvious now that he looks at it. It reminds him of some of his old classmates, too afraid to talk to him or admit weakness while the Classroom King was around.

"I do," he says before he can help himself. "Follow me."

"What?" The boy's porcelain mask of distrust slips a touch, revealing pure surprise behind it. Izuku does his best to act like it was an actual thought process that led him to say that and not him blurting things out on the spur of the moment like always.

"I know the way. I can help you," he says, moving past the boy. He needs to go; someone's bound to have made it to the finish line already. Some of the kids with mobile quirks, no doubt.

"Why would you help me?" the boy asks.

Izuku doesn't have an answer to that, so he just looks towards the purple-haired boy with pleading eyes and asks, "Why *not*?"

"That's not an answer."

Izuku hunches his shoulders and rubs the back of his neck, claws grating over the scales his hands find there.

"I don't really... Have an answer. I just... Wanted to help."

"How do I know you won't be leading me the wrong way?"

"That would be pretty detrimental to my own progress, I think. Also, I literally can't. It's against the rules."

"Right," the boy says.

"Besides," Izuku continues without a clue what he's saying. "Two's better than one, right?"

This is met with silence, and Izuku isn't sure what else he can do. To his surprise, the boy takes a few hesitant steps towards him, before jogging to match his pace. With a new member of his figurative party in tow, Izuku heads forwards.

"I'm Midoriya. What's your name?"

"...Shinsou."

"Nice to meet you, Shinsou."

"...Nice to meet you, too."

The going isn't easy; the buildings seem to be moving faster, and Izuku has to avoid walking on the ones that are sliding backwards. His bones feel like they're made of molten lead,

dragging him downwards. He almost falls a few times, and he's had to tap or shout at Shinsou a few times to keep him from getting a face full of cement.

"Thanks," Shinsou mutters after Izuku rescues him once again from a dastardly fate of being hit by a building. Izuku goes to respond, only to catch sight of another robot bearing down on him and Shinsou from behind. *Goddammit*. He just wants this test to be over already.

"Shit," Izuku hisses through his teeth, tugging on Shinsou's sleeve without thinking. "Run."

Shinsou follows his wide-eyed stare, catches sight of the three-pointer robot hurtling towards them, and runs.

They're both sprinting now, wheezing and out of breath as the robot behind them tails them. Izuku can't tell how far away from the exit they are by now, and all he can do is hope that they can outrun the three-pointer. It's outlandish, and he knows it. They can't outrun it; even he can't with his Leviathan legs.

Part of him considers digging down inside his gut and pulling out the lightning, but the feeling of utter *agony* he had felt, lying on the pavement amongst the shattered remains of a titan and trying not to sob, warns him against it. Still, he doesn't have many other options, and it's not just himself he has to take care of now.

"How the hell," Shinsou wheezes as they round a corner, the robot screeching behind them. "Are you so fast?"

Izuku swallows, stopping Shinsou short of stepping onto a backward-sliding slate. "My legs are... Not human, right now."

It's a terrible explanation, and Shinsou's expression proves it, but he thankfully doesn't question it further. Izuku doesn't really want to think about what his legs look like right now, quite frankly.

It's another few minutes before Shinsou speaks again, and at this point, Izuku's questioning just how big this stupid fucking fake city is.

"I'm just slowing you down," Shinsou says, gritting his teeth. "It would be better for you to just go."

"Sounds boring," Izuku says before he can think better of it. Shinsou stares at him, and Izuku has to desperately tilt his head in a 'let's go' gesture to get him moving again.

His brain shrieks at him, mentally socking him over ' *sounds boring* ', but it's gotten Shinsou to keep running, so he counts it as a success.

The building in front of them slides out of the way, and he spots the exit.

It's a ways away, but closer than it's been. In the archway, he can make out a few figures; the tall, imposing figure of Iida, the slouching, annoyed form of Kacchan, and the almost invisible shape of Todoroki. He's not last. Shinsou's not last.

“I can see the exit,” he says, and Shinsou glances up. There’s a flash of light behind his faded purple eyes, and he seems to get a little bit less tired for a second. That is, until the three-pointer makes a swipe at them from behind, and then they’re both sprinting again.

“Almost there,” Izuku wheezes through his burning lungs. Shinsou nods, and they both make a break for it.

Izuku wants to sprint and throw himself over the finish line, but he thinks about Shinsou’s quirk. What is it? He hasn’t seen Shinsou use it, so it might not be useful in this situation. As far as he knows, if he leaves Shinsou behind, he’ll be defenseless. So he paces himself, staying by Shinsou’s side.

The exit grows nearer, and the roar in Izuku’s ears grows louder. He can’t hold this up for much longer, he realizes. The pressure is getting to him; if he doesn’t let go of the Leviathan soon, he won’t be able to hold on to himself. He has to finish this now. He’s so *close*.

He glances over his shoulder just as the robot revs up with a sudden burst of speed, tires screeching on the asphalt as it slams into him and smashes him into the ground.

He groans as he picks himself up off of the hard asphalt, blinking stars out of his throbbing head. His foot sears with pain; he might have sprained it. Ahead of him, Shinsou skids to a stop, twisting around to face the robot. Izuku can’t make out his expression.

“G-” he starts, trying to tell Shinsou to just go, but his head is promptly ground into the asphalt by the robot. The Leviathan screams at the impact, filling his ears with a hideous, inhuman noise, and Izuku grits his teeth and tries to get a grip on the ground. He does, but the three-pointer’s hold on him is too tight. It lifts him up like an old toy, preparing to throw him into the nearby wall, but something grabs his dangling wrist and *pulls*.

He lurches, off-balanced, and slides out of the three pointer’s metal claws. He hits the ground hard, but then something’s pulling him up to his feet.

“Get up,” Shinsou says, straining, and Izuku does. As he touches his left foot to the ground, it sends a white-hot flash of pain through his leg, and he grits his teeth.

“Fucking- my foot’s messed up,” he pants, stepping back and wobbling as he pulls his weight off of Shinsou. “Just- just go.”

Shinsou wrinkles his nose, looks back towards the robot, grabs Izuku's sleeve, and runs.

They reach the exit gate together, the robot a few steps behind them, and Izuku takes a split second to pause and turn to face it. As Shinsou stumbles over the finish line, Izuku slashes at the robot’s outstretched claw and tumbles backwards. It’s pointless, but it lets him internally yell, *take that!*

He hits the ground on the outside of the fake city, and the robot makes an odd beeping noise, turns away from him, and slowly rolls back into the testing arena.

“Shinsou, sixteen minutes and thirty-two seconds. Fourth place. Midoriya, sixteen minutes and thirty-six seconds. Fifth place,” Aizawa’s gruff voice says, and Izuku stares up from where he’s panting on the ground and resists saying, “*What the fuck was that?*”

“U.A.,” he knows, would be the answer.

Izuku stays there for a while, spread-eagled on the pavement. His head pounds, and the Leviathan’s trying to fight him for control, and Izuku wishes it would *stop*.

It takes him longer than usual to suppress the scales and claws all over him, but he chalks that up to exhaustion. His hands feel hot and sweaty when they return to their tiny, freckled selves, and his legs are stretched tauter than a bowstring. The transition for his foot from not-human to human is painful as shit, but he’s taken worse.

Someone nudges him with their foot, and his first thought is that it’s Kacchan about to nail him in the ribs. He scrambles to his feet, hobbling backwards on his good leg, before realizing that it’s not Kacchan, but Shinsou.

Shinsou gives him an odd look, and Izuku feels small under his gaze. When he had the Leviathan’s legs, they were roughly the same height, but now he’s back to his original height, a good few inches shorter.

They stare at each other for a moment before Shinsou sticks his hands in the pockets of his uniform, looks away, and mumbles a quiet, “Thanks.”

“N-no problem,” Izuku stumbles. “Thanks for helping me, too.”

Shinsou shrugs. “You helped me, so I helped you. That’s just how it works.”

“You didn’t have to, though,” Izuku points out. “You could have left me.”

“What kind of hero would that make me?” Shinsou snorts.

“A better one than Mr. Aizawa seems to think we are,” Izuku mutters under his breath, mostly to himself, but Shinsou snickers.

Izuku looks up in surprise, and Shinsou’s face reverts back to its original emptiness. Izuku almost wishes it wouldn’t.

“What is your quirk, anyway?” He asks before he can help himself. Shinsou’s expression sours, and Izuku’s heart sinks. He doesn’t want to think about his own quirk. No matter the reason, Izuku can relate.

“Never mind,” he says. “Forget I asked. Sorry.”

Shinsou looks at him blankly, before wrinkling his nose and looking away.

“You’ll find out eventually,” he says. “...I might as well just get it over with. Save both of us the trouble.”

“...Wha-” Izuku starts, and then he stops.

The world seems to freeze. At least, Izuku does, and he realizes in horror that *he's lost control* . His first thought is to panic, to throw himself at the Leviathan and try to pry it loose, but then he realizes that his mind isn't overcome with horrific screaming and howling. In fact, there's nothing. Just a dull silence.

Izuku can see Shinsou standing in front of him with a bored expression that seems to be hiding something else, but he can't move his limbs. He can't feel the Leviathan anywhere. He's lost control, but he's still himself. What is this?

“ *Wave your hand* ,” Shinsou says, and Izuku does. Rather, his body does; it's almost a subconscious movement.

*Mind Control*, he realizes. *Shinsou's quirk is mind control* .

Then it's over, and Izuku's back in control of himself a split second before the Leviathan comes hurtling back. It slams into him with enough force that it almost knocks him over, and he gasps as scales try to shimmer to life all over him. Shinsou's expression switches to what could almost be horror, but he doesn't move.

“Sorry,” Izuku coughs, straining his arms until the scales disappear. “Backlash of, um, my quirk.” Backlash of the Leviathan being a fucking bitch, as always. “So, your quirk... Mind control?”

Shinsou nods, not meeting his eyes.

“Holy shit,” Izuku says without thinking, flinching as he sees Aizawa's eyes dart towards him. “I- I mean, holy crap. But that's... You can control people by talking to them, right.”

Shinsou looks away and nods again.

“That has got to be the best-suited quirk for heroics I've ever seen,” Izuku says, staring at Shinsou wide-eyed. This is evidently not the reaction Shinsou was expecting, and he turns to stare at Izuku.

“What?”

“You could just... Ask villains to turn themselves in,” Izuku says before he can stop himself. “You wouldn't even have to *fight* since some of Musutafu's villains are so talkative. You could-” He flinches as his throat tightens a bit. “...Take care of hostage situations without anyone getting hurt.”

Shinsou stares at him, evidently shocked. Izuku can't understand why he's surprised.

“...Seriously?” He asks after a long minute, scrutinizing Izuku's face in the way Bit did on that day so long ago. Looking for lies, he's come to realize.

“Of course,” Izuku says, and he doesn't have to worry about being caught lying this time because he isn't. “You could help so many people with it.”

“You’re not lying,” Shinsou says, and it’s less of a question than a statement. Izuku nods eagerly.

“Ah,” Shinsou says, clearly unsure how to proceed. “...Thanks, then. Again.”

“I-I’m just telling the truth,” Izuku says, rubbing the back of his neck. At that moment, Uraraka tumbles through the gate, panting heavily. Izuku nods to Shinsou, awkwardly signaling the end of the conversation, before crossing over to Uraraka.

“Uraraka, eighteen minutes and forty-five seconds,” Mr. Aizawa’s voice informs them. Uraraka looks up with a pained smile before all but collapsing onto the ground.

“That was painful,” she pants as Izuku stands over her. He laughs mirthlessly.

“Tell me about it.”

-----

Roughly ten minutes later, there are nineteen people standing near the exit, eyes trained on the arch, waiting for the last person to show their face. This proves to be the blonde-haired accent boy from the exam who had told Izuku that they wouldn’t cross paths again. Oh, the irony.

“Aoyama, twenty-eight minutes and forty-two seconds. Twentieth place,” Mr. Aizawa says, and Aoyama’s already exhausted face twists into horror and disappointment. The pity in the room is palpable as the rest of Class 1-A stares at the unfortunate one who just couldn’t meet the par. Izuku looks at the ground.

“I’m sure you’re aware that some of you, thanks to the nature of this test and your quirk, were at a disadvantage,” Mr. Aizawa says, pocketing his holographic stopwatch. The class nods, Aoyama especially.

“Still, you all did your best. Also, nobody’s getting expelled.”

This is met with surprised yelling from pretty much everyone, which Mr. Aizawa takes in stride without even a flinch. The catlike grin returns.

“It was a logical ruse made to pull out your best performances,” he finishes.

As the class continues chatting in relieved surprise, Mr. Aizawa turns away with a shrug. Izuku lets the tension run out of his shoulders, dripping down his arms and onto the ground. It’s okay. Nobody’s getting expelled. He hasn’t taken anyone’s position.

“Midoriya, head to the nurse’s office and get your foot looked at,” Mr. Aizawa says, and Izuku’s head snaps up painfully fast. “Somebody help him get there.”

Izuku shrinks as this is met with silence. Same shit as always.

“It’s fine,” he says, gingerly treading on his bad foot. “I can get there myself.”

“That wasn’t optional,” Mr. Aizawa says. “Shinsou, make sure he doesn’t mess up his foot more. The rest of you get dressed and head back to the classroom. Yamada’s waiting.”

Izuku squirms under the rest of the Class’ stares as they pass him, shrinking further as Shinsou stops by his side and raises an eyebrow. As Mr. Aizawa’s back retreats around the corner, he shuffles sideways a bit.

“I’m fine, you don’t have to help me,” He says.

“Midoriya,” Shinsou says, unimpressed.

“I’m serious,” Izuku repeats. Shinsou’s already had to help him once; he won’t drag him down again.

“...Can you walk on your foot?” Shinsou asks, his tone suddenly changing.

“Yes,” Izuku says, missing the danger.

“You’re a shit liar. *Come here* .”

Izuku goes to respond, only to realize he can’t. He’s powerless as his body awkwardly slides over to Shinsou, who hooks one arm underneath his shoulders. Shinsou literally used his quirk on him.

“ *Walk with me* ,” Shinsou says, and Izuku’s body starts walking with absolutely no regard for its injury. Izuku can’t help the hiss of pain that escapes him as a sharp burning sensation grips his foot.

“Shit,” Shinsou says. “ *Don’t walk on your bad foot* .”

Izuku’s body thankfully obliges, and Izuku mentally files that bit of knowledge; people under the influence of Shinsou’s quirk do exactly as he says. He wonders what the extent of that is.

Still, there’s something about being mind-controlled that’s almost... Nice. His mind is empty and quiet for once; the Leviathan is vacant, and its mangled screaming, howling and tearing is gone as well. It’s relaxing in a really fucked up way. Not that he’ll ever admit it.

A few minutes of awkward possessed-hobbling later, Izuku feels control suddenly return to him. He stumbles, but Shinsou thankfully keeps him from falling flat on his face.

“Did you actually need to use your quirk on me?” He asks. Shinsou shrugs, his shoulder rubbing against Izuku’s.

“It didn’t look like you were going to give in anytime soon, and you probably don’t need to have your foot fucked up on your first day. I was helping.”

Izuku sighs. Shinsou’s right; he probably would have tried to walk himself.

“Still, don’t you need to get to English?”

Shinsou stares at him incredulously. “You think I’m in any hurry to get to English?”

Despite himself, Izuku can’t help but laugh. As he does, he feels the familiar feeling that always accompanies laughter rush into his head, and fins sprout from beneath his hair.

Shinsou stares at him, and Izuku looks intently at the ground as his fins flatten themselves against his head.

“Sorry, it happens,” he mutters. He doesn’t have the energy to suppress them, honestly, and the fins are harmless, even if they’re embarrassing.

Shinsou, thankfully, doesn’t seem to care, and he doesn’t make a fuss out of it when Izuku’s fins flick and accidentally cuff him on the side of the head.

They arrive at the nurse’s office a short while later, and Izuku manages to untangle himself from Shinsou and brace himself on the doorway.

“Thanks,” he says. That seems to be a theme for the day.

Shinsou doesn’t respond but waves and turns to head towards their classroom. It’s only as he leaves that Izuku realizes his expression had been different; the mask he wears hadn’t been gone, but it had been... thinner.

Holy shit, did Izuku just make a friend?

If he did, then that’s three; one friend he made by almost dying on a beach, the next he made by sacrificing his own ass to smite a robot from hell, and the third he made by offering to help in a horrifyingly overkill maze. He just can’t seem to make friends normally, can he?

With a sigh, he turns and hobbles into the nurse’s office. Time to get his foot fixed.

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“So that’s U.A., huh?” Bit asks, swinging his legs over the side of the abandoned hotel.

“They really do like trying to kill their students.”

“You’re telling *me*,” Izuku groans, rubbing his sore foot. Recovery Girl had done her best to heal it- after chewing him out for being reckless, as if that was *his* fault-, but it still ached.

“At least you made a buddy,” Bit says with a snort, clearly referring to Shinsou. He doesn’t know about Kirishima, mostly because Izuku had carefully left out the Kacchan locker room encounter. “How is he?”

“I- I’m not sure if we’re *friends* yet, but-”

“You’re friends, dude,” Bit says, elbowing him lightly.

“You don’t know that,” Izuku responds, rubbing his neck.

“Actually-”

“Bit, no. I’m not jumping to conclusions.”

“You went through some potentially life-threatening ordeal with him, right? You’re friends now.”

“ *Bit* .”

“Remind me how you met Uraraka.”

“ *Bit, that’s not how that works.* ”

“I’m right, and you know it.”

“No, you’re not. *Anyways* , the rest of the day was just... Normal school stuff. Except with pro heroes as teachers.”

“Like who?”

“Well, uh, Present Mic is our English teacher-”

Bit snorts, eyes going wide. “Wait, are you serious?”

“Yeah,” Izuku snickers, shaking his head. “It was... An experience.”

“Did you tell him about Mini Mic?” Bit asks, leaning towards him with sparkling eyes. Izuku rolls his eyes.

“No, I did not tell him about your loud bird.”

“Mido, I will actually pay you to let me show him Mini Mic.”

“Are you- are you implying that you want me to smuggle you into U.A.?”

“That’s exactly what I’m implying.”

“Bit, oh my *God*- I am not getting expelled so that you can show a pro-hero your bird.”

“Please?”

“This is not up for debate.”

“Fine, I’ll find my own way in.”

“Bit, do *not* try to break into U.A.”

“I never said that’s what I was going to do.”

“But I know you well enough to know that’s exactly what you’re going to try to do, and you’re probably going to get yourself arrested. Again.”

“Aww, you know me so well! I won’t get arrested-”

*“Bit. ”*

“I won’t! I’ll be careful, don’t worry. Now, my mom’s gonna kill me if I’m not back before ten, so-”

“Bit, don’t you dare-”

“Bye, Mido! Have fun at Overkill Academy! Please don’t die.”

## Chapter End Notes

Everybody's here! Hooray! Welcome to Overkill Academy!  
oh also mineta just doesnt fucking exist. rip.

# find my faults with what i know

## Chapter Summary

Life happens

## Chapter Notes

this chapter is dedicated to the guy reading this fic on a bus in tasmania. cheers.

sorry for the wait lmao school is kicking my ASS

{TW for explicit mentions of gross blood and gory shit :/ }

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku hopes that his first night after U.A. will be a peaceful one, and he'll wake up the next morning refreshed and ready for another day of trying not to die.

He's wrong.

As he flops into bed, wriggling under the covers, the feeling of dread gnawing on his mind like a dog with a rawhide warns him that tonight will not be a restful night. He knows it; the knowledge seems to be carved into every bone in his body. It's a curse, a warning, but it won't do him any good. He's too tired to stay awake. He'll have to face it head-on.

Izuku slips into unconsciousness, hands tangled in his sheets like a lifeline. Lifelines don't exist in bad dreams, but it makes him feel safe. Well, as safe as *the Leviathan* can feel at any given time.

For a moment, he's in blissful, dreamless sleep, and then peace is brutally snatched away from him and he wakes up on a beach. A beach, not an alley.

Izuku freezes, looking around. He's on the beach where everything happens, except it's completely clear of trash and stretches as far as he can see in every direction. He turns around, expecting to see the nighttime city skyline, but there's nothing. Only pale, ghostly sand, gleaming in the moonlight.

He's cold, he realizes dimly, and he looks down. He's wearing his old middle school uniform, and he notices that one of the top buttons is missing. It's the one he wore the day that Blade went after Kacchan. It's the one he wore the day he got his scar.

Izuku does not like where this is going.

He swallows, walking to the edge of the water. His eyes follow the tide as it slips over the sand like velvet gloves over pale hands, searching amongst the dark ripples for any hope of safety. It's not the water he knows; it's different. It's murky, and thick, like tar, he realizes. He's not even sure if it's water.

He steps back as the inky liquid seeps towards his feet, bare feet sinking into the icy sand. This feels so real, and he hates it. The worst thing about it, though, is that he doesn't know what's coming.

The good thing about the other dream was that it was static. It never changed; every night, the streetlight would go out, and the Leviathan would come barreling out of the darkness. Even if it made his gut twist and want to throw up, he knew what was coming.

Now, as he stares out at the black-and-white expanse of sand and sea, he realizes that he has no idea what's coming. He doesn't know what is going to happen. He doesn't have a clue.

Well, he'll probably get eaten by the Leviathan, but that's pretty much all he's got.

Izuku settles for sticking his hands in the pockets of his uniform and walking along the beach. The trail of footprints he leaves is there as he watches, but the moment he looks away, they vanish into the sand like a ghost. It makes him feel like he doesn't exist.

He watches his footprints appear and disappear for awhile. It's strange; the black, lifeless ocean can't seem to wash them away, but they disappear at a moment's notice. At one point, he reaches down and draws a circle with his fingers, wiping the sand off on his shirt. He looks away and then peers back down. It meets the same fate as his footprints.

When he looks back up towards the horizon, it's not just flat emptiness anymore. Something is coming towards him; stumbling, almost, as if limping. As it slowly draws closer, he realizes that it's not a what, but a who.

It's a tall figure, donned in dark clothes. He can't make out anything about them, but as they draw closer, he begins to pick out details.

Pale face with short-cropped hair. Gleaming, black shoes. A dark, probably rather expensive jacket over a white dress shirt. No tie. A pair of sunglasses, gleaming in the moonlight.

Izuku stops, his breath catching in his throat. The figure is walking towards him faster now, and he realizes, far too late, just who it is.

Blade walks towards him- no, he staggers. One of his legs is torn open and leaving a trail of blood across the white sand. Blood pours from a slash across his collarbone, and his jacket and pants are ripped and torn. He doesn't say anything; he just keeps stumbling towards Izuku. Dark red blood begins to seep from his mouth in a bubbling, gurgling stream, and Izuku turns and runs.

This is worse. This is so, so much worse. He wants the Leviathan to show up so that this will *end*; so that this will be over. This is bad. *He doesn't want this.*

He peers over his shoulder and sees Blade is following him, sprinting and stumbling. He looks like a zombie ripped straight out of some high-budget horror film, and Izuku tries to run faster.

This isn't fair. He just wants one night of sleep- *one night* where he doesn't have to worry about something like this. But life's not fair, is it? Not to a murderer.

As he runs, Izuku's mind slithers and pools into a slick mess, not unlike the 'ocean' spreading along the beach on his side. He stops being able to tell if he's dreaming; all he knows is that Blade is coming after him and that he needs to run, run, *run*.

His eyes land on something in the distance; a burst of sand, rising from the earth like smoke from an explosion, and flashes of piercing green lightning. A rumble meets his ears, a low, groaning noise, and Izuku realizes what's about to happen before it ever does.

The Leviathan swirls out of the cloud, six legs kicking and flailing as it swims upward. Its fins are on full display, and swirling, curving patterns cast a luminescent glow over its scales. It turns, slowly tilting earthward, and Izuku knows without knowing that its many pale eyes are locked onto him.

"Leave me alone!" He screams, and his voice sounds raw and pained to his own ears. Blade's footsteps at his back are louder, and he turns to look.

It's a mistake. Blade's head is lolling awkwardly, barely even clinging to his neck, and his chest is torn to shreds like it's been ravaged by some monster. Looking at it makes Izuku horrifically sick, and he looks away to see the Leviathan barreling towards him, jaws hanging open like a cave ready to swallow him whole.

A gut-twisting scream pierces the night like a scalpel, and Izuku freezes as Blade and the Leviathan blaze towards him on either side. He's trapped in the middle, with no way out, and all he can do is shake and watch in horror. As they draw closer, he drops to his knees in the cold sand and covers his head with his arms.

His two nightmares meet on top of him, and this time, the screaming is his own.

Izuku wakes up as his back hits the floor, the air rushing out of his lungs in a rough wave. He wheezes, legs tangled in his sheets and scaly claws gripping the floor. His face feels wet, and it's only when he snuffles that he realizes that he's crying.

"J-just a- a dream," he tells himself, squeezing his eyes shut. Blade's lifeless form flashes before him, blood trickling from countless wounds torn into his flesh, and he gasps and opens his eyes again.

Blade's still in jail, though, so he can't hurt Izuku, and Izuku can't hurt him. He needs to focus on that. He needs to remember that.

He stumbles to his feet, bracing himself on his bed. The darkness suddenly feels crushing, and Izuku's mind whispers of things that might come out. He's just shaken, that's all. He's safe.

He grabs his phone off of the nightstand, claws clicking on the glass of the screen. He tries in vain to open it, leathery claw pads not registering on the screen. Frustrated, he crushes the swirling emotions the dream spread within him, and the Leviathan seeps out of his arm.

He unlocks it, going straight to his browser and checking on Blade's status. He knows he's still in jail, but he needs to see. He needs to know for sure.

The first article that pops up after he searches it is a few months old, and it says in big, bold letters, **MYSTERIOUS VILLAIN BLADE ESCAPES FROM PRISON OVERNIGHT, POLICE BAFFLED**

Izuku stumbles to the bathroom and throws up.

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The train pulls into the station, rushing past the platform and sending a few loosely tacked-down flyers fluttering through the air before slowing to a hissing stop. Ochako bounces on the balls of her feet and watches impatiently as the doors remain shut for what feels like too long, ignoring the painful rolling in her stomach. The seconds tick by, drawn out like an elastic band being pulled too far, before finally the doors creak and slide open. A colorful wave of people emerge, and Ochako joins the ones pushing their way onto the train. She only stumbles a few times before she manages to stumble through the doors, sliding away towards the wall and grabbing a pole to keep herself steady.

There's another hand gripping the same one, and without thinking, Ochako follows it to its owner. Her face splits into a grin when she spots a familiar, freckled face. Who wouldn't recognize that scar?

"Midoriya!"

Midoriya doesn't look; he just continues staring blankly at the ground. His eyes are dark, punctuated by heavy bags that Ochako's surprised she didn't notice before. She hopes he's okay.

She wonders if he's too out of it to talk, but then she spots the bright yellow earbuds in his ears. He just can't hear her, that's all.

She reaches out and carefully taps his hand, the one gripping the pole a little too tightly. He doesn't notice, so she does it again, and then he jolts like he's been shocked and turns to stare at her. His expression is pale, with wide eyes, but it thankfully shifts into something akin to relief upon realizing who's standing in front of him.

"Oh, Uraraka," he says, hastily tugging out his earbuds. "S-sorry, I didn't see you there. I'm kind of, uh, out of it."

“I noticed,” she says. “Are you feeling okay?”

“I’m fine, don’t worry,” he says with a wave of his hand, mouth twisting awkwardly. “I’m just, um, a little bit tired.”

“Oh,” she says, although she doesn’t quite believe him. She hasn’t known him for too long, though, so she’s hesitant to push it. She doesn’t want to come off as pushy.

“Well, of course you’re tired,” she laughs. “That crazy race was exhausting. I’m still sore.”

Gratefulness flashes through his eyes. “Yeah, my legs feel like rubber,” he says, laughing. “I *really* hope we don’t do something like that again. I- I mean, it was kind of fun, but... it was kind of terrifying.”

“You’re telling me,” Ochako groans, remembering a three-pointer bursting out of a wall and grabbing her ankle. She’d had to make both the robot and herself float to escape, and it had taken its toll on her stomach.

“Mr. Aizawa’s terrifying,” Midoriya mutters. “Do you know what pro hero he is? I thought all of the U.A. staff was active or retired pro heroes, but he doesn’t look like anyone I’ve seen before.”

Ochako shakes her head. She hadn’t really thought about it, but now that she does, she realizes he’s right. Mr. Yamada is very clearly Present Mic- he’s not subtle- and Mr. Ishiyama is obviously Cementoss, but she has no idea who Mr. Aizawa could be.

“I’m sure we’ll find out eventually,” she says. Midoriya laughs, rubbing the back of his neck with a wry grin.

“I don’t know if we can be sure of *anything* with Mr. Aizawa,” he says, and Ochako snickers.

“At least he spends most of his time asleep instead of trying to expel us,” she says, and Midoriya sighs and nods. His hair slides down in front of his eyes like leaves concealing the sky from the forest floor.

“Yeah, me too,” he says. “*That* was scary. I thought that whoever came in last was dead for sure.”

“No kidding,” she says. Midoriya grins, and a bit of the exhaustion seeps out of his face.

“So, what do you think Mr. Aizawa’s got in store for us today?”

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Izuku knows that U.A. has a reputation to uphold and everything, but he’s still impressed at the quality of their food. He can’t help but look forwards to lunch as his stomach grumbles. It’s partially thanks to his inability to eat breakfast- thanks, nausea-inducing nightmares- but he does his best to not focus on it.

After managing to get himself a tray without messing up his order too badly, Izuku's not entirely sure to sit. The entirety of U.A.'s first year is here; not just his class, but the General Education, Support, and Management classes as well. All in all, the cafeteria's packed, and he's not sure where to sit. Yesterday, he'd managed to tuck himself in a corner, but that was only because he'd been early. Now, not a single corner or isolated table stands vacant, and Izuku has no clue what to do.

"Midoriya!"

He turns at the familiar voice and spots Uraraka waving at him from a few tables away. She's the only one there at the moment, and Izuku relaxes slightly and carefully trots over to sit down in the seat across from her.

"Hey, Uraraka," he says, and she grins.

"Hey, Midoriya! You looked lost."

"I was," he says, rubbing the back of his neck. "Thanks for letting me sit with you."

"No problem!" She chirps. "Thanks for sitting with me!"

Izuku can't help the smile that grows on his face at that. He honestly can't remember the last time someone wanted him to sit with them. It's... a nice feeling. One he doesn't deserve, but one he'll earn.

"This food is crazy good," Uraraka says, eyeing her tray hungrily. Izuku nods.

"U.A. strikes again," he says, and Uraraka giggles.

"You can't complain, though," she teases, and Izuku shrugs. Can't argue with that.

Izuku's busy chewing on a mouthful of white rice when a third figure appears at the table behind Uraraka. He glances up and meets the eyes of none other than Iida Tenya, who's standing stiffly with his tray in hand. Izuku's honestly surprised he hasn't found a place to sit yet.

"Hello, Uraraka and Midoriya," he says. "May I eat with you?"

"Oh, sure!" Uraraka says, and Midoriya nods, not trusting himself to speak with a mouthful of food. Iida sits down in the seat next to Uraraka and sets about organizing his tray. Izuku takes another bite and watches as Iida seems to make sure everything is in its place before he starts eating.

Izuku takes a sip of his drink, drumming on the table. This honestly feels... weird. He's spent so long eating school lunches alone, but now, there are people around him. He hardly even *knows* Iida, but Iida had still wanted to sit with him. It's a nice reminder that the world isn't filled with Kacchans and his middle school classmates.

He glances up and catches a glance of a lone person leaning against the wall a few tables away, tray in one hand and drink in the other. Izuku only knows one person with purple hair,

so he awkwardly does his best to wave.

Shinsou doesn't look in his direction for a while, and by now, Izuku's gotten a few weird glances from students in other classes. He feels scales blossom onto his cheeks, but ignores them and waves a bit more furiously.

Shinsou finally looks over at him, and Izuku's suddenly struck by the realization that Shinsou might not *want* to sit with him. Of course; why would Shinsou even want to sit with him? They only just met. Still, he can't help but offer.

Izuku pats the seat next to him and tilts his head, swallowing the lump in his throat. Shinsou glances over his shoulder, looks back, and points to himself questioningly. Izuku nods.

Shinsou glances over his shoulder a few more times, but eventually makes his way over and hovers around behind Izuku, one foot tapping on the floor. Izuku's not exactly sure what he's doing.

"Are you... gonna sit?" He asks. "U-unless you like standing, of course. That's fine, too."

"Just... checking something," Shinsou says quietly before settling into the seat next to Izuku. One of his eyes is partially obscured by his fluffy hair, and the other looks empty and tired, but Izuku can see the surprise lining it.

"Thanks for offering," He mumbles into his soup, and Izuku has to resist the urge to duck. He's never offered anyone a seat before, let alone had his offer accepted. U.A. really is a place of new discoveries, isn't it? Hopefully the truth about his quirk isn't one of them.

"You're welcome," he says, before adding more quietly, "You looked lonely."

Shinsou makes some sort of noise in the back of his throat that Izuku thinks might be a laugh, before falling silent.

"Oh, I haven't talked to you, yet, have I?" Uraraka pipes up, watching Shinsou curiously. "What's your name?"

Shinsou glances up, seems to realize Uraraka's talking to him. He stays silent, expression blank, but Izuku can see the gauged tension beneath his skin. Uraraka blinks, confusion crossing her face, before she shrugs off his silence.

"No rush, I guess. I'm Uraraka!"

"And I am Iida!" Iida adds after her. "A pleasure to meet you!"

Shinsou watches the two carefully for a moment, before he finally mumbles, "Shinsou. Nice to meet you." Izuku can't help but wonder what Shinsou's gone through to make him react like that. He can only hope that Shinsou doesn't have a Kacchan in his life.

"Oh, Shinsou!" Uraraka says. "I saw your name on the roster!"

“Me as well, although I didn’t see you in the top twenty for the Practical Exam,” Iida says curiously. “Could it be that you have a non-offensive quirk?”

Shinsou stiffens, and Izuku realizes what direction the conversation shifted in almost immediately. He thinks of Bit, graciously not questioning him about his quirk other than its basic functions, and he thinks of Shinsou, who seemed less-than-inclined to talk about his own.

“So!” Izuku says a little too quickly, before taking a breath and forcing himself to calm down. “What do you guys think we’re doing in Foundational Heroics today?”

If Iida and Uraraka notice the sudden change in topic, they thankfully don’t comment and busy themselves with continuing the conversation. Iida seems curious as to how their activities will help them progress as heroes; Uraraka’s rebounding ideas for possible exercises off of him.

Iida is a huge nerd, Izuku realizes with somewhat belated surprise. Up close, he’s actually less scary than before. Maybe it was first day jitters or something that distorted Izuku’s perspective. Maybe he’s just paranoid.

He’s so caught up in his discovery that he almost misses Shinsou’s eyes resting on him. He only notices when he feels the far-too-familiar feeling of being stared at and glances to his right. Shinsou’s watching him curiously, and his eyes are questioning.

Izuku has the feeling that he knows what Shinsou’s asking, so he subtly nods. Shinsou watches him for a moment longer before he looks away. Izuku can’t help but wish he knew what he was thinking.

“Midoriya!” Iida says suddenly, and Izuku nearly falls out of his seat. “Your food’s getting cold.”

“Oh, right,” Izuku says, suddenly embarrassed, because *who forgets to eat at lunch?* “Thanks.”

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As it turns out, nobody knows what’s going to happen in Foundational Heroics, but the question is answered for them when the class finally arrives. Izuku’s still drained from Algebra, but he can’t help the spark of excitement that races through him.

He’d wanted to be a hero before everything that happened, and he *still does* . The difference is that now, instead of it just being a desperate fantasy, he’s finally getting a chance to become someone worth something; he’s going to make up for what he’s done.

Then there’s a noise, and the chatter in the class falls to a stop. Outside of the closed door, there’s a strange sound, almost like an elephant is moving extremely quickly through the hallway. It’s a strange ‘thunkthunkthunkthunk’ noise and Izuku has approximately three seconds to wonder what’s going on before the door flies open with a bang and a figure appears.

Izuku's breath catches in his throat; he'd recognize that figure anywhere. There, holding himself up by the doorframe and beaming as brightly as the sun, is none other than All-Might.

"It is I!" He booms, letting go of the door and all but bouncing to the desk at the front of the room. "Coming in through the door like a normal person!"

The class erupts into excited talking as All Might jumps up on the desk and poses dramatically, and all Izuku can do is stare. It's All Might, here, going to be teaching him.

*All Might, reaching out and touching him. The Leviathan rearing up with a poisonous howl. Himself jumping backwards, snarling and frothing at the mouth, holding onto control by the skin of his teeth.*

...For better or worse. He really hopes All Might doesn't remember him from that. It's a shitty first impression, especially since it belongs to something he's trying to desperately to leave behind.

"Foundational Heroics!" All Might says in a voice that could rival Present Mic's in volume. "In this class, we'll be building up your foundational skill set for work in heroics through various trials and tests!"

The class cheers, and Izuku can't help but join in, although quietly.

"With that, let's jump right in, beginning with..." There's a dramatic pause, and All Might pulls something out from behind his back; a block, emblazoned with the word 'battle'.

"...the trial of battle!"

Izuku's heart drops onto the floor. Battle... as in fighting other people? The thought of using the Leviathan to outright *attack* people makes him sick to his very bones.

But he'll have to, if he wants to be a hero. He'll have to hurt people to prevent harm from coming to the innocent; that's what being a hero is all about, right?

He doesn't know. He tangles his hands together, takes a deep breath, and hopes nobody notices his shaking.

"And to go with your first battle," All Might continues, and a few gasps echo through the classroom as the wall on the far side of the room is suddenly home to a series of shelves sliding out from within.

"The gear you requested to match your quirk!"

The class erupts into excited noise as All Might tells the class to get changed and meet him at Grounds Beta before disappearing out the door. Izuku gratefully focuses on his costume instead of the swirling thoughts inside of his head; he's excited to see what it looks like in person. He hopes it's not too insane; Bit had helped him design it, after all.

*“U.A. sent me an email today,” Izuku says, dropping onto the couch and burying his face in his pillow. “I need to design my hero costume.”*

*“Holy shit,” Bit says from somewhere in the other room, and the patter of footsteps announces that he’s returned. “You get to design your own hero costumes?”*

*“Yeah,” Izuku says, sighing. “The problem with that is that I have literally no idea what I want my costume to look like.”*

*He looks up as Bit hops up onto the arm of the couch, crouching like a gargoyle. His glasses are skewed over to the side of his face, but he either doesn’t notice or doesn’t care.*

*“It should look badass,” Bit says thoughtfully, and Izuku snorts and rolls his eyes.*

*“It doesn’t... technically matter, I guess, because I’m going to be an underground hero.”*

*“Still, what’s the point of having a hero costume if it’s not badass?”*

*“Functionality. That’s the biggest issue, actually.”*

*“How so?”*

*Izuku pushes himself up with his arms, returning to a sitting position. He lets his head fall back onto the back of the couch, blowing out a long, exasperated breath.*

*“My quirk manifests itself in... lizard parts,” he says. “The problem is that they just poke up from my body, and if I’m wearing clothes, they tear right through.”*

*Bit hums in acknowledgment, shifting from his squatting position to sit more securely on the arm of the couch.*

*“So I need something that won’t get in the way of, uh, fins and stuff, right? I was considering just leaving open spaces in the costume for things to poke through, but that leaves me vulnerable and kind of defeats the purpose.”*

*“Right,” Bit says. “So you need something that will let your fins poke through without leaving holes.”*

*“That’s the idea, but I’m not sure how to pull it off.”*

*They sit in silence for a moment before Bit gasps and springs off of the couch, stumbling to his feet and spinning around to face Izuku.*

*“I have an idea,” he says, and Izuku raises an eyebrow.*

*“You’ve heard of pattern-retaining lithium-cotton, right?”*

*Izuku shakes his head and leans forwards, his interest piqued. Bit’s grin is practically splitting his face now.*

*“Self-healing fabric.”*

They’d built the design off of that general idea, with Bit strongly pushing for the dragon theme. The costume design itself had been accepted when they’d sent it in, although the message had said that there would be some ‘minor design changes’, so Izuku’s not exactly sure what to expect. He pulls the briefcase containing his costume off of the wall and follows a few of the other boys down the hall and out the doors to the changing area.

The room he follows a boy with a tail- Ojiro, right?- into is more or less the mirror image of the one from yesterday, so he quickly tucks himself away in what looks like the same corner, sets his case on the ground, and opens it up.

The first thing he sees is a folded square of dark, forest green fabric, which he pulls out and shakes off. It’s a shirt; long-sleeve and thick, padded a little bit around the elbows and back, and patterned by tigerlike black stripes.

It’s almost exactly what he designed, at least for the upper part. The only remaining question is whether or not the fabric is self-healing. Only one way to find out, he knows.

Letting the Leviathan slip into his arm is easier than before; maybe it’s just because he’s not restraining himself, or maybe it’s because he’s had more practice. Either way, an icy rush shoots through his veins, and soon his hand is enveloped in glittering scales and sharp claws.

Reaching out, he carefully hooks one claw on the fabric and pulls. Sure enough, the fabric tears after he tugs hard, leaving a long rip in the shirt. He pulls his hand away and waits.

For a moment, nothing happens. But then, the threads seem to stir like waking snakes, and the fabric knits itself back together. Self-healing fabric, which will allow him to grow and retract his fins and claws at will.

Excitement shoots through him, settling in his mouth and prickling in his gums, and he can’t help but grin and hold up the shirt.

“Wha- Woah, Midoriya! Your teeth!”

He almost drops the costume, whirling around to see Kirishima staring at him. His eyes are practically shining with excitement, and his mouth is pulled into a grin.

“Your teeth!” He repeats. “They’re sharp! I didn’t notice!”

Izuku blinks, before opening his mouth and running a finger over his teeth. Sure enough, his mouth his filled with an arsenal of sharklike fangs. So that’s what the prickling was.

“Y-yeah,” he says, hunching his shoulders. “It- It happens sometimes.”

“That’s *so manly* !” Kirishima whoops, bounding over to him. “Check it out! We match!”

He grins, and Izuku notices for the first time that Kirishima’s teeth are all razor-sharp, too. He hadn’t noticed, and he could slap himself for missing something so obvious.

“We... I guess we do!” He laughs, and Kirishima raises a fist in the air. He’s so excited about the Leviathan’s teeth, Izuku thinks to himself. Someone’s... happy about his quirk. Just because it’s there.

It feels good.

When Kirishima turns to talk to one of the other boys, Izuku pulls off his uniform shirt and hastily tugs his costume on. It’s soft, he realizes, kind of like silk sliding over his skin.

He reaches into his case and removes the pants, which are like the shirt; a dark green, although darker than the shirt, with lighter stripes beneath the knees. They’re similarly padded around the joints, and he wastes no time putting them on.

The next pieces to join his arsenal are the boots. They’re thick but flexible, and the tip is retractable in the case of Leviathan feet. He pulls them on, grunting with the effort, before jumping up and down on the ground to make sure they’re on all the way. They’re springy, he notes.

The next piece he pulls out is one of the key ones; a black visor that hides his face, key for anonymity and masking his scar, although he won’t exactly admit that’s its purpose. He brushes it off, eyeing the sleek, goggle-like appearance, and jumps when it lights up.

The outlines of two angular eyes with slit pupils pop up in a bright, luminescent green, and Izuku stares. It’s... an interesting touch. He wonders what it’ll look like when he’s wearing it, but he saves it for last in cases it hinders his visibility.

He finishes up the arms of his costume with thick leather elbow guards- engraved with a scale pattern, of course- and fingerless gloves with course palms. For grip, Bit had said, to climb buildings. Then, he tugs on knee guards- probably should have put them on before the boots- and makes sure he’s still got a full range of motion.

As he reaches into the case yet again, his hands brush cold metal, and he pulls out what looks like a mouthguard modeled after a snarling dragon’s maw. It’s... a bit different than his original design, but he can’t say he doesn’t like it. He lets it rest around his neck, not wanting to put it on immediately.

The last thing still in the case is a strange, shawl-like piece; it’s almost like the beginnings of a cape, but one that hardly goes past his forearms. There’s a hood attached as well, so when he slips on the semi-cape, he tugs it up and over his hair. With it in place, he pulls on the visor and takes a step back.

The costume is overall surprisingly comfortable, which is a bonus. He flexes, shifting around and holding his arms over his head. The costume shifts, but it doesn’t constrict him at all.

He turns around to face the rest of the room. Most of the boys have already left; only a few linger. There’s him, Sero, Kaminari, and Shinsou.

“Lookin’ snazzy!” Kaminari says, snapping and pointing finger guns at him.

“Uh- Thanks!” Izuku says. “Same to you!”

Kaminari winks, tapping Sero’s arm and leaving the room. Sero trots after him a few seconds later, and then it’s just Izuku and Shinsou.

Izuku’s about to leave as well but hesitates. Shinsou’s still fiddling with his costume, and Izuku doesn’t want to just abandon him to walk out alone. Awkwardly, he elects to lean against the wall and wait.

Shinsou doesn’t seem to even realize he’s there until he’s already finished putting on his costume. He turns to leave, sees Izuku, and stops dead in his tracks.

Izuku pushes off of the wall, suddenly feeling self-conscious. He hopes he doesn’t look ridiculous; that’s the last thing he needs right now. Thankfully, that doesn’t seem to be what Shinsou’s focused on.

“You waited for me,” he says flatly, and Izuku can’t help but tilt his head slightly.

“Uh, yeah,” he says. “I, uh, I did.”

Shinsou stands there for a moment longer, and it’s not until Izuku starts walking towards the entrance and glances over his shoulder that he starts moving again. He catches up to Izuku before slowing to match his pace, and the two walk side-by-side to the door.

As they do, Izuku gets a good look at Shinsou’s hero costume. It’s similar to his in its simplicity; he seems to be gunning for the purple theme, with a dark purple hoodie lined with pale lilac. His pants are black, which makes them hard to distinguish from the equally dark boots. His untamed mess of hair is held back by some kind of angular face guard that covers his hairline and sends thin spines shooting back over his head, and a strange contraption covers his mouth. One closer inspection, it looks like a speaker.

“What are you doing?”

Izuku can’t help but flinch backward, realizing he’s been staring at Shinsou a bit too intently. Scales blossom out from under his eyes, and Shinsou raises an eyebrow.

“Looking at your costume,” Izuku says quickly. “S-sorry, I didn’t mean to be weird-”

“You’re fine,” Shinsou says, looking back ahead. “I was just curious.”

They reach an underpass, beyond which Izuku can clearly see the bright light of day. He shivers as his brain recalls a similar alley in which some very bad things had almost occurred. He wants to get out of here, but he doesn’t want to randomly sprint ahead and leave Shinsou behind. Then, he has a thought.

He taps Shinsou on the shoulder, tilts his head towards the exit, and says, “Race you.”

Shinsou jolts, staring at him, and Izuku gives him a second to puzzle it out before he takes off. He hears an indignant shout, and then footsteps behind him. It actually worked.

He can't help the grin that slides on to his face as he slows down enough to keep himself only a few steps ahead of Shinsou, who sounds like he's getting increasingly frustrated. Within moments, the overpass is behind him, and he's enveloped in the warm light of day.

The rest of the class stands before him, led by All Might. Beyond them is a handful of dilapidated-looking buildings; not an entire fake city's worth, but a good amount.

He spots Uraraka and Iida a little ways away, and he trots over without thinking. As soon as they turn to look at him, he instinctively falters, but Uraraka grins brightly and waves.

"Woah, Midoriya!" She says. "Your costume looks super cool!"

"It seems rather thin," Iida says. "Won't you be leaving yourself somewhat defenseless?"

Of course Iida would say that, Izuku thinks, looking at Iida's straight-up armor. There's even a full-on helmet, which he's holding under his elbow. It reminds Izuku of something he's seen before, but he can't pinpoint it at the moment.

"It- It's supposed to be like that," he says. "It's padded around the joints, but it's purposely thin so I can, uh..." He's not sure how to say it, so he sighs, holds up one arm, and lets a thin, spiky fin sprout from his forearm. It pushes against the fabric before popping through with a tearing noise. He absentmindedly realizes that it's the first time he's intentionally summoned fins.

"Won't your costume have a ton of holes in it, then?" Uraraka asks, tilting her head in confusion. At her side, Iida mirrors her expression.

Izuku shakes his head and grips the Leviathan, dragging it out of his arm. The fin flattens itself against his arm, quickly disappearing. A moment later, the hole in his sleeve is gone as well.

"It's self-healing fabric," he says in response to Iida and Uraraka's awestruck expressions.

"I see!" Iida says. "A clever application to get around your quirk's liabilities! I may have underestimated you, Midoriya!"

"It... was partially my friend's idea," Izuku mutters, but he can't help but grin slightly at the praise and rub the back of his neck. He wonders if his teeth are still sharp. They are.

"You guys' costumes look great, too!" He says, realizing that he hasn't said it already. "You look like a knight ready to ride into battle, Iida."

Iida preens, puffing out his chest. Uraraka giggles, and Izuku turns his attention to her.

"Yours is really cool, Uraraka," he says. "I like the space theme. It suits your quirk really well!"

"Thanks!" She says, twirling. Her costume is a sleek black unitard speckled with scattered white stars over the shoulders and sides. A stripe down the center of her chest has been replaced with a glittering, iridescent fabric that looks like galaxies swirling in the vast

expanse of space, and her sleeves and the lower part of her pants are made of a similar material. She has white bracers and boots that remind Izuku of an astronaut's, as well as a pale, translucent visor. Her hair is tied up with a white ribbon that dangles in the wind behind her. It's an ethereal costume, and it suits her.

She suddenly stops, peers over Izuku's shoulder, and grins. "Your costume looks great, too, Shinsou!"

Izuku turns around just in time to see Shinsou, standing stiffly behind him, mutter out a quiet, "Thanks. Yours, too."

It's a strange atmosphere, Izuku realizes. Positive. Nobody's here to insult him or insinuate that his quirk is useless- other than Kacchan, of course, but Kacchan is standing rather far off from the group with a sneer on his face. Izuku doesn't have to worry about him, at least for the time being.

"Students! As you see, in front of you are a number of buildings!" All Might says, catching everyone's attention. "This will be an indoor battle trial! Villain cleanup is usually only seen out in the open, but in fact, most villains hide behind closed doors!"

He's right, Izuku thinks. He hasn't seen many indoor villain battles; he wonders how different they are.

"For this test, you'll be split into "villain" and "hero" groups," All Might explains. "For a two-on-two team battle!"

The class immediately breaks into a cacophony of questions, and Izuku can only watch as All Might looks rather pained. It almost reminds Izuku of one of his old teachers, but he refuses to make the comparison.

"For this training," All Might says, effectively cutting off the questionnaire. "We'll have 'villains' guard a faux bomb they intend on deploying! The heroes must catch them and stop their nefarious scheme before time is up!"

If only it were always that black and white.

"If the heroes capture the villains or reach the bomb before time is up, they win. If the villains manage to keep the bomb away the whole time or capture the heroes, *they* win! Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir!" Is the unanimous yet slightly scattered response.

"Very good! Now, we'll be picking teams by lottery!"

"Lottery?" Iida says at Izuku's side. "I suppose pros are often forced to team-up with random pro heroes they may not have worked with before, so this is likely teaching us how to plan and work with anyone."

"That- That's right!" All Might says, and Izuku can swear he sees All Might glance to the side fearfully. "Anyways, let's begin!"

He starts pulling out tickets with names on them, pairing them off as he goes.

“Team A, Kirishima and Asui! Team B, Tokoyami and Ashido! Team C, Uraraka and Midoriya!”

Izuku breathes a sigh of relief and meets Uraraka excited gaze.

“Team D, Bakugou and Todoroki! Team E, Aoyama and Hagakure! Team F, Kaminari and Yaoyorozu! Team G, Jiro and Shoji! Team H, Iida and Shinsou! Team I, Sero and Satou! Team J, Koda and Ojio!”

“Yes!” Uraraka says. “I’m glad I got you. Are you ready?”

“Hopefully,” Izuku says, looking back towards All Might.

“The first two teams to fight will be...” He sticks his hands into two boxes, one labeled Heroes, and the other labeled Villains. A moment later, he pulls out two balls with letters on them.

“Team H as heroes and Team C as villains!”

He and Uraraka are villains. Of course. But team H means that they’ll be fighting...

“Good luck to both of you! Do your best, but I will be doing mine!” Iida says, pointing at him and Uraraka. At his side, Shinsou gives Izuku a wry smirk. Before he can think better of it, Izuku matches it, tilting his head in the same way Shinsou does.

“Good luck,” he says, before turning to his partner. “Are you ready, Uraraka?”

“Ready as I’ll ever be!” She says. She’s still clearly excited, but there’s a competitive fire burning behind her eyes. Izuku can almost feel its heat; warm and powerful, but not destructive like Kacchan’s explosions. He’s gotten lucky, for once in his life. Uraraka will be a valuable asset, and not just because of her quirk.

“Well, then let’s go.”

## Chapter End Notes

I debated including the trial in this chapter, but decided to split it up. Have a chill chapter before we get back into the action!  
Shinsou is killing me. writing him is HARD

(Also, to those of you worrying about a Bakugou-Midoriya confrontation, don't worry!  
You'll get your bloodfest.)

[Update: costume sketches are [here](#)]



# mercy comes and mercy goes

## Chapter Summary

The first training exercise, and the aftermath.

## Chapter Notes

im sorry this took so long but Oh My God i am so tired  
enjoy me screaming at a wall for two hours and churning out this in a week  
a whopping 8k words Oh Boy

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Hitoshi looks at the piece of paper he's been handed blankly, turning it around in his hands and trying to choke a meaning out of it. It's some sort of floor plan, he assumes, but a really shittily drawn one; the rooms are nothing more than disjointed, collapsing rectangles sketched out loosely in thin pen. Did All Might *make* this?

At his side, Iida seems to be mirroring his thoughts.

"Odd," he says. "This seems rather unprofessional. Perhaps UA is attempting to teach us to work with minimal information."

Hitoshi shrugs, but he doesn't bother responding. He's not quite sure what to make of Iida; he seems... friendly enough, even if he comes across as a little intimidating, but Hitoshi has to remind himself that Iida doesn't know about his quirk. He doubts that Iida will treat him the same after he finds out. That's the way it always is.

At least, that's the way it *was* until the enigma that is Midoriya showed up. He'd helped Hitoshi yesterday in the test- which he would have failed without help- for no clear reason other than simply wanting to. Then, Hitoshi had told him about his quirk- hell, he'd *used it* on him, for some stupid reason he'd thought was clever at the time- and Midoriya hadn't seemed to care. He'd thought Hitoshi had a *hero's* quirk, something Hitoshi never thought he'd hear. Midoriya had even gone as far as to help steer the conversation away from Hitoshi's quirk at lunch, granting Hitoshi just a little bit longer as just Shinsou instead of 'the kid with the villain's quirk'.

Hitoshi doesn't understand. He genuinely doesn't. Midoriya doesn't follow any of the patterns he's come to watch people follow. He doesn't fit into a box that Hitoshi can label and

store away for future use. He's... unpredictable, unlike most people, and Hitoshi's not sure what to think of that.

Iida, on the other hand, is a familiar shape. He's similar to a few of the upperclassmen Hitoshi used to see around school; noble, smart, and a bit uptight, but still somewhat friendly. Like them, Iida seems approachable, but once confronted with Hitoshi's quirk, he'll twist his face in disgust or fear and avoid Hitoshi like the plague.

It's unavoidable, Hitoshi knows. There's no point in sugarcoating it. It's not like he can lie about his quirk; he'll be stuck with Iida and his other classmates for the next few years.

Hitoshi can't help but be bitter about the whole setup, quite honestly. He makes a friend- sort of- and has a shot at making two more- and then he has to fight them. Well, he's not fighting Iida, but he has to use his quirk, so he might as well be.

"We have five minutes to devise a plan," Iida says, effectively snapping Hitoshi out of his thoughts. "In order to succeed, we'll have to find and secure the bomb. My quirk is suitable for speed, but... I'm a bit disadvantaged in closed spaces like building interiors. What is your quirk, Shinsou?"

There it is. The question that always pops up, no matter the circumstances. That was fast. Hitoshi can feel his friendship with Iida dying already.

"Brainwashing," he says flatly. "If I can get someone to verbally respond to something I say, then I can control them."

He waits for Iida's face to switch into horror, for him to take his first steps down the path that all people like him follow. He waits for the usual, *'That's such a horrible quirk,'* or *'wouldn't you make a better villain?'*

"To what extent?" Iida asks, raising an eyebrow. Hitoshi blinks. What?

"I'm not... sure," he admits, confusion bubbling up in the back of his mind. Where's the reaction? "I haven't used it for much. As far as I know, I can only make people follow basic commands."

"That could be a versatile quirk," Iida says, continuing and tapping his chin. "If we manage to find Uraraka or Midoriya, could you get them to lead us to the bomb?"

Hitoshi watches with wide eyes as Iida shrugs off the pattern Hitoshi has placed on him, unknowingly shifting Hitoshi's world on its axis. He does his best to keep the surprise off of his face and answer the question.

"Yes," he says. "Midoriya already knows about my quirk, though. He probably knows not to answer me."

Iida starts pacing, and Hitoshi watches with mild curiosity as his engines puff and stutter to life. His face is contorted in thought, his free arm swinging loosely while the other is folded around his helmet. It's a strangely amusing sight, honestly.

“Then we’ll have to find another way to find the bomb,” he mutters, before more loudly saying, “I suggest that we split up to look for it, and if you find either of the villains, you try and use your quirk on them and tell me where you are. If it doesn’t work, we can attempt to capture them.”

He stops pacing and turns his gaze onto Hitoshi, who’s a bit busy reeling from the fact that Iida doesn’t seem to care that Hitoshi has a villain’s quirk. It doesn’t make *sense*. All his life, everyone’s fit into the same patterns, and he’s known how to act around them. Now, the patterns are unraveling at the seams; first Midoriya, now Iida. For the first time, he’s completely in the dark, unsure what to do.

“Shinsou?” Iida asks, and Hitoshi hopes his face hasn’t betrayed his mental calamity.

“That works,” he says. “How are we going in? Through the door?”

“Most likely,” Iida says. “Uraraka doesn’t have a largely offensive quirk. Midoriya... I’m not sure, but he doesn’t seem inclined to attack. We should be safe entering through the front.”

Hitoshi’s about to agree, but a closer look at the building reveals a fire escape winding up the side all the way to the roof. There must be some sort of roof access there, then.

“Wait,” he says quietly. “There’s a fire escape. I’ll go up and in through one of the upper floors, and you can go in through the door and start at the bottom. We’ll work faster that way.”

Iida nods. “An excellent strategy!”

Hitoshi nods blankly, trying to pretend that this isn’t the first time he’s ever heard that. His ideas are always the ones to be shot down or ignored for fear of his quirk. This all feels weird. A forgotten, long-silenced part of him hopes he gets the chance to get used to it.

As Iida goes back to scrutinizing the ‘floor plan’, he stares at the paper in his own hands, mind buzzing for the remaining few minutes. When they’re up, All Might’s voice cuts through the quiet static flickering in his headset.

