

Aspiring Fires

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Aspiring Fires

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Summary

The Tododeku side of Common Ground as told from Todoroki's perspective.

Notes

Hey guys you ready for another one???? Oh I doubt it but lets go!

This one is going to be sadder than Common Ground because I'm not going to beat around the bush with what Todoroki has gone through. If this may trigger you please don't read this.

The Coldest Heart

Shouto had long come to terms with the fact that his life was not his.

He'd had no say in his future since the moment he was born, and struggling only made things worse.

He felt like a bird in an iron cage of thorns, unable to fly for fear of being hurt. It felt like the longer he lived, the tighter the cage became until he could scarcely breathe without feeling it begin to pierce him. The only comfort he allowed himself was in the scantest rebellion he could get away with.

As long as he lived, he would never use his bastard old man's power.

His mother's power was more than enough. She was a strong woman, with a quirk that could have brought that son of a bitch to his knees if she'd had the temperment to do it. That had never been her though, she was the softness of snow on Christmas morning, snowball fights had between neighborhood kids.

Shouto however had been broken of that kind of gentle nature early.

He let the chill of his quirk ice over all the parts of himself that had cracked and splintered until he was something painful even to look at. His father had wanted to make him a weapon, and Shouto had obeyed, though he refused to do it the way the bastard wanted. That was his consolation.

And for years it had been enough. When he fell into his bed, bruised and aching and miserable, he would push himself until he could sink under the ice and snow. His heart slowly froze too until he could swear in the dark of the night he couldn't hear it beat anymore.

He'd joined UA, he'd destroyed every practical, blown away every test they placed before him without batting an eyelash. It was nothing to him.

No, the hardest thing was watching the others in his class interact with each other.

He had almost no understanding of it, even though their easy touches and quick banter with each other made his chest ache. He'd never been allowed friends, and even if he had he highly doubted he could have maintained them for long.

Before he'd sold his soul to the winter inside of himself he'd been incredibly volatile. He lashed out at anything close to him, be it with words or teeth or hands. He'd hated it, but he couldn't stop it until the mounting fear of becoming like *him* had driven it beneath the surface of the ice with everything else.

He couldn't understand how they laughed together, couldn't understand how joy could come so easily over something idiotic. He wondered why even after they fought or argued, they still stood close to one another, still touched.

He wanted to understand, but it seemed hopelessly out of his depth.

And then there was the problem of *him* . The green haired boy with the sad eyes and the bright smile that mystified him.

Shouto spent altogether more time than he knew was reasonable staring at Midoriya Izuku, trying to puzzle him out. The other boy made even *less* sense to him if that were possible. He could see the same kind of pain in the boys eyes as in his own, in those of his brother and sister, but the kid *s till* smiled like that when Shouto himself couldn't even remember the last time he'd smiled. It was if it wasn't a response to his own happiness, but something he did for everyone else.

But why would he do that?

Shouto nearly drove himself mad wondering about it.

Before long it became something of a habit, watching the boy. It would probably have been disconcerting, but it wasn't as though anyone paid Shouto enough attention to notice. He could watch him for as long as he felt like without having to field questions about why he was doing it.

He wouldn't readily admit it to himself, but watching Midoriya became something of a comfort as well.

He should have known how foolish that was.

"Shouto." His father began, walking into his room without so much as a knock.

The boy had been stuck at his desk ostensibly working on his homework, but actually his mind had been wandering back to Midoriya and how today he'd been trying to lift a weight twice his size. Shouto had been surprised when he'd managed to get the thing off the ground, even if he was bright red and shaking.

"Yes?" He asked, sparing the man a side eyed glance.

Sometimes Shouto wondered what it would be like if the image of this man didn't make him so sick to his stomach. It was a pointless musing.

"There's a boy in your class that has ties to All Might." Endeavor explained, "I have reason to believe the kid is being groomed by him. Which means you need to take him down as soon as possible."

Shouto tasted familiar bitterness at the back of his throat as the words 'Yes father' passed his lips.

"His name is Midoriya Izuku."

The jolt that went through Shouto's chest was unlike anything he'd felt in years. It physically hurt, the surprise and panic that broke through his control to clamp around his heart. He could feel his stomach roiling, threatening to spill over at just the thought.

He should have known.

"Is that a problem?" Endeavor's eyes narrowed, their gaze like the sun, hellfire licking out from their edges.

Yes. If he weren't such a coward he'd say yes. He'd use this rogue emotion to propel himself, to fight, to reclaim himself and purge every ounce of Endeavor's influence from his body.

"No, father." He said instead, feeling disgusted with himself all over again.

"Good."

And just like that, he'd left. He hardly noticed when he burned holes in Shouto's world before, why should this time be any different?

He finished his homework, choked down the dinner Fuyumi made for them all even if it made him feel sick, trained to try to keep his much larger father from beating him in submission though it went as poorly as ever, then retired to bed as soon as he was allowed.

For hours he lay awake, trying to bury spring green beneath winter's chill.

When the Sports Festival had been announced, Endeavor seemed more keyed up than usual. In the weeks before it started he barely allowed Shouto any time away from that goddamn room, not letting him rest until he deemed their training finished.

He claimed it was his chance to show the world the superior hero he had created. That it would be where he took down All Might's protege and showed the other hero what lay in store for him too.

Shouto didn't have time to think of anything outside of drills and fighting techniques, and at school he was almost too tired even to pay attention to lectures. He got in trouble for losing weight since he'd been skipping lunch to take naps during those weeks.