“ *Hero Team, you may now enter the building!* ”

“Let’s go!” Iida says, tugging on his helmet and heading towards the building with long, purposeful strides. Hitoshi trails after him, pulling his speaker to up around his mouth and jamming his hands in his pockets. Time to see how this goes.

The rest of the class’ eyes will be on him. This is his chance to prove to them that he can be a hero. If Midoriya and Iida have already broken away from the pattern, maybe, just maybe, the rest of his class will, too.

He’s going to win.

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“O-okay,” Izuku says, rubbing his gloved hands together and leaning against the wall. “We need a plan.”

From where she stands on the other side of the room, Uraraka glances up at him. One of her hands is trailing idly along the paper mache- with her pinkies neatly tucked in, Izuku notes almost without thinking- and her visor has been flipped down. Behind it, her brown eyes are glittering.

“Right!” She says, letting her hand drop and taking a few bouncy steps towards him. “Do you have anything in mind?”

“Not yet,” Izuku admits, leaning his head back slightly. His ears prick, and he lets the fins unfurl; there’s no point in wasting his effort to keep them restrained. Uraraka glances at the new additions to his head but doesn’t say anything.

“What do we know?” She says, tapping her chin with her index finger. “We’ve got the layout of the building, and what else?”

“We know their quirks,” Izuku says. “I don’t know if they know ours.”

“Iida’s quirk is his engines, right? I think they let him run fast. I... I actually don’t know what Shinsou’s quirk is. Do you?”

Izuku goes to answer and then hesitates. Shinsou clearly didn’t want to talk about his quirk, but on the other hand, any information Izuku has could win them the exercise. He doesn’t know what to say.

Uraraka’s bound to find out sooner or later, he knows.

“It- It’s brainwashing,” he says finally, and Uraraka’s eyes go wide.

“*Really* ? Wow. What a crazy quirk.”

“It’s really suited for hero work,” Izuku says quickly, and then more quietly adds, “and right now, we’re villains.”

“Right,” Uraraka says grimly. “Do you know how it works?”

“I think so,” Izuku says. “If you verbally respond to something he says, he can control you.”

“So I just can’t talk to him?” Uraraka asks, visibly relaxing a bit. “That’s not so bad.”

“I think he might try to catch us off guard,” Izuku says. “If you see him, be careful.”

Uraraka nods. “Okay, so we know their quirks. What’s our plan?”

Izuku thinks for a moment. Yesterday, Shinsou hadn’t seemed too physically strong; he probably won’t be a problem if it comes down to a physical fight- and *God* Izuku hopes it won’t, even though he knows better than to hope by now- but Iida is a different story

altogether. He's obviously fast and, if Izuku had to take a guess based on his stature, probably absolutely fucking ripped.

"We need a way to stop Iida," he says. "But I- I don't think we can beat him in a straight-on fight."

Uraraka laughs. "Yeah, no way. He's huge. We have to capture him somehow, right?"

"Right. Maybe..." Izuku glances down at Uraraka's hands. "How long can you hold your quirk for, Uraraka?"

Uraraka blinks, then pulls a pensive face. "It depends on how much weight I'm holding. I think the longest I've ever held someone up was half an hour, but that was when I was only using my quirk on them. Why?"

"Do you think you could keep Iida floating for long enough to capture him?" Izuku asks, not wanting to know what the unfortunate person that Uraraka kept weightless for half an hour did.

"I think so," Uraraka says. "He'll see me coming from a mile away, though."

"We'll ambush him, then," Izuku says. "If you find somewhere to hide... I'll bring him to you."

"Really?" Uraraka says, eyes wide. Izuku swallows and nods. This way, he won't have to fight.

"It- It'll be risky," he admits. "But I think I can do it."

"Okay," Uraraka says with a firm nod, and the determined fire flickers back to life in her eyes. Her fists clench like she's trying to smother the air trapped between her fingers.

The spot they pick for Uraraka is on the second floor. It looks the same as every other hallway, except there's a small notch in the wall where Uraraka can hunker down and lay a trap. She presses herself into the space, disappearing from the side view almost entirely, and gives Izuku a thumbs up.

"Is- Is that okay...?" Izuku asks, peering at her. "It's not too tight, is it?"

Uraraka shakes her head. "Nope! I'm fine."

"Okay," Izuku says, leaning back and running a still surprisingly human hand through his hair. "Now for the hard part."

They don't have time to waste looking for Iida and Shinsou, so Izuku grits his teeth and decides to get the drop on them while he can. It's one minute until Iida and Shinsou can enter the building, so they're still outside.

Finding a window isn't difficult at all. Izuku pries open the window with a quick tug, gritting his teeth as a shining wave of scales sweeps down his forearms. His fingers stretch and grow

longer, and his nails curve like black scythes. The fog at the back of his mind grows louder, and the Leviathan's low rumble is suddenly more present than before. He ignores it. It's all he can do.

He sticks his head out carefully, leaning as far out as he dares and scouring the area for Iida and Shinsou. He doesn't have to look hard. Iida and Shinsou are standing just beyond the building, talking quietly. Izuku watches them, flinching every time one of them tilts their head upwards even slightly. Thankfully, he doesn't have to wait long. All Might's voice crackles to life over his headsets, informing them that the hero team may now enter the building.

Shinsou and Iida speak for a moment longer before they both head towards the building. Izuku twists himself to get a better view and glimpses Iida pushing open the main door. Shinsou heads around the opposite corner of the building and disappears. He'll have to be careful with that.

"Iida is entering through the main entrance on the ground floor," Izuku says, his microphone rubbing over his lips slightly. He adjusts it with one hand, pulling himself back into the window and shutting it as quietly as he can.

"Alright," Uraraka says, her voice suddenly diluted into a whisper. "Good luck."

"Thanks," Izuku says, and then he's off. The staircase is a few hallways away, and then he's sliding down the stairs on legs that are no longer entirely human. The static in his mind is loud, but it conceals the waking movements of the Leviathan. He can drown it out for now. He won't be able to outrun Iida without the Leviathan's power. That's all he'll use it for. Running.

He peers his head out of the stairwell, peeking down the adjacent hallways like a bird. There's no sign of Iida, so he takes a deep breath and carefully slides further out and down the right hallway. His steps are muffled on the floor by his shoes, and for a while, the only noise is the faint ruffle of his fins against his hair and the clink of his claws tapping together. Then, a distant sound reaches his ears; clanking footsteps, like an armored ghoul is making its way down the hallway towards him.

Or, in this case, someone wearing a hero costume that may or may not be entirely for the aesthetic.

Izuku resists the urge to duck into one of the nearby hallways and stands his ground, eyes trained on the bend beyond him that the sound is coming from. Soon enough, a shining white boot appears, and then the rest of Iida's heavily fortified figure follows. He can't see Iida's eyes, but he can picture them locking onto him as Iida comes to a sudden stop.

"Halt, villain!" He says, pointing one finger accusingly. There's a hum, almost mistakable for the Leviathan's distasteful hiss, but Izuku recognizes it as Iida's engines. He decides not to take Iida's suggestion, turns around, and breaks into a sprint.

Not a moment too soon, either. There's a loud revving sound, and then a flurry of footsteps are coming up behind him. Iida's fast; much faster than Izuku realized. In retrospect, this was

actually a terrible plan. He doesn't trust himself to turn around, so he grits his teeth and throws himself into every stride.

He tears around corners as quick as he dares, skidding on the tile and throwing down his claws to keep himself from sliding too far. Behind him, he can hear Iida attempting to address a similar problem, and he's suddenly thankful. If the building wasn't made of sharp angles and turns, he'd probably already have ended up face-down on the floor with capture tape around his wrists.

Izuku darts around another corner, shoulder hitting the wall as his boots suddenly lose their traction. He pushes himself off with his right hand, eyes zeroing in on the stairwell in front of him. It's a straight path; he'll have to be quick, or Iida will close the distance between them in a blink.

Izuku's panting by now, but he throws whatever strength he has left into a dead sprint towards the doorway. Behind him, Iida is doing the same. The Leviathan shrieks, sending a spike of foggy dissonance through his nerves, and Izuku takes it as a warning.

He reaches the staircase just as Iida's hardly a few steps behind him, and he doesn't try to take the stairs. Instead, he crouches and leaps, pushing his cold legs as far as they'll go and shooting himself up. He grabs onto the railing a good bit above him, swinging himself over and darting up the remaining handful of stairs to the second floor. Behind him, Iida is sprinting up the stairs, and he risks a quick glance before turning back.

"I'm coming, Uraraka!" He whisper-yells into his microphone, choking on the air he uses to force the words out. Uraraka's a few bends in the hallway away; he's almost there.

His limbs are burning from exertion. Why did he think he could outrun the kid with engines in his legs? Literal *engines in his legs*. Iida's catching up, and Izuku's starting to slow down. If he just drops, he's done.

It would be easy to collapse. He wouldn't have to fight. The Leviathan's screaming would stop- at least, after its initial hissy fit- and he wouldn't have to worry about hurting anyone. But, he'd also abandon Uraraka to complete the exercise on her own.

Izuku grits his teeth. That's not an option. He has to keep going. For Uraraka, for the thirty-two, and for himself. He's going to be a hero.

He rounds the corner, and he hears Iida slide across the floor. Fingers grasp at his back, missing him by millimeters, and he resists the urge to flinch and runs with everything he's worth.

He reaches the hallway that Uraraka's on and hurls himself past her hiding spot, lunging and rolling to a stop on the floor with a feeble, "Now!" He cranes his neck and sees Iida running towards him, arms outstretched, and he squeezes his eyes shut.

Uraraka barrels out of her hiding place, slapping one hand on Iida's armor. Iida's fingers brush Izuku's shoulder, but he doesn't stop and shoots overhead with a surprised yell. Izuku opens his eyes and sees Iida spiraling down the hall like a leaf in the wind, his engines

making him flip like a pinwheel in his weightlessness. He's still yelling, but his words are bleeding together into a pool of incomprehensible gibberish.

"Oh my god," Izuku wheezes, letting his head fall back onto the floor. "That actually worked."

"Yup," Uraraka says with a smug grin. Her hands go to her hips, and she yells, "Take that, hero!"

Izuku can't help the rough laugh that escapes his lips. Part of him feels bad for Iida, but he refuses to let guilt overtake him. It's just an exercise, he reminds himself. He's not actually attacking heroes. At least, not right now.

"Capture tape," Izuku says, forcing himself to his feet and rummaging around in his pocket. Uraraka beats him to it and pulls her roll out from where it's hooked around her belt with a grin. She waits a moment for Izuku to catch his breath before they head towards where Iida is attempting to right himself mid-air at the far end of the hallway.

"Clever," he begrudgingly admits when Izuku and Uraraka approach him. Uraraka beams, and Izuku stares at the floor. Iida's not done, though.

"Shinsou!" He barks, and Izuku realizes that Iida's still connected to his partner. The headset. "Uraraka and Midoriya are both with me on the second floor. Hurry!"

"Midoriya," Uraraka says. "Get ready."

Izuku glances over to see her offering him the capture tape, which he pulls out and unwinds quickly. She nods, glances up at Iida, and taps her fingers together.

"Release."

Iida drops- and he drops *fast* - but somehow manages to land on his feet. He's ready to run in an instant, but Izuku is ready. He lunges, hitting Iida from behind and wrapping the tape around his arm in a quick loop. Iida struggles for a split second, but by then, it's already over. Izuku breathes a sigh of relief.

*"Iida Tenya has been captured!"* All Might's voice booms, and Iida bows his head and lets the last dregs of steam escape his engines. Uraraka whoops, holding up her hand. Izuku blinks at it for a moment, before registering that it's a high-five. He taps it carefully.

Iida looks from Uraraka to Midoriya with a unscriptable expression. He bows his head, fists clenched.

"I see I have been bested this round," he says. "Best of luck."

Uraraka nods in acknowledgment, patting him on the shoulder. "Thanks, Iida." She turns to Izuku. "What now?"

"Let's get back to the bomb," Izuku says. "We can work out what to do from there."

Uraraka nods, and they head off, leaving Iida behind. The bomb is on the fourth floor, a decent ways away, so they walk with brisk steps. Izuku's claws have long since slid out of his shoes and are clicking on the floor.

"Good job outrunning Iida," Uraraka says. "He's crazy fast."

"Thanks," Izuku mumbles, rubbing the back of his neck. "Good job catching him. Your quirk is really cool."

"Thanks!" Uraraka says, face practically glowing. "So, what are we doing once we get to the bomb?"

"Trying to find Shinsou," Izuku says with a grimace.

"Right," Uraraka says. "You found Iida pretty fast- do you know where Shinsou is, too?"

Izuku shakes his head. "I saw where Iida went in. I don't know where Shinsou is."

They trot up the stairs all the way to the fourth floor, muffled footsteps echoing around the dreary walls. Izuku pushes open the door and wordlessly holds it open for Uraraka, who offers him a curt nod. He takes a few steps when his fins flick, flaring open like fans as a faint, almost unnoticeable sound hits them.

"Wait," Izuku says, holding up a hand. "Listen."

Uraraka falls silent, and sure enough, there are near-silent footsteps on the floor above them echoing down the hall. Izuku glances at her, and she nods knowingly.

They head back to the staircase and up to the fifth floor. From there, it's easy to follow the sound of footsteps to a lone hallway near the middle of the building. Izuku stays close to the ground as he peers around a corner, and sure enough, a lone figure is walking away from them towards the end of the hallway. His hands are in his pockets, and he's hunched over.

Izuku steps into the hallway, Uraraka at his side. His claws click on the floor, scratching reedily, and Shinsou stiffens and turns at the noise.

"Oh," he says, and the soundwaves on his mouthpiece zigzag into steeper lines than before. "Hey."

Uraraka opens her mouth, but after a quick glance at Izuku, she quickly closes it. Shinsou's expression turns dark, and Izuku clenches his fists at the guilt swirling around in his chest.

"Of course," he says, and his voice is accusing. Izuku can't help his flinch. Why did he think that telling Uraraka would be a good idea?

Shinsou watches them for a moment longer like a wolf surveying its prey. Nobody moves, each waiting for the other to throw the first punch. Shinsou is the first to talk again.

"Thanks for going for Iida first," he says. "Good to know I'm not a threat."

Izuku wants to say ‘you are a threat, that’s why I’m not talking’, but he bites his lip to keep his mouth shut. Shinsou tilts his head carefully, eyes narrowed.

“Just because Iida’s built like a brick shithouse doesn’t mean that I can’t be dangerous, too.”

Izuku falters, caught completely off guard. He doesn’t realize the statement’s intention until Uraraka snickers and whispers a wide-eyed, “Oh my god.”

“I figured that would work on you,” Shinsou says, cocking his head, and Izuku’s blood runs cold as Uraraka’s eyes suddenly go blank and glaze over. *Shit.*

“ **Use your quirk on Midoriya** ,” Shinsou says, and his voice suddenly sounds like it’s laced with magnets. Its pull is tangible, and Izuku can only watch helplessly as Uraraka turns toward him. Her hands raise like they’re being pulled by marionette strings, and she takes a step towards him.

Izuku doesn’t know what to do. He can’t *attack* Uraraka- she’s his partner- but he doesn’t know how to release her from Shinsou’s grasp. If she gets ahold of him, it’ll be bad.

He has to find a way to get Uraraka out of Shinsou’s control. There has to be a way to get Shinsou to release her. Maybe if something were to happen to Shinsou, his quirk would short out.

His mind spins like the gears of a machine. Shinsou’s commands are straightforward, so Uraraka’s critical thinking probably isn’t working if she isn’t in control. She’s on a one-way track right now. He glances at Shinsou’s vacant expression. Maybe he can use that to his advantage.

“Uraraka?” He says, pretending to be surprised. Out of the corner of his eye, he sees Shinsou pull the capture tape out of his pocket and take a careful step towards him. He’s cornered. Good.

He waits as Uraraka walks towards him, creeping backward towards Shinsou. He’s taking a risk leaving Shinsou out of his line of vision, but it’s all he can do. He takes one step backward, then another, and then another. He doesn’t even breathe.

There’s a split second where it’s dead silent, a tangible tension that hangs in the air like a spider’s web. The whole room feels tense and thick, and Izuku takes a silent breath. Then, in an instant, the moment is over.

Shinsou and Uraraka lunge at the same time. Izuku ducks, spinning around on the ground and twisting himself so that he’s behind Shinsou. Uraraka’s fingers meet Shinsou instead of him, and Shinsou yells as Izuku pushes him into the air with as much strength as he can risk. For a moment, he’s on the ground, watching Shinsou spin head-over-heels with wide, surprised eyes, and he thinks he’s won. Then Uraraka’s hands meet him, and a familiar feeling returns.

Izuku gasps as the omnipresent weight pressing down on him vanishes, and he drifts into the air. He’s empty, lighter than air, with nothing tethering him to the ground. His hands wave and grasp at empty air, and he’s stuck with nowhere to go.

A few feet away from him, Shinsou has managed to right himself with his hands against the ceiling. His eyes are locked onto Izuku, and they suddenly curve. He must be grinning.

“Touché,” he says, and Izuku rolls his eyes as he continues to slowly spin like an astronaut in orbit. The blood rushes to his head as he drifts upside-down, and he grits his teeth. If he can reach Shinsou, he can try to get him to release Uraraka or capture him but at the moment, he’s stuck. His arms and legs can’t reach the walls around him to let him push himself off.

The Leviathan screeches, and something tingles along his spine. He starts to muffle it, but he recognizes it as a suggestion.

Tail.

It’s his only option. Still, it’s one of the Leviathan’s red flags. If he uses it... what if All Might recognizes him? What if anyone recognizes him? It would all be over before it began.

Still, a more logical part of his brain shakes his head; just a tail isn’t enough to condemn him. As long as he doesn’t go overboard with the fins, he’ll be okay. He has to use it.

He lets more of the Leviathan slip out, mentally forcing it to run down his spine. Sure enough, he feels a shifting at the base of his hips, and a moment later, a tail splits through his uniform and uncurls like a whip. It’s a strange feeling- controlling another limb isn’t exactly a skill Izuku has under his belt- and it takes him a few precious seconds to get its rampant swinging under control. He ignores Shinsou’s distant, “Wait, what the hell-” and presses it against the wall at his left, extending it as straight as it will go. The pressure sends him shooting towards the opposite wall, and he manages to pinball his way to Shinsou and tackle him.

They both go flying- literally- down the hallway. Shinsou yells and tries to kick Izuku off, but Izuku tangles his claws in the front of Shinsou’s uniform and clings to him. They spiral over and over down the hallway, and Izuku glances up at the oncoming wall a second before it hits.

He twists without thinking, whipping his tail outwards and angling himself so that instead of Shinsou hitting the wall, it’s him. The air rushes out of his lungs, and Shinsou yelps as his head slams into Izuku’s with a sharp crack.

“God- Shit!” Izuku yelps through gritted teeth. The Leviathan howls at the impact, fully awake now, and attempts to claw its way into control. Izuku inhales sharply as it digs at the back of his head, tearing at the ropes with renewed vigor. He’s manifested too much.

He squeezes his eyes shut and pulls away the tail. It’s not easily; the Leviathan squirms in his mental grasp, and pushing it back is like trying to reverse the direction of a rushing river. Still, he somehow succeeds, and the Leviathan’s screaming decreases in volume slightly. Now that his internal battle is more manageable, Izuku opens his eyes and pushes his legs against the wall behind him, sending them back into the space between the walls.

“Let go!” Shinsou yells, and Izuku shakes his head. He lets go of Shinsou with one hand and reaches back and pulls the capture tape out of his pocket, snagging the end of it with his teeth

and pulls out a long piece. Shinsou reaches out and pulls it away from him, and it's a brief tussle over the tape until it slips from Izuku's claws and drops to the floor. So the tape isn't weightless. Izuku tries to kick off the ceiling and go after it, but Shinsou manages to catch the left wall and send them hurdling into the right. The Leviathan shrieks.

They hit the metal tiles, and Izuku curls his back so that they bounce upward. They hit the ceiling next, and impact sends them dropping downwards. They hit the floor next, spinning uncontrollably, and Izuku's head swims with vertigo as he can suddenly no longer tell up from down. He is going to have so many bruises.

His fingers slip, and Shinsou digs his boots into Izuku's chest and *pushes*. It's enough force to tear them apart and send Izuku hurdling backward, fingers grasping at empty air as the Leviathan lets out a guttural roar and claws at the edges of his vision. Nausea swells in his throat.

His back hits something relatively soft, and he twists and freezes when he sees Uraraka hit the wall with a gasp. He must have run into her. She flinches sharply, and her eyes open. They blink quickly, and Izuku realizes that they're not glazed anymore. She's free. He doesn't have time to mull over the reasoning behind it. He'll just take the lucky strike and run.

"What-" She starts, staring at the upside-down Izuku, but Izuku cuts her off and yells, "Release your quirk!"

Shinsou starts to say something, but it's cut off when Uraraka claps her hands together and yells, "Release!" Immediately, gravity's chains are once more tightly encircling Izuku, and he has a split second to think before he's dropping to the ground like a stone.

He lands shoulders first, grunting as he slams into the ground. One of his hands lands under him and twists with a loud crack. A blaze of white-hot pain races up his arm, and Izuku manages to force his pained scream into a garbled whimper. *Fucking ow*. He rolls off of it and holds it up carefully. His hand is bent at an impossible angle, and he has to look away. It's okay. He's felt worse.

A few feet away, Shinsou groans as he stumbles to his feet. His face is twisted in pain, and Izuku suddenly feels guilt for what he did, but- it's not over yet. Shinsou moves to run, and Izuku manages to roll to his feet and lunge at Shinsou. He snags his uniform, ignoring Shinsou's yell and elbow to his face. His arm sears with pain, and he muffles his scream of pain into his mouthguard. Shinsou tries to escape, and Izuku grips tighter.

"Uraraka, the tape!" He yells as Shinsou kicks and tries to tear his way out of Izuku's arms, yelling all the while. Every time Izuku's hand is jostled, he resists the urge to yell and just holds on. Shinsou's fingers scrabble and scratch at the fabric of Izuku's sleeves, but he's not strong enough to escape.

"Wait!" Shinsou yells, his usual monotone replaced with something more desperate, but he's too late. Uraraka coils the tape around his arm.

*“Shinsou Hitoshi has been captured!”* All Might’s voice booms over the headsets. *“The hero team has been immobilized! The villain team wins!”*

Just like that, all of the fight goes out of Shinsou. Izuku makes a noise of surprise and stumbles slightly as Shinsou slumps backward, letting all his weight fall onto Izuku.

*“Goddammit,”* Izuku hears Shinsou curse in a strained whisper.

“Yes!” Uraraka shouts, pumping one fist in the air. Izuku would do the same, but he’s currently supporting the weight of both his guilt and Shinsou. Uraraka grins, before her expression fades as she looks over.

“Shinsou?” She asks, blinking at him. “Are- are you okay?”

“I’m fine,” Shinsou says flatly. For a moment, he stays still, breathing quietly. Then, he’s awkwardly wriggling out of Izuku’s arms and back to his feet. Izuku lets him go and leans against the wall, clenching his good hand and breathing heavily. *Fuck*, that hurts.

He lets the Leviathan go, carefully tightening the ropes until the scales disappear back into his skin. He feels himself lower as his legs revert back to regular human ones, losing their extra joint and settling back into place with a soft click. His fins fold into themselves like origami, disappearing into his head. The Leviathan quiets.

He starts to pull the scales out of his hands, but he’s forced to stop when doing so sends another spark of pain through his arm and kicks up clouds of fog in his mind. He doubles against the wall with a whine, turning away from Shinsou and Uraraka.

*Goddamn.* Is this going to happen every day? Is this just a trend now?

“...Midoriya?” Shinsou asks carefully. Izuku cranes his head around, latching onto his voice to drown out the pain and the Leviathan’s pissed-off screeching. “Y-yeah?”

“What’s wrong?” Uraraka asks. “Are you okay?”

Izuku forces himself to grin. “Yeah, I’m okay. Just- bruised.”

“Bullshit,” Shinsou says, eyes narrowing. Uraraka glances at him, but nods. Izuku grits his teeth; there’s no point in hiding it.

He raises his arm, and Uraraka’s eyes widen. Shinsou straightens up.

“It’s fine,” Izuku says quickly. “I-I’ve had worse.”

He quickly realizes that that was the wrong thing to see as Uraraka’s expression turns stricken. *Nice going, dumbass.*

“What do you mean you’ve had- oh, wait. The exam.”

That’s not the incident Izuku was thinking of- isn’t that sad?- but he nods. Shinsou watches him from the side, expression unreadable.

When they get to the first floor, Iida greets them and dutifully congratulates him and Uraraka. It takes him a moment to notice Izuku's hand, but once he does, he's on Izuku like a hawk. Izuku stumbles around his questions with wide-eyes and promises to see Recovery Girl. He does, because as soon as All Might sees him, he's sent straight to the nurse's office.

"Midoriya," Recovery Girl says, raising an eyebrow as he steps into the quaint room where she works. He offers her a sheepish smile.

"Uh... H-hello."

"It's only your second day here, and you've already injured yourself twice," she says. "Come over here so that I can take a look at you."

He walks over carefully, boots squeaking on the clean tile of the nurse's office, and he's suddenly very aware of the fact that he's still wearing his hero costume. Thankfully, Recovery Girl doesn't seem to mind.

"I figured this would happen if they let All Might teach," she says dryly, and Izuku blinks.

"You know All Might?"

"Do I know All Might," Recovery Girl repeats, rolling her eyes. "Of course I know him. He's more reckless than you. I have to fix him up on a daily basis."

"I thought that All Might never got hurt," Izuku says quietly. Recovery Girl looks at him with a strange, almost sad expression.

"Most people do."

She pulls him down and presses a quick kiss to his forehead, and he watches silently as his hand fixes itself. As soon as it does, he flexes it experimentally, before a wave of exhaustion hits him like a flood.

"Oh," he says, wobbling on his feet slightly. Recovery Girl gives him a flat look.

"Mhm. That'll teach you to be more careful. Also, I'll have to have a talk with All Might about his training exercises. I keep telling this school that killing the students in their first week at U.A. isn't helping anyone, but apparently that's being unreasonable."

"I'd prefer not to die on my first week," Izuku says without thinking, and Recovery Girl chuckles and offers him a handful of gummy bears seemingly out of nowhere.

"I'd imagine you wouldn't," she says. "Now, get out of here, you. School isn't over."

"Right," Izuku says. "Thank you."

She purses her lips and waves him off, and he rubs the back of his neck and hurries back to the classroom.

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At least, he tries.

It takes Izuku longer than he'd care to admit to get back to the testing grounds. He's not exactly prone to getting lost, but U.A.'s campus is like a maze, and it's his second day. Maybe it's just due to exhaustion- he's dead on his feet, a byproduct of Recovery Girl's quirk- or maybe he just never paid attention to where he was walking. He quickly decides that he needs to ask someone for directions, but there's no one around to ask. At least, not at first.

He's in an unfamiliar, nondescript hallway when an unfamiliar bell rings, chiming through the hallway, and the doors around Izuku open. A sea of students pour out, most ignoring the confused kid watching them with wide-eyes, and a few giving him curious glances. They're older than him, Izuku notes. These must be the second or third years.

He's not sure who to ask. Everyone has places to be, and he doesn't want to make them late to their classes, but he doubts it'll be good if he never shows back up to All Might's class. God, him from a year ago would be having a fit right now. The Leviathan, at least, is dormant and content to watch him look like an idiot.

He's just decided to suck it up and ask one of the nearby students when he hears a loud voice call out, "Midoriya?"

Izuku turns around, blinking, and spots a familiar grin and spike of blonde hair. Togata trots over to him, wearing his uniform like a badge of honor, and waves.

"You made it in!" he says, and Midoriya is both relieved and extremely embarrassed to see him.

"Hi, To-Togata," he says awkwardly, waving. "I did."

"I knew you would!" Togata says with a bright smile. Behind him, two unfamiliar people come to a stop to watch Izuku curiously. There's a thin, tall boy with dark hair and elvish ears who looks like his uniform is attempting to swallow him, and a blue-haired girl with big eyes that faintly reminds him of Uraraka.

"Mirio?" The girl asks, peering at Izuku curiously. "Who's this?"

Togata turns to face them, one hand gesturing towards Izuku. "This is Midoriya, the boy from the entrance exam you told me about! The one I met over the break!"

"Oh!" The girl says, eyes widening even further as her mouth breaks into a grin. "I remember you! You're the lightning kid, right?"

"Yes," Izuku says, not sure how he feels about being known as 'the lightning kid'. It's much better than 'the Leviathan', at least.

"I'm Hado Nejire," she says, resting one hand on her hip. "Third-year hero course student. You're smaller than I thought you'd be."

“M-Midoriya Izuku,” Izuku says, ignoring the second part of that statement. His eyes dart over to the dark-haired boy, who looks away as soon as their eyes meet.

“Amajiki,” he says quietly. Izuku nods, glancing away.

“It’s nice to meet you guys,” he says, rubbing his hands together. Togata grins.

“How’s U.A. so far? It’s only your... second day, right?”

“Y-yeah,” Izuku says. “It’s... It’s a bit crazy.”

Hado laughs. “God, I remember my first year. Who’s your homeroom teacher?”

“Mr. Aizawa.”

“Oh, man, you’re in for a *treat*,” Hado says knowingly, and Izuku feels scales prickly at the corners of his eyes. He tilts his head curiously.

“How so?”

“Aizawa can be pretty tough. Actually, scratch the ‘pretty’. Aizawa’s pretty much the toughest teacher here. No idea why he’s in with the first years, but I guess he does his job well.”

“He’s a good teacher,” Togata affirms. “He’s tough on you because he wants to bring out your full potential.”

“I’ll keep that in mind,” Izuku says, noting that bit of information carefully. What happens if Mr. Aizawa tries to bring out what he assumes is Izuku’s ‘full potential’?

“Actually, speaking of Aizawa, aren’t you in class right now? I thought first years were on a different schedule.” Togata asks curiously, reminding Izuku of the question he still needs to ask.

“Yes,” he admits. “Foundational heroics. I got sent to the nurse because I... hurt my hand. I was actually wondering if any of you knew the way to Grounds Beta...?”

Thankfully, they do, and Hado points him in the right direction after a short bout of laughter (“Mirio got lost on his first day, too!”). He can’t help his fins popping back up- something Amajiki appears to take interest in, although he doesn’t voice it- and wastes no more time practically sprinting back to the classroom after thanking them. It’s weird, seeing Togata in a social setting like that, but he’s not surprised that Togata has a lot of friends. He seems like the outgoing, popular type. Like Bit, except slightly more functional.

He makes it back to the basement where the rest of the class is almost a half hour after he left, feeling self-conscious as he psyches himself up to open the door. He steps in, and a dozen eyes immediately dart to him. Izuku’s fins flatten themselves against his head, wobbling uncertainly.

“Uh,” he says weakly. “Hey.”

Most of the class waves at him or greets him with a similarly informal tone. Iida, who's the closest to both him and the door, looks him up and down, glasses glinting in the fluorescent light.

"Are you alright?" He asks. Izuku nods quickly, holding up his hand and flexing it. Iida surveys it with a hawklike glance before he steps back, seemingly sated.

"Midoriya!" Uraraka waves from the far side of the room, and he takes the invitation and scurries over to her side as quickly as he can. Iida follows him with long strides, stopping on the other side of Uraraka and looking more like a general about to lead his troops into battle than a student.

"You're back!" She says. "We started getting worried when you didn't show up."

"I got lost," Izuku admits, and Uraraka blinks at him before her face breaks into a bright smile. Laughter bubbles out from her lips, popping the tightness in the air, and Izuku can't help but let a little bit of the tension in his shoulders seep into the floor.

"S-so, um, what did I miss?" He asks, glancing over and tilting his head. Iida jumps on the question before Uraraka can even open her mouth.

"You missed two exercises," he says dutifully. "Aoyama and Hagakure were villains, and they were defeated by Tokoyami and Ashido. Koda and Ojiro were then heroes, and they lost to Sero and Satou."

"Oh," Izuku says, somewhat wishing he'd been around to watch. "...Who's up now?"

Iida looks up towards the screen, mouth twisting into a faint grimace. It's Uraraka who answers his question this time around.

"Todoroki and Bakugou versus Asui and Kirishima," she says with a frown. Izuku suddenly understands why she and Iida don't look so happy all of a sudden. Bakugou and Todoroki, from what Izuku knows about Bakugou and can guess about Todoroki, are absolute powerhouses.

He thinks of Kirishima's bright toothy grin, and his steely expression when he'd told Bakugou to leave Izuku alone. He then thinks of the same face, blasted and signed with the same marks that used to mar his own on a daily basis. The thought makes him ball his fists, nails lengthening into claws.

"You... know Bakugou, right?"

Izuku can't help the way his fins flare up in surprise, glancing to his left to find Shinsou standing there and watching him out of the corner of his eye as if he's not entirely sure if he's invested in the conversation yet. Izuku swallows and nods.

"We're from the same middle school."

"That's unfortunate," Shinsou says, looking at this screen with a distasteful expression. Izuku doesn't even bother to disagree. He'd be lying.

Shinsou glances over at him a few more times as the onscreen fight continues, before he asks, “How’s your hand?”

“Fine,” he says. “Recovery Girl wasn’t happy about me being back, but she fixed it.”

“You look like you’re about to fall over,” Shinsou comments. Izuku grins dryly and rubs the back of his neck.

“Well, yeah. Recovery Girl’s quirk does that.” He would know, wouldn’t he?

Shinsou tilts his head, and Izuku takes it as wanting an explanation.

“Her quirk speeds up the body’s natural healing I think,” he says. “But it requires a lot of energy, so it takes a lot out of you.”

“Oh,” Shinsou says, a bit awkwardly, and as he looks like he’s going to let the conversation drop, Izuku grabs ahold.

“Sorry for telling Uraraka about your quirk,” he says before he can stop himself. “I- I know you probably didn’t want me to, but I-”

“Midoriya,” Shinsou says flatly. “It’s fine. She would have found out eventually, anyways.”

“I- I know,” Izuku says quietly. “Still, it didn’t feel fair.”

Shinsou doesn’t respond but looks at him with a strange expression that Izuku just can’t parse out. It resembles confusion more than anything else, but it’s not quite that. Izuku’s not sure if Shinsou’s going to speak again, but he does.

“You’re confusing, Midoriya.”

Izuku startles, a splatter of scales appearing around his eyes. “I- What?”

Shinsou, however, doesn’t offer to elaborate and turns his attention back to the screens in front of them. Izuku briefly entertains the thought of asking for an explanation, but he figures that if Shinsou’s being purposely vague, that won’t do anything. So, he just tangles his fingers together and focuses very intently on the floor.

“Hero team, you may now enter the building!” All Might says, and Izuku looks up just in time to see Asui and Kirishima running towards the building. This should be something.

## Chapter End Notes

YEET

tbh i like the fight scenes from this chapter. they came out good

# find your friends and find your foes

## Chapter Summary

The rest of the battle trials, and a recruitment.

## Chapter Notes

oh boy

shout out to my beta reader tanzytechgem, who i made read this stupid thing like seven times. tanz, you're the best

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

In the few seconds after All Might announces the beginning of the trial, Izuku learns a few things.

The first is that Todoroki's quirk is *absolutely terrifying*. As soon as the trial starts, he steps to the center of the room, braces his right hand, and coats the entire building in a layer of ice. The precision of it is jarring; not only does the ice cover every surface, but it rises to block off doorways and windows, effectively encapsulating the entire playing field in an unbreakable barrier.

"Woah," Izuku whispers, wide-eyed with both amazement and fear. At his side, Uraraka and Shinsou share a similar expression.

As Asui and Kirishima slowly circle the outer perimeter, seemingly searching for a way in, Uraraka turns to him and asks, "Tsuyu and Kirishima, do they... Do you think they have a chance?"

"I don't know," Izuku says. "I don't know what Asui and Kirishima's quirks are."

"I know Tsuyu's," Uraraka says. "I was talking to her yesterday. It makes her frog-like, and she has abilities that come with it. She can jump really far, and she has a long tongue."

Izuku nods. That has to be a mutant quirk, but a frog mutant quirk? He's never seen anything like that. He wonders how it will fare against Kacchan's explosions and Todoroki's insanely powerful ice.

"Do you know what Kirishima's quirk is?" He asks, and Uraraka shakes her head. At her side, Iida does as well, frowning as he does.

“I probably should have paid more attention,” he says. “I’ve seen Bakugou and Todoroki’s, but I’ve yet to interact with Kirishima.”

“I know Kirishima’s.”

All three of them turn to Shinsou, who stiffens underneath the attention. His mouth straightens into a thin line.

“It lets him harden his skin, I think,” he says, before adding in a quieter voice, “He was in my group for the entrance exam.”

“Wow!” Uraraka says, turning to look at the screen. “That’s a cool quirk. I wonder how hard he gets.”

Behind her, someone snickers. Iida’s head snaps around like an owl’s, eyes narrowed, and the snickering stops. Izuku stifles a sputter into his mouth guard.

“*Anyways*,” Iida says, “Now that we know their quirks, who do you think will win? Midoriya?”

Izuku rubs the back of his neck, staring up at the screen. Quirk-wise? He knows that Asui and Kirishima don’t stand a chance. But teamwork-wise, they leave Todoroki and Kacchan in the dust.

“If it comes down to a straight-up fight, I- I don’t think it’ll go well for Kirishima and Asui,” he says, because he doesn’t want to straight-up say they’ll *lose*. It feels cruel.

“But... K-Kacchan can’t work on a team,” he says, gesturing at the screen where Kacchan appears to be having a one-sided screaming match with Todoroki. “And from the looks of it, Todoroki can’t, either.”

“So you’re saying they could be enough of a hindrance to each other that they lose,” Iida says, and Izuku nods.

“Sounds plausible to me,” Shinsou says darkly. “Bakugou looks like he’s ready to kill Todoroki.”

“Knowing Kacchan, he probably is,” Izuku whispers to himself, and his fins flatten themselves against his head with an audible snap when Shinsou’s eyes dart over to him. Thankfully, Shinsou says nothing.

“Holy shit, is he-?” someone says behind him, and Izuku looks up just in time to see Kirishima get a running start and slam himself into the iced-over door. The ice doesn’t crack, but Kirishima brushes himself off, backpedals, and tries again. This time, the ice gives, and the doors fly open with enough force to make the walls rattle. Kirishima’s excited grin as he picks himself up off the floor is infectious, and Asui gives him a thumbs up.

Izuku notes Kirishima’s bare but completely unmarred skin, despite the sea of shattered ice and splintered wood he’s standing in. Shinsou’s right; Kirishima does have some time of hardening quirk. He can’t help but wonder how it works.

His eyes stray up to the screen in the top right corner depicting the bomb room. The once normal room has been utterly transformed; everything is covered in a layer of slick ice, and large spikes jut out from the floor like jagged teeth. Izuku's mind helpfully depicts the Leviathan's jaws from his nightmare in detail, and he stiffens and has to consciously force the thought away.

The bomb is in the center of the room, frozen to the floor. Todoroki leans against it, staring blankly at the wall. On the other side of the room, Kacchan is continuing in his attempts to blast the door open. He's making decent headway, and cracks are beginning to form. His mouth is moving, and Izuku is suddenly glad that he can't hear whatever Kacchan's saying. He almost feels bad for All Might, whose face is pulled back into a pained expression.

Kirishima and Asui are moving now, heading towards the staircase and up to the fifth floor. Izuku frowns, wondering how they seemingly know exactly where to go, and then he realizes that Kacchan's screaming at the top of his lungs. For a second, he finds himself wondering why Kacchan's just giving away his position like that, and then he realizes; Todoroki has pinned Kacchan in the room with the bomb. Since Kacchan can't go find Asui and Kirishima, he's bringing the fight to himself. No doubt he thinks he can subdue them both before they ever make it into the room.

A quick glance at the map proves that Asui and Kirishima are moving in the right direction. They head towards the door as one, before they share another quick conversation. Asui suddenly bounds over to the right side of the room and bounces onto the ceiling, clinging there like a spider. Then, she pulls the grate off of the air vent next to her and scurries inside.

Izuku realizes what they're planning before it happens. Kirishima, who's striding down the hallway towards the bomb room door with his shoulders squared, is a distraction. Asui is going to sneak in.

Just as Kirishima steps up to the door, Kacchan finally gets the ice to crack. Izuku gasps as an avalanche of shattered ice rains over Kirishima, promptly followed by Kacchan's signature right hook. Izuku instinctively braces, hands balled into fists, but it's Kirishima who takes the hit- surprisingly well. Kacchan's fists glance back, and his face contorts into momentary surprise before settling on anger. He swings again, and Kirishima ducks and slides between his legs into the bomb room.

"Uh oh," Uraraka says as Todoroki turns to stare at Kirishima, who's sitting sheepishly in the middle of the floor. Kirishima only gets a moment's warning before he's forced to awkwardly scramble out of the way of a massive spire of ice, boots sliding on the floor. He hits the floor again hard, and the ice intended for him clips Kacchan, who blasts it away with a snarl.

"Bakugou and Todoroki aren't working together at all," Iida says. Izuku clenches his fists. *Come on, Kirishima.*

Kirishima's not doing so well, but he doesn't have to. The class starts murmuring excitedly when Asui suddenly appears from the vent in the far corner of the room, clinging flat against the ceiling and slowly creeping inwards towards the bomb. She's close. She's so close.

Then, just like that, everything goes to shit. Todoroki swings his arm out, and a wave of ice floods from his skin. Kirishima hits the wall with enough force to crack it and is promptly pinned there by a glacier's worth of ice. He struggles and kicks and punches, but it's obvious that he's stuck.

Todoroki straightens, shaking leftover frost off of his arm. At his side, Kacchan's mouth starts moving. Then, he glances past Todoroki, screams, and lunges.

"No!" Izuku doesn't even register himself yelling as Asui is forced to leap away from the bomb onto the floor, a massive, smoking crater where she'd just been. Izuku notices a few people staring at him and firmly clamps his fingers over his mouth, although he can't stop the scales prickling at his knuckles.

Asui's on her own now. Kirishima's obviously talking, trying to free himself desperately, but he's trapped. Asui's running, bounding on all fours along the wall as Todoroki and Kacchan trip over each other attempting to stop her. Todoroki looks frustrated, and Kacchan looks unbelievably pissed.

Suddenly, Asui's face creases into a frown, and she throws herself directly at Todoroki. Izuku's about to ask what the hell she's thinking when Kacchan turns and fires off a massive explosion at where she's about to be. She wraps her tongue around one of the support beams to the right and swings herself away from the bomb, and instead of hitting her, the explosion sends Todoroki sliding across the floor and slamming into the wall.

Izuku's jaw hits the floor.

Asui crawls higher onto the support beam and leaps over Kacchan's head, fingers outstretched towards the bomb. Kacchan raises a hand towards her, his veins already glowing, but Todoroki is quicker; he sends out a massive spire of ice that catches Asui's foot, freezing her in place- but at the cost of freezing Kacchan as well.

Kacchan tears himself free seconds later, but when the ice breaks, Asui is freed as well. Before Kacchan or Todoroki can recover, she's already latched onto the side of the bomb, tongue hanging part way out of her mouth victoriously.

"The bomb has been secured! The Hero Team wins!" All Might says, and the class breaks into cheers. Izuku can't help but join them, smiling. Looks like he underestimated Asui.

In a clean fight, he's still not sure if Asui would win. But his earlier thoughts were right; Kacchan and Todoroki couldn't work together, and that was their downfall. The only difference is that Asui spotted that animosity and used it to her advantage.

The class is cheering, and Izuku can't help but join them.

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There's only one trial left after that.

Once Todoroki, Kacchan, Kirishima, and Asui accept their criticism- well, Kacchan looks less like he cares and more like he's seconds away from detonation, but that's Kacchan- Yaoyorozu and Kaminari head into the villain to set themselves up for Jiro and Shoji's arrival.

Jiro and Shoji are able to locate the bomb with ease by use of their strange mutant quirks, but when they arrive at the bomb room, they discover that the entire hallway has been extensively booby-trapped with charged wires. While Jiro and Shoji search for a way in, Kaminari and Yaoyorozu wait out the timer and are victorious. It's not the most eventful battle, but Yaoyorozu quick thinking is impressive.

Congratulations are shared between victors and losers, before both head back to receive criticism. Izuku stays silent during most of it, letting others do most of the talking, but he does raise his hand once to ask if Jiro has any sort of other abilities. She does and admits she could have used them better, but that she didn't out of fear of hurting Shoji. Izuku understands more than he should.

Once everything is over, All Might dismisses them with a slightly shaky grin and a salute, and they're ushered off to the locker rooms to change back into their uniforms. Izuku hangs near the back of the bustling crowd, trailing in the footsteps of his classmates and taking time to let himself breathe. He makes it hardly a few feet before Uraraka spots him, bouncing over to him.

"So that's what this class is going to be like," she says. "U.A. sure is crazy, huh?"

"Yeah," Izuku says, thinking about what Togata told him. "I- It was really cool, but I hope we don't have to fight each other all the time."

Uraraka nods. "I totally get you. I don't really want to fight my classmates either, but if it helps me become a better hero..." She shrugs. "I'll do what I have to."

Izuku can't help but admire her resolve.

"So... you missed our critique," Uraraka continues after a short bout of silence, bouncing on the balls of her feet.

"I did?" Izuku says before he remembers going to the nurse's office and then getting lost for half an hour. He rubs the back of his neck, ignoring the scales creeping up his jawline. "Oh, right. I did."

Uraraka laughs. "Don't worry, I remember most of it."

She hums, sticking her hands in the pockets of her costume and pulling a thoughtful expression onto her face.

"Let's see... Well, first of all, Yaoyorozu said that you were the best in our round."

Izuku chokes and nearly trips over his boots. "I was *what?* "

Uraraka giggles at his expression. “She said you managed to keep your cool throughout the entire thing even when I was brainwashed, although she also said that you started to lose your grip on your quirk towards the end.”

Izuku swallows the ice rising in his gut at that, and the Leviathan hums at the back of his mind. What does she mean by that? Did- Was he obviously losing control in front of the whole class?

He hides his trembling hands in his pockets, tilting his head with a wry half-smile. “Yeah, I sort of lost it, I guess.”

His tone sounds fake, even to his own ears, but Uraraka carries on.

“Don’t worry about it,” she tells him- as if it’s something Izuku could just *not worry about*. “Anyways, she said that we made a good team, too.” She beams. “I think we did, even though you kind of did most of the work.”

“That’s not true!” Izuku says quickly. “I didn’t do most of the- I wouldn’t have been able to do *any* of that without you. You helped me plan, and were the one who ambushed Iida, and you kind of indirectly helped me get Shinsou even when you were being controlled, so...”

Uraraka blinks. “I did?”

“Yeah, you-” Izuku starts, and then he stops, eyes shifting to Uraraka. “Do you... not remember?”

Uraraka shakes her head, frowning. “No. When I responded to you, everything... went kind of blank. Almost like I fell asleep. After that, my memory’s all foggy. The next thing I remember was you yelling at me to deactivate my quirk.” She pauses. “You were in the air- *both* of you. How did that happen?”

*She doesn’t remember*, Izuku thinks, remembering the first time Shinsou used his quirk on him. *So why do I?*

He decides to ask Shinsou about it later- or maybe not. He doesn’t want to bother.

“When Shinsou controlled you,” Izuku says, chewing his lip as he does. “He tried to get you to use your quirk on me, but I kind of... used him as a shield.”

Uraraka snorts.

“So you used your quirk on him, but then you used it on me, too,” Izuku explains, trying not to sound like an idiot. “So both of us were weightless, and I guess I decided that would be the best time to try and capture him.”

He grimaces.

“It went about as well as you’d expect.”

Uraraka laughs and baps him on the shoulder again. “Well, we won, so I guess it worked. I think I understand Yaoyorozu’s reasoning a lot more now.” She pauses. “Do you think All Might will let me watch the fight? They were recorded, right?”

Izuku shrugs. “I mean... probably. Though- you really didn’t miss much, other than me and Shinsou slamming into walls for a good five minutes.”

“Sounds entertaining,” Uraraka says with a smug expression, and Izuku actually does trip over his feet this time. Uraraka laughs as she helps him to his feet, and he pulls his hood up in a poor attempt to hide the scales blossoming from under his eyes. It almost feels like the Leviathan’s laughing at him, too.

“I’m kidding,” she says, waving her hands, but her poorly-concealed laughter betrays her.

Izuku can’t help the smile that tugs at his lips. “I’m sure.”

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“This is a terrible idea,” Tomura snarls, fingers digging into his neck with nearly enough vigor to tear the skin. “There are dozens of other hackers in this city- *hundreds* maybe.”

Kurogiri stands at his side, his smoky form rippling and hissing like a silently burning flame. His yellow eyes narrow, and Tomura knows from experience that it’s his way of frowning.

“You may be right,” he says in the slow, wispy way that only a man of mist can. “But how many could tear through U.A.’s firewall like child’s play? If your plan is to succeed, time is of the essence. We need him.”

“*Shut up*,” Tomura spots through gritted teeth, hands clenching and neck stinging. He knows, underneath all of his rotting, knotted spite, that Kurogiri is right, but he *hates* being wrong.

He tries to hold on to his anger like always, fan it into a scorching wildfire of malice that he can use to sear the coals of his determination, but Sensei’s words slither into his mind and put out his fire like rain. ‘*A defeat is only a defeat if you make it so. Learn to use every change in the plan to your advantage, and you will never truly lose.*’

“God- *Fine*,” he says. “I’ll get him.”

“Good,” Kurogiri says. “Well, then. Should we be off?”

“Let’s get it over with,” Tomura says, and he closes his eyes just as his vision is obscured by tendrils of purple smoke that wrap around him like an icy blanket.

Kurogiri’s portals are strange things. They allow him to move unseen, gathering his minions from the guts and bellies of jails and disappearing without a trace. Still, walking through them feels like stepping into a cloud of ice; it stings with the kind of cold that burrows into his bones and threatens to stay there like an insolent parasite. He hates it, but it’s too great of a gift to turn away. He’ll just have to deal with the recoil. Every great weapon has its drawbacks.

The cold recedes, and Tomura opens his eyes to find himself in the rotting bones of an old hallway. The walls are off-white, discolored by the grey mold creeping down from the cracks in the ceiling. The floor is covered in speckled tiles, not unlike the ones found in hospitals, except much dirtier. The pale, fluorescent lights flicker on and off, occasionally plunging the already dim hallway into complete darkness. The whole place looks like it's been untouched for years, but Tomura knows better.

He spent some time here once, a long time ago. It was his own fault, and he'd paid the price for it. He's lucky that they didn't break him as they did some of the others.

He still remembers the hallways as he walks forward, sneakers squeaking on the tile. His eyes squint and strain, searching through the dull light for the benchmarks he knows are there; an old door labeled 'off limits', still locked after all these years. A window leading to nowhere. A gash torn into the wall by someone Tomura would rather forget.

He walks past his old solitary room, eyes narrowing as he stares through the narrow slit in the iron door at the tiny cement cell. A pair of quirk-suppressing cuffs lies discarded on the floor, tied to the ground by thin cobwebs. No one has used that room in a long time.

He comes to a split in the hallway and pauses, hands rising to scratch at his neck once again. To his right, he knows, is where the sleeping prisoners of this hell lie dormant. He could free them if he willed it. He's the one in control here, for once. He decides if they live or die.

Tomura looks down the right for a short while longer and turns away. He's here for one thing. He'd rather not spend any more time here than he has to.

As he walks, he watches as the cameras that have been placed intermittently suddenly disappear. Signs on the walls start to crop up, bearing warnings such as, 'NO ELECTRONIC DEVICES PAST THIS POINT' and 'AUTHORIZED ENTRANCE ONLY'. He ignores them.

The room he's looking for is at the end of the hallway. As Tomura approaches, old coagulated anger splits open in his chest like a picked scab, sending pulses of anger rushing through his chest. He thinks of an old recruitment, of blackened insults, and of shattered glass. He doesn't want to open the door, but if Sensei has willed it, it must be done. Sensei is always right.

Tomura reaches out with one hand, forcing his dirty hands to unclench and dragging his nails across the thick metal door. It curls into itself like a dying plant, withering and turning to dust. Its remains pour into the doorframe like an hourglass, and a minute later, the door is no more. He steps inside.

There's a figure on the far side of the cell, sitting on his cot and staring at his hands like they're the most interesting thing in the room. Slowly, his eyes slide upwards, and Tomura can see his face for the first time in a few years.

It's broken. His cheeks are thin and gaunt, and the lower half of his face is ridden with uneven stubble. There are bags sunken into his eyes, and his mouth is pulled into a frown like the corners are laden with bricks. Tomura's almost glad.

But then, he seems to realize who he's looking at, and the frown quickly shifts into a wry grin. He tilts his head, raising his eyebrows with an expression that can only be described as smug. Tomura doesn't have a fucking clue what he's acting smug about. He's in jail, for fuck's sake.

"Well, if it isn't Mr. Murder Hands himself," the man says. "Fancy seeing you here."

"Shut the fuck up," Tomura says.

"What brings you here to my own little slice of hell?" The man continues as if he was never interrupted, making Tomura bristle, "Did you want to check out the view?"

"Stop fucking talking."

"But what's the fun in that?"

"If you keep talking, I swear to god I will disintegrate your fucking face."

The man frowns, but he's not upset. He looks like he's pitying a small child. Tomura feels his nails digging into his palms, and he grits his teeth.

"Where's your babysitter?" The man asks curiously. "Is he outside?"

"*I swear to fucking god*," Tomura spits, and it takes every ounce of his strength to avoid rushing forward and clamping his fingers around the bastard's throat. The thought fills him with a rush of vengeful satisfaction.

"So he's outside," The man says with a curt nod. "Good to know."

Tomura goes to retort, but then a thought comes to mind. He smiles.

"Where's *your* brat, Retro?"

Retro's smile wobbles, and Tomura swells with pride. Retro's eyes flicker with something that's not quite malice, but not indifference, either. It's a look Tomura's come to know and appreciate. It means he's hit a nerve.

"He's around," Retro says, and Tomura barks a laugh.

"I'm sure," he says slowly, savoring the look on Retro's face like a fine wine. "How old was he when he escaped right under your nose and got you thrown into this dump? Ten?"

Retro falls silent for a moment, his face uncharacteristically blank. Tomura's grin falls to match. Why isn't he reacting? Why is he-

"Ha!" Retro barks suddenly, eyes lighting up as his mouth curls into a manic grin. "Someone finally taught you to make comebacks instead of empty threats. About damn time."

Tomura's teeth snap shut with enough force that he's surprised they don't crack.

“Anyways,” Retro says, “I take it you didn’t come here to catch up and talk about how the kids are doing. What do you want?”

Tomura takes a deep breath to avoid screaming at the top of his lungs, exhales and tilts his head carefully.

“My... *advisor* thinks that you can assist us with something,” He answers. Retro perks an eyebrow, leaning forward and resting his elbows on his knees with a pensive expression.

“Oh? You’re actually getting off your ass and doing something? Interesting.”

“Keep talking and I will leave you here to rot.”

“That ship’s sailed. Continue or go find someone else to bother.”

Tomura’s eye twitches, and it takes all of his strength to move on. “How good are you at breaking through firewalls?”

Retro raises his eyebrows, eyes glittering with sudden interest. “The best.”

“I’m sure,” Tomura says dryly. “How about... *U.A.* firewalls?”

“Easy,” Retro says pridefully, leaning forwards like they’re playing a game of cards and he’s about to lay out a winning hand. “Though, I gotta ask, why *U.A.*?”

Tomura smiles. “Of course you wouldn’t know. Did you know All Might has decided to be a teacher now?”

“You gotta be fucking with me,” Retro says flatly.

“Nope. Old bastard thinks he can teach-”

“That’s not what I meant, crusty. You’re going after *U.A.* while All Might’s there? *Why?* ”

Tomura knows he shouldn’t say, but the surprised look on Retros’ face is satisfying- *too satisfying* .

“We’re going to kill him.”

Retro blinks, as if he’s not sure he’s heard right. He leans back, eyes narrowed.

“You,” he says, surveying Tomura up and down with an incredulous look. “Are gonna try and kill All Might?”

“Not just me,” Tomura says, and Retro’s eyes glitter again.

“Oho,” he says. “Tell me more.”

“It wouldn’t be wise to reveal my full inventory before the game even begins, would it?” Tomura says, swelling where he stands. “This is our offer; help us shut down *U.A.*’s security and walk free, or sit here and rot for the rest of your miserable life.”

“Interesting offer,” Retro says, kicking up his legs. “You realize I could just walk out of here right now, right? You destroyed the door.”

“I’ll call the guard,” Tomura says flatly. “Pick your poison. I haven’t got all day.”

“Right,” Retro says. “Got some Call of Duty to get back to?”

Tomura bares his teeth, but his response never leaves his mouth. He chokes it down, thinking of Sensei’s words. ‘ *Bite your tongue and bide your time. He’s all talk. Show him something he wants, and he’s yours.* ’

“I think I’ll just refuse your offer and walk right out that door,” Retro says smugly. “Once I’m through, I’m as good as gone. *You* of all people know that.”

Tomura’s sleeve starts turning to dust.

“However,” Retro says slowly, like he’s reeling in a fishing line with something big caught on the hook. “There is *something* you can offer me.”

“What?” Tomura asks. *Show him something he wants.*

“That brat didn’t escape me just by slipping away,” Retro says thoughtfully. “He did something; took control of my lovely creation.”

His eyes glitter with something darker than coals, and he levels Tomura with a stare and says, “ *I want him back.* ”

It’s a tantalizing simple offer. All Tomura has to do is pull some strings and get some low-level pawn to go retrieve the brat. He won’t be hard to find; Tomura can’t imagine there are many with his quirk, and from what he hears, the cheat has somewhat of a reputation on his own.

“Fine. I’ll get your stupid fucking pet,” Tomura says. “In exchange, you rip U.A.’s security system to shreds when and where I tell you.”

Retro grins widely, eyes crinkling. “Pleasure doing business with you, Crusty.”

“Shut the fuck up.”

## Chapter End Notes

well... that's that.

I won't lie; i'm not terribly fond of this chapter. i stared at it for weeks in frustration, and i just don't know how to fix it. i figure that at this point, the best i can do is make it as good as i can, post it, and move on. i'm sorry it's not my best work, but once we're out of

this little 'event', I should be able to get back on track.  
Thanks for bearing with me. I hope you enjoyed!

# sirens beckon to the storm

## Chapter Summary

Shinsou reflects, the press attacks (more than once), and Iida learns a thing or two about democracy

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

It doesn't take Hitoshi long to figure out that it's one of those nights. He's hoping that as soon as his head hits the pillow he'll be out like a light, but no such luck. Even as he buries his face in his sheets and bundles the comforter around him, an alien restlessness hums under his skin and refuses to let him go.

He knows from experience that it's better to just lay in his bed, even if he's not getting any actual sleep, but something refuses to let him do it. His tired limbs beg for sleep, still burning with exhaustion and blossoming bruises from today's hell, but his mind refuses.

It's just past midnight when he groans in defeat, buries his face in his pillow, and shuffles out of his bed. His feet are freezing in the breezy apartment, but he pulls a pair of worn socks off of the floor and pulls them on before he walks down the hall to the kitchen.

The faded grey carpet muffles his footsteps all the way until he steps onto cool tile. The room is dark, but he notices a single shadow that doesn't move like the rest; instead of staying stationary, it pads behind him on silent feet and slinks around his socks. He pauses, and it stills for a moment before darting over and scratching on his leg.

"Ow," Hitoshi mutters. "Stop that."

The offending shadow, a black cat with bright yellow eyes, yawns at him lazily and rubs against his leg- thankfully not with her claws this time. He sighs and reaches down to rub her head.

"Hey, Milk."

Milk, blissfully unaware of the irony of her name, purrs brightly before slinking off to the kitchen. Hitoshi yawns, trailing after her and scratching the back of his neck as he does.

Milk watches him intently as he grabs a glass from the cabinet and fills it with icy water, sipping from it as he jumps up onto the counter. The moonlight illuminates the room, sliding through the windows and casting rectangular prisms of soft light across the walls. He holds up his hand, admiring the way the light makes his pale skin almost glow.

On the floor, Milk meows to get his attention and bats at his foot.

“Seriously, do you ever sleep?” He asks her, leaning over the counter to get a clearer view of where Milk is treading circles into the tile. She looks up at him and meows, blinking at him with her usual golden stare before disappearing from view. She reappears a moment later when she jumps onto the counter behind him, rubbing her head against his shoulder and purring when he pets her back.

Talking to his cats is normal. It’s not like talking to regular people, where he has to predict and guess at their moves and hope they won’t ask about his quirk. His cats don’t give a shit what he does, and he can say whatever he wants to them. They’re good listeners, even if they don’t act like it.

It’s still a valid question, too; Milk is always around on these nights when his brain just won’t let him sleep. Whenever he shows even the slightest hint of being awake, she’s there, meowing and scratching loudly at his door. He appreciates the companionship, even if Milk can be a little shit at times.

Speak of the devil-

“Milk, don’t you dare,” Hitoshi says, realizing far too late the danger they’re both in. Milk has slipped from his side to the far end of the counter, where she now sits with a single paw extended towards an old mug leftover from that morning. She looks at him, then back at the mug, before slowly reaching out.

“*Milk*,” he hisses, sliding off of the counter and rounding the table. Milk, however, sees this as her opportunity and shoves the mug smugly off of the table.

It hits the tile with a loud crack that reverberates through the small kitchen, and Hitoshi’s head snaps up as he waits for the tell-tale noises of his foster parents getting up to investigate. They’re not bad people, but they certainly won’t be happy about him being awake this early in the morning- or him waking them up. Thankfully, he hears nothing, and he lets out a quiet breath and walks over to where the mug lies on the floor.

It hasn’t shattered, but a few spiderwebbing cracks now mar its surface. He picks it up, tracing his fingers along them with a frown. The mug isn’t irreplaceable, thankfully; it’s just a faded purple one that always seemed out of place next to the white and ivory ones in the cabinet.

He sighs, glaring at Milk, who looks at the mug and proceeds to groom herself innocently. He leaves the broken cup on the counter for his parents to find, washes down the last of his water, and grabs Milk off of the counter. She yowls in his grip, and he shifts her in his arms but doesn’t let go.

“Why’d you have to go and do that?” He mutters as he steps back into his room and closes the door with his back. “Chio won’t be happy that you ruined her cup.”

Milk wriggles in his grip, and he drops her onto the floor. She jumps up onto his bed, stretching out and curling up into a neat black swirl in the center of his white sheets. Hitoshi

rolls his eyes.

“Honestly,” he whispers, sinking onto the bed. “Why can’t you be more like Carpet? He doesn’t break mugs.”

Carpet is his other cat, a pale grey tabby whose dark stripes match the pattern of the apartment’s carpet. He’s lazy as hell, and he’s always too busy lounging around to bother breaking things. Unlike Milk, he actually sleeps at night. Usually.

Milk responds to this by reaching out and catching her claws in his left sleeve, tugging until the fabric threatens to tear. He extracts her with his free hand and a scowl, tossing her paw back onto the bed.

“Jesus, what’s your deal tonight?”

Milk, unsatisfied, stands up and jumps over to his desk where she readies herself to knock over the old All Might figurine near the edge. It’s cheap and poorly-painted, but he’s still fond of it and not very willing to let it get knocked over. He manages to catch it when it makes a desperate leap towards the ground, placing it back on the desk and whispering. “Alright, you’re banned,” to Milk. She yawns, and he rubs his forehead.

“Please stop breaking things,”

Milk stretches and jumps back onto his bed, and he’s not sure if she’s ignoring him or she just doesn’t care. He follows her, slumping back down onto his sheets but not bothering getting under them. His head is still full of erratically roving static, filling his veins with an itch to move, to think. It’s frustrating as all hell.

“I had a fucking wild day,” he tells Milk quietly, and she blinks at him before rubbing her head against his fingers. He spreads them, and she licks his knuckles and yawns.

“Apparently U.A. really likes pitting their students against each other,” he continues quietly. “I had to fight Midoriya and Uraraka. I had to use my quirk on them. And they were cool with it.”

Milk stares at him, somehow conveying the exact emotion that he’s feeling.

“I don’t understand it,” he admits, rolling onto his back so he can stare at the ceiling. “I thought it would be just like middle school, but it’s not. People know about my quirk, and they don’t give a shit.”

Milk curls up next to him, but her eyes are still open, so he keeps talking.

“Some dude- fuck, what’s his name- Kirishima? Kirishima came up to me to tell me how cool my quirk is.” He closes his eyes, rubbing his forehead. “And Midoriya told me that my quirk would be amazing for hero work after I used it on him. I just- I don’t *get it* .”

He holds one hand above his face, staring at it in the dim light.

"I thought I'd have to fight to be a hero, and that it would be hard but worth it, but..." He pauses and reels his hand back in. "I haven't. At least... not yet."

He breathes, in and out, and lets his curled hands fall onto his face. Milk meows and shoves her face into them, purring as she does. He lets out a quiet laugh, and a small smile curls onto his face.

"Thanks, Milk, you're a good listener."

A pause.

"When you're not breaking things."

Milk sneezes on his face.

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Izuku meets Uraraka on the train yet again, and they spend the ride trading stories to pass the time. Uraraka has a million and one stories about the devilish pomeranian that lives across the street from her, and Izuku is more than willing to recount certain hero fights he's memorized by heart.

A short while later, when they finally arrive at U.A., there's a crowd amassing outside the gates. Izuku glances at Uraraka, who looks just as baffled as he is and shrugs when he meets her eyes. They creep closer, staying on the outskirts of the cluster and trying to figure out what's going on.

He spots microphones and cameras, and he makes the connection quickly.

"It's the press," he says just as the realization dawns on Uraraka, and she lets out a sigh of relief. Izuku wishes he shared her feelings about it, but he bites his lip and plunges into the crowd nonetheless.

Their uniforms act as a beacon for the reporters, who flock to them like pigeons to a chip and shove all sorts of microphones and cameras into their faces. Izuku blinks as one manages to single him out, asking him, "What's it like learning from All Might?"

He glances to the side, but Uraraka has been similarly penned in. The reporter inches closer, shaking her microphone impatiently.

"It's... just like any other teacher," he says awkwardly, wringing his hands together. "Except it's... All Might, which I guess takes some getting used to."

The reporter looks annoyed, but she lets him go, and Izuku takes the opportunity to attempt escape. He almost makes it, but someone grabs his shoulder and turns him around. He tries to pull away from the touch, but the guy who's grabbed him doesn't let go.

"Hey, kid! What do you know about- Woah! How'd you get that crazy scar?"

Izuku locks up like someone's doused him with ice water, teeth gritted as his fins drop as far down as they'll go. He stutters out a response and turns to run, but the reporter grabs his arm.

"C'mon, it's just a quick question!"

Izuku's starting to panic now, because people are looking at him and his scar and his fins, and holy shit what if someone recognizes who he is and *what he is* -

The reporter's hand is wrenched off of his arm, and Izuku glances back to find Mr. Aizawa towering over him with an annoyed glint in his eyes.

"Don't grab the students," he says through gritted teeth, "unless you want to get sued."

The man backs off, gripping his microphone like a weapon, and Mr. Aizawa puts a hand on Izuku's shoulder and steers him through the crowd until he's on the other side of the gate and he can breathe. Izuku's never felt more grateful in his life.

The reporters shout questions at Mr. Aizawa, mostly starting off with some sort of comment on his appearance, but Mr. Aizawa completely ignores them.

"Vultures," he mutters. "He's not even here today."

Izuku stumbles away from the gate a little further, reaching up to trace the pale skin on his face. Holy shit. He does not want to do that again.

Mr. Aizawa glances at him, glances back to the gate, and mutters a gruff, "Homeroom starts in five minutes. Hurry up."

Izuku nods, mutters a quiet, "Thank you," and hurries off towards the main building. He feels bad about leaving Uraraka, but he's pretty sure that if he'd gone five more seconds there, he would have gone into a full-blown panic attack, and that's the last thing he needs.

Uraraka doesn't seem to mind, and when she gets to the classroom a minute later, she collapses into the desk next to him with a tired groan.

"Oh, man," she mumbles. "There were so *many* of them. Is that even legal?"

Izuku rubs the back of his neck. "I don't know. I guess so?"

"It shouldn't be," she says.

The last students to come in are Todoroki, who wears a blank expression that doesn't quite hide the anger rolling in white-hot eddies beneath his skin, and Shinsou, who looks more tired than Izuku's ever seen him.

"Did they get you, too?" Uraraka asks as Shinsou drops his backpack and settles into the desk behind Izuku, tucked against the back wall. He nods.

"It was crazy," she mutters. "All those questions about All Might. They asked me what classes he taught. What'd they ask you?"

Izuku stares at his desk. “They asked me what I thought about having him as a teacher, and then some guy tried to ask me...”

His fingers, which are rubbing up and down his scar, press too firmly and suddenly *he’s on the beach, gasping as he drags himself across the sand and presses his back against cool, cold metal. His blood is seeping from his back in a red-tinted torrent, and his glazed eyes are drawn upwards to the night sky while his body crumples like a dying star.*

He doesn’t realize he’s shaking until Uraraka’s leaning across the space between the rows of desks and resting a hand on his shoulder.

“Hey, it’s over,” she says. “It’s okay.”

It’s not over, not really, but Izuku takes in a deep breath and makes his hands still. “Right. Thanks, Uraraka.”

She gives him a thumbs up right as the door swings open, and Mr. Aizawa trudges in. His bright yellow sleeping bag trails across the floor behind him, and he tosses it somewhere behind his desk and settles into his chair. He clears his throat, and Izuku figures that everyone’s learned their lesson because the class goes silent.

“Good morning,” he says in a way that makes it sound like the morning is anything but good. “I have an announcement.”

The class goes so silent you could hear a pin drop.

“We’re picking a class president.”

The sigh of relief is so intense it’s more of a gust, and the peace lasts exactly one second before everyone registers what exactly that phrase entails.

Immediately, a dozen or so hands fly up into the air, and everyone starts shouting some rendition of ‘I’ll do it!’. Izuku stays silent, although he can’t help but quirk a grin at the cacophony. It’s so... normal. He keeps forgetting that U.A. is still a school, even if it does occasionally pit its students together in near-death matches.

Part of him is interested in what the position entails. He’s used to the class president being a mundane, work-heavy task that nobody really wants other than the ambitious overachiever, but this is U.A. Being Class President of a hero course class surely has to equate to *something*.

Izuku still doesn’t raise his hand. He just wants to be an underground hero. He’ll be okay without the position.

Mr. Aizawa watches the class scramble over each other in an attempt to get picked with an expression that clearly states he would literally rather be anywhere else. Thankfully, he’s rescued- or condemned- by Iida, who slams a hand down onto his desk with enough intensity to make Izuku flinch.

“Quiet down, everyone!”

Surprisingly, it works, and the yelling quickly quiets into confused mumbling. Mr. Aizawa closes his eyes.

“Leading the group is a task of heavy responsibility, but ambition does not equate to ability!” Iida starts, switching into the voice that Izuku has subconsciously dubbed ‘the intellectual voice’. Behind him, he swears he hears Shinsou mutter, “Oh, boy.”

“The sacred office demands the trust of its constituents!” Iida continues, and Izuku tilts his head. *The sacred office?*

“If this is to be a democracy, then I put forward the notion that our true leader must be chosen by election!”

It’s not... a bad idea, Izuku thinks to himself even as Iida’s plan is met with mostly rebuttal.

“But Iida, we haven’t known each other for long enough to build any trust,” Asui points out, turning around in her seat to look at him. In the desk next to her, Kirishima rests his elbows on his desk and asks, “And won’t everyone just vote for themselves?”

“That’s precisely why anyone who manages to earn multiple votes will be the best-suited individual for the job,” Iida says with a striking finality, tilting up his chin in a silent challenge that no one rises to.

“Will you allow this, Mr. Aizawa?” Iida asks, turning to their teacher, who looks like he’s half asleep. Mr. Aizawa cracks open one bloodshot eye, rolls it, and says, “Do whatever you want as long as it’s quick.”

Iida pulls out notecards from his bag and swiftly passes them out to the class, telling them to write the name of whoever they vote for on them and deposit them at the front. Izuku quickly scrawls *Iida*, folds it up, and drops it off on Ashido’s desk in the front. He sits back down, and his attention is promptly called elsewhere until he realizes the results are on the board.

*Asui Tsuyu - 3 Votes*

*Yaoyorozu Momo - 2 Votes*

Then, there are a bunch of people with one vote. Izuku raises his eyebrows, noting that both he and Iida are among them. Still, he hadn’t expected Asui.

He does understand, though. From what he’s seen, Asui is calm under pressure and a good strategist. She managed to exploit the weaknesses of and defeat the two powerhouses of the class, snatching victory from the jaws of certain defeat and pumping up the whole class in the process. She’s a good fit.

Behind him, Iida stares silently at his desk. Izuku can’t help but feel bad for him. The system was his idea, yet in the end, it undermined him.

Asui and Yaoyorozu take their places at the front of the classroom, turning to face the students. Yaoyorozu looks slightly sad about being bested, but Izuku supposes if it had to be anyone, it would be Tsuyu.

“Thank you, kero,” Asui says. “I’ll do my best.”

“As will I,” Yaoyorozu says with a curt bow.

“Good,” Mr. Aizawa says. “Now go sit down.”

----

Izuku’s still thinking about the reporter when lunch rolls around. He’s barely focused as he gets his tray and sits down across from Iida and Uraraka, staring blankly at the table.

Shinsou sits down at his right, glancing at him out of the corner of his eye. He bumps Izuku with his knee, and the involuntary flinch is enough to knock him out of his foggiess. He rubs his eyes. He wants to take a nap, but he knows how that’ll go over.

He takes a bite of his food, oblivious to the fact that everyone’s staring at him until he looks up.

“Hey Midoriya, how much sleep do you get?” Uraraka asks, peering at him over her plate curiously. Izuku blinks. Bit’s right. He is a shit liar.

“...A decent amount, I think. Why?”

It’s not entirely a lie. Some nights are fine, and he wakes up in the morning feeling somewhat refreshed with his thoughts free of nightmares. The past few nights, however, have been anything but; he either doesn’t fall asleep at all, or he wakes up with a scream budding in his throat.

Uraraka frowns. “You don’t look great.” She stiffens, and her face goes red. “I- I don’t mean that you look *bad*, it’s just...” She traces a finger under her eye. “You’ve got some shadows.”

Izuku rubs his face, poking the eyebags he’d forgotten are there. “Oh. Huh.”

“You really should be getting more sleep,” Iida says, setting his spoon on his plate. “If you do not, your performance will be limited, and that’s not good in hero work.”

“You’re right,” Izuku says, staring at his plate. “I’ll try.”

“You too, Shinsou,” Iida says firmly, and Izuku glances up just in time to see Shinsou raise his eyebrows. Now that he looks closely, he can see Shinsou’s eyes are lined with dark bags as well; they aren’t as intense as Izuku’s, but they contrast more with Shinsou’s pale skin.

Shinsou looks like he’s trying to make a decision, glances away, and says, “I can’t. Insomnia.”

“Ah,” Iida says with a knowing look. “My brother used to suffer from insomnia. If you want, I can ask him how he managed it and pass his words along to you.”

Shinsou blinks at Iida like he's just announced that he's the second coming of Christ. He looks completely unsure what to say, but he settles for swallowing and mumbling, "It's fine. Thanks for the offer, though."

Iida nods, and Uraraka takes the opportunity to jump in and ask, "You have a brother?"

Iida's eyes glitter, and he's practically glowing as he pushes his glasses up onto his nose and says, "Yes, I do! Have either of you heard of the Turbo Hero: Ingenium?"

Izuku's jaw drops. He's seen Ingenium on patrol once or twice, but he's never had the guts to flag him down for an autograph. "Of course! Are you saying that Ingenium is your older brother?"

"I am!" Iida says, puffing up like a proud bird. "He leads the people with his unwavering adherence to rules and regulations. A truly beloved hero!" He pauses, seemingly to catch his breath, before continuing more gently, "It's my admiration for my brother that's inspired my own desire to become a hero."

Uraraka's grinning when he finishes, and Shinsou looks both surprised and impressed-although something like a flicker of jealousy crosses his face for an instant.

Iida laughs, then, and quietly says, "Though, I realize I'm not yet ready to lead anyone."

That's bullshit, Izuku thinks, but he keeps his mouth shut.

Iida was born to be a hero, he realizes. It's in his blood. Ingenium comes from a long line of pro heroes, which means Iida does too. He'll make a great one, Izuku knows. He's intelligent, a good leader, and has a good quirk.

He also doesn't have a body count.

Izuku snaps his teeth together at the thought, and he screws up his face when he suddenly tastes wood along with his rice. His tongue finds two pieces of wood in his mouth, and he spits them into a napkin, staring at them in confusion. He glances at his chopsticks, and his eyes widen when he realizes that he bit the ends of them off.

He runs his tongue over his teeth and finds them razor sharp, and he wants to slam his head onto the table. Why can't he control his damn quirk?

Thankfully, nobody's noticed. Iida's still staring wistfully into the distance, a soft smile on his face. Uraraka looks at him and says, "You really love your brother, don't you?"

"I do," he says, and it's not the prideful announcement that it was before, but a gentle confession.

Izuku wishes he had someone like that. A sibling that he could turn to. He has his mom, and she's everything that he could ever ask for and more, but... She works so hard. There are some things that he doesn't want to burden her with.

He almost wonders-

A high-pitched whine tears through the lunchroom, cutting off all conversation like a razor and filling the room with an echoing wail that makes Izuku flinch so harshly it almost hurts. He shakes his head, ignoring the trembling in his limbs- *that- that sounded like-*

“The alarm?” He mumbles, fins wobbling as he stands up. All around them, students are abandoning their meals and rushing towards the door in a terrifying torrent.

“ *Security Level 3 has been broken ,*” a monotonous, mechanical voice informs them over the intercom. “ *All students please evacuate in an orderly fashion.* ”

Izuku glances around, hands still gripping the table. He doesn’t know what Security Level is. Iida, thankfully, spots a third-year stuck in the crowd near them and yells, “What’s Security Level 3?”

“It means someone’s infiltrated the building!” The third-year yells back, eyes wide and face twisted into confusion. “I’ve never seen it happen before! Hurry up and get out of here!”

Izuku would rather do literally anything else than plunge into the massive sea of people flooding the doorway, but Iida shoves him along and he’s forced into the mess. There are people everywhere, pushing and jostling him as they fight to get ahead of the pack, and Izuku nearly stumbles multiple times. He feels trapped, like the walls are closing in on him, and it’s no surprise that when someone knocks into him more harshly than before, his feet skid and his head disappears under the surface of the crowd. Over the mess of yelling, he can hear Iida and Uraraka yelling his name, but he can’t seem to find a place to stand up without getting knocked to his knees again.

Someone grabs him by the back of his uniform, hauling him from the floor with a single, strained tug, and he stumbles and turns to find Shinsou.

“Thanks,” Izuku says, and he doubts Shinsou can hear him, but Shinsou nods.

Izuku turns back to the crowd, searching desperately for Uraraka and Iida, but it’s like looking for a needle in a haystack. Izuku grits his teeth, and the Leviathan picks that moment to make itself known with a whispered hiss that’s somehow louder than the screaming. He ignores it, stomping on it and pushing it further and further beneath the tangled layers of his thoughts until he can’t hear it anymore.

He hears a familiar voice above the crowd, but he can’t register who it is or what they’re saying. A moment later, he spots Iida leaning over the crowd a few meters away with his hand outstretched towards Uraraka. As he watches, Uraraka slaps his hand, and Iida springs into the air. He doesn’t fall, but floats above the crowd towards the ceiling Izuku wonders what he’s doing until Iida’s engines sputter to life, and he suddenly goes whizzing head-over-heels down the hallway like some kind of warped frisbee.

Iida ends his looping flight by slamming clean into the wall at the end of the hallway, gripping a pipe there to stay up. He’s pressed flat against the wall like a mural, but his face is determined as he opens his mouth and shouts.

“Everything is fine!”

Izuku can hear him even over the ungodly amount of noise, and apparently so can everyone else, because the stampede slows.

“It’s just the press!” Iida continues. “There’s nothing to panic about! We’re fine!”

Slowly, the room shifts from a yelling race to a couple hundred students milling about confusedly in a tight hallway. Izuku spots an empty corner not far away and carefully pushes toward it, wrapping his fingers around Shinsou’s sleeve and gently pulling him along. Finally, they stumble into the thankfully open pocket, and Izuku takes a deep breath and tries to get his hammering heart to still. Shinsou steps past him and leans his head against the wall, and Izuku catches the tail end of a string of muttered curses.

“Not one for crowds?” He asks quietly, leaning against the wall next to him, and Shinsou gives him a flat look. Izuku wrinkles his nose and stares out at the crowd dryly.

“Me neither.”

Thankfully, a few teachers arrive a few minutes later to shepherd them back to their classrooms. Izuku waits until most of the crowd has passed, tapping Shinsou’s shoulder when he spots Iida. They weave through the stragglers to get to him.

“Oh, hello!” Iida says when he spots them. “Are you alright, Midoriya? I saw you fall.”

Izuku nods. “I’m fine. Shinsou saved me from getting trampled. Are- Are *you* okay? It looked like you hit the wall pretty hard.”

Iida winces, rubbing his shoulder. “It was not a very... graceful landing, but I’m fine.”

“It was pretty cool, actually,” Izuku says with a faint grin. Iida’s eyes crinkle at the edges.

“I’m glad.”

They’re the last ones to get to the classroom. Izuku slides into his seat and stretches, and Iida slips into conversation with an excited Uraraka. Shinsou lays his head down on his desk and doesn’t move again.

Out of the corner of his eye, Izuku sees Asui say something to Mr. Aizawa, who nods. She springs up to the front of the class, and Yaoyorozu slides out of her seat to follow.

“We have an announcement, kero,” Asui says. Izuku glances up, and Shinsou picks his head up off his desk and rests his chin on his hands.

“We still need to pick the other council members, but first...” She pauses thoughtfully.

“During lunch, Iida managed to calm everyone down and keep us from getting trampled when no one else could. His leadership skills and experience are more suited for the role of president, and I think that he can guide you better than I can, kero.”

Izuku turns to find Iida staring wide-eyed at Asui, glasses sliding down his nose yet going completely unnoticed.

“Sounds good to me!” Kirishima says. “He really showed his stuff in the cafeteria!”

“He saved me from getting crushed by some really scary third years!” Kaminari adds. A few other people pipe up, eventually cutting off when Mr. Aizawa sticks a hand out of his sleeping bag and waves it irritably.

“Just *get on with it* .”

“I...” Iida says, glancing around the classroom. “I accept. Thank you for the opportunity, Asui. I will not let you down.”

Asui smiles. “Call me Tsuyu, kero.”

Iida startles, but his response is drowned out by the class chanting, “Exit-sign Iida! Exit-sign Iida!”

Izuku laughs, and when Uraraka joins in, he does as well. Mr. Aizawa zips his sleeping bag up all the way, hiding his face from view.

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The day is otherwise rather uneventful. Hero training is thankfully just an intense workout, which Izuku survives only because he’s been hauling rusty fridges and old motors around for Bit. Most of his classmates aren’t so fortunate, as he discovers when he steps into the locker room and finds half of the people in there sprawled spread-eagled on the floor and panting. He steps over Kirishima and Tokoyami, almost tripping over Tokoyami’s Dark Shadow, and claims himself a corner to change back into his uniform.

They only have a short study hall after that, and Izuku uses it to finish most of his homework so that he can try and fit in a nap later. He still has to do English, but he’s planning on doing that last.

“You’re dismissed,” Mr. Aizawa finally tells them, and everyone is immediately scrambling to pack up.

“Also, the door was damaged by the press, so you’ll be using the side door. Don’t go through the front. Go home.”

Izuku packs up his homework, still struck by the oddity of being able to pack up at his own pace instead of having to jam everything in his backpack and run. Still, he tenses every time someone laughs or raises their voice.

“The door was damaged?” Iida says quietly as they leave the classroom. “How?”

“I saw the door before I came inside,” Uraraka says. “It was huge. There’s no way someone just *broke* it.”

“Right,” Iida says quietly. “That is strange indeed.”

They fall off into silence for a moment, before Uraraka whispers, “What if, really quickly, we went and checked out the door.”

“Uraraka!” Iida says, staring at her with a faint air of betrayal.

Uraraka shrinks guiltily, but her eyes are pleading. “Just- Just a quick look! I won’t go right up to it, I just want to see if I can tell what happened. Mr. Aizawa said not to go *through* it, not that we couldn’t look at it.”

She glances around. “Who else wants to look?”

Izuku quietly raises his hand. Iida pinches the bridge of his nose.

“Not you too.”

“It’s just a look. We’re not getting any closer than we have to,” Izuku supplies, and Uraraka does her best puppy dog eyes. Iida sighs and shakes his head.

“I cannot believe I’m enabling you- One quick look, but if you stay any longer I *will* tell Mr. Aizawa.”

“Yes!” Uraraka says, pumping a fist in the air. “Let’s go!”

Iida sighs, and Shinsou raises an eyebrow, but no one makes any move to stop them, so Izuku follows Uraraka’s peppy steps down the hallway.

They take the stairs with the rest of the students, but break off from the pack and head down the hallway that leads to the regular entrance. They get a few odd glances for that, and Iida looks uncomfortable, but he doesn’t object.

After checking behind them to make sure no one’s looking, they step through U.A.’s main entrance and onto the pavement outside. The cement path leads beyond them, cutting the green lawn in half before meeting what once might have been a door.

The door is huge, made of interlocking jaws of thick steel plating that once completely blocked off the entrance to U.A. Now, a massive section of it has been turned to a heap of grey dust, and the remaining sides are still crumbling. It gives a feeling of *wrongness* to the atmosphere that makes Izuku’s blood run cold.

“What...?” Iida says, loyalty to Mr. Aizawa temporarily forgotten. “Who could have done this?”

“I don’t think that was a reporter,” Shinsou says warily. Izuku nods.

A breeze blows, chafing more dust from the sides of the gate and scattering it across the pavement. Izuku wonders what kind of quirk is capable of turning thick steel to dust without being noticed.

“Someone’s coming!” Uraraka hisses, and they duck back into the doorway as Mr. Aizawa strides across the lawn, accompanied by Nedzu. Izuku catches a glimpse of Present Mic and a

tall woman for a second before Iida closes the door and shakes his head.

“That was our look,” he says firmly. Uraraka looks like she wants to run back out, but she nods and follows Iida back down the hallway. Izuku trails after them, brows creased thoughtfully.

Something about this doesn’t seem right. Why would someone with a quirk like that break the door down and just... walk away? Nothing else was disintegrated; they obviously didn’t come inside.

Did they?

Izuku shivers, and the Leviathan growls a low, guttural warning. He's aware of the scales clambering up his shoulders, and he shakes his arms in a feeble attempt to get rid of them. It's fine. He's fine. If someone had gotten in, he would have known. They all would have known.

Fighting villains is a long way off. Right now, he has to focus on getting his quirk under control.

## Chapter End Notes

wrow  
that was fast

# find the name for which i mourn

## Chapter Summary

Izuku confronts some things he's been running from and learns a little bit about himself.

## Chapter Notes

hoooooooooo boy hold onto your asses because here we go  
i promised you a confrontation, didn't i?  
[trigger warning for: attempted drowning, kind of mentions of insignificance, and deep water. if you see anything else that needs to be tagged, tell me.]

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The night passes uneventfully- for *once* -, and Thursday morning rolls around quickly. Izuku thanks whatever god there is as he rolls out of bed, feeling somewhat rested for the first time in what feels like months.

His routine feels strangely normal by now. There's still the childish part of him that whispers in wide-eyed wonder, *you're going to U.A. You're going to be a hero* , and the other, tucked away thoughts that chant *murderer* and *liar* over and over again, but they're ultimately insignificant as he rides the train to U.A. He still can't tie his tie, but the dress code at U.A. seems far more lenient than his old school. He's not sure Kacchan even *wears* a tie.

He doesn't see Uraraka on the train this time, but he catches up with her at the gates of U.A. The sky is overcast, and the sun is hidden behind rolling tides of silver. It casts a gentle light over the ground, highlighting the pavement and blissful lack of reporters at the repaired gate. Izuku breathes a sigh of relief.

"Oh, thank god," Uraraka mumbles, shaking her head as they walk through the gate. "I thought we were gonna have to make a break for it."

Izuku grins, although it turns forced as he remembers the man pointing a camera at his scar and the hands grasping at his arm. It's not something he wants to relive again- is that how the press always acts?

His dream of becoming an Underground Hero suddenly feels so much more sensible.

The first half of the day is nothing but regular classes, starting with homeroom and finishing up with Algebra. Izuku's never struggled with math- he has Bit to help him fill in the gaps if

he ever falls too far behind- but sometimes it just feels like the numbers are sliding out of his brain. Today is definitely one of those days. He's not even sure how knowing how to graph logarithms will even help him as a hero, but maybe the secret in defeating villains lies within numbers and graphs. It sounds unlikely, but Izuku's learned not to question things.

Still, he's one of the relatively better off people in that subject. A few of his classmates- Ashido, Kaminari, and Kirishima, more specifically- are left nearly sliding out of their seats by the end of the lesson. Kaminari looks like his soul has been forcibly extracted from his body, and Kirishima may or may not be crying.

"Are they... okay?" Izuku asks Uraraka, who shrugs with a baffled expression as Iida attempts to pry a limp Kaminari off of the floor beside his desk. Shinsou stifles a snicker into his hands.

Izuku's still confused by the normalcy of it all as they head to lunch. It still feels surreal- not just the U.A. part, but just the whole *I have actual friends, and we're training to be heroes* thing. He does his best to ignore the part of him that whispers that he deserves none of it.

U.A. is a million years away from his old school. He gets his food and, instead of scurrying away to hide in a corner and hope nobody throws anything at him, sits down to talk with his friends. Uraraka and Iida are always ready to jump into a conversation, and Shinsou is still hesitant, but he sits without asking. It feels good.

Izuku wonders how long it will last.

"What'cha thinking about?" Uraraka asks him around a mouthful of rice. Izuku blinks, realizing that he's been zoned out of the conversation for the past few minutes.

"Just, uh, class," he stumbles, resisting the urge to sigh as scales bloom from his eyes. *Real helpful.*

"We were discussing the use of support items in mainstream heroics," Iida offers helpfully, allowing Izuku to slip back into the conversation. "Uraraka believes that it should become more normalized."

"It should!" Uraraka says. "Support items help heroes a lot! Look at Thirteen's costume!"

Izuku nods. "Support items help a lot, as long as they're... functional."

Iida looks at him over a bite of pork. "As opposed to what?"

"Blowing up the neighbor's mailbox," Izuku mutters under his breath, ducking his head when all three of them turn to stare at him.

"You've seen support items that... blow up mailboxes?" Uraraka asks carefully.

"It- It wasn't technically a support item, but it could have been," Izuku offers awkwardly. "We didn't have to pay for the mailbox. They had insurance."

“Hold on. We?” Iida asks. “Midoriya, you were involved with the destruction of private property?”

“No,” Izuku says. “I was the one who said it was a bad idea.”

“Does anyone else want the story behind this?” Shinsou asks, side-eyeing Izuku curiously. Uraraka raises her hand. Iida sighs and nods.

Izuku groans and buries his head in his hands, but he ends up telling them the story of Bit, the renegade drone, and the poor mailbox that happened to be in the line of fire. Iida’s concerned about the legality of it, and Izuku’s hasty to assure him that the police are *well* aware of Bit’s antics by now and that it’s perfectly legal to construct machinery like that as long as they don’t blow up anything else.

“...Wow,” Uraraka says once he’s done detailing the sad remains of the mailbox. “That’s crazy.”

“Holy shit,” Shinsou mutters.

Izuku only shakes his head, lips twitching. Compared to the lightsaber incident, the mailbox was *tame* .

“He’s... yeah.” He sighs. “I’m actually going over to his house tonight. He’s probably blowing up my phone right now.”

The three of them stare at him warily, and he rubs his forehead and says, “ *Not literally* .”

“Thank goodness,” Iida says, looking far too relieved. Uraraka looks like she’s about to giggle, but her expression abruptly turns to one of realization.

“Wait,” She says. “Speaking of phones, I still need to get your numbers! I’ve been meaning to ask you, but I forgot.”

Izuku blinks, but he scribbles his number on the napkin that Uraraka slides him. Iida does the same, and after him, Shinsou scrawls his number in near-illegible script. Uraraka squints at it for a moment, but she seems satisfied.

“Thanks!” She says with a grin. “I’ll text you guys after school.”

Iida nods, and Izuku can’t help his own smile.

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After lunch, it’s another hero training session. Izuku sighs as he slides into his desk, already bracing for another two hours of run-laps-until-you-drop with Aizawa.

But Aizawa isn’t here, and he doesn’t show even as the bell rings. Instead, Izuku hears a familiar patter coming down the hallway, and then-

“It is I!” All Might bellows, sliding across the room and coming to a stop behind his desk with a graceful flourish. “Hello again, students!”

Izuku isn’t sure how to feel about this. On the one hand, it’s *All Might in his classroom* , but the last time All Might taught him he spent ten minutes slamming into walls and running away from Iida. He wonders what he’s going to do today.

“We’ll be doing another exercise today. Put on your costumes and meet me at Grounds Omega!” He says with a salute before darting out the door, coughing. The class is quick to follow him, rising from their desks in a hurry that Izuku is quickly swept up in. He swallows whatever worry he has. He’ll be fine.

Ten minutes later, they stand at the edge of Grounds Omega in their hero costumes. Before them is a slightly crooked building, similar in appearance to the one from the Heroes vs. Villains exercise, save for what appears to be a large lake encircling part of the first floor. The whole place looks somewhat abandoned.

“Welcome to Grounds Omega!” All Might says, coming to a stop in front of them. “In your career, you’ll encounter many villains. When cornered, some villains will choose to fight. However, others will attempt to hide! Today, you’ll be learning how to hunt down and capture a villain who is trying to evade you!”

Izuku tilts his head. That doesn’t sound so bad.

“The exercise is simple; you’ll be broken into groups of four, with three heroes and one villain. The villain’s job is to hide, and the heroes’ job is to find and capture them!”

As long as he isn’t the villain, he’ll be fine. He can capture someone without hurting them with his quirk.

“Whoever finds and successfully detains the villain first is the victor! If the villain manages to remain uncaptured for twenty minutes, they win!”

Once again, the odds are unsurprisingly in favor of the heroes. Izuku’s starting to wonder if it’s some kind of mental conditioning where they’re taught that the heroes are supposed to win. He’s not sure why U.A. would think that they, hero class students, would need to be taught that.

“Follow me down to the viewing room, and we’ll get started!”

As All Might leads them towards the building, Izuku feels something tap on the top of his head. He glances up and finds nothing, only to be hit in the eye with a raindrop a second later. Within moments, the grey clouds above him open up, and it begins to lightly rain.

Izuku ducks into the doorway leading to the viewing room, pausing as thunder rumbles somewhere in the distance. He hopes that the coming storm won’t interfere with the exercise at all.

“Alright,” All Might says once they’re all inside. “As you can see, you’ll be able to observe your classmates as they participate in the exercise.” He pauses. “Now, let’s get started, shall we?”

The class cheers. All Might beams, pulling a list out of his pocket and clearing his throat.

“First up, we have Bakugou, Shouji, and Kirishima as heroes!”

Izuku can’t help but wince, pitying whoever has spend twenty minutes running from *that* matchup. Hopefully it won’t be-

“And as the villain... Midoriya!”

-him.

*Goddammit.*

The class turns to look at him. Some people are excited, unaware of the trap Izuku’s about to be forced into. Others, however, are more sympathetic, like Asui’s.

Slowly, Izuku turns to look at the people he’ll be running from. Kirishima flashes him a bright, toothy grin, Shouji nods, and Kacchan....

Kacchan looks like a tiger whose been handed an antelope on a silver platter. His eyes are burning with an emotion that Izuku registers only as *danger*. On his back, phantom hand prints twinge and burn. Shit.

He turns away, ignoring the way his fins wobble and scales appear on the back of his neck. God- This is *bad*. Kacchan’s just been giving free reign to hunt and detain him, and Izuku knows from experience that it can only end in pain.

Unless, against all odds, he can actually avoid him for the whole thing. That’s what he’s supposed to do, right? Hide and run.

Izuku’s been hiding and running from Kacchan his whole life. He’ll be okay. He *has* to be okay.

“Midoriya, you’ll have five minutes to find a starting position,” All Might says. “After that, you need to last twenty minutes without being captured.”

Izuku nods, sticking his hands in his pockets so that they don’t shake.

“Heroes, you’ll have twenty minutes from the whistle to find and detain Midoriya by any means necessary! You won’t be given capture tape, so get creative!”

Izuku stiffens.

*By any means necessary.* He doesn’t like the sound of that at all.

All Might won’t let them go too far, though. He’ll stop them if it gets out of hand. He will.

“Midoriya, you may head over to the building now. Good luck!”

Izuku nods, taking a deep breath and turning away from Kacchan’s burning eyes. He walks towards the door, hoping his trembling fins don’t give away his terror at the thought of facing Kacchan in such a small space. What if he loses control?

He won’t. He can’t.

As he closed the door behind him and starts to climb the stairs, he pulls his visor down and his mouthguard up. His hood comes up over his head, and his fins quickly pierce the fabric.

He’ll be fine, he tells himself, stepping onto the front porch of the building and reaching towards the door.

He’ll be fine.

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The building is a lot like the one that the Heroes vs. Villains exercise took place in, except smaller and much more run down. Instead of solid steel walls and plated floors, this building has rotting wooden floorboards and crumbling cement walls. It looks purposely abandoned, and the lower floor is completely flooded.

The second floor, or the first floor if he doesn’t count the basement, is a maze of hallways and shattered tile. The water here is mostly up to his ankles, except for a few drooping spots where it’s almost past his waist. He makes a mental note to avoid those places.

He doesn’t waste much time finding the stairwell, knowing that the third floor is a safer bet to start out on. It’ll take them longer to get to him, and when they do, he’ll have more room to run.

He still has three minutes, so he does his best to get the lay of the floor. It’s all hallways like the one beneath, so Izuku makes sure he knows what turns to take to get where he wants to go.

The sky is exposed in a few places thanks to the rotting ceiling, so Izuku pauses to get a breath of fresh air. The remnants of the ceiling lay on the ground around him, and Izuku stops to survey the area for potential hiding spots.

A large sheet of metal, warped and scratched in places, catches his attention, and he lifts it to see if he’ll fit beneath it. To his surprise, he finds a hole where the floor has fallen away that leads to the second floor. It’s a pretty nasty drop, but nothing he hasn’t faced before. He grins; if someone finds him, he knows how to get away. He’s going to be okay.

All Might warns him that he has a minute left, and he scurries away to find somewhere to start. The place he settles on is a small, tucked away hallway on the third floor, halfway down. He stops in the middle, clambering on a pile of rubble. He’s in plain sight, but if someone spots him, he has far more room to maneuver than he would if he were hiding.

Before the exercise can begin, Izuku needs to get ready. He stretches out his arms and very slowly releases his grip on the ropes inside him.

The Leviathan slams against the bars of its cage with a garbled scream that almost knocks him off the pile, but he channels its desperate attempts at control into his arms and legs. His bones shift with an uncomfortable feeling, and a few seconds later, his arms and legs have become reptilian talons.

Izuku grimaces at how loud and close the Leviathan sounds, but he takes a deep breath. He needs to work on control. He can handle this.

Balancing carefully on a piece of rebar, Izuku curls into a crouch and takes a deep breath. He stares at the ground, clenching his fingers, and breathes.

He can do this.

“I’m ready,” he says, and a few seconds later, a shrill whistle announces that the exercise has begun.

Izuku’s plan is simple; he’s going to wait for someone to find him here- it should take them a little while as long as he’s careful to not make any noise- and once they do, he loses them and finds another hiding spot. It’s a risky plan, but the building is pretty small and the test is only twenty minutes. As long as he’s quick enough, he can do it.

Within a few seconds, he can hear the telltale sounds of the heroes breaking into the building. There’s an explosion from below that rattles the walls and makes Izuku’s breath catch in his throat, but he grits his teeth. It’s from below, and it reveals Kacchan’s position.

The good thing about the setting of this exercise is all the water, he notes. If he’s lucky, it’ll help to weaken Kacchan’s explosions should the worst come to pass.

He thinks of Kacchan, reaching for him with blazing fingers and none of the feeble restraints that his old school offered, and he shivers. If Kacchan goes too far, All Might will stop him.

Right?

He swallows the thunder in his throat and the prickle of scales up his back. His spine tingles, offering him a tail, but he crushes the feeling. He’s bordering too much as it is.

He stays where he is, perched on the edge of the rebar like some kind of overly attentive gargoyle. His fins flare outwards, and he keeps his breathing quiet and waits for any kind of sound. There’s nothing at the moment, save for the silent slosh of water around the rubble on the floor and droplets slipping from the ceiling. He keeps a careful watch, looking back and forth.

A few tantalizingly long minutes pass until someone finds him. The only warning he gets is the rebar shifting ever so slightly, and he glances over his shoulder and leaps out of harm’s way. Shouji’s strange arms come together on where he was only a split second before, and he regards Izuku with a slightly impressed look.

“I should have known it wouldn’t be that easy,” he says with a nod, and Izuku gives him a fanged grin before turning tail and breaking into a sprint.

So it begins. Thankfully with Shouji and not with Kacchan.

Izuku’s thankful for all his scouting as he leaps over a mountain of debris, skidding to a halt and ducking under a metal pole stretching across the hallway. Behind him, Shouji is using his massive arms to send rubble flying aside, smashing and crushing his way through the hall and using his size to his advantage. Izuku doesn’t have his raw strength, but he doesn’t need it. Not right now.

A few stray bricks fly over his head, and he looks over his shoulder to see Shouji gaining on him. Heart pounding in his chest, Izuku swings around the corner, claws scrambling on the ground. He feels Shouji swipe at his feet and throws himself forwards, scrambling on all fours for a moment before getting back to running on two legs. This is what he gets for being cocky, he guesses.

Finally, he turns onto the hallway with the hole in the floor. As Shouji sends a stack of crumbling bricks flying out of his way, Izuku drops to his knees and skids on his knee-guards towards the sheet of metal, yanking it up and over him and scurrying towards the hole. The metal covers him like a protective blanket, casting him in shadow.

That shadow, however, abruptly disappears as Shouji yanks the metal from the ground and sends it flying over his shoulder, reaching out for Izuku with all six of his hands. Izuku throws himself forwards, and Shouji’s hands miss his hair by mere inches as he slides through the hole and down to the lower floor.

For a moment, he’s in free-fall; the ceiling is ten feet high, which means he has approximately a millisecond before he hits the ground with a grunt, managing to weather the impact by letting his reptilian legs fold as much as they can. His feet ache, and he rolls his shoulders as he stands back up, surveying the area he’s dropped into.

The hallway stretches on in front of him, seemingly vacant. Satisfied, he turns around and comes face-to-face with a rather startled-looking Kirishima.

For a moment, they just stare at each other, frozen with surprise. Then, Kirishima raises his hand, grins, and says, “...Hey.”

Izuku runs.

“Hey, get back here!” Kirishima squawks behind him, but Izuku pays him no mind as he focuses on getting as far ahead as he can. He doesn’t have the advantage of knowing the hallway, now, so he needs to move as quickly as possible. *Shit*, he should have known Kirishima would have been in the hallway he dropped into, and Shouji’s probably heading for the stairs. He needs to move.

He hurdles over a piece of collapsed ceiling, glancing up when a realization hits him. If he’s quick, he can get back onto the second floor through the open space the debris has left. If

luck is on his side, Kirishima won't be able to follow. Digging his claws into the cracks in the cement wall, Izuku grits his teeth and starts pulling himself up.

"Sorry about this, dude!" Kirishima calls, and a split second later, a brick flies up and hits him in the hand. It sends a bolt of pain through his arm, and he releases the injured hand to shake it out. He glances beneath him and yelps, scrambling upwards and barely avoiding another brick. Kirishima frowns.

Without warning, his skin hardens, and he suddenly throws himself at the wall hard enough to make it tremble. The already thick cracks start to spread, and Izuku realizes that the wall he's clinging to is coming down a second before it happens. Desperately, he hurls himself towards the ceiling, claws scraping it for a second before he comes down hard. He hits the ground the same time as the wall crumbles with a roar, obscuring the hallway in dust.

"Crap!" Kirishima says somewhere to his right, and Izuku carefully inches away from his voice. His claws curl around whatever bricks or stones he steps on, keeping him from falling, so by the time the smoke clears, he's a good distance away. Kirishima spots him and starts scrambling after him with a cry, and he grinds his teeth and breaks into another run.

Kirishima's fast, but his quirk doesn't enhance his running speed like Izuku's does, so he's able to outrun him with bounding strides. His legs fold and stretch like springs, sending him almost falling on his face a few times. Still, he's thankful.

With Kirishima's yells growing distant and his heartbeat pounding in his ears, Izuku ducks into a hallway to take a breather. His sides burn, and his hand is sore from where it got bricked, but he's doing okay.

The ambush comes without warning.

He's standing there one minute, and the next he's throwing himself into the knee-deep water as he senses a searing heat swooping around the corner towards him. The place where he'd just been standing falls prey to a massive burst of crackling flames, the wall crumbling into ash. A plume of steam goes up as sparks hiss into the water, and Izuku chokes on the hot air as he scrambles away. Unfortunately, the water is loud, and Kacchan is able to pinpoint his position with ease.

"*Stop fucking running!*" He screams, lunging out of the smoke with an explosion burning at his back. Izuku slams his back onto the floor, soaking his costume and narrowly sliding under Kacchan's explosion before hurling himself back into the fog. Behind him, he can feel Kacchan's searing palms roving around like tiny suns, and the sensation makes his skin itch. Kacchan's going all out.

"*Deku !*"

The first connects with his back too quickly- *how did Kacchan move that fast*- for him to get out of the way and sends him sprawling. A boot crashes down on his back, making him wheeze and choke on water as panic fills his lungs. The Leviathan grows louder as scales appear on his shoulders.

He rolls to the side as Kacchan's boot comes down again, splashing him with a wave of dirty water. He shakes his head, sending drops of water flying everywhere, and throws himself out of the way of a punch that leaves a dent in the wall.

"Stop running and fight me, you fucking coward!" Kacchan screams, but over the roar of his heartbeat and the Leviathan's screams, Izuku pays him no mind. He takes off in a blind sprint, panic tearing at him. He needs to get away from Kacchan- if things get worse, he could lose control.

The thought of that *thing* tearing into Kacchan with a mangled, inhuman scream is enough to make fins start to sprout from his forearms. The Leviathan *howls*, louder and closer than it should be, and he covers his ears with his hands and yells.

Kacchan, unfortunately, has never taken no for an answer and is currently using his quirk to fly down the hallway at a speed that far outpaces Izuku's. He comes down like a shot, and Izuku pauses and ducks under the blow-

-only for Kacchan to use his explosions to whirl around and nail him across the face, sending him sprawling. Kacchan is supposed to *detain him*, not kill him.

*By any means necessary.*

Izuku doesn't hate All Might- he *never* could, are you kidding- but he hates the way that the directions are worded. They give Kacchan leeway to do almost anything, and it looks like he's going to take advantage of that.

In the time Izuku takes to clear his spinning head, Kacchan towers over him and blasts him with an explosion that sears his skin and makes him scream. The Leviathan creeps into his throat, and his cry abruptly becomes something dangerously inhuman.

Kacchan pauses for a split second, but he doesn't let up. While Izuku clutches at his burns, Kacchan grabs the hem of his costume and flips him into the ground, knocking the air out of his lungs. He gasps as his head submerged for a terrifying second, grasping at anything that could get him away.

"*Fight back, dammit! Use that useless quirk of yours!*" Bakugou screams, grinding him further into the ground with a flurry of explosion-backed punches. Izuku tried desperately to escape, but the fight is one-sided.

*Call it off, All Might!*

Nothing happens, and Izuku is forced to think. When Bakugou pulls back for another swing, he ducks into the space under his fist and takes off at the fastest sprint he can muster. His lungs ache, but the Leviathan's thrashing and his own adrenaline send him off faster than he ever could on his own. Behind him, Bakugou screams.

Flying blind, Izuku veers right into a hallway that is darker and more watery than the rest. He quickly flips on his goggles, and the hallway is outlined with green. Thank god for the night

vision. His feet slog slowly, tripping over invisible debris, so he gives up trying to desperately trudge his way through the waist-deep water and dives.

The water feels natural and oddly calming despite the circumstances. He moves quickly, the fins on his forearms and legs streamlining him. He could move faster, but his costume drags him down. Maybe he should look into that.

The water is cold, and the harsh difference between it and Kacchan's fists is why he manages to sense and avoid the oncoming attack. The explosion sends the water flying into the air in a geyser of droplets and steam, and he rolls out of the way and kicks as fast as he can.

He rounds a corner, losing Kacchan for a moment only thanks to his swimming, and he wonders if he might have made it. A second later, his head hits something hard with enough force to make him gargle a grunt, and he surfaces and spits out murky water to see what it is.

It's a wall. It's a wall, completely cutting off the hallway. It's a *dead end*.

He turns, back pressed against the wall, and finds Kacchan stalking closer. No, no, *no*.

"Why won't you fight me?" Kacchan roars, a furious snarl on his face. He's a mess; his explosive hair hangs around his face in waterlogged spikes, and his mask hangs lower than it should. His gauntlets, presumably full of water, have been abandoned, leaving him with two smoking hands. The water seems to have negated his explosions. Thank *god*.

"You're looking down on me, aren't you?" He asks with gritted teeth. "You think you're better than me. You have since we were fucking *four*, and you got that quirk and suddenly you wouldn't talk to anyone."

Izuku stiffens, pressing himself flat against the wall. Kacchan's right; he didn't talk for almost a month after... that. But why would Kacchan assume that Izuku was looking down on him?

"I- that's not it-" He starts, only to be cut off when Kacchan screams, "*Shut the fuck up!*"

"You've been looking down on me this whole time. You think- with that *quirk of yours* - you're better than me, but *guess what*? You're *not*. I'm gonna be number one, and your sorry reptilian ass is not gonna get in my way!"

He lunges, and Izuku ducks desperately. It's not enough, and Kacchan's knee comes up and slams into his mouth guard. He's suddenly glad that he has it, but his face still throbs.

Kacchan grabs his head and slams him into the water, yanking him out a second later and throwing him into the wall with a blast of steam that might be an attempt at an explosion. It still sears his back, and the Leviathan responds by ramming the cage with all of its force and covering his back in nearly black scales. Fins start to poke out of his costume, and the Leviathan is *deafening*.

"Stop!" Izuku screams, clutching his head. He's going to lose control. Already, his head feels foggy, and he's clinging with everything he has. He has to get rid of something.

Kacchan doesn't stop, smashing him into the ground, but he ignores the way his ribs creak under the blow and focuses on pulling something- *anything* away. The Leviathan snaps at his efforts, but he barely manages to erase the scales on his back and shoulders. The screaming returns to what's manageable, and Izuku sucks in a relieved gasp.

His relief is immediately cut short when Kacchan pulls him up, holding him slightly above his own head by the throat. He gasps and kicks, thoughtlessly clawing at the fingers clasped around his neck, but Kacchan sneers at him with eyes ablaze.

“ *Fine* ,” He spits. “I'll make you.”

Before Izuku can puzzle that out, he's suddenly being forced under the water again. He gasps right before his head goes under, sucking in a deep breath as water floods his senses. He waits for Kacchan to pull him up and fling him somewhere, but it doesn't happen. He stays underwater, held there by the burning hands around his neck.

The realization hits him a few seconds later.

*By any means necessary.*

Kacchan is trying to *drown him* .

The discovery comes with a new wave of panic, and he starts to thrash desperately, all holds forgotten. He claws at Kacchan's hands, feeling his nails catch and tear, but Kacchan doesn't let go.

His panic increases, and the Leviathan starts to slip with a scream. It's so loud, louder than it's ever been, and Izuku has to grit his teeth to keep from screaming alongside it. Scales cover his torso, climbing all the way up to his jawline and coating him in a layer of ice. He can only hear the Leviathan, and he can feel it tearing at his insides. He's slipping.

Even still, he hangs on through outright refusal. He digs his fingers in and won't let go, no matter how his lungs sear and his ears ring with screams. He won't. He's gotten this far. He *won't*.

The Leviathan continues to seep out. His tail slides out, thrashing for a few futile moments before it's pinned under one of Kacchan's feet. His teeth are sharper than they've ever been, and his vision wobbles and starts to split into more than one vantage point.

He clamps down on it, pushing down with what waning strength he has. His lungs *burn*.

Then, his sides sear with a sudden pain, like someone has slashed him open. He screams, the last of his air coming out in garbled bubbles, and before he can stop himself, he breathes.

His lungs fill not with water, but with air, even through his mouth is clamped closed. The Leviathan falters, and Izuku forgets for a moment the trouble he's in and crushes it with every bit of energy he has.

For a moment, it's him and the Leviathan locked in a wrestling match for control. He pulls and pushes and holds as tight as he can and *somehow* , through the smoke clouding his vision

and the burning of his muscles, he manages to force the Leviathan back into its cage. The tail and fins slowly slide away, and he pulls the scales off of his shoulders and upper legs. His torso is still covered, but he's too exhausted to care.

When he's sure he's back in control- his heart is still pounding, but he *did it, he's okay* - he focuses on the new development. He's breathing, and the air is murky and thick and not coming in through his mouth or nose, but he's breathing. Carefully, he reaches down to where his sides sear with pain, running his fingers over them and finding faint ridges beneath the fabric. They ripple when his chest rises, and water rushes out of them when it falls.

They're *gills*.

An incredulous, terrified laugh escapes his lips as he breathes, in and out, under the water. As thankful as he is, it only figured that he'd discover this *now*.

Kacchan is still holding him under the water, and now that he's no longer in a frenzied fight for both his and Kacchan's lives, he can think.

Kacchan is trying to kill him. Kacchan is trying to *kill him*.

Izuku doesn't know how to feel. On the one hand... he deserves it, doesn't he? He's a fake, a murderer trying to infiltrate U.A. with a power that controls him more than he controls it. But on the other hand, if he doesn't become a hero, how can he make up for what he did? How can he save lives so that his guilt no longer eats him alive?

Who is Kacchan to stop him from trying?

As Kacchan's hands refuse to let go, Izuku stares up at him, flexes his claws, and starts planning. When a thought comes to his mind, he takes a deep breath, closes his eyes, and goes limp.

If he's a liar to Kacchan, then a liar he will be.

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Ochako is panicking.

She doesn't know what to do. She doesn't know what to *think*, quite frankly. All she knows is that everything has gone to shit and that there's nothing she can do.

It started barely five minutes ago when All Might coughed and his hand came away covered in something that looked worryingly like blood. He'd laughed and announced that he had to take a short break. Ochako has been slightly concerned at the time, but it was just an exercise, so it should have been fine.

She's right. It should have been fine. But it isn't.

Not long after All Might had left, gasps had rippled through the class as Bakugou launched a sneak attack on Midoriya. He'd dodged, but barely.

What ensued could only be described as a one-sided *beatdown* , with Bakugou crushing Midoriya into the ground and hurling him into the walls. No one had been able to look away, although Ochako had been covering her mouth at the sheer *brutality* of it.

Midoriya's face had only come into view of the cameras once, and Ochako had felt sick. He looked *terrified*.

The class had been silent as Midoriya desperately escaped, silently hoping that he'd make it. That hope had been shattered when Yaoyorozu had whispered with wide eyes, “ *He's heading towards a dead end.* ”

Sure enough, Midoriya had run straight into the wall before plastering himself against it in terror. He and Bakugou had shared a short conversation, one that could only be faintly heard through the abandoned headphones on the table, before Bakugou has lunged and the beatdown had continued.

“That Bakugou...” someone whispers. “He's *terrifying* . Why is he doing that? He has Midoriya. He's already won.”

Bakugou holds Midoriya up by the throat, and Ochako is powerless to watch as Midoriya gasps and claws at the hands holding him upright. A second later, Bakugou's hands force him under the water, and as he struggles, Ochako realizes that Midoriya's not coming back up.

“He's- He's trying to drown Midoriya,” she whispers with wide eyes.

Next to her, Iida's engines flare to life with a dull roar, and he turns to the door.

“I'm going to look for a teacher,” he says desperately before rocketing out the door and down the hallway, no-running rules abandoned out of desperation. Ochako nods, turning numbly back to the screen where Midoriya is still thrashing beneath the murky water.

“Come *on* ,” she whispers desperately. “Get up, Midoriya, *please* . ”

Midoriya tries, and she stiffens when she sees his tail appear. Her hope is promptly crushed when Bakugou stomps on it, pinning it to the ground. Midoriya's flailing is growing weaker.

“I think I'm gonna be sick,” Kaminari whimpers.

“Is this even allowed?” Ojiro asks, tail tense.

“It *can't* be,” Jiro whispers.

“All Might said by any means necessary,” Sero says with growing horror. “I- I think he's taking that a little bit too seriously.”

They talk, arguing amongst themselves while Ochako grips the table with white knuckles and watched helplessly as Midoriya's struggling slowly ceases.

Then, it stops. Completely. Midoriya's hands go limp and fall away from Bakugou's, disappearing under the water. Bakugou stops straining, instead barely holding on as he stares

with a smirk.

“Oh my god,” Ashido whispers. “Is he...?”

Before she can finish, Bakugou hauls Midoriya’s limp form out of the water and tosses it onto a nearby pile of crumbling wood. He trudges over and kicks Midoriya in the ribs, not gently at all.

Midoriya doesn’t move.

Bakugou looks at Midoriya for a long while, not moving. The camera quality isn’t the highest, but Ochako can make out *something* on his face- a mixture of emotions she couldn’t place. He nudges Midoriya once, and then again, and then he takes a step back, away from Midoriya, and turns away with a scowl. His fists are clenched.

Midoriya still doesn’t move.

“Holy shit,” Kaminari says. Ochako feels like she’s going to cry. It’s only their first week. He can’t be... he *can’t* be...

“Wait,” Yaoyorozu says, straightening up. “Look.”

Ochako does, and she gasps alongside the rest of the class when, behind his shattered mask, one of Midoriya’s eyes slowly opens. He watches Bakugou’s back for a moment, hands slowly moving to position themselves on the ground. The class is dead silent.