When the day finally came around, he was very nearly grateful for it.

He kept an eye on Midoriya at each stage of the competition. The boy was doing well, even if the panic in his eyes told Shouto it was less than intentional.

He'd still managed to get one up not only on Shouto but on Bakugou too during the race. It had earned Shouto a nasty slap across the face away from prying eyes, but he wasn't sure that he felt it. The pressure registered, as did the harsh words that accompanied it, but they didn't sink below the surface. He'd frozen himself back over, nothing could touch him this way.

During the second stage, he'd gone after Midoriya almost exclusively. He was far from the only one, the boy had a target painted on his forehead. Despite having consistently placed lowest in their class when it came to anything quirk related, Midoriya was holding his own as he and his team fended off multiple attacking teams at once.

He led excellently, though it was clear this was the first time he'd had so many people to direct. But Shouto had built his team with the specific intent to take Midoriya on. It wasn't hard to find all the right pieces, given his powerful quirk and flashy last name, people usually tripped over themselves to work with him.

Though, he'd been surprised at how good a fight Midoriya had put up. Shouto had won, ultimately, but the boy had launched a counter attack so effective he'd forced Shouto to use the fire as a shield. It disgusted him immediately and his distraction allowed them to grab enough points to scrape through to the next event. It was admirable, if nothing else.

None of this was helping the lingering urge Shouto felt to simply watch the boy go.

It was irritating that though he'd told himself to relent, his eyes were still drawn to the other before he could catch himself. It was something he *wanted* which immediately made him need to crush it. He couldn't *want*. Wanting things meant there was something to exploit, and Shouto would not suffer that kind of weakness. Not now and not ever.

So when Midoriya attempted to praise him for a job well done, rather than taking the interaction and running with it, letting the warmth the boy exuded melt the cage around his heart, he curtly reminded him he wasn't there to make friends. The look he received seemed genuinely wounded, but he refused to let it make him take his words back. He had an objective.

When the singles matches began, Shouto watched each intently. Even Midoriya's though he told himself that it was just to figure out what he could expect when they inevitably faced off. Data collecting. No one ever won a fight by coming unprepared, and Shouto absolutely *had* to win.

That he couldn't seem to blink while he watched the head of green come into view at the match was only due to focus.

Although in terms of studying, the only thing he learned about the boy was something he already knew, that his resolve was absolutely absurd.

He'd somehow fought against the mind control quirk, something that by rights should be next to impossible. He'd managed to free a single finger and break it presumably using his quirk, snapping himself out of the trance less than an inch from the boundary line. Shouto couldn't fathom how he'd done it, and from the shocked gasps around him, no one else could either. Midoriya, for all his bumbling bubblyness in class seemed to be a formidable opponent.

The idea of fighting him grew a little less nauseating as he watched the boy circle around his opposition. He was quick, and seemed to be at least one move ahead at all times. Not the best fighter, but with the kind of power Shouto knew him to possess that wouldn't matter much.

Even if Shouto knew he would beat him, there was much less chance of accidentally hurting him in the process if he knew how to defend himself.

When it came time to get ready for their match, Shouto found himself pulling Midoriya aside.

He wasn't sure of what he was going to tell him, or why, but it was as if his body had acted on its own, relegating him to ride shotgun.

"Uh, was there something you wanted to talk to me about, Todoroki?" Midoriya had prompted him.

There were a few things he wanted to talk to the other about. Some that would actually benefit his 'mission' and some that were purely personal.

"You're All Might's lovechild, right?" He said.

Out of all the things he could have asked him, that was both the most and least important. It was also not at all what he'd meant to say. Not even *remotely*. At this point he was no stranger to his mouth betraying him, but it was never really less irritating.

Midoriya reacted as if Shouto had just accused him of spying on the girl's locker room. His arms began flailing around him and he went red practically up to his hairline.

"That's not it at all! I mean, that would be amazing, and I guess our quirks are pretty similar so I can see where you're coming from but there's no way! I'm just lucky enough to have such a strong quirk and he took an interest in me I guess because I hurt myself a lot on accident and I'm kind of a human disaster and when saving people is what you do, it'd be kinda hard *not* to get involved with a kid like me, I mean it's not like I would argue with that kind of thing I mean it's *All Might* who wo-"

"Midoriya."

"S-sorry, I'm trying to stop doing that." The boy covered his mouth with one hand.

Shouto stared at the other for a long moment, trying to make sure his mouth would say what he intended it to this time before he spoke. He let out a long, deep breath.

"My old man is a bastard." He began, "He despises All Might because he's always been better than him and he can't stand it. He knew he'd never be able to beat him so he made something that can."

He stared Midoriya directly in the eye, noting the grim look that had come over his features as he spoke.

"My life is the direct product of Endeavor's spite. He married my mother and forced her to have his children until one of them came out how he wanted, and then when she finally broke, he threw her away. He spent years carving me into the kind of weapon he wanted, until I was perfectly hollowed out. That is my purpose, to take down All Might, and as of today, it starts with you."

The look in his eyes as Shouto spoke wasn't one of fear, but rather... no, Shouto hadn't seen that look before. His brows were pulled desperately tight together, his mouth a thin gash, and his whole frame trembled. He looked like he might cry, but he was holding it back. Was that how he showed anger?

"Todoroki," He breathed, his voice a hoarse echo of what it had been minutes ago, "I am so sorry."