Then, right as Bakugou starts to turn around, Midoriya scrambled to his feet and sprints to the end of the hallway, turning on Bakugou with fire in his eyes. He’s heaving and soaking wet, and his wild hair is plastered to his face, but his fists are curled. He looks furious.

He screams something at Bakugou, and before Ochako makes a conscious decision of it, she’s moving forward and slipping on the headphones that All Might abandoned.

“- *some fucked-up things, but what did I ever do to you ?*”

Bakugou recoils, a snarl on his lips, but Midoriya beats him to it.

“*All I ever did was try to be like you! Why are you trying to kill me, for fuck’s sake? All you have to do is detain me, and you know it? Why me?*”

He’s crying, Ochako realizes. His fins are wobbling, his fists are shaking, and he’s crying.

“*Just leave me alone, Bakugou!*”

Ochako doesn’t know why, but the last statement sends Bakugou over the edge. He roars- a horrible, angry scream that makes Ochako rip the headphones off and stumble backwards- and lunges at Midoriya.

He doesn’t get far, though, because beneath his costume, Midoriya’s chest glows a bright green. He opens his jaws, and the luminescent rushes up his throat and *pours* out of his

mouth in a crackling spray of piercing green lightning.

Ochako gasps, as does most of the class. The lightning writhes along the ceiling, tearing the already rotting birds to shreds and raining a mountain of rubble down on Bakugou. He screams and tries to blast it away, but all that comes out of his palms is steam, and he's promptly buried.

Midoriya stays there, eyes wide as smoke slowly drifts from his mouth. He's trembling, and he presses his hand against his neck. Ochako can't see, but she remembers what happened last time he used his lightning.

*It's horrifying, quite honestly; Ochako doesn't know what lightning or fire-breathing quirks are supposed to look like, but it can't be this.*

*His neck and the lower part of his face are charred black and flaking off, and his face is twisted into what Ochako can only describe as horrific pain.*

Before Bakugou can claw himself out of the rubble, Midoriya runs, tearing down the waterlogged hallway towards the stairs. He's stumbling, nearly blind from the tears he's trying desperately to scrub off of his face. On another camera, Ochako sees Shouji coming down them. If Izuku goes up, they'll run right into each other.

"What's he *doing*?" Hagakure wails. "He's going to get caught!"

Midoriya reaches the stairs, but instead of running up them and hurdling smack into Shouji, he ducks down, beneath the surface of the water and down to the first floor. The first floor, which is entirely flooded.

Shouji spots him quickly and dives after him, swimming after him, but Midoriya is fast beneath the water. He paddles desperately away from the staircase, moving further into the flooded hallways and farther away from the area where he can breathe.

"He's going to drown again!" Ashido yells.

"I-I'm sure he has some sort of plan," Yaoyorozu says uncertainly.

Midoriya keeps swimming, long after he should have run out of air. He swims all the way until he reaches the far side of the building, a place where *nobody* should be able to reach him, and he pauses.

Then, he swims up to the top of the frame, sticks his head up, and then quickly tears back down. An air pocket, no doubt. So he can breathe.

Why didn't he just do that in the first place?

Midoriya, seemingly satisfied, slowly sinks to the bottom of the hallway, claws touching down on the rotting wood. Hesitantly, he drops to his knees and curls up in a ball in the corner, pressing his nose into his knees and wrapping his arms around them.

Ochako didn't know it was possible to cry underwater.

It's that moment, when Midoriya is tucked away beneath the water and Bakugou is screaming under a mountain of smoking floorboards, that Iida bursts in with Mr. Aizawa in tow.

That's also the moment that All Might returns, looking cheerful and pleased with himself. He trots through the doorway, a smile on his face that promptly dies when he sees the pale faces of his class and Mr. Aizawa's pissed-off expression.

"Uh oh," he says.

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They cart Midoriya off to the nurse's office after All Might ends the exercise- only two minutes before Midoriya would have technically won. It takes him a long time to come out of the flooded basement, and when he does, he looks exhausted. All emotion has been wiped from his face.

He says nothing when they coax him into laying down on the medical mat so the twin robots can drive him to the nurse's office. He doesn't respond to All Might's fearful apologies, just stares at him with a distant expression in his eyes that doesn't match up with the Midoriya that Ochako knows.

His throat is smoking.

The rest of the exercises run smoothly, but Ochako suspects that's only because Mr. Aizawa is standing in the corner of the room and watching All Might with eyes harder than steel. It doesn't take the class long to move on from the incident as more groups get ready and head into the building, although the mood is significantly dampened.

Ochako doesn't move on. No matter how she tries to focus during the exercise when she's supposed to be hunting for Kaminari, she can't stop seeing Midoriya in her mind's eye, curled up under the water and sobbing. Sero wins, wrapping Kaminari in a cocoon of tape, and she comes out and sits back in the observation room without a word.

She won't be able to mourn her allies in battle. In the real world, her distraction would be her undoing. She can't let it get to her. She needs to move on.

But she *can't*.

She can't stop seeing Midoriya, lying limp on the ground with Bakugou standing over him. Ochako had watched him scream.

She's so lost in thought, she doesn't register that they've been dismissed until a hand rests hesitantly on her shoulder and shakes her lightly. She blinks, following the arm to find Shinsou watching her with a careful expression. He nods towards the door, and she swallows and stands.

They walk side-by-side towards the locker rooms and don't say a word. Ochako's grateful. She doesn't trust herself to speak.

When they part, Shinsou pauses, turns to her, and nods with a knowing expression. Ochako forces a weak smile onto her face, and Shinsou's lips slowly curl to match it.

Ochako makes small talk with the girls in the locker room as she peels off her soggy hero costume, storing it carefully in her locker and fixing her hair in the mirror. She's never been so glad to listen to Ashido ramble about bands she's into, and she laughs when Jiro refuses Ashido's requests to play dance music from the speakers in her costume. She feels lighter.

The rest of her classes are a quiet affair. English is hard, but it always is, and math is... well, math. Ochako makes a valiant attempt.

Midoriya doesn't come back for the rest of the day, and his desk feels empty. Iida is oddly quiet as well. Even Shinsou seems subdued.

Bakugou refuses to talk for an entire period.

When the last bell rings, Ochako doesn't wait for Mr. Aizawa to dismiss them. She jams her papers into her bag as quickly as she can and sprints out the door, stumbling through the growing crowds and towards the nurse's office.

She bursts through the door, nearly losing her footing as her feet squeak on the polished tile, and Recovery Girl turns in her chair with a tired sigh on her lips.

"Yes, dearie?"

"Midoriya," Ochako says. "Is he-?"

Recovery Girl smiles, and Ochako thinks she detects a bit of relief. "He's alright. I fixed him up with my quirk and then let him rest for a little while. You just missed him."

"Right," Ochako says, glancing over her shoulder. "Thank you!"

Recovery Girl waves her fingers in a sort of goodbye, and Ochako closes the door and turns only to run into Iida and Shinsou.

"Where's Midoriya?" Iida asks with a worried frown, glancing over her shoulder at the door.

"Recovery Girl said he just left," Ochako answers, rushing past them before spinning back around impatiently. "Come on. I want to make sure he's okay."

Iida nods, and the three of them head back down the hallway, weaving around the swarm of students flooding out of their classrooms and hurrying towards the stairs. They save some time by taking the far staircase instead of the crowded main one, but they still have to run towards the gates.

When they arrive, there's a bustling crowd of people emerging from the main gate- it's been repaired, Ochako notes- but she can't spot Midoriya's head of green hair. She tries, she really does, but as more and more people break away and start heading away from the gates, it's evident that Midoriya's already gone.

She frowns. She really, *really* wants to check on him; he hadn't looked okay when he'd left. Not just physically, but... mentally, too. She's scared for him.

Eventually, she's forced to break away from Shinsou and Iida and head towards her station, but even still, she's worried.

*It's fine*, she tells herself. *Midoriya's strong. He'll be okay.*

Still, somewhere, she knows that it's *not* fine. Something feels very, very wrong, and she can't quite put her finger on it. It's like something deep in the back of her mind is trying to warn her of some unseen danger that Midoriya's facing.

She shakes her head and resolves to text him as soon as she gets on the train.

---

Izuku doesn't stay home for long. The house is dark when he arrives, since his mom works until six on weekdays, and the walls feel like they're made of dark, crumbling cement. He can still feel the vibrations of explosions ricocheting off the walls, gripping his chest and crushing his ribs.

He tears out of his uniform and tosses it onto his bed. His backpack is abandoned by his desk, papers halfway spilling out. He hurriedly throws on a red tee shirt and shorts, and he's still pulling on his shoes as he stumbles out the door. He kicks it closed, locks it with his free hand, and runs down the hallway.

He needs to go somewhere- *anywhere* where he can't be found, where he can be alone and breathe and scream about the unfairness of it all. Someone where he can be safe, both from others and from himself.

He thinks about water, dirty, soggy water sloshing over his head and filtering through his gills in gritty breaths, and when he stumbles out the door of his apartment complex, he turns towards the beach and runs.

The scent of salt reaches his nose by the time he's halfway there, strengthening his resolve and filling him with a sense of calmness that he couldn't replicate if he tried. He shakes his hair out of his eyes and barely avoids getting hit by a car, stumbling out of harm's way and waving apologetically at the honking driver. His heart feels like it's going to burst.

He jumps across the final road, skipping onto the fine sand. He looks up, and his heart sinks.

Helping Bit haul trash away from the beach had been great in a number of ways, but all his time there had led him to develop an attachment to it. Now that a large section of the trash is gone, people have flocked to it, and a number of people are milling about on the shore. There aren't a *lot* of people, seeing as the sky is still rather grey and it had been storming earlier, but it's enough. Part of the beach is still ridden with trash, mostly new bits of garbage that had washed up in the past few months or had been dropped there by dumpers, but the rest is clean and covered in people.

Izuku swallows, wincing as his raw throat burns. He wishes Recovery Girl could heal him all the way, but simply fixing his neck and his bruises had left him sleeping for the rest of the school day. He's still tired, but his desperation outweighs it.

He doesn't know where to go. He could go to the abandoned hotel, but during the daytime he runs the risk of getting spotted and arrested- and that's the *last* thing he needs right now. Bit's house is similarly a no- he loves Bit, but the thought of interacting with even a single person is exhausting.

Plus, he doesn't know if he can drag himself to leave the beach.

He walks further down the shore, keeping his head ducked and avoiding the curious eyes of a few beach-goers. As he draws closer to the water, he slips his shoes and socks off, glancing around for a place to put them. After a moment, he settles on stashing them under a piece of trash along with his phone and his keys.

No longer fearing something important getting wet, Izuku sloshes out into the water all the way up to his knees. The water rises and falls around him, swirling around his legs like an old friend. He breathes, and the sting of salt and crisp wind settle inside his lungs.

The Leviathan is blissfully quiet- at least, until a child shouts somewhere upshore, and then it's getting to its feet with a snarl and Izuku is reminded of his predicament.

He needs to get away from the people.

He starts to thoughtlessly move towards the remaining trash on the beach, but his eyes flicker out towards the horizon. He could swim out far enough that no one would be able to bother him, but someone would probably try to come to get him. He wishes he could hide under the water and never come out.

Except, he realizes with wide eyes, he actually *can* do that now. Maybe not forever, but for long enough.

Feeling giddy, Izuku smooths his hair out of his face and moves out further. He momentarily debates taking his shirt off, but the thought of people seeing the scar on his back makes him nauseous, so he leaves it and pushes his way out to where the water is almost up to his shoulders. Then, he thinks back to the exercise, filtering out the situation and instead focusing on what he'd been feeling.

The Leviathan has been covering his chest, he remembers. He'd felt a rush and that searing pain in his sides, and then his gills had appeared. He grimaces; he's not fond of the idea of repeating that again, but he figures he needs to get used to it.

He needs to get used to a lot of things, too, like being in life-threatening situations without losing his already frail handle on the goddamn Leviathan, but he figures he can focus on that when he's not on the verge of a breakdown.

Slowly, Izuku lets the cage open a crack, but this time he forces the Leviathan's gutters howls into his chest. It coils around his ribs, squeezing his lungs and checking him to the bone, but

he ignores it and tries to channel it further into his sides.

*Gills, gills, give me gills*, he tells it, and his response is a low growl somewhere in the back of his mind. He bares his teeth at it, pushing harder until *finally* he feels his sides splitting open. It hurts, and he bites his lip as tears spring to his eyes, but he can feel the rub of his t-shirt against gills.

With a glance over his shoulder to make sure no one's watching, Izuku rolls his shoulders and dives under the water. He blinks the sand and salt out of his eyes, ignoring the distant burning feeling, and focuses on breathing.

Cool, ocean water floods through his gills, and he gasps. The water here, instead of being murky and hard to breathe, is clear and crisp. It's like winter air, and he shivers at the sensation of it. He can't hear anything from above the water.

"Huh," he says without thinking, and his voice comes out strange and warbled, punctuated by a flurry of bubbles escaping his mouth. He coughs on the water that he almost breathes in, focusing on breathing through his *gills*.

Thankfully, his body obliges, and he goes back to inhaling and exhaling through his sides. It's a *weird* feeling, but not too uncomfortable, so he ignores it and starts swimming.

The water is a bit murky and hard to see in, but he doesn't care. He paddles further, hesitantly letting fins creak open on his arms and legs. The Leviathan tries to slip out further by spreading scales across his shoulders, but he slams down on it more harshly than he normally does.

His revived anger only fuels the Leviathan, and he's drawn into yet another tussle- one thankfully not as severe as earlier's. He wants to scream at it, to yell *why won't you just let me exist* and kick at it, but the angrier he gets, the stronger the Leviathan gets.

So he swallows his anger and lets the ocean flood his chest in its place, erasing his fear with crystalline blue water. The Leviathan fades, although the parts he's already manifested give it enough leeway to growl at him. He goes back to ignoring it.

The farther from the shore he gets, the more things he sees. The sand is covered in sunken trash, rusted metal appliances and old furniture that the sea has reclaimed. Schools of fish dart past and around him, chased by unseen predators. A few larger, curious fish swim up to him, staying far enough away to escape but close enough to look at him with their bulbous eyes and wonder *what are you?*

Izuku, with his murderer's quirk and resolve to become a hero, can't answer.

He swims deeper, trailed by curious fish and glittering silver bubbles. The sand down here is a pale, blue-tinged grin, and he carefully draws his still-human hands through it. His head throbs when he sinks, but the feeling vanishes when he stretched his jaws, so he doesn't worry about it.

Swimming like this is strange; so far beneath the surface with water filtering through his gills, he doesn't float. He's weightless, but not in the way he is when Uraraka uses her quirk on him. It's more like he's suspended, with equal pressures pushing up and down.

He does a quick flip, spinning and reveling in the way the water twists with him. He feels so *free*.

And to think Kac- *Bakugou* is the one to thank for that.

The Leviathan rises, bleeding scales onto his arms, and he bats the thought away. He wants to focus on the *now*.

The space beneath him abruptly changes color, and Izuku glances down to find that he's swum right off of the coastal shelf. Beneath him, the sand drops away, disappearing into a shadowy abyss that stretches for as far as his eyes can see.

Izuku hastily kicks back to the sandy area, turning around once he doesn't feel quite so exposed. With his back to the shore, he slowly lets himself sink, dropping to his feet and standing on the edge of the unknown. Beyond him, he can see nothing but blue.

The ocean is a strange thing in its complexity. It's so vast, and it encircles whatever enters its grasp without care. To the ocean, Izuku is simply another human, another shape to tug beneath the waves and play with like a toy. He is nothing to the ocean, in its rolling, shuddering magnificence, and he takes solace in that.

The warm water of Dagobah Beach, however, is different. It treats him not like a murderer, not like a stuttering, awkward teen with a broken quirk, but like a lost child. It cards hands of salty brine through his hair and whispers *I found this one*.

Between two giants, on the precipice of the void and nothingness, Izuku is no one. He is not the boy who nearly suffocated earlier only to be saved by an insignificant twist in his biological structure, or the boy who wakes up in the night with tears on his face and a scream on his lips. He is not Izuku, and he is not the Leviathan.

He is an insignificant thing, a puny space where the water cannot tread, and he is no one.

Izuku settles down onto the sand, flexing his fingers and staring at them. His skin is a dull, unsaturated green, a far cry from the color it usually is. His red shirt is a similar shade, all color having been leached from it by the blue light. He is a ghost of himself, and he lets his mind drift in solace.

He looks up for a moment after what might have been hours, and far above him, he sees the sun glittering on the top of the water. It's a brilliant shade of orange, and as he watched it, he noticed that the water is getting even darker around him.

Shit.

Izuku doesn't want to leave his newfound paradise, but his mom will panic if she comes home to an empty house without a note and he has homework to do. With a sigh that flutters

his gills and makes his soggy tee shirt ripple, he stares out at the rising shadow.

It reaches out towards him, and he drops his anger and his troubles into its outstretched hands and swims away.

The sun sinks lower and lower, it's golden rays ceasing to penetrate the surface. The blue water slowly bleeds into black, and Izuku's mind pleasantly supplies him with the image of the tar-black beach. Fear starts to grip him, and he crushes it and swims faster.

The sand rises beneath his feet, forcing him higher and higher until his head bursts above the surface of the water. He takes a deep, water-lined breath of afternoon air through his mouth, coughing up what water remains in his lungs. The sun is barely a red glimmer on the horizon, and Izuku quickly shakes his hair out, shoves on his shoes, and pulls up his phone. It's a good bit past seven. He winces.

**Mom [6:27]**

i just got home. where are you?

Izuku?

**Mom [6:49]**

izuku, please answer. i'm getting worried.

izuku

**Mom [7:12]**

izuku, please text me back.

Izuku swallows the guilt in his chest.

**Izuku [7:28]**

mom im okay

i went to the beach and forgot to text you. Im really sorry

**Mom [7:29]**

Oh thank god

izuku, you scared me to death. You know you're not supposed to be out past seven on school nights

**Izuku [7:31]**

i know. I lost track of time

im on my way home

**Mom [7:32]**

Do you need me to pick you up?

**Izuku [7:33]**

im Fine. I'll be home soon

i love you

**Mom [7:34]**

i love you too, sweetie. hurry home and stay safe.

Izuku stretches his sore legs with a grimace. He'd gladly accept the ride home if he could, but he needs the walk home to air-dry. If he tried to get into her car shopping wet, he'd be faced with a lot of questions he's not sure he can answer.

He goes to pocket his phone but realizes that he still has the unread notifications. He checks and finds that mom isn't the only one who texted him.

**Unknown Number [3:25]**

hey midoriya

its Uraraka

I didn't see you after school, so I'm just texting to see if you're okay. We're worried about you

*Shit* , Izuku realizes. He hadn't stopped to talk to them or anything- he'd just *run* . They care about him and want to know if he's okay and all he did was *run* . He swallows the scales climbing his throat and replies.

**Izuku [7:35]**

Sorry. I didn't see you on my way out

I'm ok. Thanks for asking

He still has two more unread messages, and he realizes with a sinking feeling that he knows who they belong to. Uraraka isn't the only person he forgot about.

**20000 degree knife [4:35]**

dude where are you? i thought u were gonna help me with the lightsaber  
mido?

**slytherin [7:36]**

shit im so sorry  
some shit happened at school today and I totally forgot  
tomorrow?

As the messages send, he starts the short walk home, ignoring the chill of the wind against his slick skin. His hair hangs in his eyes, sandy and salt-encrusted, and his grimaces. He needs a shower.

He crosses the road, ignoring the stares of passerby who stare in confusion at the drenched teenager hurrying past them. He misses the ocean.

His phone dings in his pocket, once, then twice, and he pulls it out.

**20000 degree knife [7:44]**

no dude its fine dont worry about it  
are you okay?

**slytherin [7:46]**

im okay now I think. i just needed some time  
ill tell you about it the next time I see you  
thanks

**20000 degree knife [7:47]**

np

and tomorrow works for me, but don't push yourself if you're not feeling up to it

**slytherin [7:49]**

ill see you tomorrow then

wait did you change my name again

**20000 degree knife [7:50]**

;)

**slytherin [7:51]**

unbelievable

*slytherin changed name to izuku*

*20000 degree knife changed izuku's name to the Best Boy Ever*

**the Best Boy Ever [7:52]**

why

**20000 degree knife [7:53]**

its the truth

**the Best Boy Ever [7:54]**

:/

so does your mom know you're still working on the lightsaber

**20000 degree knife [7:55]**

first of all: rude

second of all we made a bargain

im allowed to work on it as long as the laser isn't strong enough to cut stuff :(

**the Best Boy Ever [7:57]**

thank god

ok im home, gtg

thank you, Bit

**20000 degree knife [7:58]**

tell your mom I said hi!

Izuku slides his phone back into the pocket of his relatively dry shorts and stares up at his apartment building. The sun has fully set, and the building is illuminated by the light coming from inside. He swallows, heading up the door and heading inside to get his keys.

He's still shaken and tired, but he can't hide from it forever. He'll just push on. Homework will help, and so will Mom- after his obligatory earful and hug about being out so late.

It's time to face the real world again.

## Chapter End Notes

yep. that's that.

i've been planning this scene for a while. i could have gone straight to usj, but it feels too quick for me. also, i wanted to develop some things more.

we'll get to usj Real soon, so don't worry about that. in the mean time, enjoy.

# **breathe the smoke that i have wrought**

## Chapter Summary

The consequences of the villain capture exercise.

## Chapter Notes

holy shit i did it. i actually did it  
this doesn't even feel real? i guess i thought i'd be stuck on this bitch of a chap forever

WELL i fuckin bled for this. here you go  
a look into why it took so long in the end notes

(before you go: a shoutout to my amazing friends cloud and hitamory for encouraging me so fucking much with this chap, as well as my ceaselessly wonderful beta reader tanz, who continues to be a godsend)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Mom is waiting for him when he gets home.

He's well aware that's something's off as soon as he steps in the door, his fins wobbling slightly. The air in the apartment is different, tense, almost. It lacks some of the warmth that's usually melted into the very walls, one of the things that makes it so calming.

Then he sees Mom's expression, and he knows the night is going to be a long one.

She's scared; that much he can tell in the tightness of her posture, the creases in her face. She's standing too stiffly, and if Izuku were anyone else, he might think she was angry. But he knows his Mom maybe better than he knows himself, and he can see the fear in her eyes.

"I got a call from the school," she says tightly. "They- they told me what happened."

"...Oh," Izuku says, his voice coming out in a ragged, mostly-healed but still injured croak. He'd known that he'd have to talk about this with her eventually, but he hadn't expected that to be as soon as he walked through the door. He's not sure if he's ready, but then again, he's not sure if he'll ever be.

The events of earlier feel like a dream, almost. Some kind of overly-realistic nightmare that *feels* real, but isn't. He desperately wishes that were the case, but he knows from long nights

hating his quirk and begging the stars for a different one that wishes don't mean anything to murderers.

"Izuku," Mom whispers, and her voice sounds so pained, so scared. "I want you to tell me what happened. I don't want to hear it from them- I want to hear it from *you* . And please, baby, don't lie to me."

Izuku feels paralyzed where he stands, one hand still gripping the kitchen doorway. His hair is oily and salt-encrusted, hanging around his face in greasy curls, and his fins are trembling, and he smells like salt and fish. He knows how he must look to her; like someone who tried to run away from his problems.

Isn't that what he did?

"Can- Can I shower first?" He says. "I'm all salty, and... I- I need to think for a while."

She looks at him sadly, but she sighs and nods. "Go take a shower, then, and come out when you're done. This isn't something I can ignore, Izuku. We need to talk about it."

"I know," Izuku says. "I- I know."

He steps past her and heads towards his bedroom, aware of how his hands are shaking. He can't put this off forever, but he can at least spare himself a few precious minutes to think about what he can say.

He turns the faucet as far to the left as he can without throwing himself bodily out of the shower, letting the scalding water wash over his scuffed skin and scales. It's so different from the cold seawater; it brings relief, and at the same time, it brings nothing but empty promises and a sense of foreboding.

He chases the salt out of his hair with shaking fingers, thinking about what he's going to say to his mom. He can't lie to her- there's no sense in doing so, not when the school's already told her everything. What can he say that he doesn't already know? What is she expecting him to say? Does she want to know why Bakugou tried to-

Tried to what, exactly? What was Bakugou trying to do?

In the spur of the moment, Izuku had assumed the worst. Maybe he'd been right, but even after everything they've been through, Izuku *knows* Bakugou. He knows that Bakugou wouldn't kill someone who wasn't fighting back. Above everything, Bakugou craves to win a fair fight. Is that why he tried to drown Izuku? Because he wouldn't give him a fair fight?

He doesn't know. Just because he knows Bakugou doesn't mean he understands him.

He's still lost for words when he escapes the steamy bathroom, dressed in baggy pajamas and still toweling off his hair. He lingers in the doorway of his bedroom for what feels like a year, unable to make his feet pass through the threshold and into the land of half-explanations and unanswered questions. But he knows he doesn't have a choice, so he lets go of the doorframe, and he walks.

Mom is waiting for him on the couch, her hands folded in her lap and her mouth drawn into a thin line. He sits across from her, trying not to curl into himself too clearly, although he suspects his quivering fins give away his worry.

“Tell me what happened,” she says softly, and Izuku swallows, opens his mouth, and speaks.

He talks about an exercise that should have been just that, of running and of learning to use his location to his advantage. He talks about crumbling walls and floors, and then he talks about running from Kirishima straight into Bakugou. His throat tightens, but he keeps going; he talks about running, about getting slammed in a one-sided fight, and then he talks about water.

And he talks about gills, about faking passing out so that he could keep fighting and escape. He talks about escaping to the flooded floor of the building, and he talks about staying there for the rest of the match.

It hurts to say it, in a weird way. Up until now, he could pretend it didn’t happen, but now that the words are out, he can’t take them back. The ring in the silence of the apartment, hanging over his head like a heavy cloak that he can’t shake off. He wants to sleep.

“And why didn’t they stop this?” Mom asks. The tightness is gone from her voice, replaced with something harder and colder than steel. Izuku glances up and finds her much firmer than before, her fists clenched.

“They said All Might... left,” Izuku says flatly. “He had something to do, and he thought that it would be okay to leave for a few minutes.”

“His job is to keep you safe,” Mom echoes. “And he left you alone.”

“I don’t know why he did it, but it- Ka- Bakugou would have done what he did whether All Might was there or not. Nobody can stop Bakugou once he gets... like that.”

Mom’s mouth grows tighter. “And you would know?”

Izuku realizes his mistake too late, and his fins jolt upwards as his eyes go wide. “He- He’s never hurt me like that before.”

“Like that’.”

“He’s *Bakugou*,” Izuku says tightly. “He hurts everyone. I- I wish I knew why, but I don’t.”

There’s silence after that, and Izuku can’t bring himself to look up and see Mom’s expression, so he stares at his hands instead. They’re scaly and cold, covered in glistening teal scales and curled into loose fists. It’s strange, how used he’s gotten to just having parts of the Leviathan out at all times. The screaming in his head that once would have driven him insane is hardly even noticeable anymore.

Maybe he’s getting stronger.

He has to be. A year ago, Bakugou's attack would have triggered a loss of control in an instant. Yet somehow, he managed to keep himself from letting go. He's not sure how, but he's glad. Bakugou might have attacked him, made his life hell, but... he doesn't know if he could live with Bakugou's death on his hands.

The Leviathan tightens around his ribs, as if to whisper, *but you can carry the lives of strangers?* and he grits his teeth and forces it away. A few scales disappear from his hands.

"Well," Mom says after their silence has ended. "Thank you for telling me."

"What are you going to do?" Izuku asks warily, because he *knows* that look.

"I'm going to make sure something like this doesn't happen again," Mom says. "And if that requires legal action, so be it."

"You're- You're going to *sue UA*?" Izuku says incredulously. He wants her to shake her head and say *nothing so intense*, but she nods and never once loses that hard look in her eyes.

"You can't," Izuku says before he can think better of it. "Mom, you can't just *sue UA*."

"And why not?" She says. "I have plenty of material for a lawsuit. It's their job to keep you safe while you train to become a hero- *one of their only ones, I might add*- and they've failed in the first month. If I don't take action, who's to say it won't happen again?"

"It won't," Izuku says. "All Might was- he's a new teacher, he just- Mom, *please* don't do this. I- If you sue, then what'll happen to me? What if they expel me?"

"There are other schools," Mom says. "I won't stop you from being a hero; even if it's dangerous, I know how important it is to you." She pauses. "But I need to make sure you're safe along the way."

"There's *nowhere safer* than UA," Izuku pleads. "This was a one-time thing- the teachers will make sure it doesn't happen again, I know they will."

"What's stopping Katsuki from attacking you again?" Mom says. "What's stopping him from killing you?"

"He- He wasn't trying to kill me," Izuku says. "That- That's not like him. He was just trying to win."

"By *drowning you!*" Mom says, looking pained. Her eyes are begging him to understand, but Izuku can't let her take away this chance. He *can't*.

"I have *gills*, Mom!" Izuku says. "I'm fine!"

"Did he know that?" Mom says. Izuku's aware his hands are trembling, so he clenches them.

"Neither of us did," he says. "But that's not the point!"

“How is it not the point?” Mom asks. “He tried to drown you, whether it was to kill you or not. He can’t go unpunished. What if he still acts like that when he’s a hero? What if he tries to drown someone who doesn’t have gills?”

“He- I-” Izuku grips his head. “I just- I don’t *know* why he did what he did, but- the teachers won’t let it happen again. He’s still trying to be a hero. He- He can learn.”

“He’s had years to learn,” Mom says. “This shouldn’t have happened, Izuku, no matter if it was Bakugou or anyone else.”

“I- I know,” Izuku says. “Just... give UA a chance. This was a one-time thing, I promise.”

“I’ll think about it,” Mom says. “But I won’t make any promises. The school wants us both to come in and talk about what happened. I’ll make my decision then.”

“O-okay,” Izuku says. Mom looks at him sadly.

“Izuku,” she says softly. “I hate to do this to you, but you have to understand. I can’t in good conscious let you go to a place where I know you’ll be injured. It’s my job to protect you, hero or not.”

Izuku feels the fight drain out of him like a squeezed-out sponge, and he slumps and slowly nods his head.

“I... I know,” he says. “I just... I’ve come so far. I don’t want to let it all go to waste.”

“It won’t,” Mom promises. “Whatever happens, you’re still the brave, strong Izuku that I’ve been lucky enough to raise. You’re still a hero no matter what uniform you wear.”

“...Thank you, Mom,” Izuku says, before he slowly rises from the couch. “I... I’m gonna go to bed. I’m not hungry.”

Mom frowns, but she sighs and reaches out to gently brush the hair out of his eyes. “Alright, sweetie. Goodnight. Get some rest.”

“Good- Goodnight, Mom,” Izuku says, and he grabs his backpack and wordlessly heads into his bedroom. He has homework to do. Maybe it’ll serve as a distraction.

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That night, Izuku dreams.

Unlike the rest of his dreams, which cement him solidly within the bounds of what seems to be reality, this dream is far less lucid. It comes as a series of images and encounters swimming through his head, each one more surreal than the last. Through a distorted lense of kaleidoscopic colors, he sees strange things he doesn’t recognize; buildings that seem so far away, a full moon glinting against thousands of raindrops, and flashes of harsh, sparkling green. He sees people running, but their images are blurred and warped and so *little*. He sees broken buildings, falling debris, and he knows above all that he wants it to stop.

His brain stutters and restarts like a dying film reel, spitting out images at a jerky rate. He tries to claw his way back into the realm of consciousness, but in the end, he's doomed to watch the strange images play over and over until his alarm screams at him from his desk and rescues him from his mind.

He doesn't feel rested at all. More specifically, he feels like, instead of sleeping, he ran three miles and then fell off a cliff. It's not the most enjoyable feeling.

He wonders what he saw as he sluggishly gets dressed, blinking a leaden tiredness out of his eyes. He feels... stiff; his muscles ache, and his throat is sore, and everything is kind of fuzzy. Getting on his uniform is a challenge, since moving his legs is like trying to operate a stubborn marionette, but he manages.

Breakfast is a largely silent affair, which Izuku is thankful for. The thought of speaking is both exhausting and painful, and he has to save his energy for the talk soon. He's up earlier than usual, so he should be able to get everything over with before school starts. He just hopes that he'll have some energy after to finish the day with.

They take the train, but it's not the one he usually does, so Uraraka isn't there. Izuku doesn't know if he's relieved or sad; Uraraka's bubbly personality is a blessing, and it might score him some 'stay at UA' points with Mom, but he's not sure if he could handle her energy. Well, he'll have to soon enough.

Mr. Aizawa is waiting for them at the gate when they arrive, slouched against the frame and looking at something on his phone. He glances up when they stop in front of him, and his eyes slowly travel from Mom to Izuku.

"Nedzu wants to see you both in his office," he says. "Follow me."

They do. The walk from the gates to Nedzu's office is strikingly long and very awkward, but Izuku manages to busy himself with looking around the halls. Despite it being almost a week, he hasn't seen much of the campus so far. It's *huge*, more expansive and pristine than anything even remotely similar to his old school, and from the upper floors, he can see the city sprawled out beyond the windows.

Nedzu's office is on one of the highest floors, down the hall from the elevator. The room looks surprisingly normal from the outside; a simple door, with two long benches on either side. Izuku wonders if the inside is just as mundane.

It's not. Nedzu's office is strikingly huge, with one wall made completely out of glass and allowing the morning light to shine through. On the other side of a long, neat desk, Nedzu sits in a very high chair, his clothes neatly ironed and his paws folded in his lap. His black eyes glitter strangely.

He's not alone in the room, Izuku notes with mild interest. Sitting in a chair to his right is a thin, skeletal man in an extremely oversized suit who looks like he might keel over at any given moment, and a few seconds later, Mr. Aizawa takes a seat to their left.

“Thank you both for coming,” Nedzu says, and Izuku’s aware of the fact that he’s standing in the doorway staring. “Please, have a seat.”

Mom’s footsteps are light yet stiff as she crosses the room to sit on the couch across from Nedzu. Izuku sits next to her, clasping his hands and praying that this conversation doesn’t go as badly as he fears it will.

Mom is the first to break the short bout of silence. She clears her throat, raises her eyes, and speaks.

“Nedzu, I would like an explanation as to why what happened was allowed to happen to my son, and I hope on your behalf that it is satisfactory.”

Nedzu, thankfully, doesn’t cower under her gaze. Her regards her levelly, with a sort of interest, almost, before he folds his paws and begins to speak.

“Yesterday, Midoriya here was placed in an exercise alongside Bakugou as well as two others students, Kirishima and Shouji. The goal of the exercise was, in your son’s case, to remain hidden or uncaptured for twenty minutes, or in the other’s case, to find and capture the ‘villain’.” A pause. “During the exercise, the teacher in charge, All Might, had to take a momentary leave for personal reasons. He did not follow school policy, which calls for even short absences to be filled by a substitute, and instead left his students alone for long enough for the ensuing fight to take place. We take full responsibility for his actions and those that followed.”

“I see,” Mom says tightly. “Now, explain to me why I shouldn’t pull my son out of your school and sue you for negligence.”

Izuku goes very still.

“Mrs. Midoriya, rest assured that we are currently and already have taken lengths to make sure nothing like this ever happens again. All Might has been thoroughly reprimanded for his actions, and he is well aware that a repeat of such carelessness will result in him getting fired, number one hero or not.”

Mom nods.

“Bakugou Katsuki will also be facing retribution for his actions. As it stands now, the likelihood is that he will be expelled. Midoriya, is there anything you’d like to say on the matter?”

“You’re- you’re going to expel Bakugou?” Izuku says blankly. The words feel... surreal. He’s been going to school with Bakugou for *years*, and Bakugou’s never gotten even a slap on the wrist. The words *expulsion* and *Bakugou* make a puzzle that just doesn’t quite fit together. “...Why?”

Nedzu tilts his head. “You should be more than aware of the ‘why’ in this situation, Midoriya.”

“I- I know, but...” Izuku swallows. He hadn’t been willing to give up being a hero for Bakugou, but if Bakugou loses his place at UA because of Izuku- because of *the Leviathan* -

“He- He’s trying to be a hero,” he ends up saying. “Why do I have to be the reason that chance is taken from him?”

“*Izuku*,” Mom says. She’s not scolding him; she sounds more surprised and sad than anything. Mr. Aizawa narrows his eyes ever so slightly.

“The reason Bakugou is currently facing consequences has everything to do with his actions, not you. You are not the reason he’s losing his position at UA. The responsibility for his actions lies with him alone.”

“He wouldn’t have attacked anyone else like that,” Izuku says. “He wouldn’t- We- we have history, and there are... a lot of things between us. I think they all came out, and... that was the result.”

“So you’re saying his actions were the result of unresolved anger and possibly insecurity,” Nedzu says. Izuku blinks. Anger absolutely, but... he doesn’t really see Bakugou as insecure. Still, he’s in no position to fight, both figuratively and mentally, so he nods silently.

“With all due respect, anger issues or not, Bakugou attempted to kill my son,” Mom interjects, her hands clasped tightly in her lap.

“That is not being overlooked,” Nedzu says. “However, it allows me to believe that there’s far more to this issue than meets the eye. We won’t be able to come to a solid conclusion until I speak with Bakugou himself on the issue, but there will be consequences, I promise you.”

“Good,” Mom says. She’s angry, but some of the steel has melted out of her spine. “Make sure nothing like this ever happens again.”

“It won’t,” Nedzu says. “Now, Midoriya, I believe we’d both prefer if you were on time to class. Thank you for your time.”

Izuku sits for a moment, his foggy brain not even registering what’s happening, and then it clicks that Nedzu’s *dismissed him*, and he hurriedly gets to his feet. He feels scales prickle at his eyes in embarrassment, and the Leviathan slowly starts to shift as if waking up.

“Thank you,” he says hurriedly, and then he hastens towards the door to make his retreat. Mom follows with a similarly distant goodbye, and then they’re out the door, and Izuku can finally *breathe*.

He just wants this to all be over. He doesn’t want to think about it anymore. He just wants to get to class and maybe take a nap. If Iida will let him.

The thought of interacting with Iida is simultaneously relieving and exhausting, but Izuku presses onwards. He doesn’t have a choice. He might as well make the most of it.

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Katsuki's been sitting outside of Nedzu's office for *thirty-five fucking minutes* .

The jackasses at UA hadn't even let him wait; they'd simply shepherd him, the hag, and his dad to the bench outside of the office like they were a bunch of lost ducklings. Katsuki had bared his teeth at the person guiding them, but the threat had washed off like water from wax. He'd fucking hated it.

Now, he's sitting here bored out of his fucking mind while he waits for Deku to finish *whatever the hell it is* he's doing in the office. Probably fixing up some kind of sob story, if that look in his eyes was anything to go by. Katsuki doesn't *get it* - UA is supposed to be where the best of the best train to become even better. Why the hell would they take *Deku*? All he's ever done is run and cry and hold himself back until the end of time. He's such a fucking fake; it disgusts Katsuki.

*Finally* , the door opens, and Deku steps out. His ugly fins aren't shaking, they're just drooping like a kicked puppy, and he looks like he can't even see the floor he's walking on. His eyes are blank, like they've been sucked dry, and they never once look up.

They never get the chance to, anyways, because as soon as Katsuki looks up, Mrs. Inko is standing between him and Deku with an absolutely *venomous* look in her eyes. Katsuki glances back to the side with a muttered 'tch', not bothering to meet her gaze.

"Midoriya, head to class," Aizawa says, leaning against the doorframe. Deku ducks his head and nods, some of the glaze disappearing from his eyes as he hurries down the hallway after a rushed goodbye to his mom. Then, Aizawa's dull red eyes turn to Katsuki, and he meets them with a scowl.

"Bakugou, inside," he says, turning and walking back into the office without another word. Katsuki wrinkles his nose, but he pushes himself up from the bench and strides into the flamboyant office. The hag and his dad follow, albeit slightly less resolutely. He slumps onto the offered couch, stretching out his fingers and looking away when the hag sits down next to him.

*This* ought to be fun.

"I take it you already know why you're here," Nedzu says. "I had the liberty of a long conversation with Mrs. Bakugou on the phone, so I won't bore you by re-explaining what you already know about the issue at hand."

"*Pay attention* ," the hag hisses, slapping the back of his neck. Katsuki rolls his eyes and stops slouching to the side, staring at Nedzu irritably.

"We would like you to explain your perspective on all of this, Bakugou," Nedzu says. "As of right now, no one is able to understand your motivations for your actions during the exercise. If you explain, then there is a chance that we can help you instead of outright expulsion."

"I don't need your *help* ," Katsuki sneers, leaning forwards in his chair and putting as much bite into his words as he can. They glance right off of Nedzu, which infuriates him further.

“Katsuki, *please* ,” the hag says, but it’s not a request. It’s a demand, simple and desperate, probably for the sake of her own ego. Still, getting thrown out of UA all because of Deku could ruin him, so he lifts his chin and stares Nedzu down.

“You don’t know Deku like I do,” Katsuki says. “The piece of shit never *gives up* . He *never stops trying* , even when it’s pointless and his worthless ass will never be anything. He gets this look in his eyes, this stupid *look* - and you know he’s never going to fucking stop.” He exhales forcefully through his teeth. “I knew Deku wasn’t going to fight me- he was just going to sit there and let me punch him until he fucking dropped- and there’s no fucking *winning* with that. Not with him.”

“So you... attempted to drown him,” Nedzu says, watching him oddly.

“I wasn’t trying to fucking *kill him* ,” Katsuki snarls. “I figured maybe I could get it through his head that he didn’t have a *choice* to fight back. Apparently, he was too fucking stupid to figure it out.

“He was fighting back, though,” Nedzu says. “We have access to the footage. During the time when you held Midoriya underwater, he was very clearly struggling.”

“No he *wasn’t* ,” Katsuki says. “That’s the thing that nobody seems to realize or care about- he could have thrown me across the fucking room if he had the balls to try. He’s holding back because he was looking down on me. He’ so high and mighty, he was ready to pity me even if it killed him.”

“What do you mean?” Nedzu asks.

“For fuck’s sake- There was a time in grade school right after his shitty quirk first showed up- he says he doesn’t remember it, and he’s probably fucking lying about that, too- but we were arguing and he just went batshit. The dipshit broke my fucking arm in half and then passed out for like three hours. We were five fucking years old. If he could break my arm as a five-year-old, there’s no goddamn way that he’s not holding back now.”

“I can’t imagine Midoriya was holding back in the sort of situation he was placed in,” Nedzu says, his whiskers twitching.

“He *was* ,” Katsuki snaps. “I know he was. He’s always like that- looking down on me. He didn’t even use that goddamn lightning attack.”

“Are you aware of the fact that, at the moment, Midoriya’s usage of his lightning gravely injures him?” Nedzu asks.

“He can take it,” Katsuki hisses. “If he can walk back into school with a fucking scar like that and pretend nothing happened, then he can take whatever his stupid quirk does to him.”

Everyone in the room starts paying more attention at that, especially the weird skeleton guy. Good. They’re finally actually listening to him instead of pretending to like everyone else.

“I was wondering about that, actually,” the skeleton man says. “The scar. Do you know how he got it?”

“No,” Katsuki spits. “I don’t. *Nobody* does. He just dropped off the face of the fucking earth for two weeks and then came back with it. He won’t fucking talk about it.”

“It’s true that he disappeared,” his father says quietly. “Inko was in shambles.”

“We’ll speak with Midoriya about it at a later date,” Nedzu says. “In the meantime, I’m still not sure I understand your motives, Bakugou.”

“He wouldn’t fight so I tried to knock him out so I could win the fucking exercise,” Bakugou spits, tired of all of this. “All Might said by any means necessary, and it’s not like he fucking said anything.”

“All Might wasn’t present during your exercise,” Aizawa says sharply. “If he were, he would have stopped you.” The skeleton man looks oddly pained, too.

Katsuki wrinkles his nose. All Might wasn’t even there?

“As it stands, the easy option would be for us to simply expel you and move on,” Nedzu says with a calmness that makes Katsuki’s fingers clench. “However, I believe now that doing so would only lead you down a less constructive route. Your issues with Midoriya need to be worked out, not ignored. I fear that, should we overlook that, you might be led down a darker path.”

“Are you saying I’d be a fucking *villain*?” Katsuki snarls.

“It is a possibility. Now, taking into account the circumstances present as well as what you’ve told us, I will give you two options, Bakugou Katsuki,” Nedzu says, folding his paws into his lap and staring at Katsuki with those creepy, beady black eyes. “You can either accept your expulsion and a permanent mark on your record, or you can choose to stay at UA and agree to my conditions.”

“What are your conditions?” The hag asks carefully. Her grip on the arms of her chair is white-knuckled.

“For one, he’ll be on a month’s suspension,” Nedzu says. “During that time and after, he’ll be attending weekly anger management sessions with a therapist trained in cases such as his.”

“I am not seeing *a shrink*,” Katsuki hisses through his gritted teeth.

“*Quiet*,” the hag hisses back. “And the next?”

“He’ll be transferred out of class 1-A and into 1-B,” Nedzu replies, and Katsuki’s heart feels like it’s made of lead. No, no, *no*, they can’t just *toss him out*. He’s the *best of the best*, they can’t just *toss him to the sidelines*.

“You can’t just-” He starts to snarl, standing up with enough force to rattle his chair, only to be silenced by his father gripping his arm. Not tight enough to hurt, but tight enough to shut

him up. He wrenches his arm away, but he sits back down in the chair and doesn't miss the thankful look Aizawa shoots his dad.

"Why the transfer?" The hag asks, and Nedzu tilts his head and looks thoughtful.

"As it stands, the majority of Bakugou's classmates are currently either scared or outright hateful of him," he says. "They were present for his actions, and have come to their own conclusions on his character as a result. Transferring him to 1-B would not only offer him a new start, it would separate him from people who may not want to interact with him." He pauses. "Especially Midoriya."

Katsuki wants to swell. He wants to take pride in that fact, that his classmates fear him and know how great he is, but the only feeling he gets from that knowledge is a sinking, sickening feeling in his chest. He hates it. Why does he feel *bad*?

"*You told me to win*," Katsuki snaps. "*And I won*. Deku's fucking fine. Why am *I* fucking getting punished?"

"Because you attempted to kill one of your classmates," Mr. Aizawa says coldly.

"I wasn't trying to *kill him!*" Katsuki screams, almost knocking over his chair as he stands up, but the hag drags him back down.

"Shut up, you stupid brat!" She snaps. "You've done *enough!*" Then, to Nedzu, she says, "We accept the offer to remain at UA. Thank you."

"With all due respect, Mrs. Bakugou," Nedzu says. "The choice is up to Bakugou here, not you."

All eyes in the room go to Katsuki and he grits his teeth. This doesn't matter. He'll stay at Ua, and he'll *show them* that they've made a mistake. He's the hero here; not Deku, never Deku. He's going to be number one.

"I'll see your fucking shrink," he spits, the words tasting vile. "And I'll accept your fucking transfer. Whatever."

"I'm glad we could come to an agreement," Nedzu says. "Now, this meeting has dragged on far longer than it should. Mrs. Bakugou, Mr. Bakugou, thank you for coming. Now, you're suspended. We'll send you a notice in a month when it's time for you to return. In the meantime, we'll get started on the paperwork concerning Bakugou's transfer."

"Right, of course. Thank you," the hag says, dragging Katsuki up and out of his chair. "We'll be out of your hair now. I'm sorry for my idiot son's behavior."

Mr. Aizawa's eye twitches, and he eyes the hag coldly. "Please refrain from insulting your son in front of us."

"It's not an insult if it's true," the hag says. "Come on, Katsuki. Let's go."

Katsuki rips his arm out of her grasp, but he wordlessly follows her out of the office and down the hall towards the doors. There's nobody to observe him, thankfully. Nobody to laugh at the misfortune Deku's cost him.

This is just a step on the road. He's going to be the number one hero, no matter what the people at UA think of him, or who the stepping stones in his class think he is. He has to; he's the best after all.

Right?

----

Izuku feels empty as he walks to his classroom. Not in a drained, bad way, just... empty. A blank slate.

The emptiness where his inner monologue usually sits is helpfully taken up by the Leviathan, which is hissing at him irritably. He looks down at his scaled hands, opening and closing them experimentally. His uniform rubs against his back strangely, and when he stops to think, he realizes that his shoulders are covered in slick scales as well. That, coupled with his usual fins, gives the Leviathan enough leeway to make a ruckus.

He pulls back the scales on his back and most of the ones on his hands, leaving his fingers only slightly sharper and firmer than usual. The Leviathan doesn't stop snarling, but its voice is distant, a faint memory at the back of his mind. He blows out a long sigh of relief and hurriedly makes his way towards the classroom.

The door has never felt larger when he stands in front of it, exhaustion wearing at his limbs and the sounds of his classmates' animated talking coming from within. He swallows, reaching out and slowly opening the door. Hopefully it won't have the figurative impact of setting off a bomb, but at this point, he isn't sure.

If it were his old school, he'd be able to slip in without a problem. But UA is very, very different from his old school; his classmates actually seem to care about him. As strange and warm as the thought is, he's not sure if he can handle eighteen overbearingly helpful teenagers right now.

Still, if he stands here counting ceiling tiles for any longer, he's going to be late. Swallowing and willing his fins to stop shaking, Izuku slowly slides open the door and slips inside.

It's not like setting off a bomb, at least. Nobody immediately looks his way; they're all wrapped up in their own conversations to the point that it's hard to hear the door close. Izuku ducks his head and carefully walks towards his desk, stepping around a distracted Hagakure and dropping his back onto the floor beside his seat.

*That* gets people's attention. The first to react is Shinsou, who pulls his head up from where it was previously slumped onto his desk and blinks at Izuku. The next is Kirishima, who looks over from where he and Sero are talking and grins.

"Midoriya! You're okay!"

Izuku jolts a bit at the volume of his voice, his fins flaring out in surprise, but he glances over and waves sheepishly. The action catches the eye of Uraraka, who immediately drops whatever she was doing- literally, the pen just stays there in midair- and rushes towards him.

“Midoriya!” She says. “We were worried you wouldn’t be here today!”

Izuku rubs the back of his neck, barely keeping scales from appearing on his face again. “...It takes a bit more than that to put me out of commission, I guess.”

“I’m glad,” Iida says, appearing behind her. He looks more relieved than anything. “Your determination is admirable.”

“Um,” Izuku says. “Thanks?”

“Is your throat okay, kero?” Asui says, picking up the pen Uraraka left floating and eyeing Izuku with a pensive expression. “Your voice sounds rough.”

“It’s the lightning,” Izuku says. “It, um... It does that. it’s not as bad as it was the first time around.”

“I remember that,” Uraraka says. “It was *super* cool, but... I was really worried about you afterward.”

“Thank God for Recovery Girl,” Izuku says with a wry laugh, fiddling with one of the buttons on his uniform.

“No kidding,” Uraraka says. “Well, I’m glad you’re okay. You scared us all yesterday.”

Izuku ducks his head, staring at the floor. “Right. Sorry about that, I just... I had a lot to think about, and I ran off without thinking.”

“You don’t need to apologize,” Iida says. “We’re glad you took care of yourself.”

Izuku thinks of abandoning his schoolwork to go hide in the ocean for a few hours, scaring the shit out of his mom and Bit. Is that self-care?

He settles for a “Yeah,” and hopes the conversation doesn’t get any more awkward than it already is.

Thankfully- or maybe not thankfully- that’s the moment the door opens once more. Instead of Mr. Aizawa, the classroom is graced by the presence of Present Mic, who bounces up to the podium and surveys the class with an amused expression.

“Bell rings in ten seconds, little listeners!” He says with a grin.

The resulting scramble might be funny if Izuku weren’t so fogged-over. He’s right next to his desk, so it’s easy to slide in and slump over right as the bell rings. The cool plastic feels nice against his face, and he absentmindedly wonders what would happen if he fell asleep. Someone fell asleep in class in his middle school once. The results... hadn’t been pretty.

Someone gently pokes his shoulder and he immediately snaps up, trying not to look like he'd been contemplating taking a nap. Thankfully, the offender isn't Present Mic or Iida, but Shinsou, who's watching him with an expression that's hard to read. When Izuku forces his shoulders down and turns to look at him, he tilts his head in a questioning gesture. Izuku mimics it without thinking, his fins wobbling.

*“ Alright, students! ”* Present Mic calls from the front of the classroom. He's not even using his quirk, but his volume overpowers the classroom like the sound of a jet taking off, and Izuku flinches and swivels in his seat to face forwards again.

*“ Shouta's taking care of some homeroom related stuff, which means I am going to be your lovely substitute on this fine morning! Can I get a **yeah** ? ”*

To Izuku's utter relief, the rest of the class seems content to stare at Present Mic owlishly instead of taking him up on his offer. At least, until Mina brings her hands down on her desk with a loud bang and shouts, *“ Yeah! ”*

*“ Alright! ”* Present Mic says. *“ Let's get this show on the road! ”*

The 'show' turns out to be a completely normal homeroom, which Izuku takes advantage of by staring blankly at the worksheet he's supposed to be completing while his brain swims groggy laps. Uraraka keeps shooting him worried glances, but he's too caught up in tapping his pen on the desk with claw-tipped fingers, letting his head drift. He doesn't even register what's happening until Present Mic flippantly warns them that there are only five minutes left, and he looks down at his largely-blank paper with a feeling of sudden alarm that sends scales skittering up his forearms.

*Shit* . He really needs a nap.

He ends up having to awkwardly explain to Present Mic that he didn't finish, but to his surprise, Present Mic smiles and takes it in stride. He offers to let Izuku come by after school and complete it then, and Izuku is infinitely grateful.

The rest of the morning passes like that. Mr. Aizawa appears shortly after homeroom, looking somehow more tired than he did when Izuku saw him earlier, and classes continue like usual. Izuku gets to lunch without horribly botching too many other worksheets, but braving the hallway is a ride. Thankfully, Uraraka seems at least somewhat keyed into his spaced-out behavior, because she manages to keep him from making a fool of himself.

They sit in their usual spot, with Shinsou to Izuku's left and Iida and Uraraka across from them. A few minutes in, his limbs start feeling fuzzy and heavy, like someone's slowly turning his bones to lead, and he blinks and rubs his eyes.

It's only for a moment that he pushes his tray forwards so he can rest his elbows on the table, but that moment is followed by him pillowing his arms and resting his chin on them. He tries to follow Iida and Shinsou's conversation, but his eyelids feel like they carry the weight of the world, and he sighs and closes them. Just for a minute.

*“-iya. Midoriya.”*

Izuku blinks his eyes back open, his fins flicking irritably. He hears his name, but it's distant, like it's coming through the curtain of a waterfall. He tries to close his eyes and go back to sleep, but a second later, a hand rests on his shoulder and shakes him lightly.

He lifts his head with a frown, blinking the heaviness out of his eyes. Shinsou, Uraraka, and Iida are all looking at him strangely, and their trays are all empty. It's almost as if-

He stiffens, almost knocking Shinsou over as the hand is thrown from his shoulder.

"Did I-?" He starts, only to cut himself off as his fins flatten themselves against his head. Shit.

"Midoriya, are you feeling alright?" Iida asks with a frown. At his side, Uraraka looks similarly worried, and Shinsou's hand hovers over his shoulder hesitantly.

"I'm... fine," he says. "I just- I'm... tired."

That's an extremely vague explanation, he knows, but there's not much he can do in lieu of explanations right now, so he just sighs and stares at his untouched tray blankly. He doesn't have much of an appetite if he's being honest.

"When did you sleep last?" Uraraka asks. Izuku blinks.

"Last- last night."

He's not sure if it counts as sleep, really. He wishes that he could say that he spent the night in blissful unconsciousness, but he knows that he'd ended up in another dream. He can't remember the images clearly- they're all distorted, like they're being projected onto the surface of a ceaseless stream- but he knows that they'd been there.

"You don't look like you slept last night," Shinsou says, and Izuku barely bites back an *I might as well not have* and shrugs.

"I'll... sleep after school," he says, and he hopes that whatever's haunting his unconsciousness will leave him alone. "And maybe for all of tomorrow. Thank God for weekends."

Uraraka gives him a thumbs up, before she pauses. "...Speaking of weekends- if you guys are up for it, do you maybe want to hang out? Like- this Saturday?"

Izuku's fins straighten out, and he blinks at her, unsure if he heard her correctly or if it's his sleepless brain talking. At his side, Shinsou seems to be having a similar reaction.

"I don't think I have anything planned," Iida says, far more used to this whole *having friends* thing. "What did you have in mind?"

Uraraka shrugs, looking sheepish. "I don't know. I just figured we could... get lunch, maybe? You know, just for fun."

Iida hums, thoughtful. "That sounds enjoyable. What do you two think?"

Izuku blinks slowly. He can't really remember the last time anyone asked him to hang out. Maybe one of his classmates, before Bakugou scared them into avoiding him like the plague? Either way, it's been a *long* time. He doesn't really know how it works, if he's being honest. Maybe it's something like this? Where they just sit and talk?

He thinks he could do that.

"...I think that would be fun," he says, almost instinctively waiting for Bakugou to burst in and ruin it all. But Bakugou isn't here, and Uraraka is different from anyone at his old school.

"Great!" She says, beaming. "What about you, Shinsou?"

Shinsou looks like the human embodiment of a deer caught in a pair of headlights. He's stiff, looking uncharacteristically startled. He looks tense, like he's waiting for something to happen. Whatever prophecy he's banking on doesn't come to fruition, and his surprise slowly bleeds into something softer, something new.

"...Sure."

Uraraka grins. "Awesome! I got your phone numbers, so I'll text you an address and a time or something like that."

"I'll be looking forward to it," Iida says.

"Yeah," Izuku says, ignoring the part of him that hisses that he doesn't deserve *any of this*.  
"Me too."

-----

True to his word, the first thing Izuku does when he gets home is collapse into his bed and fall asleep for the next few hours. He's out like a light the second his head hits the sheets, not even bothering to change out of his uniform. Thankfully, whatever higher power that's been tormenting him recently seems content to have this short period of peace, and he sleeps without dreaming.

When he wakes up, his uniform is wrinkled and his face is creased red with the imprint of his sheets, but he feels significantly less leaden than he did before. He yawns, peeling himself off of his bed and changing out of his uniform. Once he's in a t-shirt and shorts, a significant step up from his previous attire on the comfort scale, he picks up his backpack, fully intending to knock out his homework for the weekend now that he has nothing else to do.

He's about halfway through when his phone buzzes. He assumes it's Uraraka as he picks it up, but it's Bit.

**2000 degree knife [5:34]**

hey mido are you coming over tonight or no?

my mom's making food and she wants to know if she should make extra

Izuku blinks. Shit. Right.

He momentarily puzzles over his current energy reserves. He could say no, but if he does, he'll just spend the rest of the day lazily lounging around and sleeping. Plus, he did drop out on Bit without warning yesterday.

Also, Mrs. Okyoita's cooking is really good.

**Hell Yeah Lizard Man [6:13]**

yeah! if its not too much trouble

wh

did u change my name again

**2000 degree knife [6:15]**

HELL YEAH

also hell yeah

**Hell Yeah Lizard Man [6:16]**

>:T

ill see you in a bit then

**2000 degree knife [6:18]**

haha a BIT

Izuku doesn't even bother with a response. He just groans, sets his homework aside, and starts pulling on his shoes for the walk to Bit's house. He's still tired, and his head is fuzzy, but if anything can distract him from the guilt pooling in his stomach, it's Bit and a few well-timed explosions.