Shouto blinked, stunned.

That hadn't been at all what he'd expected, given that he'd essentially just given a declaration of war. He expected to be met with claws and determination, to be told that Midoriya wouldn't simply go down so easily. He expected to become a villain in his eyes the way he had in his mother's.

Not... not this.

"What?" He frowned harder.

"That must have been so painful for you." Midoriya explained with that same tightness to his voice, "We grew up very differently so I can't even begin to imagine how much you've been through. But I am so sorry you had to face all of it alone."

His eyes went wide and he could feel his heart slamming against the bars of its cage, heedless of the pain it was causing him. He couldn't seem to swallow right, a knot he hadn't felt since he was a child tugging at the back of his throat.

"I-" He didn't know how to respond to that, any of it, so he fell back on his default, "It doesn't really matter."

"Of course it does!" Midoriya argued frantically, "You're a human being, Todoroki, you have a right to be treated like it."

The corners of his eyes stung and no matter how evenly he forced himself to breathe, it did nothing to calm his body down. It was like the thing was rebelling against him, against the rigid control he'd maintained over it for so long. He could feel his right side slowly heating and with it bile rose to the back of his throat.

"I'm going to reject him." Shouto managed to force out, his voice not betraying any of the turmoil inside of him, "I will do what he's made me for, but I'm going to do it my own way. I've never once used his damn quirk in battle, and I never will. I will prove to him how strong she was."

Midoriya didn't look any less anguished, but there was hardly time to debate it when Shouto was called away for his next match.

He was so far in his head he froze half of the stadium.

Little Campfire

Chapter Notes

Oh my /GOD/ tho.

When it finally came time to fight Midoriya, Shouto was in no way surprised to barely feel so much as a kick from his chest about it. With his last attack he'd made sure to let some of the ice that had encased so much of the world around him wrap back around his heart too. He had no time for anything less and would suffer no weakness.

Midoriya stood across from him, that determined look on his face skewed somewhat by something else Shouto didn't bother to try to put a name to. It didn't matter much anyway.

This would be over quickly.

Having watched Midoriya fight, his main concern was going to be dealing with that monster strength of his. If he could keep him from using that, the rest should be no problem. He wasn't a particularly strong fighter, and his tactical skill wouldn't mean much if he was overwhelmed.

He'd have to strike hard, and strike quickly.

As soon as Present Mic finished up his opening remarks, Shouto was launching an ice attack fast enough that Midoriya would be left with very few choices in how to respond to it.

And just as he'd suspected, Midoriya countered it, expending a finger to do so.

So that was his plan.

Noted.

Simple, Shouto could easily out last eight blasts, ten if he got really creative. He'd just have to keep his distance and look for an opening while Midoriya wasted his chances dealing with his ranged attacks.

He was actually sort of disappointed that it was going to be so easy. He'd been not so much looking forward to a proper match up, he didn't really care for fighting, but maybe hoping that his preoccupation with the boy had been justified? He wasn't sure really what he'd been

hoping for, but this was hardly it. Watching Midoriya break himself over a match he was never going to win only made him feel more hollow.

He kept pressing, feeling himself grow just slightly colder as Midoriya fought off the attacks. The shockwaves were rattling the stadium, and the cold drafts they caused were biting. He didn't much feel them, not any more than he felt the cold seeping in from his right side. After this, he wasn't too sure he'd feel much of anything again.

After his third or so attack he saw his opening, and quickly capitalized on it. Midoriya had exhausted his first hand, and in the time it took him to ready the other past the pain he had to be in, Shouto formed a bridge between the two of them. He scaled it in quick order, so familiar with the feeling of gliding across his ice that the adjustment in his footing came second nature, just the way pacing his breathing for running did.

He pushed off from the bridge just at the highest point, giving his punch just a little more bite behind it.

Midoriya dodged.

While it was certainly faster than he'd expected, honestly with those kinds of injuries he shouldn't have been able to focus well enough to pull off a precision move like that, it was hardly of consequence. Shouto reacted just as quickly, reaching out with his ice to encase Midoriya's leg before he could get too far.

But it seemed he'd underestimated one key thing.

As Midoriya reared back with his whole arm, Shouto realized, belatedly, he wasn't dealing with someone only concerned about winning some sporting event at school. No, Midoriya's determination went far beyond that.

The punch sent Shouto flying backwards with the force of energy it expended. It was like the punches All Might threw, so powerful they could change the weather or send enemies flying for miles. Shouto just barely managed to keep himself from being thrown out of the ring by erecting an ice structure behind himself.

It wasn't as graceful as his usual fare and he could hear his back pop as he slammed into the thing, taking his breath away for a moment. But, ever the good student, he wouldn't let pain keep him from getting back to his feet.

While Midoriya had managed to keep him from getting close, he'd also lost his other arm entirely. It was red and raw, the skin blistered and bleeding, like he'd scrubbed it with steel wool. His eyes were absolutely manic from forcing himself to endure the pain and keep moving forward. It was another look entirely too familiar to Shouto.

He forced down the nausea in his stomach, forced back the persistent feeling of... what, he didn't know. It was too faint, just the reflection of a feeling really. Nevertheless it was distracting and he needed it gone.

He struck out with another spire of ice.

This one should hit home. Midoriya was out of fingers to break.

The shockwave that hit them nearly sent him out of the ring, catching him by surprise yet again. He was sure Midoriya had broken every finger on both of his hands, and looking back at him he found the boy... to have reused one of the fingers on his right hand.

That was...

How could he bring himself to *do* something so obscenely painful? He was screaming, tears flowing down his cheeks and Shouto felt sicker now than ever. He hated this, he wanted to stop, more than anything but he had to press on, he had to keep going. What Midoriya chose to do to himself wasn't his concern, it shouldn't matter to him, it *didn't*.

He had to focus. His limit was starting to approach.

Focus.

He was in the middle of reassessing Midoriya's threat level when the boy called out to him.

"QUIT SCREWING AROUND!"

Shouto's head snapped up at the accusation, once again baffled that Midoriya was in any shape to be saying anything that didn't involve begging to end the match and have his wounds tended to. Was he... was he serious?

"Look at me Todoroki!" His teeth nashed together, as he clenched his broken hand into a fist, "You haven't put a single scratch on me yet! So quit messing around and come at me with all you've got!"

It took Shouto a minute to parse what the other was asking of him. But when he did he felt his arms begin to tremble though he absolutely refused to acknowledge that.

"You want the fire?" Shouto cocked his head, narrowing his eyes, "What did my old man put you up to this?"

That would explain his absurd drive. Endeavor had a way of bringing that out in people.

Midoriya had the wherewithal to look offended more than anything, "No! But the rest of us are giving our all here, and you're only fighting at fifty-percent! If that's all you're willing to give, then you don't deserve to win!"

Something long buried and as so far unfamiliar gripped Shouto by the throat. It was stronger for it's extended absence, choking him out and fueling him all at once before he could even comprehend that it was there.

Rage, like he hadn't felt since he was a child, bit through him and suddenly he was moving again.

He was slower, clumsy by his standards, due to the frost build up on his skin, between his muscle fibres.

How dare he! This kid who didn't know him from Adam save for a few small things he'd told him though he could just tell Shouto what he already knew? That he was a goddamn coward, that his little rebellion was nothing but the actions of a little boy still too scared to really stand up to his father? He knew that! Of course he did! He wasn't *blind*.

He circled Midoriya, throwing a sloppy punch that earned him a hit right to his gut. It wasn't hard enough to make him get sick, he hadn't had that happen in years. But it was baffling that the stupid kid could still swing his disfigured arms.

"Why are you putting yourself through this!" Shouto yelled back, surprising himself with how loud it came out.

Surely there had to be something driving him. Something Shouto didn't know about. No one would go this far just to win, surely no one could possibly be that stubborn. What was it with this kid?

"Because I want to live up to people's expectations!" Midoriya's voice was beginning to show the pain he had to be in, coming out as a dogged groan at first before building, "I want to be able to smile while I do something right! Whatever it takes to be a hero!"

Shouto stood stunned, receiving another punch for his stupid inaction.

"That's why I'm giving this everything I have!" Midoriya gritted out, now a few feet away, his eyes clouded over with too many emotions for Shouto to even begin to try to name, "Just like *you* should be!"

Shouto lost a few more steps backward as he avoided the next punch, and the one after that.

"I can't know what you've been through or how much it's cost you." Midoriya said quieter, in a voice likely only Shouto would hear, "But whatever it was it's past now. Right now nothing else matters but you and what you choose to do with who you are."

Shouto tripped, actually tripped over his own feet as he struggled backwards, away. Midoriya hadn't even thrown another punch, and the ones he'd been throwing weren't strong enough to do much. He was clearly waning, but Shouto couldn't think about that.

It felt like he was on the edge of something important. His breath was stuck in his throat and his eyes wide, heart beating so fast, so hard he couldn't doubt its presence. He felt too warm, too much, too real and yet almost not present at all. He stood on the edge of a knife, waiting for Midoriya's next words to push him one way or another.

"It's *your* power!" Midoriya shouted, desperation shattering the words against Shouto's errant heart, "Your power, not *his*!"

He... he remembered.

He was still so young then, sat beside his mother, enraptured by the TV as he so often was. He liked watching the colorful pictures, the stories it told of places far far from him. He was still sore from the training father had given him, though it hardly mattered when he was in his

mother's arms. She was so soft, so cool to the touch it felt like she could heal all of his wounds.

All Might was on the TV, which meant Father wasn't home as he would never allow Shouto to watch him. Mother hardly cared though, she always let Shouto break the rules.

All Might was talking about quirks, about how kids could sometimes have their parents quirks, like he did. Shouto felt like All Might was talking directly to him when he said that.

"Remember kids, a quirk is what you make of it! Whether it's passed on to you by your parents, it's something that is your very own! Only you can make the decision to be a hero!"

It sounded corny, but everything All Might said sounded corny. Shouto wished that were true for him, but even at that age he knew he would never be allowed to do what he wanted with his quirk. Father had already told him as much.

"You do still want to be a hero, right Shouto?" His mother's voice, gentle as the first snow, asked him.

He'd nodded.

"Then I want you to know something. Even though your fire comes from him, that doesn't mean you're like him. It's your's so you can decide how you use it." She'd smiled at him, oh god she'd looked so peaceful when she smiled, so happy, *"Fire is more than destruction. It brings life too."*

"It does?" He'd asked, his eyes wide and confused, *"How?"*

"Well, it keeps people warm, it cooks our food for us, and in the wild it gets rid of all the dead things so new life can grow again. It's not all bad, it's just how it's used. So, how do you want to use it?"