Well, he's not sure if an explosion can ever be well-timed, but Bit sure can try.

Chapter End Notes

aaand that's a wrap. bit of a rough landing, i'm aware, but it's over with.

ohh man when i was writing this i had some thought-out plan for how the end notes were going to be? but now thats shot to shit and i dont really know what to say I guess... some thoughts?

Here's my response to something a few people have asked me: no, I do not like Bakugou Katsuki. However, I do not think that he is evil/deserves to die/a villain/etc. He is a very complex character, and I'm worried that I failed to properly convey that in my prior chapter.

However. this is an AU. Bakugou's relationship with Izuku in this fic is different than in canon, which resulted in the events of last chapter. I'm not trying to completely excuse what happened- I'm well aware that my characterization there was not the best- but I feel I can at least offer an explanation.

On that note, I'd really appreciate it if you guys could stop commenting 'omg i want to kill bakugou' or 'i hope he dies' or something like that? it's just... very, very uncomfortable for me, especially if the majority of comments are like that. I know most of you are joking, but still.

but... yeah. as for why this chapter took so long: it was a mixture of writer's block, creative frustration, mental illness, and... some not-so-nice asks on tumblr. hopefully now that we've moved on from this mini-arc, the chapters will come a bit quicker, but i wont make any promises.

and lastly: i am a writer creating fanfic for one. as hard as i try, i am not infallible.

thank you guys for being patient with me!

[EDIT (10/17/18): THIS FIC IS NOT DEAD OR ON HIATUS!! im just really busy in real life and haven't found time or energy to work on the next chapter. It'll come soon, I promise. Sorry!)

# make a list of what i'm not

## Chapter Summary

a weekend passes.

## Chapter Notes

uh. hey. i live

tbh i dont have a Grand Explanation as to why this took so long. i guess, just a mixture of writers block and Holy Fuck Real Life, yknow?  
hope u enjoy

aand, as per usual, thank u to my God Tier Betas for putting up with my shit:  
tanzytechgem and, a newcomer, theshoutingslytherin !

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Mom's not thrilled about him up and leaving to run off to Bit's house, but she relents surprisingly fast. Izuku assumes it's due a mixture of a few factors.

For one, she knows Bit. She can't not, seeing how many times Bit has dropped by their apartment unannounced. She trusts him a surprising amount, even despite his track record with destruction of private property. Also, she's spoken with Mrs. Okyoita on more than one occasion mostly due to Bit's said antics, and they seem to get along well. Their interactions are understandably different from Izuku and Bit's, so they don't have the somewhat ride-or-die dynamic that Izuku and Bit have cultivated, but that's probably for the best.

Maybe it's mostly because she assumes he needs to be with a friend tonight, after everything that's happened. One that's not in the UA loop, that won't pry or ask him questions that he either can't or won't answer. If that's what she's thinking, she's right, but Izuku doesn't ask her to find out.

He heads out the door after she agrees to let him go, pushing headphones into his ears. It's a meticulous process, since he has to do his best not to stab himself with his own claws, and he eventually just forces the Leviathan out of his hands. The end result is weird, and he finds himself realizing that he's gotten used to constantly having claws. Now, his hands seem... frail, smaller than what he's used to. He flexes them, feeling clammy, freckled skin in place of smooth scales and leathery webbing, and he's not sure how to feel about it.

So he doesn't think. He's tired of thinking; he's done nothing but think all day, about himself, about the Leviathan, about Bakugou, and he just wants to watch shitty movies with Bit and maybe fall asleep on the couch. He just wants a break.

Blasting music is easier than thinking. He likes filling his head with a sound that isn't the constant grate of the Leviathan's scales against his skull or its vehement hissing. Music is calming, and he much prefers it to the cacophony that usually dominates his senses. So he presses play on his music and lets sound course through his headphones like a heartbeat, blocking out his mind and focusing on the world around him.

With his perception confined to such a small space, he's on Bit's doorstep before he knows it. He swallows, pausing his music and shoving his headphones haphazardly into his pockets. The bell lingers just within reach, but before he can ring it, the door slides open of its own accord with a soft creak.

It's not Bit that stands in the doorway, or his mom. Instead is a figure that Izuku's seen only a handful of times, but seen nonetheless.

"Hey, kiddo!" Mr. Okyoita greets, extending a hand. Izuku makes sure his own are still human before he reaches out to take it.

Mr. Okyoita is a tall man, with tanned skin and a face dotted with dark stubble. He doesn't have his wife or his son's silvery hair, but he does have those grey eyes that gleam with no small amount of mischief. From what Izuku knows, almost all of Bit's technological ambition comes from him; he's the 'do-it-yourself dad type', according to Bit, and Izuku thinks the description is pretty accurate. He's the type to encourage Bit's madness— at least, to a degree. It's fortunate for the rest of the world that he's only around on weekends. He's back early today.

"H-Hello, sir," Izuku says, waving a hand awkwardly. Mr. Okyoita seems completely indifferent to his social inadequacy and steps aside, ushering him into the house and sliding the door shut behind them.

"The Destruction King is in the basement," Mr. Okyoita informs him. "Try and keep him from blowing up the street?"

"I'll do my best," Izuku responds with a grin, and Mr. Okyoita winks and leaves him to open the door to the basement and head down the stairs. They're significantly more scraped-up than they were the last time Izuku was here, but he chalks that up to Bit's usual antics. He's not sure if trying to keep the stairs presentable would be worth the effort.

When he steps into the basement, Bit is sprawled out on the couch, dressed in a T-shirt that's at least three sizes too big and a pair of sweatpants. He doesn't look up, too enthralled in what Izuku can only assume is yet another episode of that weird Power Rangers rerun. His hair is pulled back into a small, fluffy ponytail that sticks straight out like a unicorn horn, and Izuku can't help his snort.

Bit notices him, glances back over the arm of the couch, and raises his eyebrows. He offers a cheerful wave, rolling off of the couch and springing into an upright position.

“You came!” he says.

“Yeah,” Izuku says, rubbing the back of his neck. “Sorry for... randomly dropping out.”

“No worries,” Bit says, waving him off and crossing the room towards the table. “Shit happens. How’s murder school?”

Izuku knows Bit means nothing by it, but he can’t help his slight flinch at the word *murder*, or the way scales skitter up his arms. It’s... too fresh. He just doesn’t want to think about it.

Thankfully, ever-observant Bit immediately notices his discomfort, and if he’s alarmed by Izuku’s reaction, he doesn’t show it. He just says, “My school’s been boring, like always. They told me I couldn’t make a jetpack using school-supplied materials.”

“Wait,” Izuku says, thankful for the change of subject, “they actually tried to contain you?”

“We had a substitute,” Bit explains, a grin on his face as he scrounges through a messy pile of half-assed blueprints and spare parts. “One who wasn’t used to... me.”

“And they weren’t warned?” Izuku asks. Bit laughs.

“Apparently not.”

He finds what he’s looking for, then, pulling out a thin cylinder of metal that Izuku momentarily assumes is the infamous Pringles can grappling hook. But then he sees the thin grates and buttons on the sides, and he recognizes the equally infamous lightsaber.

Bit holds it up, adjusting it in the pale light. It’s slightly scuffed, which Izuku guesses is from the incident at the department store, but for the most part, it’s intact.

“So, right now, the problem isn’t *powering* the laser. That I have figured out.” He holds the thin cylinder up in the palm of his hand, as if weighing it. It’s about the size of a bicycle handle. “The problem is *stopping* it.”

“Stopping it?” Izuku echoes.

“Yeah, like— you know how a laser pointer just goes on forever? Since it’s a light beam? This does the same thing. I need it to have a finite length, so it doesn’t shoot a hole through the nearest object whenever I turn it on.”

“Like it did at the department store?” Izuku asks, unimpressed, and Bit snorts.

“Yeah, pretty much. So... any ideas?”

“Not really,” Izuku says. “You’re the technopath, not me.”

“I *wish* I was a technopath,” Bit says wistfully. “It would make things much easier. But, then again, I wouldn’t be able to charge people 500 yen to charge their phones.”

“Isn’t that illegal quirk use?” Izuku asks, picking up the metal cylinder and gingerly turning it over. “For... a number of reasons?”

Bit shrugs. “Well... what are they going to do?” His face twists into a pouty, childlike expression, and he sticks out his bottom lip and starts to speak in a squeaky voice. “Sorry Mr. Tsukauchi, I won’t use my quirk for capitalism ever again.”

“Would you get shut down for having a monopoly on chargers?” Izuku asks as Bit laughs at his own impression and hops up onto the counter.

“Maybe. I guess my one-man business is just too lucrative.”

He leans over the table and picks up the remote, which is lying precariously close to the edge,

“Wait,” Izuku says, staring at the hologram TV and then at Bit. “You made the hologram, right?”

“Yeah, I did,” Bit says, perking up. “Why?”

“Couldn’t you... reuse that concept?” Izuku asks, frowning thoughtfully and staring at the lifeless metal. “The hologram should work the same way as a laser pointer, seeing as its made of light, but something stops it and suspends it in mid-air.”

“I thought of that,” Bit says. “But the holograms are harmless. I can’t use a hologram to cut a steel beam in half.” He swipes a hand through the hologram for good measure, and sure enough, all he succeeds in doing is making the screen wobble and distort slightly.

“They’re harmless *now*,” Izuku presses, remembering an old article he read. “But when they were first being developed, they weren’t, right?”

Bit opens his mouth to reply, and then his eyes go wide with realization. A moment later, they’re glittering, and his face splits with a wide grin.

“Mother *fucker*,” he says. “The old ones were made with ionized air instead of particle projections.”

Izuku, who only has a vague idea of how they work but assumes that’s it, nods.

“And ionized air is, well, ionized,” Bit says, his expression distant and thoughtful. Izuku can almost see the gears turning in his head. “I don’t know how strong it’ll be, but it’s *definitely* a start. Shit, I need a whole new thing of parts for that. I should be able to condense the pulse-launcher into something that’ll fit in the canister, but I don’t...”

Just like that, he’s gone, launched into full mad-scientist mode that even Izuku’s year with Bit has not prepared him to properly parse. He starts redrawing the blueprint on the table with a white pen, scratching out lines and retracing them, and Izuku’s content to lean over his shoulder and watch.

They spend the next hour or so like that, with Bit tossing out hypotheticals and suggestions, and Izuku returning them to the best of his ability. Most of his scientific knowledge is simply

obtained by osmosis and his proximity to Bit, so he's not terribly helpful, but Bit seems more than happy to have him nonetheless.

Mrs. Okyoita calls them up to eat, eventually. Izuku feels awkward sitting at the table, surrounded by Bit and his family, but Mr. Okyoita seems perfectly content to half-include, half-drag him into the conversation. The atmosphere remains light, and Mrs. Okyoita's incredible food only adds to the scene. In time, that familiar guilt rises to tug at the back of Izuku's mind in time with the Leviathan's faint hissing, but he shoves it away.

He asks him about UA, of course, and he answers as well as he can. He talks about being taught classes by Present Mic— “No, Bit.” —, Midnight, and even All Might. The Okyoitas look surprised and enthralled by the thought of the number one hero being a teacher, so Izuku clenches his hands in his lap and tells him about the first training exercise. He doesn't mention there ever being a second one.

He feels Bit's eyes on him every time he dodges a question.

When they return to the basement, Izuku expects Bit to lunge right back into working on the lightsaber. However, that's not the case; Bit seems content to hop onto the couch and grab the hologram remote off of the floor, patting the spot behind him as he turns the screen on. Izuku falls into the cushions beside him, stretching and raising an eyebrow once he's confirmed that there are no loose screws or scraps stabbing him in the back.

Bit starts to turn the hologram on, but at the last moment, he hesitates. Izuku, who's never known Bit as anything other than the poster child of impulsiveness, immediately starts paying attention. For a moment, they just sit in silence. Izuku's about to ask what's going on, but before he can, Bit shuts the hologram off with a flick of his thumb and settles back onto the couch. He stares up at the ceiling for a moment, and then he sighs.

“...So,” he says. “I don't want to push or anything, but you've seemed off for a bit, and you mentioned something happening at school, and I just.... Are you okay?”

Izuku blinks at the sudden shift in conversation, moving to respond ‘yes’, but he falters at the last second. He's been saying yes for the past few days, dodging questions about how he feels, refusing to admit them. Sure, Izuku is probably the figurative king of concealing important things, but... he's tired. Maybe just once, he can oblige.

“UA is— it's *incredible*,” he says, swallowing and looking up at the ceiling. “but it's hard. And I knew it would be, and that's great, it *should* be, but... Some things are hard for the wrong reasons, and I'm tired.”

There's silence for a moment, where his words cling to the shadowed walls of the basement and stare down with beady eyes that he refuses to meet. Then, at his side, Bit leans into the couch and folds his hands in his lap.

“Can I ask what you mean?”

“I— I guess,” Izuku says, rubbing his eyes with his wrist, “but I don't really know how to explain it. It's just a mix of— *everything*, really. I feel so out of place, like- like I *shouldn't*

*be there* . Everyone else, they— they *know what they're doing*. Or at least, they seem to. And then I'm over here, just... trying to keep up."

"Well, you're there to learn, aren't you?" Bit asks. "You can't expect yourself to know everything from the get-go."

"I *know* that," Izuku says, his words coming out too sharply. "I- I mean... God, I don't *know*. I don't know what I'm doing. I thought everything would work out when I got into UA, but it's just getting more complicated."

And that's the truth, isn't it? Things were supposed to get better. UA was supposed to be his key to compensation, a way for him to finally *do something* so that his guilt would stop eating him alive. But no matter how he tries, he keeps messing up, and it's just *never enough*.

He's started wondering if it ever will be.

There are a few seconds after that where neither of them speak. The silence is heavy; not in a tense, tightly-strung way, just... heavy. Like a blanket, draped over Izuku's head, that might have been intended to comfort but instead only suffocates.

Then Bit brushes some hair out of his eyes, takes a deep breath, and turns to face him fully.

"So, you dropped out?"

*That* catches Izuku off guard, and he turns to stare at Bit in disbelief. "I— No, of course not. Why would I—"

He stops when he realizes Bit's watching him with a soft smile, feeling his fins slowly lower in confusion.

"So you're choosing to keep going, even though everything's confusing and you're exhausted, huh?" Bit says, in that way that means he already has this whole conversation mapped out. "Why?"

"...Because I worked hard to get where I am," Izuku says quietly, realizing too late Bit's plan. "And... I'm not going to let the bad things dictate who I'm going to be."

"Sounds like hero talk to me," Bit says, kicking his legs up on the footstool. "I think you don't give yourself enough credit. You're allowed to be tired, Mido. It's *UA* , for fuck's sake. Their whole shindig is how hard it is to get in and stay in."

"I... I guess," Izuku says, rubbing the back of his neck and staring at the far wall. "I just—it's complicated, like- like I said."

"Then I won't press anymore." Bit shrugs. "Just know— You're stronger than you think you are. If anybody can take UA head-on, it's you."

Izuku doesn't think Bit understands the ironic truth of that statement, but he swallows and nods.

“Thank you,” he says quietly. “I— Thank you. I think I... I needed that.”

“You’re welcome,” Bit says, tilting his head with an expression that’s *almost* his usual grin. “Now, kick their asses for me, alright?”

“Alright,” Izuku says with a wobbly smile, and when Bit opens his arms, he doesn’t resist the hug.

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It’s not until he checks his phone, maybe twenty minutes later, that he realizes how late it’s gotten. It’s almost nine, and the sun has sunk to just below the city skyline in a blaze of orange. The thought of walking through dark streets to get back to his apartment alone isn’t a friendly one, seeing how high crime rates are these days.

“Maybe you could just stay here?” Bit suggests, peering over Izuku’s shoulder at the blaringly bright phone clock in his hands. “It is the weekend. Are you doing anything tomorrow?”

Izuku shakes his head. “I don’t think so. Are your parents okay with it, though?”

“Oh, they’ll be fine with it,” Bit says, grinning. “They’ll probably *thank you* , actually. I’m pretty sure they see you as some sort of danger-deterrent.”

Izuku ignores the irony of that. “To keep you safe from other people, or to keep other people safe from you?”

“Both,” Bit says.

His parents are indeed fine with it— (“ *Please* keep him from sneaking out to go test a firework gun.” “That was *one time!*” ) and so is Izuku’s mom. He texts her to say where he is and why, and she agrees with him that it’s probably a good idea.

Bit helps him dig an old air mattress out of one of the hall closets. It doesn’t look like it’s seen the light of day in a while, but it’s functional, and that’s all Izuku can ask for. It does take them a while to blow it up, but that’s mostly due to their own incompetence, not any production errors regarding the mattress.

When it’s relatively firm, they toss some blankets and pillows onto it and call it a bed. It still gives slightly when Izuku falls onto it, but he ignores it in favor of avoiding the deafening whirr of the air pump.

“I’m feeling nostalgic,” Bit hums, and Izuku pulls his head out of his nest of sheets to see Bit offering him clothes that are still a size too big. He eyes the shirt, squinting at the text on it.

““Come to the dark side, we have pie’?” He asks. “Really?”

“Do you have a problem with excellent puns?” Bit asks without turning around.

“Why do you even have this?” Izuku asks, lifting it. “I thought you were a connoisseur of blank T-shirts.”

“Can’t I indulge in more fashionable tastes?” Bit asks.

“ *This* is not fashionable,” Izuku snorts, examining the shirt. Before he can comment more, Bit snatches the shirt from his grasp and wings a different one at his head.

“ *Fine*, ” he snaps, but there’s no heat behind it. “I see I’m the only one with *taste* in this house.”

“Maybe so,” Izuku laughs, turning and heading into the bathroom.

When he closes the door, his eyes land on the mirror. For a moment, he simply stares, caught off-guard by how familiar this feels. He looks, for the most part, the same as he did on that night so long ago, where he’d stumbled into Bit’s house in a papery gown and stared at his scar for the first time. He reaches up to trace it once more, this time with a black, inhuman claw rather than a trembling hand.

Despite the similarities, though, he knows he’s different. The space under his eyes is speckled with teal scales, and his fins stick out of his head like they always do. He’s become so casual these days. It’s... strange. He wonders if it’s a good change or not.

Some things, however, never change, because the Leviathan chooses that moment to snarl at him when he hesitates for too long. He rolls his eyes and looks away from the mirror.

When he finishes his nightly routine and falls onto the air mattress, he expects Bit to keep him up by rambling about random things. To his surprise, Bit seems content to just pass out with hardly a word. It’s so genuinely unsettling that Izuku stays up for a while, just *waiting* for something to happen. Eventually, the boredom gets to him, and he closes his eyes and lets himself fall out of consciousness.

He has the dream again. Not the one where he’s brutally torn apart by the two things he hates most in the world—the strange, incomprehensible one. It presents itself slowly, like it’s hesitant to emerge from the curtain of his conscious, but the moment it does, he’s bombarded with flickering film-reel images. Some are the same as last night—a full moon, glowing like the beam of a spotlight and illuminating thousands of icy raindrops, a blurred image that looks like falling debris, and the glint of a sharp blade. Some, however, are different, like the splatter of red on grey cement, claws and teeth that bite and tear, a world fragmented into three, then five, then twelve. He sees blurs of things, of people, of angry eyes and broken sunglasses, and they all meld together in a puzzle he just can’t fit together.

Weirdest of all is the feeling; he feels... not angry, or scared, but... cold. Not in a physical way, not really, but like he’s made up of razor-sharp edges and blooming thorns, of icy steel that’s so cold it burns skin and rolling seas. He feels *overwhelmed* , like there’s simultaneously a vacuum inside him that’s pulling him in and an exploding nova in his head that wants to get *out* . He feels cold, then big, then small, and it’s all *too much* .

And then he wakes up.

He doesn't jolt into reality with a scream ghosting his lips like bad aftertaste, or with his hands tangled in sheets so tightly they're near tearing. He wakes up as he would from anything else; his eyelids flutter open, and then he's staring at the wonderfully mundane walls of Bit's bedroom. It's a jarring shift, like someone grabbed him by the shoulders and flipped him upside-down, and it honestly gives him vertigo.

Izuku ends up staring at the ceiling of Bit's room, confused and mildly uneasy. That's not to say he isn't thankful— he doesn't know what he'd do if he ended up having a shitty nightmare right in front of Bit— he's just... confused. Plain and simple.

A shuffle of sheets announces that he isn't the first to wake up, and a moment later, Bit leans over the side of his bed to peer at Izuku curiously. He's not wearing his glasses, and his hair is sticking up in a way even more unkempt than his usual gravity-defying waves. Still, he's definitely awake, and if his lack of sluggishness is anything to go by, he has been for a while.

"You okay?" He asks, raising an eyebrow. Izuku groans and rubs his eyes with the heels of his— human, oddly enough— hands, letting one arm flop to the side.

"Yeah," he ends up murmuring. "What time is it?"

"Eleven-ish," Bit replies, disappearing back over the edge of his comforter. "Welcome back to reality.

"Thanks...?" Izuku chances, bracing his palms against the ground and forcing himself into a sitting position. "How long have you been up?"

"About an hour," Bit replies. "I woke up when Mic started yelling. You sleep like the dead, dude."

"I... What?" Izuku says, glancing around the room to find Present Mic sitting on the back of a chair and staring at him with the intense beadiness of a very loud bird. He offers a wave, and Mic responds by bobbing his head and turning around to ignore him.

"You've been up for an hour and you never put your glasses on?" He says eventually, once he's satisfied that Mic isn't about to start screaming. He hears a thoughtful hum.

"Didn't need 'em."

"What have you been doing for the past hour, then?"

"Googling the legality of owning a lightsaber," Bit replies, entirely too nonchalantly considering the content of that statement. "Technically, there aren't any rules against it, since I built it myself, but I need to make sure. I am not letting my hard work get confiscated by Tamakawa again."

"Like the ping pong ball gun?" Izuku asks, resting his chin on his knees. He hears an indignant noise.

"*Like the ping pong ball gun* . Look— I can get taking an actual gun or something, but, like — the ping pong ball gun wasn't even a public safety hazard! It just shot ping pong balls!"

“Didn’t you shoot him in the head with it?” Izuku asks.

“That was an *accident* , and you know it,” Bit replies. “He said I’d get it back when I went three months without getting the cops called on me. Do you know how much people around here hate innovation?”

“They don’t hate innovation,” Izuku says, yawning. “They hate being woken up at four in the morning because somebody blew up a drone in the middle of the street.

“That’s their loss,” Bit says. “The future waits for no one.”

“It’s too early for me to argue over this with you,” Izuku says, rubbing his eyes. “Just— don’t get arrested, and we’re good.”

“It’s not even that early,” Bit says. Izuku ignores him and rolls over so he can reach towards the desk, managing to snag the charger and pull his phone onto the floor. As soon as he unplugs it, the screen lights up to reveal eight new notifications. Izuku frowns and unlocks it.

The notifications are from a new group chat.

#### **Uraraka [9:34]**

hello!! ^u^

If you guys are up for it, there’s a really good cafe near where I live.

*[Uraraka has shared a location]*

if you want to come, we can meet at 12-ish??

#### **Iida [9:36]**

Thank you for the invitation, Uraraka! I will be there!

#### **Shinsou [9:46]**

thanks. i’ll be there

#### **Uraraka [9:52]**

great!! i’ll see you guys there!

are you coming, midoriya?

It's currently 11:24, a glance at the top of the screen reveals. The destination Uraraka has in mind is a twenty-minute train ride away.

For a moment, Izuku just stares, and then he manages an eloquent, "Oh fuck."

"What's up?" Bit asks, leaning back over the edge of the bed to stare at him.

"I— Fuck, I'm meeting some friends today," Izuku says. "And I forgot."

Bit, the unhelpful bastard just laughs. "Are these your UA friends? What time are you meeting them?"

"Twelve, apparently," Izuku says, running a hand through his hair. "At a cafe, twenty minutes away. I don't have any money."

"I can lend you some," Bit suggests. Izuku swivels around to stare at him, eyes narrowed.

"I thought you didn't have any money?"

"I have a bit," Bit says, and then he snickers to himself at the pun. "Why?"

"Then why'd you make me haul trash for you instead of buying materials?" Izuku asks.

"I said I had a *bit*, not enough to afford decent materials," Bit says, grinning in a way that suggests otherwise. "Do you want it or not?"

"Yes," Izuku says. "God, I'm gonna be late."

"You'll be fine," Bit says, pulling his phone out of his pocket. "Just... maybe hurry."

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The little cafe is fairly busy when Ochako arrives, but not so much that she has to wait to be seated. A waiter guides her to a table of four, which is thankfully near one of the walls and not awkwardly situated in the center of the room. She takes a seat with a grateful nod, and then she settles down to wait.

The first person to arrive is, unsurprisingly, Iida. He's dressed in a button-down shirt and nice pants with cutouts for his engines, and he looks refreshed. When he sits down, he does so with a grace that Ochako can only hope to imitate.

"Hello, Uraraka," he says pleasantly.

"Hi, Iida!" Ochako says, waving brightly. "I'm glad you could make it!"

"So am I!" Iida says, his face brightening to match Uraraka's enthusiasm. "This part of town is nice. Do you come here often?"

“I used to,” Ochako says. “My parents live right around here, so I spent most of my weekends here with friends. I haven’t had time to come here recently, though, since I moved to an apartment closer to UA.”

“I see,” Iida says. “Do you live alone?”

Uraraka nods, smiling. “Yeah. My parents work right around here, so they couldn’t move with me. It’s alright, though. A little weird, but alright.”

They talk a little more after that, during which Iida flags down a waiter and orders some waters for the table. A few minutes later, Shinsou arrives, slumping into the seat across from Iida and yawning behind a hand. To Uraraka’s amusement, he’s dressed in a black t-shirt with a cat pun on it and jeans. More surprising, though, is the pair of rounded glasses perched slightly off-kilter on his nose.

“Hey, Shinsou!” Ochako says. “Glad you could make it!”

“Me too,” Shinsou says, rubbing the back of his neck. “Thank you for inviting me.”

“Of course!” Ochako says, and then, because she can’t help it, “I didn’t know you wore glasses.”

“Not many people do,” Shinsou says, reaching up to fix the glasses in question so they’re not so lopsided. “I usually wear contacts.”

“How long have you had them?” Iida asks, probably more well-versed in glasses discussion than Uraraka.

“Uh... Since I was eight, I think?” Shinsou shrugs. “My eyes went to shit pretty early.”

“I got mine when I was ten,” Iida says. “Bad eyesight runs in my family, so I shouldn’t have been surprised, but I was still disappointed.”

“It’s not so bad,” Shinsou says. “Just a bit of a hassle.”

“Indeed,” Iida says. “I’d like to switch to contacts, but... I haven’t quite gotten around to it yet.”

“Seeing you without glasses would be weird, Iida,” Ochako admits. “They’re part of your whole...” She gestures with her hand. “Your whole *thing*, you know?”

“...Ah,” Iida says, looking lost. Across from him, Shinsou looks like he’s trying not to smile. Before Uraraka can stumble through the conversation more, however, Midoriya finally slides into the last seat, looking somewhat disheveled.

“Am- Am I late?” He asks, looking between the three of them nervously. His fins flick at the sides of his head erratically.

“No, you’re fine,” Ochako says. Midoriya seems to relax, and his fins falter in their flitting. She’s about to say something else, but to her surprise, Shinsou cuts her off.

“Is that a fucking Naruto shirt?”

When Ochako turns, she finds Shinsou squinting at Midoriya, looking more awake than she’s ever seen him. His eyes are narrowed slightly, and his expression has shifted to something akin to disbelief.

Midoriya, on the other hand, has gone very still. There’s a long moment where he just stares back at Shinsou, his mouth partially open, and then he looks down at his shirt. The shirt in question is a simple black T-Shirt, with a cartoon character Ochako doesn’t recognize holding up a peace sign with a cheery grin.

Ochako can’t be sure, but she’s pretty sure she hears Midoriya mutter a near-silent, “*I swear to God*.”

“...What’s Naruto?” Iida asks, clearly just as lost as Ochako is.

“It’s— God, I forgot I was wearing this,” Midoriya groans. “It’s not mine, Shinsou. It’s my friend’s.”

“You have a friend who watches Naruto?” Shinsou asks, cocking his head. “Who owns Naruto *merch*?”

“Watching Naruto is on the tamer side of things he’s done,” Midoriya says, hiding his face in his hands.

“Am I... missing something?” Ochako asks. “Who is Naruto?”

“He’s... a character from a pre-quirk TV show,” Midoriya mumbles into his hands.

“Naruto is *so* much more than that, and you know it,” Shinsou says, jabbing Midoriya’s shoulder.

“No, I don’t! I’ve watched like *one episode* of Naruto!” Midoriya squawks, turning to Shinsou. Just like that, the two are bickering over some TV show Ochako’s never even heard of like members of a professional debate team. Ochako’s never seen Shinsou so... unafraid to speak. It’s nice, she muses, even if she has no idea what the hell is going on.

Eventually, Iida leans over to quietly ask her, “...Have you ever heard of ‘Naruto’?”

Ochako slowly shakes her head. “...No?”

Once Midoriya and Shinsou have finally exhausted whatever debate they’re having, Iida flags down a waiter, and they order. Ochako decides on the same ramen she always gets, since it’s both inexpensive and quite tasty.

At the same time, Iida attempts to talk Shinsou out of ordering a coffee at lunch, but he’s shut down by Shinsou leveling him with a completely emotionless stare. Iida’s complete, stuttering bafflement as he attempts to uphold his argument is, in Ochako’s humble opinion, hilarious, and she and Midoriya end up laughing so hard that Iida just gives up.

At one point, Iida raises a question regarding the city. Leave it to Iida to notice little details, Ochako thinks with a hum. It'll serve him well as a hero.

"Why is most of the architecture here so... modern?" Iida says. "The rest of the prefecture looks more like pre-quirk times."

"Most of the buildings in this section of town are new," Ochako says, taking a sip from her tea. "A while ago, there was a huge villain attack, and they had to rebuild almost everything. I heard about it from my mom."

"Really?" Iida says. "That's horrible!"

Ochako nods. "I was only a kid at the time, so I didn't hear about it until a while after. My mom said everyone was really scared for a while, since they never caught the villain who did it."

"...They didn't?" Shinsou asks, setting his coffee down. His expression is blank, as per usual, but Ochako thinks she sees a hint of surprise.

She shakes her head. "No. It never showed up again, though, so everybody more or less forgot about it."

"That's good," Iida says. "Still, unsettling as well. Perhaps, when I'm a hero, I'll make it my job to hunt down that villain."

"I doubt they're still around," Shinsou muses. "Probably booked it after a stunt like that."

Ochako can't help her slight giggle. "Yeah, probably."

"...Wait," Midoriya says, turning to look at the city past the window. His expression shifts, like something has suddenly fallen into place for him, and he seems to pale. "This whole block got destroyed by one villain?"

"Yeah," Ochako says. "Crazy, huh?"

"Ah," Midoriya says. His brows are low, and Ochako sees the familiar glint of scales speckled around his ears. He looks nervous. Does he think they're in danger?

"Don't worry, Midoriya, I doubt it'll show up again," she says, reaching out to pat his arm. "Like Shinsou said, whoever did it is probably long gone. It was a long time ago."

"...Yeah," Midoriya says eventually, looking back to his cup. "You're right."

---

Yatsuhiro is getting sick of this goddamn warehouse.

'The barracks', is what Handsy's misty babysitter calls it— Kurogiri's his name, but Yatsuhiro only uses it when he absolutely has to. Handsy himself has dubbed it a 'save point', whatever that's supposed to mean. Just about everyone else calls it 'the shithole'.

As it turns out, Yatsuhiro isn't the only jailbird Handsy sprung. The gloomy, stagnant warehouse is populated by an assortment of colorful characters, all with decent quirks and a grudge against society at large. Some of them are tolerable, like the strange paper cutout covered in blinking red eyes. Others are less so, like the vaguely egg-shaped demon of a creature or the ghoul-faced, worm-like menace.

Some of the people here are so utterly monstrous that Yatsuhiro barely believes they're human at all. They slobber and spit, and a few try to start fights amongst themselves when Handsy isn't looking. They're mongrels, all of them.

Still, the poorly condensed chaos of the warehouse is better than the bleak emptiness of the cell. Sure, Yatsuhiro occasionally finds himself missing the silence, but then he remembers staring at empty walls and chipped paint and can't bring himself to want to go back at all.

The warehouse serves as... not a base of operations, certainly, but a holding center for what Shigaraki not-so-humbly refers to as his 'minions'. The warehouse offers a home to the homeless of his army, which consists of fugitives who can't afford to show their faces and those with nowhere else to go. The former category is made up of the more desperate and unhinged ones, while the latter is home to the quieter ones. Yatsuhiro prefers to avoid both groups entirely.

The warehouse itself is nothing special; entirely nondescript and about the size of a small jet hanger. Its inhabitants themselves have each claimed and outlined a small section of space, of which each contains a stained mattress and whatever personal belongings they've managed to hold onto. Yatsuhiro's sector is in the corner, which is home to a rather large spider that he hasn't been bothered to kill.

He's had to piece together Handsy's plan via gossip from his fellow shithole-mates and overheard whispering, since Handsy himself can't be bothered to actually explain anything beyond giving flaky smiles and, on occasion, the bird. At first, Yatsuhiro hadn't even believed what he was putting together; it had seemed like unbelievable, utter *bullshit*. But then details had clicked into place, and things had started to make bloody shreds of sense.

Apparently, he's been inducted into some crackpot plan to *go after and kill All Might*. That, in and of itself, is a suicide mission—running into All Might *period* is just about the worst thing that can possibly happen to *anyone* who finds themselves on the wrong side of the law, whether accidentally or intentionally. Seeking him out is... beyond insane, but Handsy seems to have crossed that line long ago.

Yatsuhiro had been horrified at first, wondering if that was Handsy's plan—to throw leagues and leagues of nobodies at the Number One Hero, trying to wear him down with a half-baked attempt at victory. But then, one of the other inhabitants had directed his attention to the lone corner that everyone avoided, and he'd realized that that wasn't the plan in the slightest.

He and the others are nothing but background characters; chess pawns, cannon fodder. Normally, such a remark would drive Yatsuhiro to the point of bloodshed, but in this case, he's never been happier to go unnoticed. The real star of the show is the creature that sits, unmoving, in the corner of the warehouse; the one Yatsuhiro had foolishly assumed was a cognizant person, like him.

*The Noumu* , Handsy calls it, his tone laced with utter delight. *The Noumu* , the warehouse inhabitants whisper, as if merely saying its name will attract its attention. It's a hulking beast of bulging muscle and tight sinews, built more strongly than All Might himself. Its hunched form is vaguely anatomically reminiscent of a human, but the rest of it is not; its face is strange, almost birdlike, with a plastic border that separates deep purple skin from melted gums and chiseled teeth. Where anything human might have a forehead, or at least a skull, the Noumu has nothing but buglike, unblinking eyes, and an exposed brain that pulses with a slimy sheen. It's disgusting.

If Handsy is to be believed, the Noumu isn't some horrific quirk-user he scrounged up in the seventh circle of Hell, it's a *genetically engineered weapon* created with the express purpose of killing All Might. Yatsuhiko had found that difficult to swallow at first, but after the ninth day of the creature remaining immobile yet still... some strange sort of alive, he'd been forced to believe it. He's not sure who or what gave Handsy the resources and scientific knowledge to put together such a being, but he does know that he never wants to meet them.

So, like the others, he avoids the Noumu. His position at the corner of the warehouse allows him to stay on the opposite side of the building for the most part, but it's right next to the door, so fresh air is a commodity in short supply. He can't wait for this to be over; no matter how it ends, whether the Noumu kills All Might or is killed in return, it ends with him as a free man. He'll do his piece, and then he'll slip through the cracks.

Everyone else here has a similar motivation. All of them have been promised *something* ; freedom, money, transportation. After all, nothing comes for free, especially an agreement to not run when face-to-face with the Number One Hero and possibly a handful of other pro heroes.

Yatsuhiko's plan, in that situation, is simple: find a hostage, and play his usual tricks. This time, there will be no negotiator, no Tsukauchi with his ugly trenchcoat and fake composure, and whoever he's bargaining with will be forced to work it out themselves. It's a best-case scenario, in all honesty, and it'll be even better if he can grab some civilian or a kid.

He's hoping that the place Handsy's choosing for the confrontation won't be too populated. The closer to a major city it is, the higher the chance the big guns will pop up, and Yatsuhiko is not going toe-to-toe with pros like Ryukyu, or, worst-case scenario, Endeavor. He knows that All Might will have to be there— this whole shitshow revolves around him, for god's sake— but he's not sure how exactly Handsy is planning on making that happen. Hell, Handsy probably has it already mapped out, he's just not telling anyone. Go fucking figure.

Yatsuhiko's gotten used to not knowing anything. It bothered him at first, itched at the part of him that needed to be in *control* , but after the fourth week of watching two bulky nobodies fight over a block of dry ramen, he figured that trying to puzzle it out wasn't worth the effort. He just has to bide his time and wait it out. That leaves him with a lot of free time, the majority of which he spends sitting in his corner, avoiding the eyes of his fellow shithole-mates.

Most of them have learned not to bother him by now, or are too stupid or brain-dead to notice him at all. However, *most* does not mean *all* , and from time to time, he's sought out by the more naive or stubborn of the group. Today seems to, unfortunately, be one of those times.

He's sitting against the wall, reading a magazine that one of the bulky mutant-types dropped, when a familiar rope of grey hair appears in his vision and taps his leg. He wrinkles his nose and opts to ignore it, but the owner of the hair will not be ignored, and soon, another rope joins it.

"Hey! Daigo!"

Yatsuhiro closes the magazine, setting it to the side and looking up with the most disdainful expression he possibly can. "What do you want?"

The speaker is the person who annoys him most frequently in the warehouse; a tall, grey-haired woman with red eyes and an annoyingly cocky disposition. Her name is Sayaka, and her quirk allows her to manipulate her hair and use them as extensions of herself. So far, she's majorly used this ability to pester him.

Sayaka drops to a cross-legged position across from him, thankfully avoiding the mattress but still planting herself firmly in his space. Yatsuhiro feels his hands return to sharp, polished blades, and he makes no move to stop them. If Sayaka notices, she doesn't comment.

"So," she says, folding her hands in her lap and grinning widely. "Did you hear?"

So she has gossip. "No, and I don't care," Yatsuhiro says. "Go bother someone else."

"Oh, I think you'll want to hear this," Sayaka says, her grin only widening. "I got this straight from the kingpin."

The kingpin is Sayaka and many others' nickname for Handsy, and also the reason Yatsuhiro begrudgingly looks back up and waits for her to continue. She seems content to pause for a moment, enjoying the feeling of withholding information, before her enthusiasm gets the better of her, and she speaks.

"It's tomorrow."

"What?" Yatsuhiro says.

"The attack," she says, her eyes gleaming. "Where we kill All Might. Where we change the world."

"What the hell do you mean it's *tomorrow*?" Yatsuhiro snaps. "How do I know you're not bullshitting me?"

"Kingpin's making the announcement soon," Sayaka says, waving off his irritation. "I overheard him discussing details with Foggy over there. You'll never guess where the attack is taking place."

"Just get on with it," Yatsuhiro says, not at all interested in her games. Normally, Sayaka would be irritated by his indifference, but now, she doesn't seem to care.

"*UA*," She stage-whispers, leaning forward conspiratorially. Yatsuhiro stares at her in disbelief, waiting for her to cackle and say, '*just fucking with you!*', but she doesn't. She just

grins, thrilled at being the bearer of bad news and waiting for his response.

“UA,” He echoes eventually. “As in— that hugeass hero school? The one with the *best security in Japan?*”

“Apparently they have a contact waiting in the wings who can completely shut down security,” Sayaka says. “And one of our guys has a quirk that disables electronic communications.”

“It doesn’t matter if he can get *in*,” Yatsuhiro hisses. “If we shut down a school, *somebody’s* bound to notice. Do you want to get maimed by, I don’t know, *Endeavor?*”

“But we’re not attacking the school itself,” Sayaka says, her gleaming eyes hinting that she’s enjoying this far too much. “Turns out, one of the first-year classes is taking a little field trip to an off-campus training facility. Guess who’s going with them?”

“All Might,” Yatsuhiro says. Sayaka nods earnestly.

“And a few other pros, of course, but they’ll be easy knockouts. I’m almost *excited*.”

“I’m sure you are,” Yatsuhiro says distastefully. “Now, go bother someone else, before Handsy finds out you’re spilling secrets.”

“If they were secrets, he should learn how to whisper,” Sayaka says, but she stands up nonetheless and dusts off her outfit. “Have fun sitting in your corner.”

Yatsuhiro doesn’t respond when she bounces away, hair flowing around her head like its suspended underwater. He just flicks his blades back into hands, feeling them compress with a metallic scraping sound, and picks up his magazine. An attack on *UA* — Can Handsy get any more out of his mind?

His eyes, although focused on the magazine, are drawn up to the Noumu. It still rests dormant in the corner, the slow rise and fall of its bulky chest the only sign that it's even alive at all, and Yatsuhiro is struck by the fact that, if Sayaka is to be believed, he’ll see it in action tomorrow. He’s not sure if he *wants* to, quite frankly, but he knows he won’t have a choice.

Either way— whatever happens tomorrow, he’ll be a free man.

It’ll be fine.

## Chapter End Notes

aaaand thats a wrap, Folks. hope you enjoyed part 14 my half-delirious ramblings

next chapter (about goddamn time): USJ.

ill see you then.

# **sinners heed the raven's call**

## Chapter Summary

The class takes a field trip. It goes as well as you might expect.

(Who am I kidding you all know what happens)

(1/2)

## Chapter Notes

we're finally here, huh. ive been waiting for it, youve been waiting for it, and only took me a goddamn y ear

i wrote this entire 10k monstrosity in one fucking go instead of studying for finals yeet

as always, thank you to my wonderful betas, tanzytechgem and theshoutingslytherin !!  
yall are godsend, honestly

enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku should have known that his oddly benevolent dreams weren't to last. Nothing benevolent ever is, not with him.

He wakes up Monday morning with a scream caught in his throat, and he barely manages to choke it down before he can attract the attention of everyone in his apartment building. His heart thuds in his chest, bringing with it a lingering sense of disorientation and nausea, and he stumbles to the bathroom to wash his face with cold water.

In the flickering fluorescent light of his bathroom, the shadows slipping down his face are ghostly and sharp. They drag him right back down into his nightmare, and images of *Blade, gurgling with blood dribbling from his ragged lips, and the Leviathan, with its hundreds of teeth glinting in the pale moonlight* splatter across the backs of his eyelids. He plunges his face forcefully into the water, forcing himself to focus on the cold pressing against his skin and the swish of fabric across his shoulders.

He's okay. It's just a dream. Another damn dream.

He's back to 'relatively presentable' by the time he's gotten dressed. His tie is still a tangled heap, but that's normal for him; what might be harder to hide are the grey circles under his eyes, unusually prominent. He rubs at them with a frown, but they refuse to go away.

He sighs, smears his wet bangs out of his eyes, and turns away from the mirror.

The rest of the morning passes in a familiar, bleary haze. He's too caught up in his head to really *feel* things. He keeps falling back into the depths of his mind, where the Leviathan prowls an empty beach and Blade waits to pull himself out of a shallow grave. They're there whenever he blinks, whenever he gazes off for a moment too long. They never leave.

Uraraka finds him on the train, endlessly fidgeting with his headphones. It's clear that she can tell something's wrong with him— *again* , why is it always on the train that he's at his worst? — but instead of pointing it out, she just makes meandering small talk with him for the remainder of the ride. Izuku wonders if she knows how grateful he is for her.

Would she be the same way if she knew what he'd done?

He shoves the thought back into its dusty box in the corner of his mind, doing his best to not let his thoughts show on his face. Every time he thinks he's free, the guilt crawls back. It's never gone for long.

By the time the train hisses to a stop at their station, Izuku has majorly stopped feeling like he's about to slide out of his own skin and back into a nightmare. The cold metal of the pole grip finally feels like an actual texture instead of something he's imagining, and he clings to it.

Uraraka tells him all about a movie she watched last night on the short walk to UA. Izuku's not the best conversation partner, but he pipes up when he can, and Uraraka's smile slowly refills some of his fleeting energy.

Walking into UA is just a regular part of his routine now, as strange as that is. It's become familiar, and he likes it that way. He's never really felt... welcome in a school before, whether it was thanks to his own guilt or Bakugou's influence. UA is a breath of fresh air in that regard, and really, in many others too.

Izuku has barely settled in his seat by the time Aizawa trudges into the classroom, his hands in his pockets and his sleeping bag curiously absent. He looks tired, but then again, that's really nothing new. A couple of the braver students offer cheerful, "Good morning, Mr. Aizawa!"s, and they get a grunt in response.

As soon as Aizawa steps up to the podium, a hush falls over the class. Aizawa eyes them all, his expression as inscrutable as always, before he sighs.

"I have an announcement to make," He says, The class immediately perks up; even Izuku starts feeling slightly more awake.

"Shiozaki Ibara, please stand."

All eyes dart to the back corner of the classroom when a person stands, having previously gone unnoticed. She's tall, with olive skin and a thin build, and her uniform is well-kept. Rather than hair, wiry vines sprout from her head, a rich green in color and spattered with thorns. They're styled like hair, Izuku notes with interest; two are crossed over her forehead, almost like a crown, and the rest are gathered into a very loose ponytail tied with a wide strip of fabric.

Her eyes sweep the class, and Izuku hesitates when they pause momentarily on him. She tilts her head slightly, as if thoughtful, before continuing her searching elsewhere. Izuku's not quite sure what to make of that.

"This is Shiozaki Ibara," Aizawa says, fiddling with something on his podium. "She's a part of this class now. In other news, we're taking a field trip, so go get your costumes on and meet me at the gates. We'll be taking a bus there. Don't be late, or you'll be left behind. Dismissed."

The sudden transition from one point of excitement to the next almost gives Izuku whiplash, but frankly, it's merely what he's come to expect from UA. If the class was excited before, they're practically giddy now. When Aizawa leaves the classroom, there's a mad dash for the wall of shelves holding their costume cases. Izuku gets his last, skirting the edges of the crowd now swarming a rather startled Shiozaki. He debates trying to help her, but if Ashido's involved, there's really no point in trying to pry her off.

It's a warm welcome, he supposes, heading out the door. As he leaves the classroom, a distant rumble catches his attention, and he glances out the window overlooking UA's wide campus. Overhead, the sky is an oil painting of deep blues and greys, drifting ever closer with each passing breath.

There's a storm brewing in the distance.

—

The bus they board is divided into two segments. The front half is made up of regular segmented rows, and the second is an open area with the seats fastened to the walls. Iida tries to get them to load in an orderly fashion, but he's swept aside in the mad dash to get good seating.

The row seats are filled with breakneck speed, so Izuku makes his way to the back of the bus and finds a seat against the wall. Shinsou drops into the seat on his right, and Uraraka claims the one on his left. Iida sinks into the seat on the other side of Uraraka, looking defeated.

"It's okay, Iida," Uraraka says, patting his shoulder consolingly. "You tried."

Izuku smiles slightly and looks up. Across from him, Ashido has managed to secure a seat next to the new girl, Shiozaki. She's leaning forward, with her elbows resting on her knees and a bright, toothy grin on her face. Her hair, in its messy, curly glory, reminds Izuku of Bit's.

"So," she says. "What brings you to our humble abode?"

“...I’m sorry?” Shiozaki asks, blinking at her.

“Our— Our class,” Ashido hastens, and her cheeks color slightly. *Oh* , Izuku thinks. *So that’s what it is.*

“Ah,” Shiozaki says, and her baffled expression melts into a warm smile. “Our teacher, Vlad King, told us that one of our students would be switching with one of yours. I offered to make the trade.”

Ashido’s brows lower, and she opens her mouth. Then, her eyes catch Izuku, and she closes her mouth. Izuku looks away, gritting his teeth behind loose lips.

“Oh,” Ashido says. “Well, it’s— it’s great to have you here!”

“Thank you,” Shiozaki says, tucking a loose vine behind her ear. “If I may, what is your name?”

“Oh! My name’s Ashido, but you can call me...” Ashido seems to realize what she’s saying and goes stiff.. “...Ashido.”

“*Nice one* ,” Shinsou whispers, quiet enough that nobody hears him except for Izuku. And, apparently, Uraraka, who leans over Izuku to swat Shinsou’s shoulder and whisper, “Shh.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Ashido,” Shiozaki says, and her eyes momentarily dart over to Shinsou. He freezes.

“Pl— Pleasure’s all mine!” Ashido says, oblivious to the invisible battle of dominance taking place right in front of her. “So... What’s your quirk? It has to do with your hair, right?”

“It does,” Shiozaki says. She reaches up and tugs the strand she tucked behind her ear loose, letting it hang down in front of her face. “It allows me to manipulate the vines that grow from my head.”

To exemplify her point, the loose vine suddenly jumps to life. It writhes in the air, moving with surprising dexterity, before suddenly jetting forward. For a moment, it simply swirls upward, twisting itself into a spring before rapidly reversing the process. In no time at all, it’s back to its normal length, and Shiozaki tucks it behind her ear once again.

“Woah,” Ashido says faintly.”That’s... incredible.” Izuku can’t help but mirror her thoughts. That’s one hell of a quirk, and with seemingly no drawbacks.

“Thank you,” Ibara says with a soft smile that makes Ashido look like she’s about to melt into the floor. “What’s your quirk?”

“Oh? Mine? It’s, uh— acid,” Ashido says. She immediately holds one of her hands palm up, but seems to realize what she’s about to do and sheepishly pulls it back.

“I’d show you,” she tells Ibara, “but, uh... It’s acid, and, well. Property damage, you know? Also, I *really* don’t want to get on his bad side if we’re doing something fun.” She jerks her

head towards Aizawa, who Izuku is vaguely certain heard exactly what she said and has elected to ignore it.

"I see," Ibara says, laughing quietly. "That sounds like an excellent quirk."

"Tha— Thank you!" Ashido practically squeaks, her cheeks coloring. Izuku's not really sure what else she'll come up with to say, but he doesn't have to wonder, because that's the moment the bus finally creaks to a halt.

"We're here," Aizawa grunts, standing up before the bus has even fully stopped moving. "Look sharp."

The class quiets with startling speed, but Izuku's pretty sure it's more out of eagerness than respect at the moment.

Before them, to the side of the road, looms a massive structure; a metal-frame dome, covered in white-tinted glass that hides whatever's inside from view. The base of it is surrounded by purple and teal walls, and a gateway emblazoned with the letters 'USJ' in bright gold. Izuku's classmates peer at it, chattering among themselves excitedly. Uraraka lightly shakes Izuku's arm, a bright grin on her face.

"Alright, off," Aizawa says, stepping back to allow the students to all but stampede off the bus. Once everyone is relatively orderly, he leads them through the sliding doors of the 'USJ' and into what might be, for all intents and purposes, a whole different world.

Before them, past the banister and down a long staircase, is a massive training facility sprawling out across the interior of the structure. In the center, directly at the base of the staircase, is a flat plaza area complete with a fountain in the middle. From there, paths branch out connecting it to a variety of different 'stations'-- a huge pool of water with a few sunken boats and one hell of a waterslide, a city engulfed in flames, a miniature mountain, and so on. It's absolutely breathtaking in its entirety, and Izuku can't help the way his jaw drops.

While they're all gaping, a new voice suddenly interrupts their chatter; a fuzzy, staticky voice, like the drone of an old-fashioned radio host.

*"There's the flood zone, the landslide zone, the conflagration zone... every disaster you can imagine . I built this facility myself, you see, and I call it... the Unforeseen Simulation Joint!"*

All eyes dart over to the newcomer, who stands slightly off to the side. They're dressed in an exceedingly large puffy suit, which resembles an astronaut's gear rather closely, and a strange helmet topped by a black dome emblazoned with two white eyes. It's such a striking, recognizable costume, but to Izuku's surprise, someone speaks before he can voice his realization.

"It's Thirteen!" Uraraka chirps, bouncing up and down. "The Space Hero, who does their best work in rescue scenarios! They're my *favorite!*"

"I'm glad to hear that, young lady," Thirteen chuckles. A moment later, Aizawa steps up to them. He speaks quietly, but Izuku can hear him nonetheless.

“Where’s All Might?” he asks. “He was supposed to meet us here.”

Thirteen sighs. “Nedzu pulled him for something. Said it was important. Didn’t you get the email?”

“Apparently not,” Aizawa growls. “Damn that rodent.”

“It’s not that big of a deal,” Thirteen says, holding a gloved hand up. “He was supposed to be here for morale, mostly.”

“Of course,” Aizawa mutters. “Let’s just get started. Hopefully, he’ll show up whenever Nedzu releases him.”

“I’m sure he will be,” Thirteen says. “But, before we start the training— I have a few points to address. A lot of points, actually. Do you mind?”

“Go ahead,” Aizawa grunts, stepping to the side. With surprisingly light steps, Thirteen strides to stand in front of the class, folding their hands in front of them.

“Hello!” They say, oddly cheery. “If you didn’t hear, my name is Thirteen. I’m a hero who specializes in rescue missions.”

A few students start to cheer, but they’re silenced by a look from Aizawa.

“As I’m sure many of you are aware, my quirk is called Black Hole,” Thirteen continues. “It can suck in and tear apart anything.”

“And you’ve used it to save people in all sorts of disasters,” Izuku adds hesitantly.

“Indeed,” Thirteen says. “However, my power could also easily kill. I’ve no doubt that among you, there are some with similar abilities.”

Izuku freezes, suddenly feeling like someone punched him square in the gut.

“In our society, the use of quirks is heavily monitored and restricted,” Thirteen says. “It may seem that this system is a stable one, but we cannot forget that it only takes one wrong move with an uncontrollable quirk for people to die.”

Izuku’s chest constricts, leaving him quietly gasping for air. He’s aware of his fins folding low against his head, and he hopes that his classmates are too involved in Thirteen’s speech to notice the effect it’s having on him.

He doesn’t need to be told this. He knows it more than anyone else. How could he forget?

“This class will show you how to use your quirks not to take down villains, but to save lives,” Thirteen says. “Your powers are not meant to inflict harm. I hope you leave here today with the understanding that you are meant to save help people.”

Thirteen finishes their speech with a curt little bow, earning uproarious applause from their riveted listeners. Izuku is too stunned to join in, instead staring blankly at his hands.

For a moment, thoughts of the Leviathan's jaws and Blade's bloody face are swept away in the face of a new discovery; a blooming sense of hope, of *pride*. Pride in his own abilities—something he's felt before only in fleeting, infrequent moments.

Thirteen's right. That's why he's here, isn't it? Not to harm, but to save. To make the future better, and to make up for the past. If he's strong, he can use his quirk to take care of people rather than scare them. He can be the hero he wanted to be, before his childish dreams were dashed in a blaze of lightning and rubble.

He knows he can do it. He has to.

Then, over the sound of the discussion, there's a distant rushing sound followed by a deep, thunderous rumble. Izuku almost chalks it up to the beginning of the storm outside, but then Aizawa's head jerks in the direction of the sound, and Izuku follows.

His eyes are drawn down the long staircase to the distant plaza. There, just in front of the fountain, something is spiraling; a billowing cloud of black smoke, swirling in a slow orbit of its own making. It almost looks like a galaxy, Izuku thinks, bewildered. But there are no stars to be found within the rising smog. Instead, there are flickering spots of yellow, like whispers from the edges of a flame.

He's ready to assume it's part of the exercise. But then the smoke explodes outward into a much larger cloud, and from its foggy midst emerge... people. Strange people, dressed in blacks and greys, staggering out like an army of the dead. First comes a lanky man covered in flaky hands, followed by a hulking beast of shadowy muscles and jagged teeth. After that, Izuku catches glimpses of strangers with long limbs and gaping mouths, men with gas masks strapped to their faces, women with red eyes burning like hellfire, and he knows something is very, *very* wrong.

"Stick together!" Aizawa barks, and that only confirms the cold dread creeping into Izuku's chest. "Do *not* allow yourselves to be separated!"

His command is met from startled murmuring from the other students, who have turned to stare at him in confusion. Nobody else seems to have noticed the army approaching them. At least, not at first.

Izuku can pinpoint the exact moment people start to realize what's going on. It presents itself in furrowed brows and wide eyes, in aborted backsteps and gaping mouths. Uraraka goes pale, and Iida's jaw tightens. Shinsou seems casual at first glance, but his fists are balled so tightly they shake.

"Thirteen, evacuate the students and contact the school," Aizawa says. His voice is firm, tempered steel in the face of the danger ahead of them.

"*Aizawa*," Thirteen says carefully. They don't say anything further, but the name alone acts as a warning. Whatever they're trying to say slides right off of Aizawa, and he steps toward the base of the staircase. A single tug loosens his tangled scarf, and from its confines, he pulls something Izuku's never noticed before; a pair of bright yellow goggles, slitted like the visor of a medieval helmet and scuffed around the corners. Izuku recognizes it immediately.

“You’re Eraserhead,” he breathes, the realization momentarily drowning out the panic building in his veins. Aizawa’s eyes dart over him, almost curious, before his expression hardens and he turns back to the plaza.

“Communications are jammed,” Thirteen says, their voice low and careful. “The whole defense system’s down. I can’t get through.”

Aizawa swears, his fists tightening. For a moment, Izuku thinks he’s going to turn back around. Then he takes a deep breath, pulling his scarf into his hands.

“Take care of them, Thirteen,” he says, and then he leaps over the lip of the staircase and disappears.

There’s no time to watch. Thirteen calls them over to the door, and Izuku’s classmates follow in a hasty rush. Izuku wrenches his gaze away from the plaza, fighting past the ringing in his ears and the cold grating against his skull. Each step he takes towards the door sends a jolt up his spine, tingling like the lightning building in his throat. He can *feel* the Leviathan, coiling around his ribs and panting with ragged breaths in the back of his mind.

He needs to get out of here. The biggest threat here isn’t the villains— it’s *him* . If they get to him, there’s no way in hell he’ll be able to keep the Leviathan chained, and if it breaks free...

He looks towards the backs of his classmates as they hurry towards the exit. They’re all so *trusting* , naive to the true danger here. He feels sick.

At first, he thinks everything might be okay. They’ll get out of the USJ, backup will arrive, and the villains will go down without ever touching them. But they’re hardly a few meters from the door when darkness blooms out of midair; the smog, broiling and writhing like black fire, with tendrils of smoke creeping across the ground. Their group stutters to a halt, staring up at the newcomer. Izuku can’t breathe.

“ *Evacuating, were we?* ” The smoke says in a voice more like a windy rush. “ *I’m afraid I can’t allow that.* ”

Thirteen steps forward without an ounce of hesitation. “Stand down.”

The smoke regards them indifferently. “ *I think not, Thirteen. The League of Villains does not deal in petty threats, like the one you’ve issued.* ”

*That* gets people murmuring, but in hushed, hesitant tones. Everyone’s curious as to what a full-on villainous organization might entail, but no one wants to shatter the foreboding stillness that hangs over the conversation. It’s like the calm before the storm.

“ *Forgive our audacity, but I’m afraid you, Thirteen, are not part of our plan for today,* ” the smoke continues. “ *We have come here with one goal in mind. To end the life of All Might, the Symbol of Peace.* ”

Izuku’s brain stutters to a startled stop, and the Leviathan takes advantage of his momentary lapse in control to attempt to seize hold of its chains. Izuku stiffens, *pulling* with everything

he's got. The Leviathan slams back into its cage with a screech that makes him want to clamp his hands over his ears, and he hopes to God his classmates can't see what's happening to him.

*"You see, we were under the impression that he would be here today,"* the smoke says thoughtfully. Its form continues to waver and ripple, but its eyes, once stationary, dart to the side. *"Curiously, it seems that he is not. Well, that's no matter."*

"I will not warn you again," Thirteen says. A quiet *click* announces that they've uncapped their fingers, keeping their quirk at the ready. "Stand down."

"Y-Yeah," a new voice announces, and attention shifts to the lone speaker. It's Kirishima, crouched in a fighting position with his hands hardened into jagged blades. "Back down, or *we'll end you*."

His declaration is met by a few hesitant murmurs of approval, and Izuku watches as a few of his classmates shift into ready stances of their own. Sero raises his elbows, eyes narrowed, and Ojirou's tail whips across the ground dangerously.

*"Bold,"* the smoke muses, indifferent to the vague threat. *"So young, and yet you've already been indoctrinated with the words of heroics. I'm afraid your path ends here, young ones. Begone from this place."*

That's the only warning they get. The smoke explodes outward, arching up and slamming into them with the force of a tidal wave. Izuku's vision goes completely dark, and he's forced backward by what feels like a hurricane's gale. Above all, it's *cold*; like the biting edge of a blizzard, rushing right through his costume and chilling him to the bone. The Leviathan rises to meet its challenge with a bellowing screaming, and Izuku, caught between the two powers, can only fall to his knees and scream.

His cries, however, are lost in the roar of the smoke. He reaches out with one trembling hand, reaching for anything, *anyone*, but there's nothing there but emptiness and gritty smoke. And then, there's nothing at all; the ground beneath him vanishes, and with a scream, Izuku plummets into the void.

—

Hitoshi's only falling for a few suffocating seconds before the fog releases him, swept away by a new source of wind. He blinks as brightness pierces his eyes, only vaguely aware of the twisting sensation of *falling*. For a moment, he sees the distant blur of the USJ ceiling, and then he slams into something, *hard*.

That something proves to be water, which he realizes as soon as he shatters the placid surface of it with a burst of foamy white. The water is on him in an instant, soaking his costume and dragging him downward, and his momentary stupor allows him to sink further.

At first, he's shielded by a cloud of silver-laced bubbles. But their protection is fleeting, and they hastily scurry towards the surface and leave him alone in the murky abyss of the pool.

He distantly remembers someone mentioning a ‘flood zone’ at the USJ, and he figures this must be it.

His heart pounds in his chest with the rapid rhythm of gunfire, but he manages to reorient himself and starts kicking toward the surface. The water stings his eyes, but he forces them open, focusing on the rippling light above him. A moment later he breaches, coughing and sucking in a deep breath.

It’s lucky he does, because immediately after, something wraps around his ankle and *yanks*. He submerges again with a yell of pain, twisting around to see what has a hold of him. To his horror, it’s a *villain* ; a bloated, misshapen excuse of a man with beady eyes that glint even in the shadows of the water, whose webbed fingers are wrapped tightly around Hitoshi’s boot. He tries to kick it off, but the villain just smiles at him with far too many teeth and drags him further into the depths.

Hitoshi can’t remember a time he’s ever been so utterly terrified in his life. He’s seen villains before, sure, but never up *close*. Never like *this* . He knows that he’s training to fight them—that’s UA’s whole *shindig* — but he never expected to face them so unprepared, so *soon* .

But he’s not entirely unprepared, he realizes through the haze. He reaches up, groping with hasty, trembling fingers, and his nails manage to find the groove between one of the spikes of his headpiece and the base. With a yank, he pulls it off, and a tasteful part of his costume becomes a miniature blade in his hand. He plunges it into the villain’s hand with all of the force he can muster.

The villain recoils with a feral screech, releasing his leg. He makes a desperate break away, angling toward the surface. His lungs burn with the effort, but eventually, he breaks the surface and begins to swim with everything he’s worth.

His costume drags in the water, and he’s not going in any particular direction, but he doesn’t care. He just has to get *away* , away from that horrid thing trying to drag him to a murky grave.

Then he looks up, and a good distance away from him, he sees a boat floating in the water. It has to be part of the flood zone, he realizes. If he can get to it, he can get out of the water. He just hopes there aren’t any villains already onboard.

But then Hitoshi makes the mistake of looking over his shoulder, and he sees a fin gliding through the water towards him. It’s moving fast, *too fast* . There’s no way he can outswim them.

But, he decides with gritted teeth, he can try.

It’s a futile race, in the end. But Hitoshi swims with everything he has and then some, moving faster through the water than he ever has in his life. Adrenaline pumps through his veins, each pulse reminding him that if the villain gets to him, he’ll *die* . There’s no way that they’ll allow themselves to get caught off-guard so easily a second time.

He's not even a dozen meters from the boat when the villain finally catches up with him. He hears a bout of deep, ragged laughter, and despite himself, he turns. The villain bursts out of the water right as he does, leaping towards him in a spray of white with its claws outstretched and its fangs bared.

At the last possible second, Hitoshi is roughly snatched right out of their grasp. Something coils around his waist and *yanks* , so fast he ends up skimming across the surface and tumbling head-over-heels back into the water. When his head stops spinning and he's managed to get all of the water out of his burning nose, he opens his eyes to meet the level gaze of his savior.

"Hello, kero," Asui says, before she uses her tongue to toss him up and onto the deck of the boat.

Hitoshi hits the deck in a flailing heap, wheezing as he tumbles to a stop. His head whirls wildly, and he shakes it quickly to get it to stop. His shoulder is aching suspiciously, but he ignores it and pushes himself to his knees.

When he looks over, Asui has managed to clamber up the side of the boat and is perching on the metal railing. Her wet hair is plastered to her back, tangled around her goggles, but other than that, she looks no worse for wear. Hitoshi, on the other hand, is still trying to push his own sopping-wet fringe out of his eyes.

"Thanks," he manages to wheeze. "Asu— Asui, right?"

"Tsuyu," Asui replies, turning to look back out at the water. "I think we're in trouble."

"Yeah, no shit," Hitoshi can't help but mutter as he stumbles across the deck to stand beside her. As soon as he looks out, he can't help the breath he sucks in through his teeth or the way his heart staggers in his chest.

Scattered throughout the water are *villains* — far more than just the one chasing him, numbering a dozen at least. They come in all different shapes and sizes, but they're all drifting on the surface of the water and talking among themselves with hushed voices. Most of them are staring intently at the ship, but a few keep glancing down below.

"Holy *shit* ," Hitoshi mutters, ignoring the way his voice tightens. Tsuyu's expression darkens with something almost *guilty* , and her grip on the railing tightens.

"Midoriya's still down there," she says quietly. Hitoshi blinks at her for a moment, before her words sink in and an icy chill runs through his chest.

" *What?* "

"I tried to grab him, like I did you, but—" Tsuyu tenses, obviously frustrated. "He swam *down* , and I couldn't get to him. I had to go after you instead, kero."

"Fuck," Hitoshi says through gritted teeth, staring at the water. There's no way Midoriya's *gone*. He can't have just *disappeared* in the few seconds they were apart.

Yet, deep down, Hitoshi knows he could have. In fact, he likely did. They're surrounded by bloodthirsty villains who won't hesitate to tear them to shreds. If Midoriya hasn't surfaced already, it's likely he's already gone.

He's definitely shaking now. The reality of his situation hits him like a slap to the face. They're trapped, separated from their teachers, and surrounded by villains. There's no one coming to save them— at least, not soon enough. Either they'll fight their way out on their own, or they'll die, and they have no training to back them up.

“Breathe, kero,” Tsuyu whispers, and a webbed hand settles lightly on his back. Hitoshi forces himself to suck in a long, trembling breath, before he releases it more harshly than maybe necessary. He wants to give in to the panic clawing at the edges of his senses and start hyperventilating on the spot, but he can't. That won't save him.

“O— Okay,” he manages. “Do we have a plan?”

Tsuyu opens her mouth to respond, but she never gets the chance. At that moment, something breaks the surface of the water between them and the villains, bursting forth in a blur of flailing limbs. When the droplets clatter back down, Hitoshi realizes it's *Midoriya*, tearing towards the boat with startling speed. The villains surge toward the new opportunity, but before they can, Tsuyu wraps her tongue around Midoriya's waist and pulls him up as quickly as she can.

She sets him on the deck gently, but as soon as she pulls her tongue back into her mouth, Midoriya collapses to the deck like a sack of bricks.

Hitoshi shares a wide-eyed glance with Tsuyu, dropping to his knees beside Midoriya. She does the same, crouching on the other side and smearing his unruly hair out of his eyes. It almost looks like it's gotten *longer*, Hitoshi thinks blankly.

Midoriya never got the chance to put on his visor, so his eyes are on full display when not cloaked by the shadow of his hood. At least, they would be, if they weren't cinched shut with something alarmingly akin to agony. Waves of scales keep appearing and receding around his eyes, and he's twitching with gasping little whines.

“Midoriya,” Tsuyu says firmly, resting a hand on his shoulder. Midoriya flinches at the touch, and scales dart across the bridge of his nose with renewed vigor. His hands, fully transformed into teal-scaled claws, drag long white scratches across the deck of the boat.

And then, without warning, it stops. Midoriya's eyes fly open, and he sits up so quickly he slams right into Hitoshi's chin.

Hitoshi recoils with a barely stifled shout of pain. Midoriya, on the other hand, physically hurls himself away, landing in a crouch a few meters to the right. When he spots Hitoshi and Tsuyu, he blinks, as if not quite sure what he's seeing.

“Are you okay, kero?” Tsuyu asks, tilting her head. “What happened?”

“I— I’m fine,” Midoriya says, although he doesn’t look convinced of his own words. Something lashes across the ground behind him, and Hitoshi realizes it’s his tail, making another rare appearance. “I just— I freaked out. Bad.”

Hitoshi, frankly can’t blame him. If he’d been stuck underwater with dozens of villains for any longer than he had been, he’d probably be the same way. In any case, he swallows and slowly gets to his feet. Tsuyu straightens beside him, and after a moment’s hesitation, Midoriya does the same.

“S-So,” Midoriya says after a moment of painful silence. “This is pretty bad.”

“Pretty bad,” Tsuyu agrees. “At least you’re alive.”

And Hitoshi’s not sure if he’s imagining it, but he swears Midoriya looks almost *guilty* at her words. He turns away, gripping his shoulder, and mumbles, “Y-Yeah, right.”

Midoriya joins them in silently watching the water from the railing. Before them, the villains are drifting about and still talking, but none of them are making the first move. It’s almost as if they’re hesitant.

“They’re not attacking,” Midoriya murmurs thoughtfully. “I wonder...”

He jerks forward and raises a hand. A few of the nearer villains flinch back, even though Midoriya doesn’t do anything further.

“That’s what I thought,” Midoriya says, before he turns to them. “They don’t know what our quirks are. That’s why they’re waiting for us to make the first move— so they can analyze us.”

“Is that good?” Hitoshi asks.

“Hopefully, it means we have a headstart on whatever we decide to do,” Midoriya murmurs. “But— there’s no way we can fight them head-on.”

Tsuyu nods, croaking quietly. “We’re outnumbered too badly, kero.”

“Maybe... we could just wait it out?” Midoriya suggests. “Maybe— Maybe someone will come.”

“Thirteen said communications were shut down completely,” Hitoshi says quietly. “Nobody even knows we’re in danger.”

Midoriya swallows tightly. “Right. Up to us, then.”

They spend a few short minutes just staring at the villains, analyzing. Midoriya is startlingly adept at picking them apart, offering suggestions as to what their quirks might be and possible uses and countermeasures. Tsuyu is just as much of a strategist, her eyes narrowed. Hitoshi suddenly feels rather useless, but he quashes the feelings. He can have a breakdown when they’re not in mortal peril.

“The problem is that all of them appear to have powerful quirks— the kind that will be useful in combat,” Midoriya says through gritted teeth. “We can’t outrun them, and we can’t overpower them. We don’t have that kind of manpower.”

Then, he hesitates for a moment. His expression, once tight with worry, slowly unfurls into thoughtfulness, and his eyes slide over to Hitoshi.

“Unless,” he says quietly, “we can use that manpower against them.”

“You’re asking me to brainwash them,” Hitoshi realizes. “I can’t take control of *that many* villains at once, Midoriya. The strain would probably knock me out cold.”

“Not *all* of them,” Midoriya presses. “If you brainwashed the right one, we could use them to keep the others away and get off of the boat.” He points towards the distant plaza, separated from them by a wide span of water. “Once we’re there, we can maybe get out. Do— Do you think you could do it?”

“...I don’t know,” Hitoshi says, startled. “Maybe.”

Midoriya frowns thoughtfully, his tail lashing furiously across the deck. It’s different, Hitoshi realizes, but in a way he can’t pinpoint. It’s just a long tail, for the most part, dark teal with flecks of bright green, but... in places, he sees slight ridges, as if something is trying to poke out but can’t quite.

“Okay,” Midoriya says. “Here’s what we’ll—”

“*Get down!*” Tsuyu yells, prompting all of them to drop to the deck. A moment later, a huge tidal wave slams into the side of the boat, arching to cleave the entire thing in half. Hitoshi tumbles backwards as the boat folds inward, its two halves breaking away from each other. At the bottom of the rift between them, water froths dangerously, swirling with sharp chunks of debris.

“Can they just fucking *leave us alone?*” Hitoshi snaps, venom in his voice as he clings to the railing. “For five minutes?”

“Apparently not, kero,” Tsuyu says, creeping across the sharply angled deck on sticky feet to crouch beside him. Midoriya follows, his head ducked low and fins twitching wildly. His tail keeps... *warping* , like it’s not sure what it wants to be. It’s bizarre, but after a moment, it stops, and Midoriya raises his head.

“We need a plan, *fast* ,” he says, glancing past Hitoshi towards the water. For a moment, he’s silent, brows pulled low in thought. Then, his eyes widen, and he taps the back of Hitoshi’s calf with his tail.

“That villain, with the striped mask,” he says, jerking his head towards the water and prompting Hitoshi to stare at the villain in question. “He’s the one who controls water. I think I have an idea. Can you get him?”

“I— not from *here* ,” Hitoshi says, bewildered.

“Great,” Midoriya says through gritted teeth, before he turns to Tsuyu. “We need your help.”

At Midoriya’s command, Tsuyu uses her tongue to snatch the masked villain right from the water. He thrashes, but Tsuyu just narrows her eyes and ignores him.

“Put me down!” the villain barks once he’s suspended above the deck.

“Would you shut the fuck up?” Hitoshi snaps, even though for once, he wants the opposite. Funny how people love to disobey commands just for the fun of it.

“You little—” the villain starts, never to finish. Hitoshi reaches out and *takes*, and he feels the connection to the villain before him in the tightness in his head and the weight in his chest. Distantly, he’s aware of the villain fighting, but it’s like listening to someone scream on the other side of six-inch glass. There’s no worry of him getting out.

“Okay,” Midoriya says, grimacing. “Fun part. Shinsou, can you get him to clear a path through the water?”

“I can try,” Hitoshi mutters, ignoring the almost magnetic pull of his voice even when he’s not issuing a command. “You heard him. **Make a path in the water from here to the shore.**”

The slightly nuanced command hurts his head, but the villain obeys. The other villains stare at him, bewildered, but their confusion is quickly replaced by shock when the captured villain lifts his hands. Hitoshi can feel the push of the villain’s quirk just as much as the villain likely can.

All around them, the water begins to swell, like some gargantuan being is rising from beneath its surface. Then, with a loud roar, it splits in half; both sides rush away from each other in sweeping arcs, revealing a thin strip of dry cement leading from the boat to the shore. Hitoshi worries it’ll just crash back together, but it says, there, suspended; almost as if some great wind is rushing up from the ground, forcing the water upward rather than together.

“Let’s go,” Tsuyu says, springing over the railing and clambering down the side of the boat to dry land with the villain in tow. Hitoshi manages to awkwardly slide down the deck of the boat towards the sunken section, from which he leaps from the railing and onto dry ground. The impact jars his head and doesn’t help his building headache, but he ignores it.

From there, it’s a dead sprint to the shore. Over the silvery walls of water bordering his path, Hitoshi can faintly see the villains trying to force their way through the barrier. But the current is too strong, and they keep getting sucked under the water and tossed backwards. It feels like justice.

After what feels like too long, the path banks sharply upwards, and they haul themselves over the edge of the flood zone’s huge pool. Hitoshi’s boots scrape on the pavement and threaten to slide back down, but he manages to push himself up and crouch on the edge.

As soon as Midoriya joins them, Tsuyu draws her tongue back like a slingshot and flings the villain as far as she can out into the water. Hitoshi relinquishes control, and he the mental

tether snaps like a worn cord.

The effect is immediate; the water, once suspended with almost dream-like tranquility, crumbles with the roar of an avalanche. A moment later, it slams back together in a clap that reaches stunningly skyward. The villains that weren't caught in the immediate fallout scramble backwards, distant pinpricks in the water that seem hesitant to get closer now. *Good*, Hitoshi thinks bitterly.

"If we're careful, we can skirt the plaza and avoid further fights," Midoriya says, wheezing slightly.

"There's already a lot of villains in the plaza," Tsuyu points out. Sure enough, it seems like almost a third of the villains' army is there, clustered around a point near the fountains. Hitoshi squints, trying to make out what's happening— and then he sees a row of them go flying, whipped by a blur of white, and he realizes that they're fighting someone.

"That's Mr. Aizawa," Midoriya breathes. "He's— That's too many. His fighting style isn't— There's no way he can fight off that many at once."

But Aizawa, in Hitoshi's humble opinion, seems to be doing fine. As the fight continues, it slowly draws closer to the water's edge, and Hitoshi can start to make out more and more. Aizawa is *unbelievably* fast, barely a blur of black darting back and forth. In his wake, villains are left in crumpled heaps or groaning piles, and the majority don't get back up again. Those who do tend to get flung far away from the battleground by a flash of white, which Hitoshi realizes is Aizawa's *scarf*. It's a *weapon*?

As the minutes tick by, the numbers of the villains dwindle ever further. But even Hitoshi can tell that Aizawa is growing tired. His movements, once razor-fast, have started to slow. He's not the only one that notices.

It's only now, once Aizawa is nearly spent, that the one villain who had previously been watching from the sidelines launches into the fight. He's a strange man, dressed in a black shirt and loose pants nearly worn to rags. More bizarre are the strange hands clamped onto him, which clutch at him even as he weaves through the fray to get the Aizawa. He moves with far more precision and skill than the other villains; whoever this is, he's *far* more dangerous than the others.

The hand villain keeps snatching Aizawa's scarf out of the air with lightning-fast grabs, keeping it from wrapping it around him. This frequently ends with Aizawa yanking the scarf back and pulling the villain towards him, where he's free to kick the villain firmly in the gut. The villain, however, just keeps getting up, head cocked thoughtfully.

It's on their fourth 'round' that the pattern changes. Aizawa rips the villain towards him and tackles them to the ground, likely attempting to pin him there. But this time the villain reaches out, and Aizawa *jerks*. The villain is quickly sent sprawling by a punch to the jaw, but when Aizawa leaps backwards, he staggers.

"His elbow," Tsuyu says, her voice oddly flat. Sure enough, when Aizawa lunges at a few encroaching villains, Hitoshi catches a glimpse of Aizawa's elbow. It's flaky and raw,

revealing muscle and bone beneath the skin, and it's utterly sickening.

"Disintegration," Midoriya breathes, his eyes wide.

Distantly, thunder rumbles.

Despite the fact that his elbow is still flaking with blood and bone, Aizawa charges the hand villain again. The villain doesn't try to stop him; he just stands there, head tilted, waiting. His pose almost reminds Hitoshi of a vulture, watching its twitching prey and wondering why it's still moving.

"So cool," the villain muses, and his words ring loudly in the suddenly silence of the plaza. Their voice is like their quirk; grating and chafing, like sandpaper. "But hero... I'm not the final boss here."

It's a subtle movement; a flick of the wrist. Its effects are anything but.

In a blink, the monster that had previously been standing stock-still behind the hand villain comes to life. It moves with a speed that leaves shattered footprints in the ground, appearing behind Aizawa in a blur of black and pink. There's no time to cry out a warning. Before Hitoshi can even open his mouth, the monster has grabbed Aizawa's head in one of its colossal hands and slammed him face-first into the concrete.

Hitoshi can't breathe. The world seems distant, held away by the ringing in his ears.

Aizawa's yellow goggles clatter to the ground in front of him, and finally, he makes no move to fight. He just hangs there, twitching slightly, caught in the hold of a monster dredged up from a child's worst nightmares.

Midoriya makes a noise akin to a strangled wail, hunching his shoulders and clutching at his head. He keeps flinching, and he's trembling almost violently. Even from a meter or so away, Hitoshi can hear his ragged, desperate wheezing. He looks terrified, and his furiously thrashing tail only gives him away further.

The hand villain walks over to stand over Aizawa, kicking the shattered remnants of his goggles aside distastefully. Hitoshi wants to leap out into the fray and scream *get away from him*, but beyond his fury, he knows that he'd die. It's not a question of his skill or luck; it's a fact, cold and stinging.

"Interesting," the villain says, scratching at his throat. "It seems you're down to the last of your health, Eraserhead. Will you continue to fight? Or will you watch, silent, as your world crumbles?"

Aizawa doesn't reply.

"Boring," the villain says languidly. "Noumu?"

That must be the monster's name, because it pulls Aizawa's head back. For a moment, Hitoshi sees his face; it's broken and bruised, with a thick trickle of blood running down from

his hairline to his chin. Then, the Noumu slams him into the ground once again, and his twitching stops.

“*No*,” someone whispers. Hitoshi belatedly realizes it was him.

A vein of shadow ruptures the air beside the hand villain, swirling into a familiar spiral of black smoke. Hitoshi grits his teeth as the warper villain appears from nothing, quickly reforming into their full, bastardous state.

“*Shigaraki Tomura*,” the smoke greets calmly. The hand villain— Shigaraki, apparently— turns toward them sharply, almost dangerously.

“Kurogiri,” he greets coolly. “Has Thirteen been eliminated?”

“*They’ve been incapacitated, yes, but... I’m afraid a few students were able to distract me for a brief moment, and an invisible member of their party managed to slip past my guard and escape.*”

Any dread Hitoshi feels at the mention of Thirteen being ‘incapacitated’ is momentarily swept away by crushing relief. Someone got out, almost definitely to get help. Someone’s coming. They might live to see tomorrow.

Shigaraki makes a strange, gurgling noise, scratching so furiously at his throat that Hitoshi can hear the faint *scritch scritch scritch* all the way from the water’s edge. His head is bowed harshly, and he keeps jerking it from side to side, like he’s lost.

“We won’t stand a chance against dozens of pro heroes,” Shigaraki seethes, his voice low and furious. He turns away from Hitoshi, facing the fountain. “It’s game over for us. For now, let’s go home.”

Those simple words offer something Hitoshi’s been grasping for this whole time; hope, thin and fleeting. He should have known that it wouldn’t last. *Couldn’t* last.

“But... before that,” Shigaraki muses, tilting his head thoughtfully. “It’s best if we make a statement. There’s no use in vanishing without achieving a single objective. It’s time the heroes new that their golden age is coming to an end.”

He pauses for a moment, still itching at his throat. Then, he says, “But... why dirty our hands, if the Symbol of Peace won’t even show his face? Let’s let the pawns have some fun.”

He reaches out a bony hand and beckons. From the outskirts of the plaza, a handful of villains emerge; the ones who waited, eyes narrowed, as their fellow soldiers fell to Aizawa’s merciless hand. When Shigaraki holds up his palm, the villains pause, and Shigaraki points at one of them specifically.

The man scoffs, but he trudges towards Shigaraki nonetheless. He’s... *different* than the other villains, Hitoshi realizes. Where everyone else is draped in torn black fabric and hastily-assembled uniforms— badges of pride for a fight they’ve already lost— this one is simply

wearing a dirty dress shirt and slacks. His eyes are hidden by tinted sunglasses, but his lips are quirked in a grimace.

Hitoshi glances to the side. Tsuyu is staring at the newcomer, her expression indecipherable. Midoriya has his forehead pressed to the pavement and doesn't seem to have noticed him yet.

"Daigo," Shigaraki says, flatly, before, to Hitoshi's horror, he turns to point at them. "Get rid of them."

"I told you," Daigo snaps, "I don't *do* combat."

Shigaraki cocks his head. "The one you might have negotiated with is dead on the floor. We brought you here to work for us. Will you kill, or will you be another nameless body among the dead?"

"*Fine*," Daigo snarls, shaking his head and trudging towards the water's edge. With a flick of his wrist, the blades where his hands should be start to swivel violently, until they're nothing but a circular saw-edged blur.

"No guardian devils here this time," Daigo says, baring his teeth in a flat grin. "I'll give you a three second head start."

At the sound of the man's voice, Midoriya goes perfectly still. His trembling stops, his whining falters, and he stops tearing at the ground. Slowly, his eyes rise, and Hitoshi sees that they're wider than ever before. Why? What can this man do that the *Noumu* can't?

But something strange happens. At the sight of Midoriya, crouched on the pavement with his tail curled around him and his fins flared, Daigo falters. His brows drop to hide beneath his sunglasses, and he leans forward to squint at Midoriya, as if searching for something.

"*You*," he says, and his tone is icy. "You remind me of something." A wave of fog washes over Midoriya's eyes, and he suddenly arches his back and *snarls*. It's the most aggressive move he's made in this whole ordeal, and it catches Hitoshi off-guard.

"You'll be the first to die," Daigo says, and he raises his blade. It glints in the musty light of the USJ, and distantly overhead, thunder booms.

Midoriya moves so quickly Hitoshi feels the rush of wind tear past him. With a speed he doesn't—*shouldn't* possess, Midoriya slams Daigo into the ground shoulder-first. Daigo yells out and slashes, and Midoriya springs away from a slice that would have taken his head clean off. He's shaking, crouched low to the ground as his tail thrashes. He keeps gasping, clawing at the ground and opening his mouth in a silent scream. He looks like he's trying to fight back a panic attack mid-combat.

Daigo gets to his feet and lunges again. Midoriya skirts the strike, staying low to the ground. When his eyes focus on Daigo, his expression goes steely and cold, but whenever he hesitates—which is frequently—he seems to fall right back into the clutches of terror. He's doing better than Hitoshi would have, admittedly.

Curiously, Tsuyu is now looking strikingly alert, her eyes darting over the scene. She's looking for a way in, he realizes. Midoriya can't dodge forever. If they don't find a way to help, he'll die.

To the side, Shigaraki is watching Midoriya and Daigo's standoff, his arms crossed and his chin tilted. He looks fascinated, in an impersonal, almost scientific way. It makes Hitoshi sick to his gut, and he makes up his mind to stand and fight then and there.

But he never gets the chance. Daigo lunges, getting in a lucky strike at Midoriya's back—almost. At the last possible moment, Midoriya's tail whips up from the ground and strikes Daigo with a loud crack, sending him sprawling across the ground. To Hitoshi's shock, Daigo doesn't get up. He's perfectly still—not dead, but frozen, with wide eyes. As if he's realized something.

Midoriya staggers to his feet, his twitching suddenly much more apparent. His hands keep twisting, lengthening into jagged claws and then melting back into human hands just as fast. His quirk is going haywire, Hitoshi realizes; turning off and on and off and on rapid-fire. Can Midoriya not control it under stress?

“Well,” Shigaraki says towards Daigo, earning a harsh flinch from Midoriya. “That was disappointing.”

“What do you want from us?” Midoriya asks, his voice oddly raspy. He turns towards Shigaraki, and his fists are balled. “You— You said you came here for— for All Might. He's not here, and if he was, you'd already be in jail. Just *leave*. ”

“Bold words from such a low-level whelp,” Shigaraki says. “You're an interesting one, aren't you? You reek of heroics.”

Midoriya says nothing. Tsuyu is getting ready to jump.

“I wouldn't, if I were you,” Shigaraki says suddenly, and Hitoshi realizes that he's talking to *Tsuyu*. “Do you think you're faster than Noumu? You'll need to level up *much* more if you want to take on the final boss.” He cocks his head again and points to Midoriya. “Move, and Noumu will crush his head.”

Midoriya jerks, clutching his shoulders. His hair is *definitely* longer now, hanging around his face in thick tangles. His fins keep wobbling, flicking, splintering into more and more spikes. He takes a few staggered steps back.

“Fleeing so soon?” Shigaraki says. “Too bad that's not an option. Noumu.”

“*Run!*” Tsuyu yells, and Midoriya does, hurling himself to the side. The Noumu's hand slams down on the concrete where he'd just been, splintering it. Slowly, it turns to Midoriya, as if curious as to what kind of creature would dare to evade it.

Midoriya doesn't look back. He bolts for all he's worth, and with lunging footsteps that make the ground tremble, the Noumu follows. It catches up in an instant, swinging another fist that Midoriya dodges by a hair's width. The strike crumples another indent in the pavement,

kicking up a plume of dust. When it clears, both Midoriya and the Noumu are gone, vanished behind the tasteful foliage scattered around the USJ.

Hitoshi's heart thuds into his feet.

"Curious," Shigaraki says, watching the empty space. "He thinks he can outrun his fate. Then again, so did you, Eraserhead."

Aizawa's prone form doesn't respond.

"All you heroes do," Shigaraki continues with distaste, his attention turning towards Hitoshi and Tsuyu. "You think fate is yours to bend. Yet the future strides closer and closer. Will you run? Or will you embrace it?"

*"We're running out of time,"* Kurogiri warns. *"It is not wise to waste the Noumu's power on a—"*

*"Shut up!"* Shigaraki snaps at him. "Master chose *me* . I'll do as *I* see fit, *Kurogiri* ."

*"Of course ,"* Kurogiri replies, although he sounds uneasy. Shigaraki's sudden fury evaporates, and he turns back towards Hitoshi and Tsuyu.

"In any case," he says, his voice curling at the edges. "It's time to meet your fate, little heroes. All lies end here."

And then, with a splintering flash of lightning, the world snaps.

---

Izuku tries.

He tries so hard and he gets *so close* , but in the end, it's not enough.

He thought he'd be able to hold it. He'd almost lost it once, on the boat, and again, when the Noumu had crushed Aizawa. But he'd fought, and for the first time, he'd been *winning* . It had been with bloody hands and a ragged voice, but he'd locked the Leviathan back in its cage over and over again. He'd been stronger.

And then Shigaraki had said "Noumu", and he hadn't.

The end comes like this, with the Noumu pinning him to the ground amid smashed trees and flattened grass. He screams a wordless cry of anger, but it's no longer his own; anything human in it is long gone, replaced by something *else*.

The Leviathan is *everywhere* , its venomous fury rushing through every vein in his body and blurring his vision. He feels his eyes splitting, *changing* , and his teeth divide into more and more until they won't fit in his tiny, human mouth. He breathes, but it tastes like smoke and the storm outside, and the Leviathan *howls*.

The chains creak.

The Noumu stands above him, blotting out the distant, rain-coated ceiling of the USJ. Izuku screams at it, and his voice shivers on the knife-point of human and not. It *hurts* , like he's ripping apart his own throat, but he doesn't care. He has to get out of here. He has to, he has to, he *has to*.

The Noumu cocks its head at him, blind to the danger its in, blind to the danger it has put *everyone* in. *Let me go!* Izuku tries to yell, but all that comes out is more ragged, ear-splitting shrieking. He's tipping over the edge, and the waterfall is roaring, and there's no hope in sight.

The Noumu raises its other fist, holding it above Izuku's head like the blade of a guillotine. The Leviathan *screams* , and Izuku is swept away by the tide, pulled deeper and deeper until he's drowning in his own skin. His control drains from his hands, slick as oil, and he tries to grasp at it, but for the first time, he can't move. He's bound, in thick chains of sludge and scale that keep dragging him down, down, *down*.

The Noumu brings down its hand.

The chains shatter.

---

A tremendous blast rips through the air like a gunshot, punctuated by a geyser of smoke and rubble from just out of sight. Hitoshi claps his hands over his ears as his knees buckle, and vaguely, he notices Tsuyu do the same. Shigaraki's head snaps towards the sound, and his posture goes stiff. Kurogiri flares up in a warning, and on the ground, Daigo twitches.

Then, like a comet cast from above, something slams into the plaza with the force of a crashing train. The concrete splinters in a spiderweb that takes up nearly a third of the plaza, boiling with dusty smoke. When it slowly clears, a twitching shape is embedded a good few meters deep in the concrete. It's the *Noumu* , with its deep violet skin torn right open. The wound appears to be mending itself, but sluggishly.

From the direction that the Noumu came comes a new noise; a deep rumble, so low it rattles Hitoshi's bones and makes his head throb. With it comes a strange sense of all-encompassing, almost *primordial* fear that trickles into him like cold water; it freezes his lungs in his chest and his heart in his throat, until he can hardly breathe.

*What is this?*

---

"I sense a disturbance in the ground," Ibara murmurs. Her eyes drift upward, and Momo follows her gaze to where smoke is drifting from the far wall of the USJ— too much smoke for any one villain.

The two of them exchange confused, terrified glances. Momo had thought things *couldn't* get worse after they'd all been separated. Now, as she watches smoke drift from the other side of

the USJ and feels a deep rumble begin to build in the air, she realizes she was very, *very* wrong.

---

Kyouka rips her earplug out of the wall as a deep rumble thrums through the earth, jetting directly into her head. She clamps her hands over her ears with a loud curse, gritting her teeth at the sudden pain.

“Jirou!” Ojirou calls, leaping over a flooded crack in the ground to reach her. “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine,” she grunts. “I just— I heard... *something* .”

“So did I,” Tokoyami says, stepping over to them. In the downpour, he looks like a half-drowned hen, but his attention is focused elsewhere. His eyes are narrowed.

“A true evil has come to this place.”

---

“The fuck?” Sero mutters, the stubborn, nervous grin sliding off of his face.

Shouto stills, one hand hovering over a whimpering, frost-coated villain. His eyes slowly slide from the frosty hills of the Landslide Zone to the far wall, where plumes of smoke brush the ceiling of the USJ. Within them a shadow writhes, growing.

*Tread lightly* , his training warns him. *The real threat is yet to come* .

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“Mon ami,” Aoyama whispers, his face a rather shiny shade of white, “did you hear that?”

“Yeah,” Kirishima says, his voice just as hushed. Outside, the USJ has fallen painfully, unearthly silent. “What was it?”

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“Uh— *What the heck was that?* ” Mina half shrieks, twisting around so fast she nearly backpedals into a sudden spurt of flame. Even in his babbling, lost state, Kaminari manages a wobbling frown and a lost, “...Buh?” and Kouda freezes like he’s been doused in cold water — which would come as a welcome change from the oppressive heat, really.

Nobody speaks, but deep down, they all know the answer. *Bad news*.

---

“Oh my God,” Ochako whispers, covering her mouth with her hands as. At her side, Satou takes a step backwards, and Iida’s engines sputter to a shocked stop. Shouji’s arms swivel into ears, and a moment later, his eyes widen.

“I hear something,” he warns. “It... almost sounds like—”

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A scream rips through the air— a manic, jagged-edged sound that tears through Hitoshi’s head like fire through paper. He moves to cover his ears, hurl himself into the water, *anything* to get the sound to stop, but he can’t move. He’s frozen in place, locked in position so tightly he can’t even breathe. Everyone else around him is too. The chaos of the USJ has evaporated, leaving nothing behind but absolute, ringing silence, and the sound of the pouring rain.

And then, with a roar that rattles the panels of the domed ceiling, a massive shape twists free of the smoke and dust. It’s *huge* — so large that Hitoshi’s not even sure if he’s seeing all of it, and when it bares its teeth, Hitoshi’s hopes wither to dust.

If the Noumu is a beast of nightmares, this creature has to have been birthed in *hell* . It’s a monstrous, abyssal thing; a serpent, maybe sixty meters long, with dozens of flat, barbed fins bursting from its spine. It claws at the air with six knife-tipped talons, spiraling upwards in a journey unbound by gravity. When it finally arches over to survey the ruins beneath it, Hitoshi sees dozens of clustered eyes, all glowing with a sickly radioactive light. Waves of green sweep over its near-black scales, rippling in the flat, stormy light like iridescence.

It’s an impossible thing; the shadow of the ocean deep, given life and form by some irreverent power. For a moment, Hitoshi hopes it will just *leave*, return to whatever deepwater trench it dragged itself out and spare them of its judgement.

And then the Noumu staggers to its feet, bellowing a war cry, and the serpent plunges down to meet it.

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## Chapter End Notes

:)

well, that was certainly something, wasn't it? poor noumu.

before you go: credit where credit is due. thank you tanzy, for helping me with that god-forsaken boat scene, and tem, for fixing my atrocious grammar

and don't fret about the cliffhanger! ill see you all very soon in USJ Part 2: "It all gets worse".

happy holidays!

# two shall stand and one shall fall

## Chapter Summary

Everything gets worse.

(2/2)

TW// Dismemberment, Gore. Seriously, there's quite a bit of it, so be careful.

## Chapter Notes

good luck

[edit: i've been told by MANY, many people that this chapter is *extremely* emotional and can be kind of draining if you're not prepared. take care while reading, alright?]

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Toshinori folds his hands in his lap, clearing his throat. Across from him, one of Nedzu's ears twitches, the only indication he notices the movement at all. He looks too much like a stuffed animal for Toshinori's taste; it can be... unsettling, speaking to him alone.

Toshinori, quite frankly, has no idea why they're in Nedzu's office. He should already be at the USJ training facility right now, waiting for the students to arrive, but Nedzu had been insistent on scheduling a sudden meeting. Seeing as Nedzu's both his boss and a super-genius, Toshinori had been given no choice but to follow him and hope his already-crumbling relations with 1-A's homeroom teacher don't get worse.

"...So," Toshinori begins, wincing at how awkwardly the words tumble out, "you wanted to speak to me?"

"I did," Nedzu says cheerfully. "I'm sorry to have to pull you out of attending class 1-A's training exercise, but our schedules do line up quite infrequently, and I figured it was best to discuss this in person."

Toshinori frowns. "This?"

"The matter of your successor, of course."

"Ah," Toshinori says, shifting slightly. He's not sure if he'll ever get used to the term *successor* being thrown around so lightly, but then again, he's not sure if he'll ever get used

to Nedzu in general.

“You seem hesitant.” Nedzu tilts his head. “Is something wrong?”

Toshinori shakes his head, resting his hands on his knees. “No, nothing’s wrong, I was just... Never mind. Let’s discuss.”

“If this is about the USJ training exercise, I can assure you that the students are in good hands,” Nedzu says, seeing right through him in a way that makes Toshinori mildly uncomfortable.

“I’m well aware of that,” Toshinori replies. “I was hoping to observe the other teachers there, actually. I haven’t quite settled into the whole... *teaching* aspect quite yet. I think more observation on my part could be helpful.”

Nedzu’s smile is knowing. “I’ve been told the transition from Pro Hero to teacher can be jarring, even for the most prepared. It must be especially so for a hero as experienced as you. You’ll adjust with time, Yagi.”

Toshinori frowns, remembering the glazed expression of the child he hasn’t found it within him yet to face. He doesn’t *have* time, not when his own incompetence can result in children getting hurt. Still, there’s no use in arguing with Nedzu, so he merely answers, “I suppose.”

“Good,” Nedzu says. “If you truly wish to observe, Class 1-B will be using the USJ training facility tomorrow. You’re welcome to join them. On that note, I think you’ll find Kan’s teaching style to be a bit more... *suited* to your tastes.”

Toshinori’s not quite sure what to make of that. It *sounds* like a lighthearted jab at 1-A’s homeroom teacher, who as far as Toshinori is aware, is rather... harsh. He settles for a mute nod.

“Now, where were we?” Nedzu hums. “Ah, yes, the subject of your successor. You haven’t been responding to my emails. How is your search going?”

“It’s... going,” Yagi admits, rubbing his neck quietly. “I’ve mostly observed the first years, lately. Seeing if anyone catches my eye.”

“Has anyone?” Nedzu asks. Toshinori rubs the back of his neck.

“A few, but not necessarily because they’re candidates.” He smiles. “Young Ashido, for instance. She’s got quite the personality, but I’m not sure if she’s the One for All type.”

“I see,” Nedzu hums. “In that case, would you like me to set up a time for you to observe the older years? I’m aware that you intended to choose from the younger classes, but maybe you’ll find what you’re looking for a year up.”

“It’s probably a good idea,” Toshinori says quietly. “My time is running short. The sooner I pick a successor, the better. Might as well broaden my horizons.”

“Excellent then,” Nedzu says. “In the meantime, tell me about the students who *have* managed to gain your attention.”

“...Well, to start, there's young Kirishima,” Toshinori hesitates. “As it stands now, if I were to pick anyone from 1-A, it would be him. He has the spirit of a true hero, but he seems to lack confidence. I’m not sure he would accept One for All if I were to offer it.”

“Ah, Kirishima Eijirou,” Nedzu’s whiskers twitch thoughtfully. “Placed second in the entrance exam, with a nearly identical number of hero and villain points. I’ll pull up his file for you, if you’d like.”

“I don’t see why not.”

“Just a moment, then,” Nedzu says, raising a paw. He taps at the air, and a pale hologram appears. A closer look reveals the hologram-bracelet wrapped around Nedzu’s wrist, so thin it’s almost invisible against the white fur. Toshinori wonders how he’s never noticed it before.

Nedzu swipes though a few screens before he pauses. He taps at the screen once, but nothing happens. His whiskers twitch.

“Odd,” he says with what must be the animal equivalent of a deep frown. “I appear to be locked out of the registry at the moment.”

Toshinori stiffens. “What?”

Nedzu swipes some more, and whatever he reads makes his eyes darken and his fur bristle slightly. “The whole system’s down. We appear to have been hacked.”

“Does UA regularly experience cyberattacks?” Toshinori asks, unsettled. He’s heard of heroes getting attacked online before, usually by villains seeking to doxx them or gather information for blackmail, but it never occurred to him that the same could happen to a school. Nedzu’s flat expression only unnerves him further.

“No,” he replies, lowering his paws. “Never.”

Before Toshinori can question the implications of that, the door to the office swings open with a deafening bang. Toshinori nearly jumps clean out of his skin, but Nedzu only glances over.

It’s Snipe, dressed in his full hero costume and breathing hard. His hand clutches the doorframe so hard it creaks, and his eyes dart around the room before settling on Nedzu.

“USJ’s under attack,” he rushes out. “Bunch of villains shut down the system and broke in. There’s some kind of guy with a warping quirk, which is how they got in. We’re headed out now.”

Toshinori’s to his feet before he even registers doing so, his heart roaring in his ears. In a flash, he’s past Snipe and tearing down the hallway as fast as his emaciated body will allow. There’s no time for precaution; as soon as he finds a vacant corner, he ducks his head and activates One for All. The power floods his body in a rush, and he ignores the tight pain in

his stomach and the taste of blood on his tongue. With his new strength, the hallways fly past in split-second blurs, and before he knows it, he's outside.

It's pouring, and the sky boils with blue-grey clouds and claps of thunder. There's a minibus parked by the gate, its doors wide open as heroes flood in. Midnight's leading the charge, standing by the entrance and yelling, “*Alright!* Everybody in, everybody in, let's go!”

Toshinori reaches Midnight in a single bound. “Which way to—”

“It's three kilometers away,” Midnight says before he can ask. “Down the main road to the left. Big dome. You can't miss it.”

“Thank you,” Toshinori breathes, and then he crouches and *springs* . He's likely cracked the pavement, but pavement can be replaced. Children can't.

The city soars past him in a whistling rush, his cape rippling behind him with every leap. He doesn't stop; he hits the ground, crouches and jumps again, waiting for gravity to pull him back so the cycle can repeat once more.

He's moving as fast as he can, but he needs to go *faster* . Furious, he curses his dwindling power. He has to make it in time. He can't allow any of these children to get hurt on his watch, not again. He owes them that.

He reaches the height of his skyward arc and curves towards the ground, plummeting like a meteor. The landing he sticks would have killed a normal man, but it barely rattles Toshinori, and he pushes his momentum into another leap.

*Faster.*

He'll save them. It's what he does.

He has to.

---

“*Duck, kero!*”

Hitoshi hurls himself at the ground as a fin the size of a small boat swings over his head, so close the air *whistles* . It slams into the ground meters away, shattering the concrete like glass and kicking up a clap of dust. Hitoshi moves to scramble away, but before he can, a tongue coils around his midsection and pulls him away from the newest wreckage.

“Thanks,” he coughs as Tsuyu sets him down beside her. They're hunkered down in one of the few untouched spaces bordering the Flood Zone, hiding between upturned slabs of crumbling concrete and ducking beneath occasional wayward swipes. The competing titans have paid them no mind so far, but the consequences of their battle serve as danger enough.

The serpent and the Noumu move too fast for Hitoshi to follow, tangling together and breaking part in a blur of green and black. The serpent so far has done the most damage, shattering the plaza beyond recognition with strikes of its tail and swipes of its claws. The

Noumu is nothing more than a distant splotch of midnight skin, ducking and weaving through gnashing teeth and flaring fins, retaliating with earth-shattering punches. With each hit the serpent screams, slamming the Noumu into the ground and tearing into it with fangs the size of Hitoshi's forearm. But the Noumu keeps getting back up. Hitoshi wishes it wouldn't.

Out of the corner of his eye, he notices Tsuyu staring at something else, and he follows her gaze to the edge of the plaza. There, hidden among scattered chunks of rubble, stand the villains responsible for all of this.

Shigaraki's black clothing has turned ashy grey with dust, and a few of his strange hands hang off of him by fingers. What Hitoshi can see of his lips are pressed into what might a sneer. At his side, Kurogiri swirls like a stygian whirlpool, blazing eyes wide.

*They did this*, Hitoshi realizes. They brought this abyssal thing here, unaware of what it could do, and now it's tearing their weapon to shreds. He'd laugh if the situation weren't so dire, if it meant that after the Noumu fell, this would all be over. But the Noumu is the only thing stopping the serpent from targeting the rest of them. When it's gone, they're all fucked.

Shigaraki and Kurogiri are talking now, but their voices are lost in the distant roar of crumbling stone. Across the USJ, the serpent and the Noumu begin tearing the Mountain Zone to shreds, hurling aside boulders the size of cars to get at each other. Hitoshi hopes to *God* that there's no one there, but at this point, he knows better than to hope.

"Where's the blade guy?" Hitoshi whispers, realizing that Daigo isn't among them. Tsuyu murmurs an, "I'm not sure," her eyes narrowing. Hitoshi risks standing up a bit to scour the rubble, but Daigo is nowhere to be seen.

Then, beside a precariously-placed chunk of concrete, Hitoshi catches a glimpse of black fabric. His eyes narrow. With a start, he realizes it's not Daigo, but *Aizawa*, miraculously untouched by the destruction.

"Aizawa's still in the plaza," he hisses to Tsuyu, dropping back down to a crouch. "We— We have to get him, or he'll—"

He never gets the chance to finish. The Noumu slams meters deep into the plaza; . Above it, the serpent swirls to a stop, tiny flecks of crimson dripping from its panting jaws. Hitoshi freezes on the spot. He's not paralyzed, but if he so much as *breathes*, that creature is going to turn on him and rip him to shreds.

As the Noumu starts to stagger back to its feet, the deep gouges in its back start to heal before Hitoshi's eyes. So *that's* how it keeps getting up; some kind of regeneration. But the serpent doesn't give it a chance to recover. In the blink of an eye, the Noumu has been crushed back into the ground beneath a single, massive talon, the concrete splintering beneath the pressure. The serpent opens its mouth, baring its teeth with a crackling hiss as the Noumu struggles weakly. Shigaraki takes a step forward.

With a jerk of the serpent's head so fast it blurs, the entire top half of the Noumu's body disappears between its jaws. Hitoshi's blood turns to ice as the serpent bites down and starts to *pull*, shaking its head back and forth. A horrid tearing seeps into the air. Hitoshi claps a

hand over his mouth as nausea builds in his gut and threatens to spill into his throat. Oh, *god* , please don't—

The serpent's head rips back, and Hitoshi ducks behind concrete, squeezing his eyes shut. But the image is still there, branded into his eyelids; the Noumu's torso, hanging limply from the serpent's jaws, its lower half completely *torn off*—

Hitoshi ducks his head, begging his mind to stop, stop, *please stop* . He wants to crouch here and never move again, but if he doesn't stay aware, he'll *die*. So, on shaky knees that barely support his weight, he turns, peering back over the concrete. At his side, Tsuyu shifts closer to him, her eyes wide. He doesn't pull away.

The serpent hangs silently above the plaza, the Noumu dangling from its teeth. From its open end something twitches, and *muscles* start to slither from the bisection. They knit together, shaping themselves into a waist, two legs, two feet. It's *completely reforming*, Hitoshi realizes. It's *still* not going down.

At least, until the serpent adjusts its hold, *bites down* , and the Noumu's muscles stutter and halt mid-repair. For a moment, Hitoshi thinks it might keep going, but finally it goes limp. The unfinished muscles unravel in loose threads, and tangles of veins fall to hang like vines from a jungle tree.

The serpent opens its mouth, and the Noumu falls to the ground and doesn't move again.

“*No!*” Shigaraki screams, earning a harsh flinch from just about everyone in earshot. “No, no, *no* , it wasn't supposed to *go like this!*”

The serpent cocks its head, twisting in the air to stare at him. It's body swirls behind it, with jagged fins brushing the ground and blood still dripping from its open teeth. It almost seems curious as to what kind of creature would dare call out to it. Shigaraki takes a step back, fists balled, but before he can scream anymore, Kurogiri sweeps over him in an obsidian tide. They're both gone a moment later, leaving nothing but a few fading embers of black. The serpent snarls, drifting closer to where they'd just been.

As it sails forward, its claws scrape along the ground, knocking apart small piles of rubble. Concrete clatters to the ground in its shadow, tumbling about and crumbling into smaller pieces. One small slab of concrete topples over onto something hidden from view; a harsh shout echoes through the plaza, and the serpent pauses, twisting around to find its source.

The slab of concrete slowly tilts up and falls over, and from beneath it stumbles Daigo. He's pressing a wrist against his shoulder, teeth gritted. His agonized expression immediately crumbles as soon as he looks up.

*Run , you fucking idiot*, Hitoshi thinks, with bated breath.

Daigo takes a step back.

With a shriek, the serpent swoops down. Daigo turns on his heel and *bolts* for everything he's worth, only pausing long enough to glance over his shoulder. He's not fast enough; the

serpent shrieks again, shaking its head and pushing up off the ground so it can shoot after him. Daigo stumbles, eyes wide, and he finally gives up and turns to face the serpent right as it lunges at him.

His first strike is a lucky one. Or maybe not, Hitoshi thinks as the serpent recoils. There's a deep gash in its lip now— small, relative to the creature's massive size, but enough to hurt—and Daigo's spinning blades are flecked with blood. He doesn't seem to realize the mistake he's made until the serpent bares its teeth and splits the air with a scream. Then, faster than Hitoshi can blink, it lunges to sink its teeth into Daigo's arm.

Hitoshi jerks away, covering his eyes as Daigo is yanked up from the ground with a yell. He eventually opts to cover his ears instead, pressing his hands down as hard as he can in an attempt to block out the god-awful *sounds* he's hearing.

A hand grabs hold of his arm, and he cracks open one eye. Tsuyu shakes him lightly. Her eyes are wide, but there's a determined glint in them.

“ *Now* ,” she says, her voice hardly a croak. “We have to get Aizawa *now* , while it's distracted.”

Hitoshi would rather do *anything* than brave the wreckage of the plaza, but he knows she's right. If they want him to survive the day, they need to get him out of the line of fire, *now* .

Glancing both directions, Hitoshi edges around the chunk of concrete they've been hiding behind, then sprints for all he's worth. They trip on crumbling clay and slanted chunks of concrete, but somehow they manage not to break anything. He's breathing heavily by the time they stumble to Aizawa's side, but that takes less precedence than his teacher's condition.

Aizawa's laying face down on the concrete, his blood-soaked hair strewn around him like spilled tar. His legs are stuck beneath a slab of cracked fountain, and Hitoshi rushes to help Tsuyu heft it off of him. It's *heavy* , enough that he grits his teeth, but between the two of them, they manage. As soon as it's off to the side, Tsuyu sinks to her knees and gently lifts Aizawa's head from the ground. Her expression is grim.

“We need to staunch the bleeding,” she says. “For now, let's get him out of here. Take his legs.”

Hitoshi complies, gathering up Aizawa's long legs in his arms. Tsuyu turns him over and hooks her arms beneath his shoulders. Just as they're about to stand and start making their way to safety, Hitoshi hears something— a hiss, like the beginning of a storm.

A scream rends the air, and Hitoshi almost drops Aizawa to clap his hands over his ears. Tsuyu goes rigid, staring past him, and he forces himself to turn. Part of him immediately wishes he hadn't.

Daigo lays motionless on the ground. He's surrounded by a pool of *blood* , the serpent hanging over him, snarling. When he doesn't get back up, the serpent spits something out at

him— that’s an *arm* , Hitoshi realizes with a sickening lurch, oh *god* — and drifts away from him. *Back towards the plaza.*

“Hide,” Tsuyu whispers, her eyes focused on the serpent. Hitoshi nods, and slowly, they creep backwards through the rubble and slip underneath a slanted slab of crumbling concrete. It shifts, scraping against the stone beneath it, but it doesn’t give.

Hitoshi stays absolutely still, his heart thudding against his ribs and his fingers clenched white-knuckled in Aizawa’s bloody pants. At his side Tsuyu does the same, although with much more success; stone-still and silent, the only clue she’s alive at all is the slight rise and fall of her chest.

For an eternity, there’s nothing but agonizing silence; the kind so sharp it almost *rings* , slithering into Hitoshi’s chest and wringing his lungs tight with trepidation. He waits, petrified, for the spell to be broken, whether it be by a skull-splitting scream or the explosive roar of crumbling debris.

Instead, there’s a new sound; a wavering rumble, so deep it hums inside Hitoshi’s ribs like a warning. A moment later, the light outside their tiny splash of shadow dims, blocked out entirely by something hanging directly overhead. The rumble crescendos, quivering on the knife-point between a snarl and a hiss.

It’s like standing beneath a tree, waiting to be struck by lightning; the tension in the air goes from palpable to that of a rubber band barely moments from snapping. Hitoshi tilts his chin and swallows, holding his breath with quivering lungs. *Please* , he begs. *Don’t look down.*

The shadow lightens and darkens in slow intervals, and the snarl begins to fade. For one horrifying second, a massive, webbed claw dips into view, dragging thoughtlessly along the ground and leaving a thin trail of white lines. Hitoshi’s eyes follow it, unable to tear themselves away, and the claw eventually draws back up and out of sight. The shadow, however, doesn’t budge.

It’s hovering above them, like the jaws of a bear trap ready to snap shut on an unsuspecting animal. And it’s not *leaving* .

Hitoshi’s lungs start to tighten, squeezing like a vice, but he refuses to breathe. Even the tiniest noise might alert the serpent, and then that jagged-finned tail will slam onto their hiding spot, crushing them beneath a mound of rubble.

Seconds dribble past. Hitoshi’s lungs have started to *sear* ; he clenches his fists tighter and closes his eyes. With the hesitance of someone treading across thin ice, he sucks in a thin breath through his mouth. It hardly makes a sound, but he waits, rigid with fear, for that tell-tale screech.

It doesn’t come.

Instead, something *else* breaks the silence; a distant shout, followed by the crack of toppling concrete. Hitoshi flinches, his breath catching in his throat, and the shadow floating above

them stills. Then, it twists, drifting toward the direction of the noise, and Hitoshi prays that whoever made that sound doesn't do it again.

Whoever it is must be absolutely blind to the danger they're in, because he hears more crumbling rubble and shouting. An anonymous voice sharpens into one he knows, and with a sickening sensation in his chest, he realizes that it's *Kirishima* .

Hitoshi's dropping Aizawa's legs before he even knows what he's doing. Silently, he rises to a crouch. Tsuyu stares at him, her eyebrows lowering, and he presses his lips into a thin line and motions for her to *stay* . Then, before he can psyche himself out, he gingerly steps into the serpent's shadow.

It's *directly overhead* , so close he could reach out and touch its leathery underbelly if he were to stretch. Hitoshi edges sideways with finger-width steps, peering around their cement lean-to. His heart is beating rapid-fire and his mind is tearing at his hair screaming *what are you doing* , but he swallows past the dryness in his wobbling throat and looks.

The sound is coming from the shattered remains of the Ruins Zone— unfortunately named, now that he thinks about it— and Hitoshi realizes that Kirishima is *trapped* in there. He must be trying to get out, if the repeated scrapes and shudder of concrete is any indication, but that also means he doesn't *know* . He has no fucking idea that he's about to skip right out of the frying pan and into a goddamn wildfire, and Hitoshi has no way to warn him.

A feather-light shuffle of fabric at his side has him freezing, but it's only Tsuyu, creeping up to watch alongside him. The crease beneath her brows suggests she's already realized what's going on and is facing the same predicament as Hitoshi. Unfortunately, she doesn't seem to have any answers. Hitoshi balls his fists so tightly they creak.

The wall separating Kirishima from the rest of the world finally falls, collapsing into jagged chunks that scatter across the ground. From the dust emerges Kirishima, and a moment later, Aoyama, who's favoring his right side. They're both coughing, shielding their eyes with bruised arms.

Kirishima pauses, reaching out to steady Aoyama, and then his eyes dart up almost of their volition. He freezes, mouth parting slightly, and when Aoyama, follows his gaze he goes sheet-white.

The serpent arching its back is the only warning Hitoshi gets. He slaps his hands over his ears, squeezing tight. The scream splits his skull like a geode a second later. It's *deafening* , rattling his bones so violently he feels like he's being shaken apart, but no suffocating paralysis creeps into his bones.

Kirishima and Aoyama aren't so lucky.

He can tell because they don't so much as *blink* when the serpent comes tearing at them, slicing through the air like a fin through water. They look like they're trying, but they can't, and the serpent is bearing down on them. If they don't move, they'll *die*.

Hitoshi doesn't think. One second, he's crouched behind his hiding spot-- the next, he's tearing across the ground and snatching up a hand-sized chunk of concrete. He hurls it with all of his strength, and it whistles through the air to ricochet uselessly off one of the serpent's massive legs.

It doesn't hurt the serpent— *can't* , really. But it does what Hitoshi needs it to.

The serpent whirls on him with the fury of a crashing tsunami, dozens of eyes burning like dying stars. Hitoshi's mind whites out. All he has is a split second to think *oh, fuck* , before he's spinning on his heel and sprinting for all he's worth.

It's hopeless. He's watched what happened with Daigo-- he knows how this ends. Even as he scrambles over jagged hunks of cement and ceramic, he can feel it in his bones. He's running, but there's nowhere he *can* go, really. At least, nowhere the serpent can't follow.

But he doesn't want to die, so he runs anyway.