"I want to be a hero mama!" He'd proudly said, serious beyond his years already, *"I don't want to be like him. I want to keep people warm. Like a campfire."*

She'd smiled even wider at that, petting through his hair and pressing a kiss to his forehead, on his yet unscarred left side.

"That's what makes you different. You'll be a wonderful hero, my little campfire."

How had he forgotten that? It had been one of his most treasured memories for years, one that he let console him when his mother had been taken from him. When the pain of the burn had made him hate the feeling of warmth on his skin. He'd reminded himself countless times so how had he forgotten?

He could feel it under his skin, the hellfire that lived on in him too. If he allowed it to, it would burst from his skin and ravage every inch of the world around him, swallowing up everything it touched, consuming and destroying with indifference.

But that was exactly the crux of it, wasn't it? He could choose to let it burn down the world around him. It was a choice. One he'd made a long time ago.

It was a *choice*.

His choice and his alone.

The warmth that licked out across his skin felt good, more than good, as it chased away the ice that clung to him. As it bubbled up, it carried with it the nervousness, the nausea, the pain, the *fear* he felt at the idea of its heat. He saw the flames bouncing off of his skin and yet the panic was nowhere to be found.

Because it wasn't Endeavor's fire, it was *Shouto's* fire and he would *never* allow it to harm someone.

He would be a campfire, not an inferno.

Shouto allowed more and more of his fire to kick up and out, feeling the difference between them and his ice. His ice was control, precision, but the flames were different. It felt so vast, so freeing, endless as he allowed them to span the length of his left side. It felt as if he were stretching a part of himself that had been folded in an uncomfortable position for too long.

He was smiling now, he could feel it. It couldn't have been a pleasant look, he knew he didn't remember how to smile right anymore. But from the look in Midoriya's eyes, it hardly mattered.

Midoriya.

More warmth flooded him at remembering the other boy was there. He was staring at Shouto, his expression openly reverent enough that even *he* could tell what it was. He looked floored, like he was having some kind of revelation of his own. Possibly the dawning realization that making an opponent more powerful was not exactly a good plan of attack.

Regardless, as he made eye contact with the green haired boy he couldn't help remember his words from before.

"I want it too." Shouto told him, uncharacteristic emotion warping the words so strongly that he hardly recognized his own voice, "I'll be a hero."

Midoriya answered with a broad smile of his own, looking probably to unhinged to be a comfort, and yet that's exactly what Shouto felt. And oh how good it was to feel again! He'd forgotten what it was like to feel more than pain, more than the ghosts of regret or fear, or sadness. It had been so long since something had touched him this way, and even longer since it was something good. The sense of euphoria made the flames around him react by writhing, caressing the rest of the ice built up on him away until he felt nearly as good as new.

He wanted to laugh, he wanted to dance, scream, sing, *something* to show how amazing he felt.

"YES SHOUTO!" His father's voice crowed in the background, unduly loud even against the sound of a crowd, "YOU'VE FINALLY ACCEPTED YOUR PURPOSE, NOW GO AND DO WHAT I MADE YOU FOR!"

Even Endeavor's foul words could hardly touch Shouto, burning away before they could get close to him. His attention was focused on green eyes and a bright smile anyhow.

"Come on Todoroki," Midoriya shifted back into a fighting stance, prompting Shouto to do the same, "Let's do this for real!"

Fire flared on his left and ice gripped his right and Shouto had never felt more balanced, more *whole* in his entire life. He was in ecstasy, drunk off his own power and for once the idea of a fight didn't make him want to immediately throw up. Because *he* could decide how far it went.

A huge wave of ice rushed out from him right as Midoriya launched himself up and towards him from across the field. Shouto's left hand cradled his flames, condensing them until they were more a comet than wildfire.

For as long as he'd gone without this, he thought it should have been awkward, clunkier and harder to call on than his ice, yet his flames greeted him like an old friend, like a pet he'd lost but had found its way back to him. They obeyed as if he'd never cast them aside.

Shouto let one last rush of warmth flutter over his skin, just to savor it, before he thrust his hand out towards Midoriya. His ice rose up to entomb them both as Midoriya plummeted down to meet him and all Shouto could feel was everything. It felt like the door to his cage had been blasted off its hinges, every last piece of ice that he'd created it with, melting away to leave behind... well he didn't know what yet.

The closer Midoriya got, the more blinding everything seemed until Shouto couldn't keep his eyes open past the light radiating from the boy. So he missed what happened to cause it, but he did feel the shock wave when their power met something else in the middle.

He was blown back, but instinctively raised a wall to catch himself, letting the ice curl around him to shelter him a little better as he tried to peak around it to see what had happened.

Thousands of pieces of concrete were raining down around them, likely due to Cementoss trying to stop their match though just a little too late. Ah, so they *were* still watching. He would have figured they would have tried to step in sooner with Midoriya injured like tha-

Midoriya.

Shouto's eyes frantically glanced around for him, nervous when he wasn't immediately apparent. It didn't take long though, the green haired boy having been blown clean across the stadium and out of bounds.

After all that, he'd just been sent out of bounds.

It felt like a cheap way to win, but honestly Shouto couldn't see it going any other way. Midoriya would have kept fighting until he died or passed out at that rate. It was probably better.

The figure of the boy slid down the wall, falling to the side and Shouto found that he'd been knocked unconscious by the blast too. He hardly heard it when Midnight announced his win, the roar of the stadium barely static in his head.