A stumbling step sends him careening face-first into a wide rift where the cement has been torn away almost entirely, creating a labyrinth of overlapping concrete and collapsing rubble. Hitoshi hops down into it before he can decide against it, hurling himself into the first possible hiding spot he finds. He hits the ground hard, jarring his shoulder, but his head's rushing too fast for him to process it. Instead, he focuses on catching his breath, balling his fists and panting.

A deafening scream reveals that he's not quite as safe as he might have assumed, and he has a split second to scramble back to his feet and hurl himself to the side before a claw slams down on where he'd just been. Solid concrete crumbles like dry clay, and Hitoshi stares at its remains, numb.

That's the last time he has to stop. The serpent lunges down on him again, and he's running, zig-zagging through a labyrinth of destruction and begging any god who might be watching to *help him* , *please* . He hops over cracks, choking on his own heartbeat and scrubbing dust from his eyes. Any place he dares to pause for even a moment the serpent destroys, turning more and more of his former haven into a barren battleground.

Reality's starting to prick at him again, in the form of lead-legged exhaustion. It pulls at him with magnetic weight, but he tears it off, forcing himself to run *faster* . The serpent's growing frustrated now, taking advantage of every tool in its arsenal. A finned tail cracks against a column of cement, sending it clattering; needle-toothed jaws the size of a train car snap shut mere meters behind him. And it won't stop fucking *screaming* .

With each step the fatigue becomes harder to ignore. Hitoshi's getting sloppy, breathing so rough he's surprised he hasn't coughed up his lungs. His whole body burns with exertion, weighed down by cinder blocks. But he can't *stop* , because if he does, this thing will *kill him* .

His fatal slip comes in the form of a crack in the ground. It's small, nearly unnoticeable, and that's why it catches Hitoshi's feet like a tripwire. He doesn't fall, but he stumbles, and that's all the time the serpent needs to swing a claw down and bat him to the side.

Hitoshi slams side-first into a sledge of concrete. Something in his arm snaps, and *wildfire* bursts through his veins. He screams, crumpling to the ground and clutching his arm to his chest.

For a moment, the world narrows to scattered pinpricks of sensation. His arm's probably broken. But he *can't* let that stop him. He *has* to get up, he can't pause, not even for a moment—

Hot breath washes over him, and his heart slams against his ribs. Slowly, Hitoshi turns. Above him the serpent towers, teeth bared, *too close* —

A blazing beam of blue and white cuts the air like a scalpel, slamming into the serpent's shoulder. It *recoils* , writhing away from Hitoshi and leaving him to crumple numbly to his knees.

*Aoyama* , all the way the other side of the plaza, staggers But Kirishima is there to steady him — and to step in front of him, skin hardened, when the serpent bellows and flares its ridged fins out in a warning.

“ *Don't* ,” Hitoshi croaks, his throat grating like sandpaper. From this distance, the words won't carry.

Kirishima pushes Aoyama towards the decorative foliage to his right and boldly stands his ground, even as the serpent shoots for him. He's going to die, Hitoshi thinks, lurching back to his feet. He's going to *die* , and all of this will have been for *nothing*—

The serpent reaches Kirishima with the speed of a bullet train, slamming one giant claw down on him and crushing him into the ground. Hitoshi reaches out with a half-aborted motion, a strange noise somewhere between a whine and a wail catching in his throat. When the serpent pulls its claw back and hisses, all that's left is a crater wheezing plumes of swirling dust.

And from that crater, *somehow* , emerges Kirishima. He's swaying, but even from here, Hitoshi can tell his skin is completely hardened. He's still *alive* , still *standing* , but he won't be after another hit like that.

“Is that— is'at all you got?” Kirishima coughs, his voice ringing across the plaza. Hitoshi starts to wonder what the *hell he's doing*, but then Kirishima glances at Aoyama's retreating form and Hitoshi realizes.

He's buying them time.

Hitoshi forces himself to *move* , stumbling towards the edge of the plaza and out of the rubble battleground. His arm sears with the motion, but he clutches it to his chest with his good hand and tries as hard as he can to ignore it. From the corner of his eye, Kirishima hurls himself at the ground to avoid a claw swipe. His chest tightens, but he keeps moving, stumbling toward the relatively untouched foliage bordering the remains of the plaza.

Just when safety seems attainable, a strained yelp tears through the air, and a blur of black and red skips across the ground across from him and rolls to a stop somewhere in the trees. He freezes, eyes wide and heart tripping over its own rhythm. *Kirishima*—

He turns, and there's the serpent, sweeping its massive tail back up into a resting position. Its head cocks slowly, curious as to where its prey has gone, and then it shifts to stare in the direction it sent Kirishima flying.

Its eyes lock on Hitoshi, and once again he freezes.

*No, no, he's so close, he's so goddamn close—*

This time, there's nowhere to run. He's not sure if he could even if there was; he's dragging, seconds from passing out. But nothing is enough to stop the bolt of ungodly terror that shoots through him and embeds itself deep inside his chest. The serpent's on him before he can even catch his breath.

It slams a claw down on his chest— not grinding him into the ground, like it had with Kirishima, but *pinning* him. It presses down hard enough to make him gasp; white-hot pain explodes through his arm, intense enough that his vision whites-out for a brief second.

With a rattlesnake-hiss, the serpent arches its neck, its jagged fins flaring out in a vivid display of fury. It's *pissed*, Hitoshi registers blankly, unable to do anything except stare into those wildfire-green eyes. He should be struggling, he should be fighting, but he *can't*. He's stuck, with his heart slamming against his ribs and every muscle in his body tensed.

The serpent angles its head to look at him closer, almost birdlike. Hitoshi presses himself in the ground, running on pure instinct. At this proximity, he can see splashes vibrant green flecked across the serpent's scales, invisible from farther away. A jet black tongue darts from between bloodstained ivory teeth.

He's going to die here. It's not the *first* time he's had this wonderful epiphany, but now it's finally sunk in. Every other time, it's been somewhat of a gamble; he's had a way to escape, no matter how slim the odds.

There's no getting out of this one.

Something bubbles up in his chest; a laugh, maybe, if he were to let it out. It fills him with manic, desperate energy he has no outlet for, and then he's shaking, his breath coming in ragged pants. Every time his chest expands, his ribs creak with pressure, but he can't stop. He can't do anything at all.

Done scrutinizing him, the serpent rears its head back, turning to look at him straight-on. For a split second, Hitoshi swears *something* happens. The serpent flinches, the fins on the right side of its head tightening. The moment passes-- with a roar, it opens its jaws wide and brings them down on his head.

Hitoshi shuts his eyes.

Except the world doesn't end. After a second, Hitoshi cracks open one eye. The serpent's meters away from his face, jaws wide. Except— it's not getting closer. It's straining, jerking its head from side to side and arching its neck, as if some invisible power is holding it *back* .

The claw on Hitoshi's chest loosens just enough to let him suck in a desperate breath. He tries to channel the jitteriness in his limbs into movement, but he *can't* . All he can do is tremble on the ground, petrified, while the serpent gets closer and closer to breaking free.

Something warm presses up against his side, curling around his chest and *pulling* . With an insistent tug, he's pulled free drag roughly over the ground, rubble scratching at his back and neck. The thing around his chest hauls him to his feet, but it's like his knees are made of jelly, and he immediately crumples. Then someone's helping him up, and he realizes with a start that it's *Tsuyu* .

He tries to say something, but all he can do is stare at her and pant. She glances at him and reaches out to grab his arm— his bad one. Fire lances up to his shoulder; Hitoshi hisses, and she immediately drops his arm to step around to his other side. Then she pulls his good arm over her shoulder, anchoring it with one hand. Her expression is tense, but she doesn't seem afraid. Hitoshi has no fucking clue how she isn't just as much of a mess as he is right now.

Tsuyu wraps her other hand around his waist and takes a quick step into the foliage that he manages to copy. Just like that, his legs are back online, and they take advantage of the precious few seconds granted to them by whatever power is restraining the serpent.

The serpent jolts back to life with a wavering roar just as they reach the treeline. It starts to turn, but before it can chase them, Tsuyu *lunges* , dragging Hitoshi along with her as they dive to safety. They hit the ground hard, but Hitoshi cages his gasp behind his teeth and rolls up before he can get hurt any further. His arm throbs hard enough to make him gasp. Still, he forces himself to his knees, pressing his hand against the cool dirt and *breathing* .

He's alive. Holy fucking shit, he's *alive* . He'd thought— he'd been *sure* he was going to die there. That the serpent would slam its jaws shut, and he'd be gone before his career could ever begin. But he's *alive*.

"Are you okay?" Tsuyu asks him, her voice rough. Hitoshi goes to respond, but snaps his teeth shut when another cry splits the air. He peers over his shoulder, expecting the serpent to be *right there* , but it's not. Through the trees, he can make out its silhouette on the other side of the plaza, fins flared and tail swishing. It's not chasing them anymore.

"No," Hitoshi chokes out. "I'm— I'm really fucking not. Where's Aizawa?"

Tsuyu doesn't comment on the way his voice cracks on every other word, instead pointing to the trees closer to the edge of the USJ. "I had to move him before I could come after you, kero." Her lips press into a grim line. "I was almost too late."

"Maybe," Hitoshi coughs, rubbing a stinging scrape on the side of his face. "But you weren't."

"I guess," Tsuyu says as she helps him back to his feet. His knees don't give out this time.

It takes them a few seconds to reach where she's laid Aizawa; the trees go from upright to keeled over, torn from their roots and left in splinters, and hidden among the leaves of one such casualty is Aizawa. He's still unconscious, but now there's a strip of bloodsoaked fabric tied around his head, which Hitoshi determines was once one of his sleeves.

One less thing to worry about. Hitoshi sinks to his knees. He wants to curl up and never move again, but Tsuyu might not appreciate that, so he settles for curling his legs against his chest and tangling a hand through his hair. Tsuyu crouches beside him, her eyes trained on the sky.

Just when Hitoshi's about to break their tenuous silence, Tsuyu stiffens and holds a finger to her lips. She creeps past him to the left, low to the ground. Then she breaks into a bounding sprint, and Hitoshi barely gets a few surprised steps after her before she's gone.

She returns a minute or so later, just as Hitoshi's starting to panic again, with a heavily bruised Kirishima and an extremely rattled Aoyama in tow. Hitoshi breathes a sigh of relief, closing his eyes and tilting his chin back.

"Thank god," he murmurs, mostly to himself, but it attracts everyone's attention. Kirishima lifts his chin, and his hazy eyes zero in on Hitoshi.

"Oh," he says. "Oh, Shinsou! You're okay!"

"I'm—I'm fine," Hitoshi manages, staring at him. "I'm not the one who got *crushed into the ground*. What the hell were you *thinking*?"

Kirishima smiles nervously. "Sorry? I just— You saved our lives, and it was gonna kill you, and I couldn't just stand there." He pauses for a moment, before adding, "And— *thank you*, dude. That was the manliest thing I've ever seen."

"Also the dumbest," Hitoshi mutters through gritted teeth, but before Kirishima can respond, Aoyama's sweeping in.

"Mon ami," he says, his words tangled together in his haste. "Merci beaucoup, je pensais que nous étions sur le point de *mourir*, et puis vous nous avez *sauvé*—"

"Uh," Hitoshi says, wide-eyed. Aoyama sweeps his hair out of his eyes, hiking his shoulders.

"Thank you," he says, in Japanese this time. Hitoshi's still trying to piece the rest of his message together, but he grits his teeth together and forces a smile.

"...You're welcome," he says. "

"What wrecked these trees?" Kirishima murmurs, squinting at the destruction around them. "Was it the snake?"

Tsuyu tilts her head, tapping her chin. "It didn't come over here, kero."

"Then what—" Hitoshi starts, and then he stiffens, like someone injected ice into his veins. "The Noumu."

“...Come again?” Aoyama asks, blinking at him.

“The— the villain’s monster,” Hitoshi says in a rush, stumbling to his feet. “It— It ran this way when it was chasing Midoriya, *where’s Midoriya* —”

His question goes unanswered, because that’s the moment a shadow falls over them all. Hesitantly, he looks up, and hovering above them is the serpent, teeth bared and eyes blazing. It twists, clawing at the air and preparing to plunge down on them. Aoyama whimpers and steps behind Hitoshi, and Kirishima lowers his brows and hardens his skin.

With a tremendous bang, the doors of the USJ explode open.

———

Izuku thinks he’s dying.

He can’t tell which way is up and which way is down anymore. The world around him is a whirlpool of kaleidoscopic colors and inky water, swelling and sinking in huge waves and tossing him around like a ragdoll. He keeps flipping, twisting around in an endless abyss, and he can’t *breathe*.

At times, the blackness around him will swell, and he’ll burst into a fractured vision of images moving too quickly for him to parse— blurs of light and sound, flashes of black and red— before the waves crash over him and he’s pulled into emptiness again.

He keeps clawing his way up, kicking and tearing and *reaching* , but there *is* no up. There’s no way out. There are chains around his ankles and around his wrists, and they’re pulling tight, pulling him *down* . No matter how much he thrashes and *screams* , he’s trapped, and his struggling just ensnares him tighter.

But he can’t give up. He *can’t*. He has to keep trying, or the Leviathan is going to destroy *everything*. He can’t let this happen. He can’t let his own ignorance— his own *complacency* — be the cause of a slaughter. He *can’t*. He *won’t*.

He gets dragged back into the suffocating darkness again, spinning head-over-heels into the space between stars. He’s drowning again; the shadows rush into his throat, filling his chest and blotting out his eyes, and he can’t fucking *breathe* —

A wave crests, hurling him into an overwhelming ocean of images and sounds. He breathes in light and color, his eyes wide, and in that moment, he *sees*.

*The plaza of the USJ, torn to rubble. The Noumu, lying in two sickening halves. A blur of sound, the flash of a blade.*

And then, just before he falls beneath the oily shadows, there’s one more vision; *Shinsou, pinned beneath one hellish claw, with wild eyes and nowhere to run.*

There’s something, deep in his chest; a burning, ravenous roar, expanding and humming with power. A storm builds in his lungs, reaching his throat and filling his mouth with smoke and

lightning. Distantly his— *not his, not anymore* — jaws open, preparing to snap shut. On *Shinsou* .

And Izuku *screams* , and he tears, and he *refuses*.

The chains wrapped around his throat and his chest suck the fight out of his body like black holes. But he won't give up— *can't* give up, so he pulls with every ounce of strength he has left, begging whatever god that might be watching to *help him, please*.

And somehow, someone answers. Something gives, and for a moment, the chains vanish. The world stops shaking and heaving, and just like that, he's standing on the surface of an endless black sea. *Power* floods his veins, rushing in like a victorious riptide, and his lungs fill with the thrum of hurricanes. Overhead, the sky is a splintered spider web of images, woven together through the lenses of too many eyes. And through the kaleidoscope, in a dozen different angles, he watches a tongue wrap around Shinsou and yank him out of harm's way.

He's okay. He's *alive* .

As soon as the thought passes through his head, something breaks, splintering like glass. The moment of stillness ends, the world *rolls* , the chains *yank* , and Izuku is ripped from the safety of color and light back into the darkness. It swarms him, pressing in on his eyes and filtering into his mouth with iron and coal, and though he tries to scream, there's no sound. A roar fills his body, so loud it rattles every bone and sets his chest ablaze, and then the world sinks out, and he knows only pain.

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When Toshinori reaches the USJ, he's not sure what to expect. Villains— that reality has been eating away at him for the entire length of his short trip— but he's not sure how many, or how much damage they've already done. They have to be strong, if they're so bold as to break into UA, but he doesn't know *how strong* .

It's in his nature to hope for the best and prepare for the worst. But he could never prepare for what he sees when he slams open the doors.

The USJ has been completely *demolished* . The central plaza, so crisp and perfect in pictures, has been reduced to nothing but strewn rubble, and the zones around it are cracked and crumbling. Buildings have collapsed, trees have been torn from the ground-- it's like the beginning of an apocalypse film. Around him, at the base of the stairs, a group of students cower. They look to him with hope in their eyes.

But what catches his attention most is the villain— the *creature* hovering within, which has turned to stare at him. It's a massive, ungodly thing; a serpent, covered in spiny fins and near-black scales, with clusters of glowing eyes and six clawed legs. It's floating above the edge of the USJ, unbound by gravity, and Toshinori suspects it's gauging him. Waiting for him to make the first move.

So he does.

He reaches the serpent in a single leap, drawing back his fist. It connects with the side of its massive jaw, and its head snaps to the side in a blur of fins and fur. The serpent recoils, shooting through the air with surprising speed and twisting around to face him. Toshinori hits the ground a moment later, landing in a crouch and returning to his feet.

An aborted sound from behind him catches his attention, and he turns to find *his students* staring at him with wide, relieved eyes. They're bloody and bruised, trembling, and they would have died, had he not been in time.

A wildfire blazes in his chest. He draws back his lips into the widest smile he can.

"It's alright now," he says. "Why? Because *I am here!*"

His catchphrase has always been his greatest ally in calming scared civilians. It doesn't fail him now. The students staring at him visibly relax, and young Kirishima even offers a tired smile of his own. Then his eyes slide past Toshinori's shoulder and it evaporates. His eyes widen as he shouts, "*Look out!*"

Toshinori turns just in time to swing a fist into the serpent's teeth, right as it's about to snap its jaws shut around him. It jerks back with a shriek, shaking out the injury and snarling at him. Toshinori meets its bared teeth with his own and vaults back into the fray.

Rather than meet him head-on, it twists out of the way, trying to snap at him from behind. Toshinori spins midair and slams the bottom of its jaw with an uppercut, sending it shrieking and swiping him from the sky with one massive claw.

Normally, he'd be self-conscious about leaving craters in the ground, but it seems the USJ already has plenty. Toshinori picks himself up and dusts himself off, but before he can jump again, the serpent has already plunged down to meet him.

He has to jet to the side to avoid the first crack of its tail, and even then, it's close. He shoots forward to slam a fully-powered fist into the serpent's throat; it topples backward, falling belly up to the ground. While it's prone, Toshinori aims for the face, landing punches to its jaw.

The serpent is *wailing* now, a bloodcurdling, inhuman sound. Every time he hears it, Toshinori's muscles start to lock up, but he powers through the sensation. He won't back down or stop. He has a duty to protect his students; he's failed them once. He will *not* fail again.

The serpent swats him out of the air with its tail again, rolling back onto its stomach so it can scramble into the air. Toshinori's up before it can get away, landing a jab between its shoulders that sends it slamming back down. It shrieks and hisses at him, eyes burning, and strikes out with a claw. He parries before it can grab him; something *snaps* with the motion, and the serpent writhes wildly, jerking its head from side to side. Toshinori nearly gets cuffed by a giant fin as it snaps open, and he's forced to leap to the side.

The serpent darts back into the air, coiling around to face him and opening its jaws wide. The claw that Toshinori had punched hangs limp near its chest, but the others tear with manic

energy at the air. He'll have to be careful; one lucky hit could do him in. But he's weathered worse, so he takes a few steps and jumps up to meet it.

The fight condenses into a flurry of movement and sound. The serpent is *fast*, and it takes advantage of that to swirl around him and strike at his open back. Toshinori refuses to let it, slamming it into the ground over and over again and pummeling it before it can get back up.

Most villains he fights are down after a single punch. The larger, stronger ones might take a handful. This villain has taken dozens, and yet it keeps moving, hissing at him and striking back. No matter. It's endurance won't be enough to save it.

He strikes anywhere he can reach. The serpent's size, despite being its greatest weapon, is also its greatest disadvantage; it's a huge target, and Toshinori doesn't have to worry about missing.

The punch he lands to the serpent's jaw shatters the earth beneath them. It screams again, eyes cinched shut, then turns on him in a blaze of fury.

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*It hurts, it hurts so bad*, and Izuku's screaming but he *can't stop it, he can't do anything*. He tries to cry out *stop, please*, but the words are choked out by tacky oil, and there's no one to hear him.

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The serpent lunges at him, mouth gaping open, and Toshinori catches it with both hands. It takes all his strength to keep its teeth from snapping shut on him, but with a mighty heave, he grabs its jaws and hurls it to the ground. For a moment, it doesn't get up, and Toshinori wonders with baited breath if the fight is finally coming to a close. Then it shakes its head and slowly picks itself back up from the ground, debris showering from its scales and back onto the plaza. It's still up, but it's moving slower now, panting raggedly.

This monster has hurt his students, and if he doesn't take it down now, it will hurt countless more. So he draws back his fist, forcing as much of One for All into his arm as he possibly can, and swings.

He hits the creature in the neck, and it shrieks as it plummets once more to slam into the ground, harder now than ever before. The floor beneath it shatters like china, spitting forth a massive cloud of dust. Toshinori's forced to cover his eyes as the dust envelops him, leaving him coughing. His cape flutters behind him, and he hits the ground right as the dust behinds to clear. When he opens his eyes, something's moving within the cloud— a shrinking silhouette, twisting violently— but it disappears a moment later. When the dust clears, Toshinori stares wide-eyed at...

...Nothing.

That doesn't make sense. How could such a creature have just *disappeared*? He'd seen it in the cloud mere moments ago, thrashing. It can't have fled— he would have seen it. But it's

not here. All there is now is a long crater in the ground, only one among many.

Toshinori curses. *The warp villain*. If the villains had such a weapon as that, they'd do anything to prevent its capture. They must have whisked it away the moment they realized it was about to fall. That a group of villains still have such power at their disposal is terrifying and infuriating, but Toshinori can't focus on that right now. He has to make sure everyone is alright.

The first place he turns to is the spot where he'd encountered his students. He reaches them in a quick leap, and they all startle when he touches down in front of them. There's four of them — Asui, Aoyama, Kirishima, and Shinsou— and of them, Kirishima and Shinsou seem to be the worst off.

"The villain that attacked you is gone," he tells them, and the relief that passes through their faces is painful. "Now, let's get you out of here."

"Not us," Asui says, and before he can so much as move forward, she's leaping away from him and uncovering something hidden within the leaves of a downed tree. Toshinori starts; it's an unconscious Aizawa, his face smeared with blood.

"He got hurt fighting one of the villains that attacked us," she says. She starts to lift him, but Toshinori steps forward, him in his arms. His matted black hair leaves a red smear on the arms of Toshinori's costume.

"Thank you, young Asui," he says. "I'll be back in just a moment."

He takes a few steps and then jumps, his cape crackling behind him as he soars through the air to skid to a stop at the base of the stairs. The rest of the teachers have just arrived—they're ushering the students that remain by the entrance outside. They look up when Toshinori arrives.

"Oh my God," Present Mic says, his eyes widening behind his glasses. "*Shouta?*"

"He was injured by a villain," Toshinori says. "He needs immediate help."

"We've got ambulances outside," Vlad King says, holding out his arms. "I'll take him. Start looking for the rest of the students. The warp villain scattered them throughout the USJ."

"Of course," Toshinori says, handing over Aizawa and turning back around. A moment later, he's back with Asui and the others, who break away from their conversation to look at him.

"Will... will Monsieur Aizawa be alright?" Aoyama asks hesitantly, his expression pinched. Toshinori nods.

"Aizawa's a tough man. He'll be fine. How are the four of you?"

"Alive," Shinsou comments. He's cradling his left arm. "Could be worse."

The exhaustion in his voice tugs at Toshinori's heart, and he steps forward. "I suppose that's all we can hope for at a time like this. Hold on."

The students are young, and they don't object when Toshinori picks them up. They do, however, squeak when he takes off, and he apologizes as soon as he sets them down. He doesn't have time to spare, though, so he's leaping back into the remains of the USJ as soon as he's sure they're alright.

He pulls Kaminari, Kouda, and Ashido from the Conflagration Zone, from where they're hiding in a building. Ashido cries with relief at the sight of him, and Kouda heaves a silent sigh. Kaminari merely babbles something unintelligible, holding his thumbs up with a distant grin.

Yaoyorozu and the new addition to 1-A, Shiozaki Ibara, he finds near the base of the Mountain Zone's crumbling remains. Yaoyorozu's costume is nearly in shreds, and she's clutching the hilt of a long metal staff like a lifeline. Ibara's bruised, and she has a gash over her eye, but determination burns in her eyes. They move to attack him when he first sets down, but their apprehension melts away when they realize who he is.

The Storm Zone yields Jirou, Tokoyami, and Ojiro, drenched and shivering. Jirou's bleeding from a gash on the back of her head which she clutches grimly, and Tokoyami's limping. Ojiro's tail is black and blue with bruising. Of the students he finds, they might be the worst off, and he takes special care when helping them back to the entrance and waiting ambulances.

The last students he finds are Todoroki and Sero, who have already left the iced-over Landslide Zone and are making their way toward the entrance. Todoroki seems entirely unharmed, although he's tense, and Sero's limping and laughing nervously, but other than that, he's alright. Todoroki refuses his help, explaining that he's fine to walk, so Toshinori tells him to be careful and takes Sero up to the entrance. He decides not to comment on Sero's terrified "*Holy shit!*" as they shoot through the air and skim to a stop by the entrance.

Most of the teachers have spread throughout the USJ to round up the remaining villains, so Toshinori steps outside. All around him, paramedics are looking over students, ushering an unfortunate handful of them into ambulances. One such student appears to be young Shinsou, who's quietly talking with Uraraka and Iida while a paramedic secures his arm in a temporary sling. He keeps wincing, but he's putting on a good show in keeping the pain out of his expression.

Shinsou mumbles something lost in the roar of the rain, and then he stiffens like he's been shot. He mouths something, and then he's surveying the crowd, almost frantic. When he doesn't find what he's looking for, he jerks away from the startled paramedic and all but sprints at Toshinori.

"Midoriya," Shinsou says. "Where is he?"

Toshinori's heart thuds to his feet. He doesn't remember seeing Midoriya among the students he rescued, and he wasn't at the entrance, either. *Shit*.

"I'm not sure. Do you know what Zone he landed in?"

Shinsou's expression tightens. "He— He was in the Flood Zone, with us, but the Noumu—the villain that took down Aizawa went after him right before the snake appeared. He ran off, and we didn't see him again. *Please*, you have to find him—"

"I will," Toshinori says, holding up a hand. "I'm sure he's alright." It rings hollow. "I'll find him."

Shinsou nods, and Toshinori turns and sprints back into the USJ. He passes a few teachers carrying cursing or unconscious villains, and he spares them a passing glance, but none of them have Midoriya with them.

An area of flattened grass and demolished trees catches his attention, and Toshinori carefully walks toward the break in the foliage. It's right at the edge of the USJ, where the glass is spider-webbed with cracks, as if something slammed into it. Rain drips through, running down the glass and pooling around an almost unrecognizable figure.

Toshinori gasps when he recognizes young Midoriya. He's bloodied and battered to an unbelievable degree, his arms bent at strange angles and his eyes loosely shut. His jaw lies half-open, deep red and cracked, and his neck is covered in scrapes. His costume lies in rags around him, barely covering him at all.

Toshinori races forward, falling to his knees beside Midoriya. He's hesitant to touch him at all— Midoriya's whole chest is mottled with deep bruises, scrapes, and gashes— but he has to. Slowly, he presses two fingers against young Midoriya's neck, light as he can.

Midoriya's alive. His lungs fill and deflate, so subtle it's almost unnoticeable, and his heartbeat is weak, but there. It's a miracle, but not one that will last without help.

"I'm sorry," Toshinori whispers as he gently pulls Midoriya from the muddy ground and wrapping him in his cape. Midoriya's face screws up at the touch.

He can't risk the shock of leaping straight to the entrance, so he holds Midoriya as steady as he can and *sprints*. It's not as fast, but Toshinori reaches the stairway in a few seconds. Then he's plunging out into the wet air beyond the USJ, flagging down the first paramedic he sees.

The paramedic— a young man with ram horns— stiffens when he sees Midoriya, but he calls over some of his coworkers and a stretcher. They load Midoriya on, leaving him draped in Toshinori's cape, which Toshinori detaches from his costume. Then they cut through the ground, weaving toward one of the ambulances parked nearby.

Toshinori watches them go, unable to look away. That's *young Midoriya* — the student Toshinori has now let get brutally injured *twice*. The one he swore he wouldn't fail again.

He forces himself to look away, turning to see if there's anyone he can help. The last of the villains have been captured and are slowly being loaded into waiting police cars. A few of them struggle, but they freeze as soon as Toshinori so much as looks at them.

Amidst the chaos, another car pulls up— not a standard police car, but one Toshinori recognizes nonetheless. Naomasa slams the driver's side door shut and runs through the rain, holding his hat on his head with one hand.

"I came as soon as Tsuragamae called," he rushes. "Toshinori, what *happened*?"

"A villain attack," Toshinori says, twisting his hands together. "They used a warping quirk to transport a large number of villains and... and some kind of huge serpent into the USJ."

Naomasa goes rigid. When he looks back up at Toshinori, there's something new in his expression. "Repeat that last part?"

"A serpent," Toshinori says, frowning. "Well, not exactly. It almost looked like some sort of marine creature. Do you know it?"

"I better fucking not," Naomasa says, clutching his head with one hand. Toshinori startles at the sudden curse.

"Are you alright?"

"Not really," Naomasa says, pursing his lips and glaring at the ground. "The villain you fought— the serpent— did it have more than two eyes? And fins?"

"So you do know of it, then," Toshinori says quietly. Naomasa mutters something unintelligible.

"God— This is *bad*. You said you defeated that thing— did you catch it?"

Toshinori shakes his head. "I tried, but the villains warped it away before I could."

Naomasa knits his hands together in front of his face, blowing out a harsh breath. Toshinori rests a hand on his shoulder, trying not to let his worry show too blatantly.

"Naomasa?"

"The Leviathan," Naomasa says, not looking up. "The villain I told you about once— it showed up ten years ago, killed thirty-two people and disappeared. Until recently. Until *now*." He presses his hands against his face. "If it's somehow affiliated with any villain group, that's *bad*. God knows what anything that strong is capable of."

"We'll find it," Toshinori reassures him. "It can't be easy to hide a beast of that size."

"Right." Naomasa sighs, pulling his hands away and adjusting his hat. "Right." He takes a deep breath. "What a mess. Are the students alright?"

"Most of them, thankfully," Toshinori says. "A few of them were injured, but they'll be alright. It's Young Midoriya who I'm the most worried about."

Naomasa glances up. "Midoriya? The one you told me about?"

Toshinori nods, solemn. "I found him near the edge of the USJ. He's... in bad condition. Young Shinsou said they set some villain on him, although I don't know what happened to it."

"God, these poor kids," Naomasa murmurs. "I'll open a case on the group responsible tonight."

"Thank you, Naomasa," Toshinori says, squeezing his shoulder. "Best of luck."

"I'll need it," Naomasa murmurs. "The same to you. Keep them safe."

"I will," Toshinori says. "I won't let anything happen to them again."

## Chapter End Notes

aaaaaand that's that. one hell of a fuckin ride, wouldn't you agree? hopefully it lived up to your expectations  
the next few chapters are gonna be cleaning up all this broken glass. we've made quite the mess. poor shinsou.

a HUGE HUGE thank you to my incredible betas-- theshoutingslytherin, for pretty much overhauling this whole goddamn thing and fixing my shitty word choices, and tanzytechgem, who is a God and helps me with like any plot point that chooses to kick my ass and also foreshadowing. you guys are gods (also: for editing this thing for like 5 hours straight fucking hell)

hope you enjoyed!

# wander with your watchful eye

## Chapter Summary

An aftermath, through several eyes.

## Chapter Notes

ohhhh boy yalls reaction to the april fools chapter was FANTASTIC. Thanks for making my day, and im glad those of you who managed to read that garbage enjoyed the little snippet you got.

Anyways, I said I wouldn't make you wait long, and I won't! Without further ado, here is the *actual* chapter 17, in its full un-owoed glory.

As usual, thanks to my betas-- or. editors, really, theshoutingslytherin and tanzytechgem! yall are gods.

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Hitoshi is drifting.

He's not sure where he is exactly; underwater, maybe, but air moves through his lungs unimpeded, and no silvery bubbles drift up from his lips. Around him, the world is a smooth, artificial blue, brighter above him and darker below. It doesn't shift as he floats endlessly onward, alone and silent.

When he reaches out, his actions don't feel like his own. He's watching them from somewhere else, separated from his own senses. His head is cottony, and there's static buzzing in his veins. When he focuses on it, it whispers at him, frantic and urgent.

There's something he needs to do. Something he should know.

Whatever that might be, it fades to the background. The desperation in his chest washes off like water off of wax, dripping down into inky oblivion. He watches it go with dull eyes, breathing in and out, in and out.

Distantly beneath him, something huge shifts. But it's far away, so he pays it no mind. Instead, he stares up at what might be the faraway surface, where sunlight glitters over rippling seaglass. Whatever is creeping below him, it can't touch him.

But he's wrong.

Within the next breath, something coils around his ankle, sharp and constricting. Bloated skin, bloodshot eyes, shark-like teeth bared in a grin flash behind his eyes-- but they're gone just as quickly as they appear. The grip on his ankle does not, and Hitoshi flails as it drags him further down. Every movement he makes is sluggish, like he's wading through tar, and the darkness around him has started to press in on his chest. He chokes under the pressure, coughing out a breath and trying to pull another in— only he can't. He can't *breathe* .

He claws at his throat, thrashing with wide eyes, but it's no use. The pressure grows stronger, pushing harder until it's *suffocating* , and the blue has bled entirely into black. Hitoshi reaches out, but his fingers swipe uselessly through empty water.

But before he can try to scream, there's a noise. It's low and grating, like the distant rattle of a train on its tracks. The world pulls taut, strung with tension, and as Hitoshi writhes under the crushing load he makes the mistake of glancing down.

A dozen blazing green spots stare back at him, so vivid they leave sunspots in his eyes. They bob up and down, but he's never freed from their harsh scrutiny. They only intensify, drawing closer, burning brighter.

Pinpricks of silver emerge from the dark, lengthening, sharpening; they're *teeth* . Dozens of knife-edged fangs, glinting in an invisible light, bared and snarling. They inch closer. Hitoshi makes a desperate scramble away, but he's paralyzed. And weight on his ankle drags him deeper, toward the growing eyes and teeth, toward the serpent.

The buzzing in his veins rises to a crescendo. It screams that there's something he needs to *do* , something he has to *remember* .

He doesn't remember. The serpent lunges at him, and those silver teeth slam shut.

Awareness hits Hitoshi like a tidal wave, slamming him down and holding him there. He stares, panting and breathless, at the distant shape of his shadowed ceiling.

Through the swirling and sloshing of his mind, he manages to get enough control enough to *breathe* . The tightness around his legs and chest belongs to tangled sheets, not a constricting serpent; he manages to extract himself from the sweaty mess as best he can. He's calmer, once he's no longer pinned to the mattress, and he folds his legs and sits upright.

Well. That was fun.

He wrinkles his nose and rubs his hands over his face, grimacing at how clammy they are. Every part of him is shaky, quivering *just* enough to be noticeable, and his heartbeat is still irregular. He presses his palm against his chest, feeling the stuttered *dmp-dmp* come quicker than it should. Nice.

Hitoshi is no stranger to the frailest hours of the night, nor is he to waking up at them. But he's never been hurled out of consciousness by such brutal dreams— at least, not in recent

memory. All things considered, he shouldn't be surprised, and deep down, he isn't. What he *is*, however, is irritated.

"Finally fall asleep, and God gives me a nightmare," he murmurs to no one in particular, rubbing his eyes. His lips feel chapped, and he runs his tongue over them experimentally. They're dry. He could probably use some water.

He's not getting back to sleep anyway, so he swings his legs over the side of the bed and stands up. He wipes his sweaty palms off on his shirt, smearing his hair out of his face once they're relatively dry. He'll need to shower in the morning. but that's a problem for future Hitoshi.

He's lucky his foster parents aren't light sleepers. He knows that they're worried about him, and he understands that. Still, he doesn't think he has it in him to explain his dream— at least, to anyone human. So he swallows, and he takes solace in the silence as he treads down the hallway with practiced, careful steps.

The kitchen is empty when he arrives. The table has been cleared off, so Milk is most likely lurking somewhere else, scouting out unwatched glasses and small knick-knacks to shove off of elevated surfaces. Hitoshi's not in the mood to pick up after her, and he breathes a quiet sigh of relief.

There *is* a cat in the kitchen, just not Milk. Hitoshi almost steps on him on his way to the cabinet, and he glances down, bewildered. In the darkness, it's easy to mistake Carpet for a shaggy throw pillow, or maybe a small rug.

Hitoshi tiptoes over him. A quiet "*mrrrrr*," is the only indication he gets that Carpet is still alive; he hums his reply, careful not to let the glass he pulls out clink against the others. The ice machine is loud, so he doesn't bother with it; he just pours some water directly into his glass, hops up onto the counter, and sits.

Two days. It's been two days since the whole fiasco at USJ, and not a single minute of it has felt real.

Including the USJ *itself*. Hitoshi remembers it, sure— in excruciating detail, thanks, *brain* — but it's... distant. The memories don't feel like they're *his*; more like something he saw on TV, or in a strange dream. He wishes they were. God, he wishes they were.

In the silence, the serpent's blood-curdling screams still ring in his ears. *The Leviathan*, the heroes had called it, between nervous glances and wrung hands. *The Leviathan*, the news articles Hitoshi read had called it, neutral words laced with distaste and worry. A villain of monstrous proportions and strength, that had appeared in full glory only once, over a decade ago. The same villain that Uraraka had told him about.

Hitoshi can still see its teeth, meters from his face, can still taste that bile in his throat at the knowledge that *he's going to die*.

He tightens his jaw. He didn't die, and he isn't going to. The USJ has passed. The Leviathan is gone. He doesn't have to be afraid anymore.

But he is. And not just for himself.

Despite everything that happened, Hitoshi was one of the lucky ones. He got off with only a broken arm, which is nothing but a faint ache now, thanks to Recovery Girl's help. All things considered, *most* of them were lucky; those who escaped with more than scrapes and bruises had sprained ankles, at the worst. There were only two people that ended up genuinely injured.

Aizawa, and Midoriya.

Hitoshi had been present for the first. He tries not to think about it, but sometimes, he can't help it. Does Tsuyu have the same problem? Maybe he'll ask her, if he ever finds the words.

Midoriya, he hadn't seen. Part of him still seethes over that— he should have done *something*. Midoriya had looked *terrified*, in those fragile seconds after Shigaraki had pointed one flaking hand and said, *Noumu*. He could have done something— brainwashed Shigaraki into calling it off, thrown something at the Noumu, *anything*. But he hadn't.

He doesn't know what happened to Midoriya, other than they found him on death's door. Hitoshi had only caught a fleeting glimpse as All Might rushed by, but that had been enough.

He doesn't know how Midoriya and Aizawa are doing. He doesn't know if either of them are even *alive*.

He takes a deep breath, swallows past the knot in his throat. He's getting worked up again. He has to calm himself down, has to *breathe*, in and out.

Something soft rubs against his bare forearm. He glances over, bewildered, just as Carpet slumps next to him, rumbling softly. Hitoshi sets a ginger hand to his side, and Carpet yawns, flicking his tail.

Cats are weird, Hitoshi decides, running his fingers through puffy fur.

"I think I like you more than Milk," he says quietly.

And speak of the Devil. Not even a *second* later, another set of paws click against the countertop, and Hitoshi turns to find Milk trotting toward him. He blows a puff of air at her; undeterred, she flicks her ears and hops into his lap. She steps on Carpet in the process, but he either doesn't notice, or doesn't care.

"You weren't invited," Hitoshi tells her, petting Carpet with pointed strokes. She ignores him, rolling onto her back and stretching. One of her paws hooks in his shirt.

Hitoshi closes his eyes. "Unbelievable."

He finishes his water and stands up. Milk rolls off of him, landing perfectly on the floor and giving him a dirty look. Hitoshi returns it with a deadpan stare.

"That's what you get," he says, setting his glass in the sink. He starts for his room, but after a moment, loops back to pick up Carpet. Carpet *mrrs* at him again, but doesn't struggle.

Hitoshi hefts him up, then heads back out of the kitchen. Milk bolts after him, darting through the door before he can close it with his foot.

“I don’t want— God, whatever,” Hitoshi mumbles, rolling his eyes. He lets Milk into his room— against better judgement, really, but if he doesn’t, she’s going to scratch up his door — and sets Carpet on the messy bed. Carpet immediately ceases being a solid again, sinking into the mattress and sprawling out. Hitoshi snorts and fishes his laptop out from under his bed.

It’s technically a school night, but Hitoshi would rather not go back to sleep just yet. So he’s got no qualms about playing pointless side-scrollers for the next few hours. Milk, however, clearly does, and attempts to impede him in every step of the process.

Hitoshi holds her off while he opens his laptop, but she manages to slip under his hand and step onto his keyboard while he’s typing his password sending *ndtriaeisiBng* scrawling across his screen. Hitoshi groans and pushes Milk aside.

“Go *away* ,” he tells her. “Carpet, restrain her.”

“ *Mrrr* ,” says Carpet, doing absolutely nothing.

Thankfully, something else captures Milk’s attention, and she trots away. Hitoshi logs in, but he doesn’t get far before he glances up to find Milk slinking along his cluttered desk.

“*No*,” Hitoshi starts, scrambling to his feet. Milk hastily selects an object— a toy robot from when he was younger— and bats it to the floor. Hitoshi makes a dive to catch it, but he’s not quick enough. It hits the leg of his desk chair with a crack, and promptly breaks in half.

Hitoshi stares at it, sucks in a deep breath, and turns to glare at Milk. She yawns and begins grooming herself— Hitoshi grabs her by the scruff, drags her out, and closes the door in her face.

Carpet doesn’t look up when Hitoshi sits back down beside him, nor does he react to Milk’s whiny scratching at the bedroom door. Hitoshi doesn’t look up either.

“That’s what you get,” he says. Milk wails and scratches the door again. It’d be nice to just put his headphones on, but if he’s not careful, Milk will wake up Chio and Yuuma. So he grits his teeth, sets his laptop aside *again* , and opens the damn door.

“Learned your lesson?” He asks, narrowing his eyes. Milk rubs against his legs, which could either be an apology or an attempt at bribery. Knowing Milk, it’s probably the latter.

Still, she doesn’t knock anything else off of his desk. Rather, she seems content to curl up beside him, opposite from motionless Carpet, and purr softly. Hitoshi rolls his eyes, but he lets her stay.

He doesn’t get any more sleep that night.

Perhaps, in another household, a mother watching television while her son disassembles a Roomba on the floor would be odd. But for Okyoita Riko, it's not only normal— it's calming. If Aki is in her sight, that means he's not getting into trouble, and she hopes there's only so much he can do with a Roomba. She's learned not to underestimate him.

Riko flicks through the channels on their old hologram while he works. It's not the finest quality, but it was built by her husband and her son, and they're equally proud of it. She ignores the fizzling and freezing, focusing on what's on.

Not much, apparently. She skips through a few infomercials, an old movie, past a news outlet — and stops. UA's crest is in the corner of the screen— doesn't Midoriya go there? Curious, she clicks back.

Her blood runs cold.

*UA FIRST-YEARS TARGETED IN VILLAIN ATTACK*, the scrolling headline reads. Above it, two reporters sit at a table, professionally neutral despite the topic of their discussion.

“—the students?” The man is halfway through asking the woman. She frowns.

“We're not sure, at the moment, but we do know there were only three people critically injured: one villain, one teacher, and one student.”

“Do we know who the teacher and student are?”

“Witnesses have confirmed the teacher to be Aizawa Shouta, the class' homeroom teacher. As for the student... we're not sure, at the moment, but we believe it to be fifteen-year-old Midoriya Izuku.”

Riko's heart drops into her feet. On the floor, Aki freezes.

“And what of the main villain partaking in the attack?” The man asks. “The... Leviathan, was it?”

“Yes,” the woman says. “The authorities have been... tight-lipped on the subject, but we have reason to believe that the Leviathan has not yet been brought into custody, and that—”

The hologram vanishes with a click. Riko looks down to find Aki, wide-eyed and shaking, holding the remote in one hand. His knuckles are white.

“Aki,” Riko breathes, reaching out. Aki swallows.

“I'm fine,” he says tightly. “I— I'm fine, I just— I need to text Mido.”

He sprints from the room. Riko watches him go with her hands folded in her lap, and in the silence he leaves behind, she prays that Midoriya is alright. Both for his sake, and for Aki's.

And then, she rises to go give Midoriya Inko a call. She'll need someone to talk to. Riko knows *she* did.

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The last time Shouta woke up in a hospital, he'd been a young man, reckless and impulsive. It'd been his own fault; he'd known he couldn't win that fight, but he'd jumped anyway. That had been back before Shouta learned to pick his battles, learned to read villains like cards and play them against one another. That had been years ago.

Maybe that's why he's so caught off-guard when he wakes up alone, with bandages wound around his arms and over his face. His head throbs, a painful one-two, one-two rhythm, and he grimaces. His fingers are bound together, but he reaches up and presses a hand against his face anyway. The faint ridges of staples beneath his right eye meet his hand, and the top of his head aches like someone took a bat to it.

Considering what actually happened, Shouta might have preferred that.

Ignoring his headache, he scoots forward out of the narrow hospital bed and swings his feet over the side. He doesn't have time to lie around—he needs to get caught up on what happened after the Noumu had slammed his head into the concrete. The sooner, the better.

Of course, that's when someone—a doctor, by the looks of it—steps into the room and pauses.

“Ah— sir,” he says, a bit bewildered. Shouta glances up.

“What.”

“You're... not cleared to leave, sir,” the doctor says. “Or walk, for that matter. Your head isn't entirely healed. I have to ask that you sit back down.”

“Can't,” Shouta says simply, ignoring the way the bandages muffle his words. “I have things to do.”

The doctor's lips press together. “I understand that, sir. I know who you are. But aggravating your injuries won't help you. You're almost healed; just a few more days, and you'll be free to go.”

Shouta has no idea how much time he's already spent here. He's not in the mood to waste another few days.

“Recovery Girl is coming in to see you later,” the doctor continues. “If you have the strength, she'll use her quirk on you. After you wake up, you'll be free to go. If you want to leave as soon as possible, I'd recommend you save your strength and wait.”

Despite himself, Shouta can't help but be impressed by the doctor's straightforward delivery. Slowly, he settles back into the bed, eyebrows raised.

“I take it you've done this before.”

The doctor's smile is tinged with exhaustion. “Too many times, I'm afraid. Now, would you like me to leave you alone, or are you up for visitors? You've got a few who asked for a call

when you woke up.”

“Send them in,” Shouta says, leaning back. The doctor’s lips quirk.

“Of course.”

With that, he’s gone. Shouta sighs, and he savors the momentary quiet of his peaceful hospital room. That quiet isn’t going to last long. He knows exactly who his first visitor will be a good thirty seconds before they arrive, and he sits up and braces himself.

“ *Shouta!*” Hizashi shrieks, stumbling in the door and twisting around. “Shouta, holy *shit* —”

Shouta closes his eyes and sighs. “Volume, Hizashi.”

“Don’t *volume* me,” Hizashi hisses, striding closer. “You gave me a *heart attack* .”

“And yet you’re still standing.” Shouta raises his eyebrows. Hizashi rolls his eyes and drops onto the edge of his bed. He’s in a civilian outfit, un-gelled hair tied back in a loose bun and eyes hidden behind actual glasses rather than his ridiculous orange ones. Shouta thinks about how quickly he arrived and wonders if he was waiting outside.

“How long was I out?” Shouta asks.

“Two days,” Hizashi says, much quieter. “How are you feeling?”

“Alive,” Shouta says, digesting this new information.

“Could’ve fooled me. Humor me, wise guy. Good? Bad? Neither?”

“...Alright,” Shouta says eventually. “Although it’s probably thanks to the god-knows-how-many painkillers in my system.”

Hizashi shrugs. “Maybe. But an ‘alright’ is an ‘alright’, so I’ll take it. Glad to see you’re awake and being a smartass again. You had us all real worried.”

“I’m sure,” Shouta says. “How are the students?”

Hizashi’s eyebrows lift. “They’re alright,” he says. “For the most part, they all got out okay. A bit shaken, but they’re strong kids. I think they’ll bounce back.”

Shouta stiffens. “For the most part?”

Hizashi deflates, rubbing his arm.

“...Yes,” he says. “Look— Tsukauchi’s on his way here, alright? I gave him a call as soon as the doctor got me. He’s got the official statements and everything, and he’ll bring you up to speed better than I can. He’ll be here in... hm. Fifteen minutes, give or take? Station’s just a few blocks down. Sound okay?”

Shouta's stomach drops. While Tsukauchi's a familiar face, and a good one to see in cases like these, he doesn't like the way Hizashi dodges the question..

"In the meantime," Hizashi's saying, "what should I tell Nedzu? He's been emailing me—wanted to know how long you needed off."

Shouta frowns. "What day is it?"

"Wednesday."

"I'll be in tomorrow."

"*Absolutely* not. You got your face smashed into concrete, Shouta. You're taking at *least* a day off."

"I've already been out for two days," Shouta points out. "That's more than a day."

"You were *unconscious* . That doesn't count."

"Shuzenji is seeing me later today. I'll be fine by tomorrow."

"*Christ's sake* , Shouta."

Tsukauchi steps in, true to Hizashi's word, roughly fifteen minutes later. His arrival is heralded only by the twitch of the doorknob, which gives Shouta a half second to shut Hizashi up before they both make fools of themselves in front of law enforcement. Tsukauchi steps in to the sight of two competent adults sitting quietly, but only barely.

"Tsukauchi," Shouta greets, sitting up.

"Aizawa," he replies curtly. "Good to see you're awake. You had us worried for a while."

"These things happen," Shouta says, even though they shouldn't, not really. Not like this. "You're here to give me the official report?"

"I am," Tsukauchi says. He reaches behind to pull over a chair, which squeaks against the polished tile. Once it's closer to Shouta's bedside, he sits down, removing a folder from his travel bag. His expression is somber as he sifts through it.

"How much do you remember?" Is the first question he asks.

Shouta pauses to think. "Up until the Noumu cracked my head into the pavement," he says bluntly. Tsukauchi's lips twitch.

"I could guess that much," he says. "What was happening around you at that point?"

"Not much," Shouta says. "I went after the leader, and he commanded that creature to grab me. I went down pretty quickly after that."

Tsukauchi's expression darkens, and he glances down. "Ah."

Shouta narrows his eyes. “What happened after that?”

Tsukauchi opens his file and starts sifting through the papers. “We’re not... sure of the timeline,” he starts. “But— shortly after you were taken out, we believe— another villain appeared. By any chance, are you familiar with the Leviathan?”

Shouta frowns. The name is familiar, but he doesn’t recognize it immediately. Tsukauchi takes his silence as a no.

“I see,” he says. “Well, to put things simply; the Leviathan is a rarely seen, incredibly dangerous villain. In its... larger form, I suppose, it’s only appeared once.” A beat. “There were thirty-two casualties.”

Ice trickles into Shouta’s gut. He’s suddenly wide awake.

“For whatever reason, the Leviathan targeted the Noumu at first— the creation you fought,” Tsukauchi continues. “The students there say the Noumu was defeated in a matter of minutes. After that, it attacked anything in sight. That included other villains and, unfortunately, your students.”

Shouta bolts upright. His fingers itch to clench, but the bandages hold them in place.

“Miraculously, none of the students were badly hurt,” Tsukauchi says. “At least— by the Leviathan. One of the villains at the attack lost an arm, but he was saved by on-site paramedics. Other than that, the only harm the Leviathan caused was to the USJ itself.”

Shouta lets out a long breath. That’s good.

“So, I was the only major injury?” He asks carefully. Tsukauchi hesitates, and shakes his head.

“...No,” he says quietly. “Not the worst, either.”

The dread returns to Shouta’s gut twofold.

“You weren’t the only one who had the Noumu set on them,” Tsukauchi says. “It went after one of your students as well— Midoriya Izuku.”

Shouta forces his jaw to relax. “How is he?”

“Alive,” Tsukauchi says. “Although it was a bit too close for comfort. When they found him, he’d been beaten within an inch of his life. He’s asleep right now. They’re waiting for him to wake up so they can bring Recovery Girl in again.” He pauses, thoughtful, and his eyes dart over to the far wall. “Actually, he might be in the room next to yours, if I remember correctly.”

Shouta’s eyebrows shoot up. “Is that so?”

Tsukauchi nods. “I wouldn’t be surprised. He was brought here the same time as you.” Shouta folds his hands and makes a mental note to check on Midoriya, should the opportunity

arise. “I see. Were there any other injuries?”

“A few, but not nearly so severe.” Tsukauchi shuffles through a few papers. “Let’s see... Sero Hanta suffered a sprained ankle at the hands of a villain, and Shinsou Hitoshi broke his arm fleeing from the Leviathan. Most of your students also had minor abrasions or bruises, and they were all treated on-site by Recovery Girl.”

Relief floods Shouta’s chest, cool and soothing. They’re alright, then.

“No casualties?” He asks, just to be sure. Tsukauchi nods.

“No casualties. Thanks in no small part to you.”

“I did what needed to be done,” Shouta says. “Now— where are the villains that attacked?”

Tsukauchi must’ve been expecting this question. His lips press together, and he leans forward.

“Statistically, almost all of them are now in custody,” he says. “However, in reality, we only caught the low-level ground troops. The leader of the attack and the villain with the warping quirk— Shigaraki and Kurogiri, respectively— both escaped after the Leviathan’s appearance.”

Shouta frowns. “And the Leviathan itself?”

Naomasa sighs. “Gone as well. We believe that Kurogiri warped it away as soon as it was defeated by All Might.”

Now that’s unexpected. “All Might was there?”

Tsukauchi shoots him a sidelong glance. “Yes. He and the other faculty arrived not long after the Leviathan did. One of your students managed to escape and alert the school, but it took some time for her to get in contact.”

Shouta nods slowly, quietly wishing he could throttle Nedzu. Of all the days to have a tea-talk with the strongest man in the world.

“All things considered it’s not... the worst outcome,” Tsukauchi says, then sighs. “Still, none of this should have happened at all. We’ll be keeping a close eye on this group to make sure it never does again.”

“Good,” Shouta says. “You’ll keep me updated?”

Tsukauchi nods. “Of course. Now...” He checks his watch. “I’m afraid I have to hurry back to the station to get some reports done. I’m sorry to leave so quickly, but...” His smile is pinched. “You know how these things are.”

“Unfortunately,” Shouta says. “Best of luck, Tsukauchi.”

“And to you, Aizawa,” Tsukauchi says. “I hope your recovery is swift.”

Rolling to his feet, he pulls his hat onto his head and disappears out the door. Shouta watches him go, the knowledge he now has sitting heavy on his chest.

What a mess.

Hizashi leaves not long after Tsukauchi, leaving Shouta with a few hours to kill until Shuzenji's visit. The obvious directive would be to sleep— after all, God knows he won't be getting much after he gets out. But Tsukauchi's words have left him restless, and he's not surprised when he finds himself slipping out of bed. The doctor can bite his tongue; it's not like Shouta's going far.

The hallway is empty when he steps out, so with cautious steps, he makes his way to the left. A quick glance at the door confirms that it does belong to Midoriya, and with a fortifying breath, Shouta turns the knob and walks through.

It's quiet, save for the faint hum of electricity and repetitive beep of the monitors. The room feels strangely empty, emptier than Shouta's was. It's anything but; in the center of the room, against the right wall, is a bed identical to Shouta's. And on it lies Midoriya.

He looks like hell. What skin isn't bandaged has been bruised and battered a mottled purple, highlighting the bags beneath his eyes and that strange scar of his. From the shoulders down he's hidden beneath a thin blanket, but Shouta doesn't doubt the rest of him is in similar condition.

It's strange. Shouta's used to seeing his students beaten up— he teaches at a *hero school*, for Christ's sake. Getting beaten up might as well be in the curriculum. Furthermore, the students he teaches go on to be pro heroes, one of the most dangerous jobs one can take. He's no stranger to seeing injuries like this.

But never like this. Never on one so young.

What happened at the USJ should not have happened. That's blandly stating the obvious, but now, faced with its brutal aftermath, Shouta finds a fire in that thought that wasn't there before. His students should not have had to face something like that so soon, no matter what they're preparing for. That's the thing— UA is supposed to *prepare*, not blindly hurl them in.

He knows it's not UA's fault. But that doesn't mean there aren't preventative measures to be taken.

That's the first order of business, then; once he gets out of this hospital, he's heading for Nedzu. God knows the rat must be having fun weathering the inevitable media shitstorm. God, what a mess things must be on the outside.

Well, UA is no stranger to controversy, nor is it to picking itself back up after such things. They've never gone through anything quite like this, but if anyone can handle it, it's Nedzu.

He sighs, snuffing out some of the furious embers flickering in his chest. There's a time and place for anger, and this, standing in his unconscious student's hospital room, is not it. He should rest, so that Shuzenji can help him get out of here.

He leaves with one last glance over his shoulder at Midoriya's unconscious body. He's... very human, lying there; no scales spread across his cheeks, no green-tipped fins fluttering beside his head. He's smaller like this. Fragile.

Shouta reminds himself of twelve-pronged lightning, splitting the air like cracks through glass. Midoriya isn't fragile. No one fragile would have walked away from whatever injury gave him that scar on his face.

Questions can wait. For now, he needs to sleep.

True to the doctor's word, Shuzenji arrives sometime that afternoon. She *tsks* when she sees him.

"Look at you," she murmurs. "Beaten to a pulp."

"It was me or the students," Shouta says. "From what I've heard, I got off easy."

"So they told you about Midoriya, then," Shuzenji sighs. "That poor boy. The state he was in when I first saw him..." She shakes her head, and her eyes slide back over. "Relative to him, yes, you may have gotten off easy. But that doesn't negate the injuries you have."

"No," Shouta says dryly. "That's your job."

"Was that a joke?" Shuzenji asks, feigning shock. "Looks like that monster did more damage to your head than I thought. What would Yamada say?"

Shouta narrows his eyes. She chitters.

"Spare me, I've seen it all. Now, head up, so we can put this all behind us."

Shouta lifts his forehead, and Shuzenji hobbles over to him and presses a quick peck against it. Her quirk spreads like warm honey through his veins, and the throb in his head dies down to a dull twinge. At the same time, however, his exhaustion swells, threatening to drag him down on the spot.

"Remember, no exertion following this," Shuzenji warns. "I know you'll try to sneak out before you're fully healed, and if you do, I'll hear about it."

"I'll leave when I'm ready," Shouta says, leaving whenever *that* may be up for assumption. Shuzenji sighs.

"You'll leave whenever you *think* you're ready, more like," she says. "Take care, Aizawa."

"Thank you, Shuzenji," Shouta says. Just like that, he leans back, and he's out the moment his head hits the pillow.

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The first day back after USJ is... odd.

Ochako's not sure what she'd been expecting. She'd known things would be different, but she hadn't been sure *how*, exactly. Would they talk about what happened? Or would they all just... pretend nothing happened?

Midoriya isn't on the train when she gets on. She'd figured he wouldn't, but something settles in her chest, heavy and hollow. Midoriya's absence is a reminder; *this is real, this happened*. It leaves her fidgety and uncomfortable, and she stays that way for the whole train ride.

Her fellow commuters don't help. Normally, she wears her UA uniform with a sense of pride. Now, though, she wishes she could cover it up. The tell-tale colors act as a beacon, drawing the eye of the whole car. Unless they're living under a rock, everyone in Musutafu knows what happened. The weight of their stares grows unbearable; Ochako shrinks further into herself with each passing minute.

If only Midoriya was here. If only she didn't have to do this alone.