The fight was over, he'd won. Just like the old man had wanted. Just like he'd known he was going to. The one thing he hadn't counted on was the flickering warmth now in his chest where his cage had been.

That was... Shouto didn't know what to make of it but he was scared, and then panicked that he could *feel* fear again, so easily and so *vividly*. He'd felt sadness too, just a few minutes ago, remembering what he'd forgotten about mother.

His feet carried him out of the arena, though he wasn't sure where they were leading. His body hardly felt trustworthy at the moment, but he had no other choice, not with the loud tangle of thoughts chained together and shrieking in his head.

He'd broken his promise.

His one resolution, his *one* solace. The only reason he could stomach letting Endeavor break him and use him and violate him over and over again, and he'd broken it immediately. Maybe... maybe he wasn't so different from the old man as he had hoped.

He stopped walking for a second, looking for a trash can and instead finding a planter which would simply have to do as he spilled his stomach into it.

That couldn't be true. He would sooner die than become that evil bastard. The thought alone had him unable to catch a real breath, unable to keep his eyes from filling with tears and his hands from shaking. He *couldn't* become Endeavor.

But he hadn't even tried to stop himself from using the fire. Not when it came down to it.

Shouto gripped onto the base of the plant a little harder, another wave of nausea chasing the last, the distant thought of getting in trouble for losing weight again tamping it down.

He'd used the fire yes (*his* fire a very quiet thought reminded him), but he hadn't been looking to hurt Midoriya. He hadn't wanted to hurt him the whole match, and actually, if he thought about it, he'd hardly even touched him. The match had been stopped before they'd made contact.

He'd still never hurt someone with... with *his* fire.

Could that be good enough?

Shouto wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and forced himself through a breath or two, despite the queasiness still pressing at the back of his throat. He gave himself five

breaths before he forced himself to stand. Two before he forced himself to start walking again, one before he calmed again.

Reasonably, he knew Midoriya was right. There was no way he could continue on only using half of his strength and still call himself a hero at the end of the day. It was cowardice plain and simple.

He knew, somewhere deep down, he'd have to stop running from who and what he'd allowed himself to become someday. He'd just hoped it would be farther in the future. He didn't feel ready at all, though he couldn't imagine he ever would have. He still felt like the quivering five year old hiding behind his mother's knees, crying over the bruises on his ribs. He suspected he probably always would.

But he'd been hiding long enough, it was time for him to step up and save his first life.

His own.

Can't Get Out If You Don't Get A Little Wild

Chapter Notes

Warning!!! This Chapter contains depictions of abuse!!! Skip to the summary at the end if you think this'll squick you out!!

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

When Shouto's feet stopped moving, he found himself outside of the last place he thought he'd be. The last place he *should* be.

The side of him that was Endeavor's weapon, the dominant side, was screaming at him to leave. He had done well today, there was no reason to ruin it like this.

But the side of him that *wanted* , that was purely his own, beginning to bud from beneath the frost and snow, was certain this was where he needed to be.

Midoriya, for how limited their interactions had been, had broken open something precious inside of him.

So he raised his trembling hand and knocked on the door.

"Just a minute!" Came Recovery Girl's kindly voice.

He wasn't sure why it hadn't occurred to him that Midoriya wouldn't be alone, in this, the *nurse's office*, but the fact had slipped his notice. He was two seconds away from bolting when the woman threw open the door.

"Ah, Todoroki." She smiled at him, "Were you injured in your match as well?"

He had been, but it was only bruising. Nothing broken, nothing that would really slow him down.

"I..." He shook his head, never very comfortable with words, "I'm alright."

She eyed him up and down before nodding as if he'd said something else entirely.

"Then you're here to see Midoriya, aren't you?" She gave him a weary smile, "He's awake and responsive, but he needs some rest so I can only give you about ten minutes, okay sweetie?"

He nodded again, feeling both unnerved by her astuteness and grateful for it.

She took a step to clear the way and gestured him inside.

Shouto didn't even have to look for Midoriya, finding the other in the first bed in the room, covered in bandages practically head to toe, but still looking eager to see who'd come to visit him. Shouto was struck with the sudden urge to apologize, even though he hadn't strictly been the source of the injuries. He didn't care to see others in pain.

"Todoroki!" Midoriya said, chipper but slightly confused, "Are you doing okay?"

The concern in his voice was so genuine. It... it made Shouto feel strange, Too many emotions to pick a solid one, but his heart sped up a little and his stomach felt tied in knots. He wouldn't let the conflict show on his face, so used to keeping it blank by now it was a habit too engrained to break.

"I'm fine." He said, taking a small step closer, "Are you?"

Midoriya looked down at his heavily bandaged body as if he had just noticed it before shyly smiling back up at Shouto.

"It looks pretty bad." He admitted, "But Recovery Girl healed the worst of it."

There was some muttering from the woman in the corner of the room. Shouto thought he heard the words 'foolish' and 'reckless' and 'stupidly high pain tolerance'. He was inclined to agree.

"Why did you do it?" Shouto asked.

He'd been wondering since he'd realized what Midoriya was trying to do. He couldn't understand why a total stranger would go to such lengths just to reach out to him like that. The pain alone couldn't have been worth it.

A light blush fell over the other boy's cheeks, hiding his freckles under the color.

"Because I know what it's like to feel alone." He said softly, keeping his eyes down, "The first time I saw you, I thought you looked really really sad. And after you told me all of that... I couldn't just let you keep going that way. It's bad enough to hurt, but hurting alone is... it's almost unbearable. There's no way I could ever leave someone who looked as hurt as you to deal with it all by themselves."

Shouto wanted to feel touched, to be grateful that this boy had gone so far just to help him, and he *did* but-

"What you did was stupid." Shouto shook his head, "You could very easily have put yourself not only out of the Sports Festival but out of UA entirely doing something so reckless."

Midoriya winced, and nodded, clearly having been scolded by someone else already.

"But," He waited until the other was looking at him to reach for the feeling tied to the words, hoping desperately that it would actually come across rather than falling flat, "I'm grateful. You reminded me of something I'd forgotten, something very dear to me. So while I can't agree with how you did it, I owe you a lot."

Midoriya's own eyes were filled with tears, running unchecked down his cheeks as if the boy had no reservations about showing the emotion. For a brief moment Shouto envied him.

"Then it was worth it." The boy responded, letting himself relax back into his bed.

"I'll be the judge of that." Recovery Girl chimed in, "Your ten minutes are up."

Shouto nodded, almost happy in a way. He'd said what was on his mind, and he felt... tired. Drained in a way he wasn't used to anymore. Maybe he could go rest up before his final match. No doubt he'd be taking on Bakugou, which would be... unpleasant.

"Thank you for coming to visit me, Todoroki." Midoriya gave him another one of those smiles, so bright, so easy despite the pain the boy must still have been in, "I really appreciate it."

Shouto shook his head again, "That's my line."

Midoriya laughed, the sound just as bright and energetic as his smile and Shouto found his own mouth quirking up ever so slightly to match.

"Alright, alright, shoo." Recovery Girl began gesturing Shouto to the door, "He needs his rest, and frankly so do you. Off with you!"

Shouto managed to get in a little rest before he found himself back at the stands with his classmates. They were just as noisy as usual, and as usual they didn't notice him approach.

Well, that wasn't entirely correct.

Midoriya had evidently done something to convince Recovery Girl to let him join the rest of the class, and was getting settled in between his two friends. Shouto wasn't sure what they'd been talking about but as soon as Midoriya caught sight of him, they were making eye contact. Shouto almost never looked people in the eyes if he could avoid it, and never for long. But he found he couldn't look away from those deep green eyes.

"I don't regret it." Midoriya said, and Shouto knew in the pit of his stomach, he was talking to him, *about* him.

The shuddery, floating nervousness that had begun to rise in his veins earlier shot through him. His heart ratcheted up a gear or two and he couldn't make sense of why. Midoriya had already told him as much, why was it only hitting now? Why was it so intense?

He broke their shared eye contact. It was too much.

Shouto took his seat and resolutely refused to look back at the other until his heart calmed. Once it did though, he snuck a peek back at the other only to find him still looking his way. When Midoriya noticed him looking, he smiled.

He wasn't sure why, but he was very nearly relieved when his name was called for the next match.

Fighting Bakugou was just as bad as Shouto had imagined it would be.

The boy was not only strong, having blasted his way through a sizable glacier, but despite his fiery temper he was wickedly smart. He read Shouto's moves after only having seen them a handful of times, and immediately compensated for them. He caught the boy off guard several times and nearly won half a dozen before Shouto could throw him off.

He would have been a challenging opponent even if the heat coming off of him didn't utterly turn Shouto's stomach. It wasn't hell fire, but it was close enough that Shouto felt like crawling out of his skin the entire match.

But then, Bakugou began to goad him.

"Come on Todoroki quit fucking holding out on me!" The blonde snarled, his mouth pulled up into a gruesome smile as his eyes blazed like twin stars, "I want to kick your ass into the fucking ground at full power so there won't be any question about who's the best here!"

As of yet, Shouto hadn't used his fire again. He still didn't want to, not in combat, not until he knew it better so he wouldn't hurt anyone. Even someone like Bakugou who was probably nearly heat proof himself due to his own quirk. If Shouto got out of hand due to his inexperience and hurt him...

The risk was too great.

Evidently, though, Bakugou took it personally.

"Quit bein' a little bitch half and half!" The blonde snarled, raining down blow after blow, "Like I ain't fucking good enough for you, but goddamn *Deku* is?!"

At the mention of Midoriya, Shouto remembered how it had felt to let his fire meet the boy. It had been exhilarating, freeing... beautiful. Just the memory had his flames buzzing beneath his skin, noisy and riotous and eager. He wanted to let them go again, but he *coul-*

"Come on Todoroki!"

Shouto's head practically snapped up to the stands at the sound of Midoriya's voice.

The boy was nearly hanging over the side, seeming to have forgotten entirely that he was still far too injured to be doing anything of the sort. His expression was loud, just like the voice that carried over to Shouto. His eyes were just as fierce as when they'd fought and Shouto

could already feel the fire in him reigniting, desperate to reach out to the boy who had summoned them back after all this time.

"Don't just stand there and let him beat you!" Midoriya called out, "Show him what you've got!"

From his left eye, flames bloomed out over his skin until they were licking at every inch of that half of his body, though Shouto couldn't remember willing them to come. It was as if they obeyed Midoriya rather than him, and the thought made him equal parts queasy as well as something...else.

"That's more fuckin' like it!" Bakugou shouted, calling Shouto's attention back to him.

He was airborne again, which under less threatening circumstances would be very impressive. He was incredibly versatile in the use of his quirk, which Shouto would have loved to admire more were he not *headed straight for him*.