The train ride passes at a crawl. By the time it hisses to a stop at her station, she's filled to bubbling with nervous energy. She's swept out of the train by the rapid tide of people, and finally, *finally*, she's alone. She swallows, takes a deep breath to steady herself, and skips up the stairs to the door.

Unfortunately, the inside of UA is just as bad as the train; wherever she goes, people notice her Hero Course epaulets and stare. Whispers follow her like an afterimage, and she swallows and blocks them out. Despite their musings and questions, though, no one is bold enough to actually stop her.

And then she steps into her homeroom.

About half of her classmates are already here, milling around and talking quietly. The atmosphere is a slap in the face; Uraraka almost wonders if she's in the wrong classroom. But no, this is right—there's Sero, with a nervous grin, talking to Kaminari and Jirou. By the window, Yaoyorozu and Shiozaki are looking at something on Yaoyorozu's phone. Shiozaki's nodding.

It's a far cry from the exuberant class Ochako stepped into on the first day, and deep down, it kind of hurts. It's not fair that their enthusiasm has been destroyed a month in.

But this won't last forever, Ochako tells herself. Of course they're quieter, now—everyone's tired, everyone's still processing. They'll be okay. This won't happen again, and they'll bounce back stronger.

With that thought in mind, she holds her head high and enters the class. Yaoyorozu offers a warm smile, and with no Iida or Shinsou in sight, Ochako drifts over to stand beside her.

“Good morning,” Yaoyorozu says. Ochako echoes the greeting, hopping up to sit on the desk beside her. From her spot against the wall, Shiozaki glances up, interested.

“I don't believe we've met yet,” she says. “My name is Shiozaki.”

“Uraraka Ochako,” Ochako replies, offering her best cheery smile. “It’s nice to meet you!”

Shiozaki nods, leaning back against the wall. Yaoyorozu takes up the conversation from there.

“How are you holding up?”

“Pretty good,” Ochako answers. “You?”

“Fine,” Yaoyorozu says, a bit nervously. “Although... still a bit shaken, if I’m being honest.”

Ochako’s smile falters. “...Yeah,” she says, rubbing her arm. “Me too. But— hey! It’s over, at least. And I doubt it’ll happen again.”

“...Can we really be sure, though?” Someone chimes in from their left, and Ochako turns to Jirou, who’s broken away from the boys. She’s picking at the edge of her earjack with a disinterested expression, but there’s tension in her shoulders that’s hard to ignore.

Yaoyorozu frowns. “What do you mean?”

“Well— we’re at a hero school,” Jirou says. She hops up onto a desk and hunches over, resting her elbows on her knees. “It makes sense that they’d target us, in a fucked-up kind of way. I’m pretty sure they didn’t catch all the guys, either. What’s stopping them from doing it again?”

Yaoyorozu presses her lips together. “Well, my parents said the school’s going above and beyond with security now, so even if the villains *do* attack again, it’ll be much harder. Besides, at least now we’ll be expecting it.”

“I’m not sure if expecting it makes it any easier,” Jirou says. She grimaces. “I just— I can’t stop thinking about it. It barely feels real, and yet every time I remember it, I get all shaky. It’s stupid.”

“I don’t think that’s stupid,” Shiozaki says quietly. “I think that’s how it is for all of us.”

“Yeah, but— we’re supposed to be heroes,” Jirou challenges, clearly frustrated. “What kind of heroes are we if we can’t work past this?”

“Ones in training?” Sero suggests from the other side of the room. Jirou’s eyes snap onto him, and he winces, fiddling with his tape dispenser.

“I— I mean... yeah, a trained hero would be able to take something like that in stride, but we’re... we’re not there yet. We’ve been at this school for, what, a week and a half? We still have three years to go. That’s... a lot of time.”

“Yeah,” Ochako says, leaning forward. “I don’t think we have to know how to deal with this sort of thing just yet. We have time. We can figure it out.”

Jirou doesn’t reply.

Ochako sighs, but she's not sure what else she can do. She's saved from continuing the conversation by Kaminari, who pipes up while raising his pencil.

"Uh— Maybe this is a bad time, but... Just to be sure, they didn't assign us homework over the little break thing, right?"

Jirou's face turns incredulous. "No, they didn't *assign us homework* after we almost *died*, Kaminari. Jesus Christ."

"I was just *checking!*" Kaminari says defensively. "I just thought— I don't know!"

"What would we even be assigned homework *on?*" Jirou asks. "'How to not die while being attacked by villains?'"

"I mean... it *is* UA," Sero says. "Not— not to side with him, but—"

"*Dude!*" Kaminari says, slapping a hand to his chest. "Are you on my side or not?"

Just like that, some of the tension in the room melts away. It's not gone, not entirely, but Ochako doesn't think it ever will be. Things are different now, and there's no denying it, no matter how much she wants to.

In the few minutes before the bell, the rest of the class trickles in. Among the new arrivals are Shinsou, who's just about dead on his feet, and a curiously late Iida. They settle into their seats beside and behind Uraraka— Shinsou's out like a light before his head even hits the desk. Ochako takes one look at the shadows beneath his eyes and decides waking him would just be cruel. Instead, she swaps leisurely greetings with Iida. Iida's stiffer than usual, but he smiles when Uraraka does and lets her ramble about sleeping for almost a whole day after the USJ.

When the bell rings, the room falls silent, waiting. For a moment, Ochako almost expects the doors to open to Mr. Aizawa's sleeping bag-swaddled form, but they don't. Instead, a different familiar face springs through the doors, papers in one hand.

"Good morning!" Present Mic chirps. "Glad to see you all."

Ochako trades a glance with Iida. She's not surprised they have a substitute, but what does that mean? Is Mr. Aizawa...?

They're not the only ones wearing nervous looks, because Present Mic smiles fondly and evens his papers on the podium. "Shouta— ah, Aizawa's alright. I know you're all worried about him. He's fine, he just needs a few more days to rest." He pauses, and adds, "Although... knowing him, he'll be here tomorrow anyway. In the meantime, I'll be your substitute. Sound good?"

This earns him a few relieved nods. He seems satisfied, and Ochako thanks whoever might be listening he doesn't try to coax a *YEAH* out of them. Maybe it's because he gets it, the whole... post-villain anxiety thing. The more she thinks about it, the more it rings true.

Heroes face villains and terrifying scenarios all the time— it makes sense they'd be used to fear like this.

She'll have to get used to it too. She knows that now. She wishes she didn't have to get used to it so *soon* , but... it is what it is. She'll do what she can, and her classmates will too. Because that's what heroes do.

They carry on.

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A phone rings. Once, twice, three times—

*Click.*

*"Who is this?"*

A light chuckle. *"I'll give you three guesses."*

*"God— What the hell do you want?"*

*"Oh, nothing—for the time being. I'm simply reminding you of our deal. Also, I wanted to congratulate you on your fiasco at UA. What a joy that was to watch."*

The scrape of teeth on teeth, then a hiss, like something crumbling into fine dust. *"We'll get you your brat. Just give us a few weeks."*

A *tsk* . *"I'm a busy man, Murder Hands. I don't think I can wait that long."*

*"We agreed to get you the kid. We never agreed when. Now fuck off. We'll call you when we're ready."*

*"Charming as always. Tell your babysitter I said hello."*

A click, a buzz, and the call drops.

## Chapter End Notes

the google doc we were editing this in fucking Broke so there might be a few typos in here, despite my final once-over. if u see any, feel free to bring them to my attention. hope you enjoyed!

# twist my tongue if i should lie

## Chapter Summary

Izuku wakes up.

## Chapter Notes

honestly I'm just as surprised as you are

(again, thank you to my beta reader tanzytechgem and my editor theshoutingslytherin, who have put literal hours into helping clean this up, yall are gods and i do not deserve u)

EDIT: heads up! this chapter delves heavily into izuku's mental state post-USJ. it's not very positive, so warning to readers sensitive to that

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Izuku wakes up in silence.

It's not the physical silence that gets to him, but the silence inside his head. Where he's used to constant white noise, there's just... nothing. No screaming, no shifting scales, nothing. That familiar weight is still there, resting just above the base of his neck, but it's unmoving. Dormant.

He blinks a few times, clearing the fog from his eyes, and rubs his head. Everything is white; white walls, white floors, white sheets. A gentle beeping draws his attention; he freezes at the sight of IV bags and monitors.

A hospital.

"... What?" He rasps, blinking. Why is he in a *hospital*? What did he—

Awareness slams into him with the force of a crushing tidal wave. He gasps, and memories shatter and swirl behind his eyelids. Water, filling his throat and his chest, and the sharp flash of a villain's claws. There's dirt, the glint of blades in an overcast sun, and then the Noumu's massive, bloodstained fists pressing him into the ground as the Leviathan *screams* —

He bolts upright in his squeaky bed. He let it out. He let the Leviathan out, and *he can't remember what happened after*.

His breath starts to come faster. He needs to know what happened. He needs to know what he did. He needs to know who he *killed*. Oh, god— what if it was someone from his class? What if it was Tsuyu, or Shinsou? They were close, he *remembers* them being close— it would have been so easy.

Around him, the world swims and frosts over with a layer of static, dizzying and distant. His ears are ringing, but through that, someone's saying his name; again, and again, until he finds it within himself to look up.

There's a young woman standing over him, long black hair tied in a bun. He doesn't recognize her, but she's wearing a hospital uniform, and her lips are pressed together in a thin line.

"Midoriya?" She says softly. "It's okay. You're okay."

He tries to open his mouth to ask *what happened?*, but the words catch on his rapid breathing and clog his throat.

"Listen to me," she says, quieter still. "You're in the hospital. Do you understand me?"

Despite the nausea curling in his throat, he nods. The action's jerky, like a video game lagging a few frames behind. The woman smiles anyway.

"Good. Now, I'm going to breathe, and you're going to do it with me, okay? In for ten, hold for ten, out for ten. Got it?"

She takes in a measured breath. Izuku coughs— his lungs won't stop expanding of their own accord. Throat ragged, his heart picks back up again.

The woman shushes him. "You can do it," she says.

"I— I ca— I can't," he stutters, choking on every syllable.

"Yes you can. Again, ten counts."

She breathes. He fails. She breathes again. He fails. She breathes. He copies.

By the fifth repetition, his lungs are marginally under control, and the room isn't spinning anymore. By the sixth, the nausea is gone, and he leans back down against the hospital bed. His eyes are hot, and when he wipes them, he finds that he's been crying.

"There you go," the woman says. "I knew you could do it. It's good to have you back with us."

"How— how long have I...?" Izuku croaks, eyes wide.

"A week," the woman says. "You're very strong to have pulled through like you did."

Another layer of fog settles over his mind. A *week*? He was out for a week? What happened? Why can't he remember?

His horror must show, because sympathy tugs through her smile. “You’ve been through a lot. Don’t push yourself, okay?”

He swallows, forces himself to nod. He’s still shaking.

“In the meantime,” the woman says, “you’ve got someone who’s been waiting a long time to see you.”

He knows who it is before she even opens her mouth. “M— Mom?”

The woman beams. “Would you like me to go get her?”

He nods desperately, trying and failing to stutter out a response. Thankfully, he doesn’t have to; “Wait just a moment,” the woman tells him, and then she’s disappearing through the door. Without her, the white room returns to its former, suffocating silence, and Izuku can’t help his unbidden curiosity. Hesitant and cautious, he reaches back into his head.

Nothing. The Leviathan remains silent.

He should be happy about that, but he doesn’t feel anything at all.

*“Izuku!”* The door flies open seconds before Mom rushes in, hair mussed and eyes suspiciously glossy. By the time he’s registered it, he’s already in her arms. She holds him so tight that his ribs creak, but he couldn’t care less.

“Mom,” he gasps. His eyes feel hot again.

“I was so scared,” she whispers into his shoulder. “They— they called me, and— oh, *Izuku*. ”

“I’m okay,” he whispers, lying through his teeth. “I— I’m okay, Mom.”

Silence descends after that. The other woman— a nurse, he learns, when he stutters out his nervous thanks— leaves to give them some privacy. Neither of them move for at least ten minutes, even after the door closes. Mom’s the first to pull back.

Izuku lets her go, notes the way she wipes her eyes with shaking hands.

“Mom,” he says, and though he knows he shouldn’t, he asks, “what happened?”

Her expression crumples, and it’s like someone’s buried a block of ice in his chest. She *knows*. There’s no way she doesn’t. Oh, god— what does she think of him?

“Please,” he says, and his voice comes out hair-thin. “I— I need to know.”

And, hesitantly, she tells him.

It’s strange, hearing her retelling of the story while his own memories play in the background. She tells him how villains attacked the school, separated them, surrounded them, and he nods through it all. This much, he remembers.

She keeps a steady pace moving over each event, but her words tremble. When she gets to Aizawa and the Noumu, she falters outright, and Izuku's blood turns to ice.

"Mr. Aizawa," he says. "He— did he—?"

"He's okay, baby," Mom says, taking a deep breath. "He— it was close, though. I saw him, he was in the room next to yours. He lost a lot of blood."

Izuku's hands are shaking. He dips his gaze to the threadbare blanket in his lap. Nods.

"I was mad at him, at first," Mom whispers. "For not preventing this. But then the doctors told me what he did, how he almost died... protecting you."

"I know," Izuku says, staring at the sheet. "I was there."

When he looks up, it's Mom's turn to glance away, eyes filling with tears. "And— after that, there was... another villain. A giant one."

He knows its name before she says it. That doesn't soften the impact at all.

"The Leviathan."

It's strange, hearing that name spoken out loud. He's gone so long with it locked inside his head that he'd almost forgotten other people knew it at all. Now, it freezes the breath in his lungs, tightens his throat like a vice. He swallows, ignoring the way his heart beats faster than a songbird's trill.

"What did it...?" He asks, and he's *terrified* of the answer.

"It destroyed the facility," Mom says. "They told me nobody was badly hurt, thank god. It attacked some of your friends, but they were okay."

Izuku nearly crumples with relief. The memory flows freely, now; he sees Shinsou pinned beneath the Leviathan's— beneath *his* claws. Nausea swirls in his gut, and the only reason he doesn't fall apart then and there is the fact that Shinsou made it out okay.

That still leaves the question of the aftermath, though.

This whole conversation, Mom hasn't avoided the subject of the Leviathan. She's been calling it an 'it' and a villain, too— and that lends him pause. She wouldn't call the Leviathan a villain if she knew it was him, no matter the circumstances.

That means... she doesn't know.

Izuku doesn't understand. How could she not know? There's no way he got out of the USJ with his identity intact. Did they not tell her?

"The Leviathan," he says, and that word is heavy on his lips, acrid and unfamiliar. "What happened to it?"

“All Might defeated it,” Mom says, and her words are like a key, unlocking a door in his mind. The memories that erupt behind his eyelids threaten to tear him apart, so he hurls them to the side, blocking them out. He remembers, now, and wishes he didn’t. Instead, he focuses on the *relief*. It doesn’t matter that he got hurt. The Leviathan was defeated. *Can be* defeated.

“After that, it just... disappeared,” Mom continues, deeply troubled. “They said they’re still looking for it, but...” She swallows. “It’s scary, knowing that something like that is still out there.”

So that’s it. She definitely doesn’t know, then, and neither does anyone else.

Izuku should tell her. He *needs* to tell her, this *cannot* remain a secret any longer.

But he’s a coward, and he *can’t*.

They leave the subject of the USJ behind after that. Instead, Mom tells him other things: how nice Mrs. Okoyota is, how quiet the house is, how happy she is to have him back. He listens until his head gets heavier and heavier, and when his eyelids start to droop shut, she leans him down and leaves him be. He barely sees her go, barely registers the handful of doctors and nurses that drift through in her wake. His thoughts are heavy and hollow, and they drag him down into empty unconsciousness.

The next few days pass in a similar manner— spots of awareness interspersed through periods of sleep. Recovery Girl visits on the third day, and he sleeps through the entirety of the fourth. On the fifth, his whole body is sore, but they tell him his major injuries are healed and that, with some rest, he’ll be okay.

He doesn’t feel okay.

They discharge him on the morning of the sixth day. Mom brings him some clothes to change into, a shirt and shorts, and he tosses away his hospital gown. When he leaves, his head is still silent. It has been for days.

He’s still not sure how to feel about that.

They don’t talk much on the way back home. It’s only a short train ride, and Izuku zones out through half of it, losing track of time in the blurred walls outside. He feels curious eyes on his back, but no one approaches him, so he ignores it.

Their apartment is dark when Mom opens the door. Izuku steps inside, and he breathes the familiar smell of dust and pine-scented air fresheners. It’s calming, and exhausting, and he moves to head to his room. Before he can, Mom’s hand lands on his shoulder.

“Izuku,” she says quietly. “I... I need to ask you something.”

Izuku freezes. Slowly, he looks up. Mom is watching him, and she looks... sad.

“... Yeah?” He asks.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” She asks. “About the scar on your back.”

It's not the question he was expecting, and maybe that's why it hits as hard as it does. In all honesty, he'd almost forgotten about it. It's hard not to remember the one on his face— he sees it every time he looks in a mirror— but the one on his back lies out of sight, out of mind. He forgot he'd never told her about it. Can't remember if he'd even planned to.

"I— I was going to," he says nonetheless. "But I just... I didn't know how, and I guess I just forgot. I knew it would scare you, and I... I didn't want that."

Mom reaches out to him, takes him into her arms. "Oh, Izuku," she whispers. "You don't have to protect me. I need to know these things, okay?"

"I know," he mumbles into her chest.

She squeezes him once, then steps back. "I'm not mad at you," she says. "Don't think that. I understand why you'd be scared. But I do need to know these things, so that I can be there for you. Do you understand?"

"Yeah," Izuku says. Mom smiles.

"No more secrets, okay?" she says, taking his hand. He looks up, and in that moment, he's never felt emptier.

"Yeah. No more secrets."

---

When Izuku steps into his bedroom, the first thing he notices is how clean everything is. The carpet has been vacuumed, the few clothes on his floor have been put away, and his bed is crisply made. On his desk, his phone is plugged in and charging. Mom must have done all of this.

Guilt rises in Izuku's throat like bile. He swallows it.

Without thinking, he unplugs his phone and turns it on. The screen lights up to reveal dozens upon dozens of unread texts, and his stomach drops to his feet. There are names he recognizes, and then a handful of unfamiliar numbers— his classmates, no doubt— and they're all asking after him. They're all *worried* about him.

They care about him, and they have no idea that this is all *his fault*.

He doesn't realize he's shaking until his phone slips out of his hand and bounces across the carpet. He should pick it up, but his thoughts are foggy, everything sliding out of focus. He stumbles sideways and crumples onto his bed, curling up tightly. On the floor, his phone buzzes.

He needs to answer them. He owes them that— among everything else— but... it's going to kill him. He can't read their messages, full of genuine, heartfelt concern, and come out in one piece. Not that he'd be starting out in one, anyway.

He's not sure how long he stays in bed, forcing out the world. He doesn't care, really. He waits, numb and shaking, until he can finally muster the nerve to just *get up* . When he does, he breathes, picks his phone up off the floor, and unlocks it. It doesn't matter if he can or can't do this. He has to.

Bit is the easiest. He always is.

There's a few older unread texts, asking him about random stuff, but they're overtaken by a few desperate, *'I heard what happened, are you okay?'* s. Izuku swallows and types his response with shaking hands.

**narutophobic [10:34]**

yeah. i'm okay

He's not terribly surprised when Bit responds almost immediately.

**6000 degree knife [10:35]**

mido

oh my god

**narutophobic [10:35]**

hey

**6000 degree knife [10:35]**

god it's good to hear from you

you SCARED me dude

I talked to tsukauchi he said it's illegal for you to die. dont do that

Despite himself, Izuku laughs, choked and wet.

**narutophobic [10:36]**

the detective guy?

please tell me you didn't actually

**6000 degree knife [10:37]**

i mean i did but not about that

**narutophobic [10:37]**

what did you break

**6000 degree knife [10:37]**

listen

**narutophobic [10:37]**

what was it

**6000 degree knife [10:37]**

nothing.

of importance

**narutophobic [10:38]**

mailbox?

**6000 degree knife [10:38]**

yeah

anways, uh. mind if i come over?

i really want to see you

Izuku stares at the screen, caught off-guard. Does he have it in him to see Bit? But what right does he have to turn him away? His fingers hover over the keys, frustration bubbling over.

**narutophobic [10:40]**

i don't know

**6000 degree knife [10:40]**

i get it dude, dw

take your time. i'll be here if you need me, okay?

**narutophobic [10:41]**

okay.

thank you, Bit

Bit types for a while, and Izuku waits, bewildered. Then the status disappears, and Bit replies;

## 6000 degree knife [10:42]

any time, mido

Just like that, the conversation is over. The guilt Izuku's been holding back with straining muscles crashes over him twofold. *I'll be here for you* . Such a simple phrase, but it hits him like a punch to the gut from All Might. Izuku supposes he knows what that's like, now. The idea makes his blood curdle and his hands shake. He takes a deep breath, closing his eyes.

Bit has no idea he's friends with a monster.

He deserves better. He deserves someone who doesn't *lie* to him on the daily, someone who *deserves* his goddamn support. Someone who isn't a blood-soaked killer who almost murdered his *whole fucking class*.

The world fuzzes out again, and Izuku chokes on the knot in his throat, coughing. Hot tears drip from his cheeks; he rubs his eyes with the back of his hands, but it doesn't help.

His phone dings.

Fifteen unread messages glare up at him, settling heavy in his chest. Fifteen messages from the people who ran screaming in terror from *him* , probably checking in on him, wanting to know if he's alright.

He should tell them.

The thought brings a bitter laugh to his lips. How *could* he? Not only is he too much of a coward— how would he even go about that? *Hey, remember that giant serpent that almost killed you? Well, that was actually me! Surprise!*

It's sick.

He doesn't deserve to talk to them. He doesn't deserve to have their numbers. He never did, but now it's even worse. They're *good people* . Their only interactions with killers like him should be on the job years in the future, with their quirks at the ready.

But he can't just *not reply* . The longer he waits, the worse it'll get. So he squeezes his phone, wipes a hand over his mouth, and types.

The first texts he replies to are the unknown numbers. Thankfully, they all state their names in their 'get well soon' texts. Izuku doesn't think he's ever had so many notifications in his life.

The guilt in his chest is familiar, now. It's probably there to stay.

In chronological order, there's Kirishima, Ashido, Yaoyorozu, Shouji, and Hagakure. He responds carefully to each of them, swallowing past the tremors in his hands and keying out something along the lines of '*i'm okay, thank you*'. He prays to god they don't reply.

Then there's Uraraka, Iida, and Shinsou.

They've been using the group chat with all four of them, but they've also sent texts to him individually. Izuku opens Uraraka's and Iida's first, ignoring the creeping tide that whispers *you don't deserve them*.

He knows he doesn't. By god, he's known it from day one.

Uraraka and Iida both receive replies in the same vein as the others; simple, to the point. Izuku doesn't have the stomach for anything more.

That leaves Shinsou.

Shinsou's the one he's been dreading. Izuku can hardly think of his *name* without plunging into the vivid memory of how he'd almost killed him— how he'd been bare *millimeters* from it. It's nothing short of a miracle that Izuku found the strength to withhold the Leviathan, and he finds himself wondering: what if he hadn't?

Shinsou's texts are simple:

**Shinsou [2:34]**

heard you're in the hospital. hope you're okay

**Shinsou [11:34]**

please be okay

It's like someone's slammed him face-first into concrete. He can picture Shinsou in his mind's eye clearly, *too clearly*, and for a moment, he's back in that abandoned place. His room vanishes, replaced by heaving waves of inky shadow, and over him, images fragment and splinter. He breathes, but his throat is clogged and tight, and he's *sinking*—

And then he's not. He's in his room, breathing too fast, clutching his phone too tightly.

He can't do this.

As if the moment couldn't get any worse, a familiar rattle finally rings out behind Izuku's ribs. He jerks, sucking in a sharp breath through gritted teeth. The Leviathan echoes it with a muted snarl, and a few scales trickle onto his face.

Izuku slams down on it. *Violently*.

His head throbs in protest, but the Leviathan isn't just muffled, now— it's *silent* . Not a single scale mars his skin.

*That's what you get* , Izuku thinks bitterly to himself, furious. Nausea swells in his chest, and once again, his room is suffocating. The pressure in his chest is starting to build. He needs to get out. He needs to go somewhere he can be alone, where he won't hurt anyone. Where no one will find him.

He knows where that is.

"I'm— I'm gonna go for a walk," he tells his mom as he hurries through the kitchen, beelining for the door. She glances up, eyebrows raised.

"Izuku, are you sure?" She asks carefully. "I don't know if—"

"It'll be okay," he tells her, offering his best smile. It feels transparent. "I just need to get some air."

The walk to the beach passes in a blur. That might be because Izuku zones out and runs half of it; he's not sure. Either way, he reaches it in record time, and the smell of salt and crash of the waves is *angelic*. How strange, that something heavenly should soothe a devil.

It's a school day, and rather chilly, so nobody's around. Still, someone *could* come. It's that thought that drives him to shuck off his shoes and socks, hiding them with his phone upshore.

The wind is cool against his bare neck as he wades out into the water. Sand washes over his feet, coarse and grating, and white foam swirls around his calves. He swallows, sucks in a long breath, and steps out further.

One step brings the water up to his knees, another few to his waist. Then, he's in up to his shoulders, and the water bobs around his neck. The current pulls, beckoning him deeper; he holds his breath and lets his knees fold.

Water rushes into his ears and nose, sweeping his hair back and digging into his squeezed eyelids. Within seconds, his tongue is saturated with salt, and his lips feel dry. He ignores it, rubbing his eyes and blinking away the harsh burn he finds there.

The Leviathan leaps to attention the moment Izuku gives it some slack, and like always, it immediately tries to overpower him. It tears at him, a screaming mess of fins and scales, and he pushes back just as harshly. With all his faltering strength, he grits his teeth and forces it into his chest, where it thrashes in his veins. His head rings, but his grip on the chains is firmer than steel. Gradually, the screaming fades to white noise, he peels his shirt away from where his gills now lie, and he breathes.

Now that he's fully underwater, the drag of the current is impossible to ignore. He sways back and forth in time with the waves, feet kicking up clouds of pale sand. His hair flutters around his face, so he smooths it back and tries to swim forward.

Unlike before, the water refuses to help him; every few meters he makes forward, he's dragged an equal length back, desperately kicking against the rolling tide. The water's like a cat, determined to carry her insolent kitten back home. But Izuku can't go home, not yet; he pushes forward, pushes onward, and finally, the ocean lets him.

He's too exhausted to swim all the way to the drop-off, so he drifts along the bottom, hovering just above rolling plains of blue-grey sand. When the real world has faded away, he drops to his knees, curling up in slow motion. This far down, the current can't reach him, and he's left to sit in silence.

Out here, there's just... nothing. In every direction, there's only a wall of uniform blue, underlined by rapidly-vanishing sand. Far above him the surface is a glass pane of marbled light, flickering and swaying with the whims of the wind.

Alone and isolated, Izuku feels... safe.

In the muted emptiness of the ocean, emotions well up within him, finally allowed free reign. They pool in his chest and in the space beneath his tongue, flooding his veins; among them are terror, frustration, and deeper still, a rolling, furious *hatred*.

There's no one to hear him deep beneath the surface, no one to see or care. So, he clutches his hair, ducks his head, and *screams*.

It's not the Leviathan's earsplitting, blood-curdling screech; just his own voice, broken and anguished, lost in the sway of the sea.

---

*To: Shinsou*

**Midoriya [12:34]**

I'm okay

**Midoriya [12:35]**

sorry.

---

He goes back to UA two days later.

Mom tells him a day before he does. All things considered, he's surprised; he'd thought for sure that she'd refuse to let him anywhere near UA ever again, that she'd plant her foot down and say *enough*. But she doesn't. She stays quiet and thoughtful, and with a somber smile, she lets him go.

He hugs her before he leaves, and hopes she understands.

Except; he doesn't realize how terrified he is until he's standing at the entrance to the train station. Until now, the thought of 'going back to UA' has been distant, abstract. Just the inevitable next step. Now he's intimately aware of what that entails.

He's going to see his classmates—the ones he almost hurt, the ones he almost *killed*. He's going to see Aizawa, Uraraka, Iida, Tsuyu, and *Shinsou* — all face-to-face.

Oh, god— what if they recognize him? What if they look at him and they *know* ?

Someone jostles him from behind. Izuku shakes himself out of his thoughts and steps into the station. His backpack hangs heavy on his shoulders, grounding, and he white-knuckles the straps.

Though it tends to be overwhelming, he's somewhat thankful for how crowded the train is today. It makes it easier to become another face among many, another shape moving with the pack. He hangs his head and tucks himself into his tiny patch of floor, while the other train-goers step around and past him.

The train lurches forward. Izuku forces his hands to stop shaking.

Two stations down, the doors slide open, and Izuku looks up out of habit. It's a cursory glance, but it's enough for him to catch a glimpse of a familiar brown bob and the blue-grey of a UA uniform. Cold dread seizes him, and before he can even muster guilt over it, he's weaving to the far edge of the train car. Passengers offer him disgruntled looks, but he buries himself in his head and refuses to acknowledge them until he's pressed against the far wall with his face ducked. Through his hair, he sees Uraraka standing on her tip-toes, looking around the train car. Her eyes pass over him without pause, and her face falls.

Izuku wonders if it's possible to die from being eaten alive by guilt.

For the duration of the train ride, he plays the rope in the world's worst mental game of tug-of-war; on one side stands his overwhelming guilt at depriving Uraraka the relief of seeing him, as if he has the right to deprive her of *anything* , and on the other stands his mounting terror at the prospect of seeing her. Terror wins, and when the train pulls into the station, Uraraka steps onto the platform unaware of his presence. He waits as long as he possibly can, but he has to get out of the train eventually.

His senses are dialed up to eleven as he makes his way to UA, taking every roundabout path he can to delay the inevitable. But no amount of extra time is going to let him compose himself. No matter what mask he puts up, it's going to crumble like wet sand the second he steps into the classroom.

God, this was a mistake. He should have just dropped out of UA and turned himself into the police the second he got out of the hospital.

For a moment, he entertains the thought of doing it now; of turning around, marching into the police station, and asking them to arrest him. Then he pictures long nights in lonely cells, cuffs locked around his wrists and throat, and never seeing his mom, and the primal part of him that had prevented him from ever telling anyone in the first place rears its ugly head.

Izuku is no stranger to how powerful guilt can be. But his fear will always be stronger, because he's a fucking *coward*.

Before he knows it, he's standing in front of UA with five minutes until the first bell. The gates stretch skyward forever, towering above him. A vague sense of accusation permeates his mind, like UA itself is rejecting him. Although its teachers may be mysteriously blind to his nature, the campus is not. He takes a step forward anyway, and hates his surprise when the gates don't slam shut on top of him.

There are a handful of students lingering around in the hallway, but none of them seem to recognize him. He keeps his head down, so he wouldn't know even if they did.

It's not until he reaches 1-A's door that he realizes he's truly, genuinely fucked.

Usually this isn't a problem. He just opens the door, steps through, and sits down at his desk. Now, though, it stands as a huge barrier; to get into the classroom, he has to open the door, and doing so is as good as ringing a bell and announcing his presence to the world. The thought of everyone's eyes on him makes him shaky all over again, and he ignores the weak rattle of chains and forces himself to just *breathe*, dammit.

He can do this. He can do this. He *has* to—

Fabric shuffles behind him, underlaid by the faint tap of boots against linoleum. He turns, shoulders tensed, waiting for whoever it is to see him and shout. But it's not one of his classmates. Rather, it's the only person who would brave getting to class this close to the bell — Mr. Aizawa himself.

He looks... tired. No bandages— but wasn't Izuku in the hospital for *two fucking weeks*? Of course he'd be back to normal by now. The only lingering sign of the USJ on Aizawa is the thin, jagged scar running beneath his right eye.

*Hey*, a traitorous part of Izuku's mind whispers. *You match*.

Aizawa looks up and meets his eyes, and it's less of a perception than a simple acknowledgement. Izuku's suddenly rooted to the spot, unable to do anything except stand in front of the door, mute and paralyzed. Aizawa's eyes bore into his, and for a moment, his face is replaced by a river of blood running from hairline to chin, ravaged by the Noumu's attack. Then Izuku blinks, and it's gone.

“Good morning,” Aizawa says. He's standing in front of Izuku, arms crossed, head tilted at a slight angle. Despite the seconds ticking down to the bell, there's no sense of gruff *get to it* lingering around him like there usually is. That roughness hasn't been smoothed out, exactly, but it's... muted.

For a moment, Izuku's mouth just outright refuses to work. Then he swallows, forces some of the tension in his shoulders out, and manages, “Um— good morning, Mr. Aizawa.”

He winces through the voice crack, but Aizawa doesn't even blink.

“How are you feeling?”

“... Fine,” Izuku says, even though he’s a billion miles away from anything resembling okay. “I’m, um. Fine. I’ve been out of the hospital for a few days, so. Uh.”

Aizawa tilts his head, looking Izuku up and down. Izuku does his best not to squirm. *He’s not looking you over for resemblance to the Leviathan . He’s just looking at you.*

Nonetheless, he tightens his jaw and flicks away the few lingering scales that have appeared on his hands. Just in case.

After a pregnant pause, Aizawa speaks again. “I spoke with the other teachers. We’ve decided that we’re not going to force you to make up the classwork you missed, so long as you don’t fall any further behind.”

Izuku almost blanches. He hadn’t even been *thinking* about schoolwork— how much has he missed?

“Oh. Thank you,” he says. “I— I won’t. Fall further behind.”

Coming here was a mistake.

“I trust you won’t,” Aizawa says. “You’re intelligent. You’ll figure it out.”

He doesn’t give Izuku time to chew over his words; just steps past him and moves to open the door. Izuku plans to just let him go, but his mouth works without his permission.

“Mr— Mr. Aizawa?”

Aizawa stops and turns to look at him.

Izuku wrings his hands so tightly he’s surprised they don’t break. “I’m... glad you’re okay.”

For a terrifying moment, Aizawa doesn’t react. Then, he... he doesn’t so much *smile* as a flicker of something lights his eyes, and his lip almost twitches. Then, he says, “I’ve survived worse.”

Izuku strongly doubts that, but he says nothing as Aizawa opens the door. Beyond it, the room is packed with his classmates, milling about and talking. Panic hits him with renewed force, and he almost bolts on the spot. But he has nowhere else to fucking *go* , so he takes a deep breath and enters after Aizawa.

Entering the room behind Aizawa is easier than entering it alone. He stays in Aizawa’s shadow, hands clutching white-knuckled at the straps of his backpack while his heartbeat threatens to start a career as a drum soloist. Each hurried *thu-thump* sends a new wave of nerves through him, and his ears ring faintly as the Leviathan attempts to gnaw on his fear. He kicks it back into its cage and earns a distant shriek for his efforts.

By some pitying miracle, nobody notices him until he’s almost to his desk. Nobody’s really looking for him; they’re all drawn into their own little conversations, discussing homework

or looking at their phones. Even Uraraka, Shinsou, and Iida are in their own bubble. At least, until Izuku rudely punctures it by sliding shakily into his desk.

He makes the mistake of looking up and meeting Uraraka's eyes. They're wide with surprise, and Izuku can almost *hear* the avalanche of questions ready to burst past her tongue as she opens her mouth—

Only to be cut off by Aizawa clearing his throat, having taken his place behind the podium. The bell rings, and the conversations in the class trickle into silence. Now that everyone is no longer distracted, the weight of nineteen startled stares bear down on Izuku's bowed head, prickling the back of his neck.

They're looking at him. They're looking at him, and they're going to *realize*—

"Good morning," Aizawa says, gruff and impartial. "It took you seven seconds to quiet down today. Do better."

Eyes hesitantly flicker between Izuku and Aizawa, unsure who to focus on. Uraraka's doesn't budge, and Izuku concentrates firmly on the speckled pattern of his desk and refuses to look up.

Aizawa clears his throat, a clear warning, and the class seems to come to the general consensus that getting a detention right now isn't worth it. Some of the weight lifts off Izuku's shoulders, and he lets out a shuddery breath. After a moment, he forces his own eyes up.

"As a reminder, the sports festival has been delayed until next month, so that heightened security and other measures can be discussed. This will give you more time to prepare, but it will also mean that your performance will be held to a higher standard."

Izuku didn't know that they were delaying the Sports Festival, but everyone else clearly does, because Aizawa's words are only met with nods. It... shouldn't surprise him, really. Villains have already proven that they can get past UA's defenses— what's stopping them from wriggling into the Sports Festival to cause a scene?

Unbidden, Izuku's mind offers him a crystal clear image of himself losing control on live TV in front of millions, and he sucks in a sharp breath. When he looks down, his hands are speckled with scales, and his claws have scraped a shallow set of grooves into his desk. He grits his teeth, and the scales disappear. The marks on his desk don't.

Aizawa keeps talking, informing the class of some things that Izuku knows and some things he doesn't. He focuses intently on Aizawa's every word, so that he can block Uraraka's stare against the side of his face.

But homeroom doesn't last forever.

He should have guessed the bomb wasn't disarmed, merely delayed. The second the bell's ring marks the end of class, it's an explosion; everyone's flying out of their seats, heading towards him. Their words weave and meld together, blurring into an overwhelming sea of

noise that only amplifies as they approach. Before he knows it, he's surrounded by a dozen swimming faces, all wide-eyed and worried, asking variations of *is he okay?* There's so many of them, surrounding him, and the Leviathan's bucking against its chains and what's stopping it from getting out again and finishing what it started two weeks ago, other than *him?*

"I understand that you're worried about Midoriya, but please, give him space! He's clearly overwhelmed."

That's Iida's voice, beating the others back like the wind against waves. It pierces loud and clear through the blanket of static filling his head. The other voices quiet in response, and eyes widen. The mob takes a step back. Izuku sucks in a breath.

His head doesn't feel like it's being cracked open by noise anymore, but everyone's still staring at him. He's all too aware of his own shaking, the way his claws are digging *more* grooves into his desk—*fuck, shit*, his *claws* —

The Leviathan lets out a grating screech as it's ripped from its foothold in his hands, but he clamps down on it, throws it firmly back into its cage. His hands return to normal in a blink, and he checks himself for scales. There aren't any, although a few are trying to bubble up across his shoulders.

Then he forces himself to look up, surveying the gazes trained on him for any hint of recognition. Waits for the accusations to come, for the screams to start.

They don't. All he sees is worry, simple and naive.

"Sorry," he croaks out, and wishes the ground would just swallow him up right now. He's an idiot for thinking he could handle this.

"No, don't apologize," someone says— that's Ashido, pushing her way through the crowd. "We shouldn't have have overwhelmed you, you're probably still recovering. We were all just really worried about you."

*I know*, says Izuku's mind. *If only you knew.*

"S-Sorry," he says again. "I didn't mean to scare you all."

His classmates share looks between one another, worried and sad. Izuku wants to ask them to back off, but the thought of requesting things of the people he almost killed has his throat sealing up. He lowers his eyes to his desk.

"Well, Midoriya's here," Yaoyorozu says, her voice toeing the curious line between confident and nervous. "That's as close to okay as any of us are, right now. Let's give him space."

And, hesitantly, the cloud disperses. Eyes still cling to him, raising goosebumps on his arms, but no one's standing over him, demanding things of him. He hates how relieved he is. He hates that Yaoyorozu is standing up for him.

But his throat is easing open, so Izuku forces the self-loathing aside and focuses on breathing. In and out, in and out, in and out. Water, swelling and dipping, swirling in his chest.

The Leviathan heaves a guttered breath and falls silent.

He catches Uraraka's eye when he looks up again; she's fiddling with her sleeves, anxiety written in the lines of her shoulders. He's going to have to say *something*. He owes her that much. What right does he have to just avoid her, after what he did?

So he says in a quiet voice, "Um. Uraraka."

She looks up immediately, hopeful. He tries not to shrink back.

"How— how are you?"

"I'm good," she says. "Really relieved to see you. I thought you wouldn't be here today— I didn't see you on the train."

Izuku shrugs. He doesn't have the energy to lie to her, but telling the truth would hurt even more.

"It's— good to see you too," he says, like he hasn't been avoiding her gaze all morning. "I'm sorry I haven't really..."

"No, no, it's okay!" Uraraka hastens. "I get it, really. I figured it might be... a bit overwhelming for you."

Izuku nods, rubbing the back of his neck, and out of the corner of his eye, he catches a glimpse of Iida. Right, Iida.

"Iida," he manages, turning in his seat. "Um. Thank you for..." He waves a hand, cringing at his own fumbling. Fortunately, Iida seems to get it.

"You're welcome," he says, offering a tight smile. "I understand."

He understands, Uraraka understands. How can they understand *this*? They've never experienced this kind of hell. Izuku prays they never will.

Of their own accord, his eyes slide further to the left— and there's Shinsou, watching him with a masked expression.

Seeing him hits exactly as hard as Izuku expected it to.

Somehow, he hides his flinch, letting his eyes dip to the floor as naturally as they can. But inside, his chest's a goddamn maelstrom, swirling and wailing like something possessed. *You almost killed him*, the voice in his head crows. *He's only alive because you failed.*

"Midoriya," Shinsou says. Izuku looks up at Shinsou's left eyebrow and hides his jittery hands in his lap. Shinsou's eyes are like drills, boring even more holes into the splintering mask that's kept him afloat for this long. *Don't look too closely*, Izuku begs. *Don't dive too deep. You won't like what you find.*

But Shinsou's not looking for anything. Instead, he says, blunt and to the point: "What do you need?"

Somehow, it's surprising. "What?"

"From— us," Shinsou says, tilting his head to indicate Iida and Uraraka. They're both listening attentively. "What do you need?"

Izuku's mouth opens and closes wordlessly. What can he say? With every second that passes, his throat closes up, until he's scared he won't be able to answer at all. So he blurts the first thing that comes to mind— and for the first time in forever, it's the truth.

"Space," he says, weakly. "I'm sorry, I just need— space."

And Shinsou says, "Okay," and that's that.

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The first few classes have Izuku strung taught as a bowstring. One by one, pro heroes drift in and out of the classroom, and Izuku waits with bated breath for them to look past the assembled students and heroes-to-be and *see* him. He waits for that flicker of recognition, those widening eyes, *anything*. Anything that suggests they see past his crumbling facade.

But they don't. Nobody does.

By the time English rolls around, he's unsure whether to laugh or cry at it all. It's almost cruel how trusting they are. They'd never suspect that one of their students could be capable of something so vile. Why would they? As far as they know, he's just another face in the crowd, another pair of wide eyes floating in the aftermath of USJ.

The knot in his throat is so tight he can barely breathe, worksheet phasing in and out of focus. Frustration boils behind his eyes, and with it comes a low hiss, the prickle of scales at his fingertips. Izuku grits his teeth; when he rubs his eyes, his hands are too cold, too smooth.

It shouldn't be this hard. Isn't this what he's been doing since day one— agreeing, deflecting, pretending? It was all a lie before. That isn't any different now.

But it is. It is different, because somewhere along the way, things stopped being a lie. He'd been stupid, and he'd let himself let go and call these people his friends. And then he'd lost control, and he'd hurt them. Almost *killed* them.

They wouldn't call him their friend if they knew that.

He wonders, deep down, if this whole thing was doomed to fail from day one. This whole *plan* — become a hero, save lives to make up for the ones he took. It feels like a joke now. Why did he think he could be a hero? He'll always be the Leviathan, nothing more.

That mantra echoes around his head for the next hour, dogging his footsteps and digging claws into his every thought. He doesn't bother trying to shake it or run from it like he would have in the past. This time, he knows it's right. There's no getting away from it.

By the time lunch comes, he's a stupid, jittery mess. He's managed to focus on class by the force of will alone, but his work is shaky and his thoughts are fragmented. He can barely read his own handwriting, hands trembling under the strain of keeping themselves free of the Leviathan's brush. Who cares if a few scales might be innocuous. He can't take that chance. Not just the chance of getting recognized—the chance of losing control again.

Not using his quirk isn't a permanent solution. Hell, it's not even a short-term one— sooner or later, probably sometime this *week* , he'll be expected to use his quirk. Then what the hell is he going to do?

He doesn't know. He doesn't know *anything*.

When the bell rings for lunch, he follows in Shinsou's shadow, fingers twitching. For a moment, he almost considers it— going to lunch, playing along, acting like he's fine— and then he imagines the overwhelming mismash of noise in the cafeteria, and he just *can't* . So, in the brief moment where no eyes are fixed on him, hardly the length of a blink, he slips away into the crowd. He's almost overwhelmed by the torrent of people heading towards him, and every muscle in his body pulls taught. But then they pass him, and he lets out a shuddery breath and starts walking.

They'll be worried, he knows. It eats at him. But he just needs to be *alone* .

So he picks his way to the bathroom and steps inside. It's empty, thankfully; he steps over to the sink and runs the tap. Maybe it's silly, but the cold water feels good on his hands, and he leans down to splash it across his flushed face. Then he looks up, and freezes.

In the mirror, his reflection stares back at him, wide-eyed and blank. For the most part, it's human. Except for the fins flared out from the sides of his head.

He touches one, shocked. It's— how long has he had fins? Why didn't he *notice*? Why didn't he feel the Leviathan push them out? If he didn't feel the Leviathan push the fins out, what else is he missing?

Izuku shoves the fins back in, ignoring the way the Leviathan shifts discontentedly against his skull. Then he checks himself over, searching for scales or fins or gills. There doesn't seem to be anything, but he's not reassured.

He abandons the sink and, after a moment of debate, locks himself inside of a stall. UA keeps its restrooms spotless, so he has no qualms about sliding down the wall to sit on the floor, knees drawn to his chest and hands tangled in his hair. Now that he's alone, isolated from the rest of the school as best he can, he has time to think:

What the hell is he doing here?

What's the point? Why did he come crawling back? He'd put coming back to UA on his calendar as the inevitable progression of events, but *is it*? Being at UA means he's training to become a hero. Being at UA means believing he actually has a future here.

Is he? Does he?

How *can* he, after everything that's happened?

USJ was an eye-opener. He thought he could keep control in the face of villains, and he failed. Spectacularly. And then he ravaged the whole fucking USJ, almost *murdered* all of his friends and teachers, and only stopped because All Might beat the shit out of him.

In a sickening way, it's relieving to know that the Leviathan *can* be beaten. That, if something ever happens to him, All Might can bring him down. All Might can stop him. There's nothing All Might can't do.

But All Might won't always be there. What happens if he's a pro, years from now, and he loses control?

What would UA do if they realized they'd trained a monster?

He doesn't know what to do. He doesn't know what to *do* .

He could drop out, he tells himself. It would make sense. UA sees him as a terrified, traumatized kid. They would try to dissuade him, but they wouldn't stop him, and in the end, they'd understand. They'd let him go, and that'd be that. He'd find another school, another career, another life. Hang his head low. Find another way to atone.

It'd be easy.

He should do it.

He doesn't want to.

It's stupid. It shouldn't *matter* what he wants. But something inside of him— something that, until now, hasn't been brave enough to show its face— has firmly latched onto UA. It's digging in its fingers, burrowing into warm memories, and hissing, *I don't want to leave* .

And he doesn't want to leave. He doesn't want to turn and walk away from the only place he's ever felt safe— from the only *people* he's ever felt at home with. He doesn't want to abandon Uraraka's bright smile, or Iida's protective kindness, or Shinsou's quiet understanding. He just *can't* .

But he can't in good conscious stay by their side while he's the biggest threat they'll ever face.

He presses the heels of his hands hard against his face and grits his teeth, crumpling to bury his face in his knees. His head is stuck in a tug of war between *he has to* and *he wants to* , and neither side will back down. They just keep pulling, back and forth, and he's teetering on the hair-thin line between. He wants to compromise, but he doesn't know *how* . He has to make a decision, but he just— he *can't* .

He can't fucking do *anything* these days, apparently.

He doesn't even realize he's crying until he pulls his hands away to see they're shiny and wet. Sure enough, when he resurfaces enough to check, there's a knot in his throat and tears

on his cheeks. Disgust curls in his gut. Two weeks ago, he almost murdered all his friends, and here he is now, crying in a high school bathroom because he can't decide whether or not he should run away.

Scrubbing at his eyes only makes the tears flow faster. Frustration tightens into a fist in his chest, and the Leviathan digs its claws into his shoulders, awake and snarling.

He hurls it away with a choked shout, crushing it down, grinding it under his heel, *stomping*. In his head, he screams until he's hoarse, begging, *leave me alone! You've already taken everything from me— what else do you fucking want?*

It hurts— a strange ghost pain that prickles up his arms and his spine. But he doesn't *care*— just keeps pushing and pushing, sobbing into his knees and gripping his pants with white knuckles. The Leviathan's screaming turns shrill and distant, and by the time he's exhausted, it's completely silent.

Izuku hiccups another sob, wiping at his eyes.

And then the door to the bathroom swings open.

Izuku freezes, covering his mouth with one hand and holding his breath. Through the gap under the stall door, he can make out a pair of brown loafers and UA's uniform bottoms. Whoever it is hasn't noticed him, silently heading across the room to the sinks.

Before he can hold it back, Izuku sucks in a quivering, painfully audible inhale.

The feet stop, and Izuku wants to *die*.

For a second, there's silence, and Izuku prays that whoever it is will decide that it's not their business and continue with whatever they came here to do. But this is a fucking *hero school*, so of course the feet come to stand in front of his stall door, and he hears a careful, "You okay in there?"

The voice is familiar, but it still takes him a second to place it: Togata. Of course it's someone he knows. What are the chances?

It's clear Togata's not leaving until he gets some sort of reply, so Izuku tries to smooth any wobbliness from his voice and answers, "Um— fine."

And of course it comes out just as choked as he'd tried to prevent.

There's a pregnant pause, then Togata says, "... Midoriya?"

Izuku grits his teeth together and doesn't reply.

"... Not to intrude, but you don't really sound fine," Togata says. "Do you mind if I come in?"

Which, frankly, is a really weird thing to say to someone in a bathroom. Izuku almost laughs, but it comes out as a wet cough. Togata apparently takes this as a yes, because he says, "Alright then."

And then comes one of the strangest string of events Izuku's ever seen— barring all things including or remotely related to Bit. On the other side of the stall door, Togata drops to his knees— and then he walks, on his knees, *through* the stall door. His shirt, tie, and blazer do not follow, but Togata barely bats an eye as he twists around to pick them up from under the door. Then, like this is all completely normal, he shrugs his shirt and blazer back on.

Izuku watches in wide-eyed silence, momentarily stunned out of his internal turmoil. He'd known about Togata's quirk beforehand, but just... *seeing* it in use like that is just *jarring* .

“Sorry about that,” Togata says, sitting cross-legged in front of him. “My quirk doesn't extend to my clothes.”

Izuku nods silently, unsure how to reply. Togata's smile shifts from cheeky to something more gentle, and he leans forward.

“It's been a while since I last saw you,” he says. “I'd ask how you're doing, but I think I can guess.”

Izuku lets out a sharp breath that's almost a bitter laugh and sniffles. God, he must look pathetic right now, curled up in the bathroom stall. Real hero material. This has to be some sort of karma.

“Honestly, I... can't really blame you, considering everything you've been through,” Togata continues, and *that* gets Izuku's attention. “Anyways, well. I know we haven't talked all that much, but I've been told I'm decent at giving advice, so... do you want to talk about whatever's got you... y'know?”

Izuku absolutely does not want to talk about it. This is not something he physically *can* discuss with anyone. It's an issue that only swirls around the inside of his head for a reason. But something about Togata's gentle, open smile urges him onward, and before he even realizes what he's doing, he blurts out:

“I— I don't deserve to be here.”

It's the truth, painfully blunt and searing to the touch. He flinches, shocked not by the admission but by the fact that he openly *admitted it* .

“... Huh,” Togata says. “Why not?”

Fortunately, Izuku stops his brain from going rogue and blurting out a much more damning truth. That doesn't stop the avalanche that's already begun, and he ends up stuttering out something that barely skates around the truth.

“At the USJ, I— I thought that I could— we're here to learn to fight villains, and I thought that I could— that when it came down to it, I'd be able to— to *fight* them, but then we— I *saw* them, and I couldn't— I couldn't—”

He cuts himself off with a sharp inhale and leaves it to Togata to connect the dots however he sees fit. And he does; his expression sobers, and he leans back.

“Ah,” he says. “I think I get it.”

Izuku says nothing. Togata sighs.

“You know, the first time I actually fought a villain, I was terrified.”

Izuku’s head snaps back up.

The corners of Togata’s lips tugs. “It was last year, on my internship. I was on a patrol, and I came across a villain, and, well.” He shrugs. “He was mugging some poor guy in an alley off the main road. I was the only hero around, and when I stepped in, he fought back. Still remember his quirk— he could set his hands on fire. Pretty nasty.”

Izuku rubs his eyes and straightens up. Togata pauses for a second, clearly reminiscing, then continues.

“They don’t really tell you that it’s gonna be like that. And it doesn’t really occur to you beforehand, either. You spend all this time preparing, all this time learning what to do and how to do it, so why would you be scared? But then you actually get out there, and it’s... it’s totally different than being in a classroom. Which makes sense in retrospect, but again, you don’t really realize until you’re actually *there* .”

“And for me, this was— *well* into my second year here. I had a year and a half of training under pro heroes and facing simulations under my belt, and I was *still* scared. I almost froze up. You’ve been here... Christ, not even a *month* . I’d be more concerned if you *weren’t* scared. Man— I’d be *terrified* at USJ, even now. What you went through... I can barely comprehend it, and I’ve only heard the rumors.”

He runs a hand through his hair, looking troubled. Izuku draws his knees up to his chest and rests his chin on them. Togata’s missing the mark completely, but at the same time, he’s somehow dead on.

“All of this is to say... It’s not your fault you were scared and couldn’t fight off any villains at USJ. Hero Course or not, nobody would have expected you to. But just because you couldn’t then doesn’t mean you’ll never be able to, or that you don’t deserve to be here. The whole point of being here in the first place is to *learn* . You have three years— that’s plenty of time. That fear... it never goes away, but UA will give you the confidence to work past it. To acknowledge it without letting it consume you.”

And *that* strikes a chord in Izuku unlike anything else he’s ever heard. *The confidence to acknowledge fear without letting it consume him*. At the end of the day... that’s it. That’s what he needs.

The Leviathan is a fear response; he gets scared, it consumes him. And the fact is this: he’s going to be in terrifying situations whether he ends up a hero or not. The world is a crazy place. He’s been caught in villain attacks before, and he’ll be caught in them again. If he doesn’t figure out how to actually overcome that fear, then every time will have the same outcome: he’ll lose control, and someone will die.

UA, as Togata unwittingly points out, offers another outcome. UA offers a way for him to become stronger than his fear, for him to become stronger than the Leviathan. He'll never have to worry about it, because he'll have the strength to work past it. He'll have the strength to *crush it*, so that it never gets the chance to hurt anyone ever again.

And... maybe that means he doesn't have to say goodbye.

Part of his brain still screams that it's selfish, that he only wants to stay because he's a coward who can't let go of things he doesn't deserve. But it's quelled now, quieted by the sobering realization that this isn't a problem he can run from. That whether he stays at UA or not, he's still going to have the Leviathan quirk, and one way or another, he's going to have to learn to deal with it.

He doesn't deserve to be here. He's a monster, and he doesn't deserve any of this. That's not going to change. But he's *here*, and he has a chance to change the pattern that's been suffocating him for his whole life. To finally come out on top of a fight he's been losing for years.

A shot in the dark at redemption.

"... Thank you," he breathes. "I— thank you."

Togata smiles. "Feeling a bit better?"

He jerks a nod, still half-lost in thought. "Uh— Yeah. A bit. I think I'm okay now."

"Good," Togata says. "Now, you should probably get to lunch. Training *sucks* on an empty stomach."

"Yeah," Izuku says, pushing up to his feet. "I'll— I'll get to that. Thank you, again."

"Any time," Togata says. "And good luck out there."

They part ways there; Togata leaves to find Amajiki— something about needing to study for a test he definitely didn't forget about— and Izuku heads for the lunchroom. Something new haunts his stride, now; something dogging his steps where there was nothing but guilt before: a deep, resentful determination.

With every step he takes, it solidifies, until his resolve has taken on a new color. He'll learn to work past— no. He'll learn to *crush* his fear, and he'll learn to silence the Leviathan for good. He's going to be strong enough. He *has* to be strong enough. For them.

He doubts facing his classmates will be any easier. He doubts it ever will be. What happened at the USJ will haunt him until the day he dies, along with the thirty-two lives lost on that day so long ago.

But he can make sure that what happened to them *never happens again*. He'll learn how to control his fear. He'll learn how to control his quirk. He'll learn how to control his life.

And if he has to grind the Leviathan under his heel until it physically hurts, then so be it.

## Chapter End Notes

whooh. so. yeah. surprise! It's me! out of the blue, eight months later. i've been picking at this chapter once a month or so for the past while, but it wasn't until like a few days ago that I suddenly had a burst of motivation (from reading another wonderfully written bnha fic, thank you, porcelain) and, well, out this came. my brain is a wonderful thing that will only give me a writing drive under the most specific of circumstances, but hey, chapter's here. whatever.

anyways. this will probably be the last chapter of the year (fic anniversary's in 3 days, it has already been two years, christ) and I guess I'm just gonna use it as a platform to say thank you all so much? I know it's been a really slow year for this fic, and I am genuinely sorry about that. but almost all of you have been so supportive of me even when i stepped away, and i genuinely can't thank you enough. thank you for a great 2019, and i hope to see you all more in 2020.

(7/12/23) EDIT:

can't believe it's been almost four years, good god. if you're reading this fic even so long after its prime: thank you, genuinely. i don't look at comments on this fic anymore, partly out of guilt, but the almost endless outpouring of support has meant more to me over the years than i can say.

if you're looking for an update on the status of this fic, i apologize for what i'm about to say: as of today, i'm biting the bullet, and Leviathan is officially discontinued. i wrote something of an explanation/post-mortem on my tumblr, [here](#), if you're curious. if you're reading this note on chapter 18 of this monster of a fic, i know that's not what you want to hear. i am really, genuinely sorry. if i could find the passion and motivation to finish this, i would. i've tried.

with all that said, thank you, again, so very much for reading, to both my readers back when i was in eighth grade and just starting this thing and to new readers just now finding it years later. this was one of the best things that ever happened to me. i wish you all the best. <3 --sparks

## End Notes

Come yell at me at [@rip-aizawa](#) on tumblr

also this story has a [tvtropes page!!](#)

edit:

aaaalright. i hoped i wouldn't have to address this, but i'm just gonna... get this out here. get this off my back.

please stop leaving criticism unless i specifically ask for it.

you're allowed to not like my story. you're allowed to think things are poorly done, or that some character interaction seems shoddy, or that there are plot holes that could have been fixed. that's *fine*! nobody's stopping you from having an opinion!

but commenting on my fic (an *anime fanfic*, that i write for *fun*) to tell me everything i did incorrectly, usually not even in a constructive matter, literally doesn't change any of that. i'm not going to rewrite a chapter because you didn't like it. the only thing you're accomplishing is making me feel bad.

i'm not a professional writer. i don't do this for a living. you're not paying to read this. if you don't like it... just go find something else.

thanks for understanding.

thank u for reading

## Works inspired by this one

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