Shouto's first instinct was to lash out with everything he had, knock the other out of the air with a quick sweep of flame, right into an ice wall.

He glanced back over to Midoriya, but rather than the other boy, his eyes found his father's form instead.

He looked positively *beside himself*. It was certainly the happiest Shouto had ever seen him, even though his eyes still looked just as cruel as ever. He'd been there to watch Shouto give in, watch him be seduced by his power and use it exactly the way he'd always intended for him to.

In his eyes, he'd finally won.

The decision was instant, thoughtless, as the flames died out on his skin, the feeling of the warmth smothering again rather than freeing. He was still too warm, with Bakugou barreling down on him, but in a few seconds it wouldn't matter.

He couldn't take back what he'd already done, but he could ruin Endeavor's perfect victory.

He shut his eyes and let Bakugou slam into him, hardly even bothering to raise his arms to soften the blow. If he got hurt, that was just a few days he had before he could train again. That in itself was a gift.

It happened quickly, the heat, the force, and then, blissfully, nothing.

When Shouto awoke, he was in Recovery Girl's office, as he had been earlier. Although this time he was the one in the bed.

His head ached, as did his back and his shoulders, but not as much as they should have, letting him know Recovery Girl had already used her quirk on him. Ah, that was too bad, he'd wanted to ask her to hold off.

"You're awake." Came the old woman's kindly voice, though it sounded annoyed.

He let his head roll in her direction, too tired to properly lift the thing.

"You had quite the concussion. A couple of broken ribs, and a dislocated disk." She rattled off, sounding concerned but irritated, "From the look of it, you didn't even try to block that final attack."

Shouto didn't respond.

"May I ask why?"

He shifted his gaze to his feet at the end of the bed, nerves itching below the surface of his skin all too similar to the feeling of his fire. He'd never been a particularly gifted liar, despite everything. What would he tell her that wouldn't worry her?

"You don't have to answer me." She sighed, "I was only curious."

Silently Shouto thanked the woman once again for her observational skills, though openly he just nodded.

"Your injuries were serious, and then with how Bakugou jostled you after the fact, you're going to be a bit out of sorts for the next few days, even with my help." She continued, "You should take it easy with yourself. Too much activity and you're likely to cause more damage."

He nodded again, once again quietly thankful. It didn't hurt too badly now, but with that as Recovery Girl's official diagnosis, that meant his father was far less likely to push him straight back into training. He'd still be punished of course, he'd lost, and lost purely out of spite at that. It'd be harsh this time, that was for sure.

He hadn't noticed his face pulling back into a grim line until Recovery Girl sat down beside him on his bed, concern etched into her elderly features.

"Are you alright?" She asked, "You seem more aloof than usual."

How was he usually? At this point he couldn't tell. It didn't *feel* like he was acting that much different, but then again Recovery Girl had been reading him like a book since he'd shown up to visit Midoriya. He really needed to be more on guard around her.

"Fine." He nodded, "Just... tired."

That wasn't untrue, he felt like he'd gotten into a boxing match with a train. All he really wanted was to close his eyes again and sink right back into unconsciousness until the feeling passed.

Evidently it had been convincing enough that Recovery Girl nodded, "Yes, I would imagine you are. That was quite a lot of damage. I think you may just have rivaled Midoriya."

Shouto was right.

He usually was when it came to his father and his punishments, and he hated it.

He'd been stood in the same position for an hour and a half and his entire body was screaming. He'd started shaking twenty minutes ago, earning himself three sharp strikes with the practice sword his father kept. It didn't hurt much but the noise scared the hell out of him, as it always did.

He was mid way between squatting and standing, holding two buckets that Endeavor had slowly been filling up. It wasn't the cruelest punishment he'd been subjected to, but it was unpleasant all the same. Especially so given that he hadn't been allowed to eat yet.

"I will never understand why you insist on being so difficult." Endeavor began yet again, as he grabbed the hose to fill Shouto's buckets, "If you'd put that goddamn stubbornness somewhere it would be of use, we wouldn't have to keep doing this."

Shouto growled in the back of his throat, the noise scratchy and hoarse as his muscles bemoaned the added strain.

"Just like I was at that age," He kept going, Jesus he'd been talking for an *hour* , "But with less direction."

Why couldn't he just let Shouto suffer in peace? Why did he always have to talk? The sound of his voice was more grating than the burning in his thighs.

"But you *did* use my power, against that Midoriya kid. Finally. You wielded it very naturally, not perfect yet but still better than your brother. Very promising."

Shut up, shut up, shut up. Shouto chanted in his head over and over again, trying to block out his father's words. Every one seemed to wedge themselves into the new cracks that had formed in him, reminding him of why he'd built so many walls in the first place. He wouldn't raise them again, was sure he couldn't even if he wanted to, and it stung so much more for it.

"I think with a little more training, you'll be able to handle my fire just fine. You might even work up to blue flames eventually. And wouldn't that be nice. You'd certainly be one of the most powerful heroes then, almost a guaranteed number one. All we have to do is take that last little bit of rebellion out of you and you'll be-"

"Shut. Up." Shouto gritted out, unable to listen to any more.

It was stupid, he knew. Reckless, and a sure fire way to end up getting hit, but if he had to listen to one more sentence he was going to scream.

"Excuse me?" His father narrowed his eyes at him.

He could take it back. He *should* take it back.

"Said.... shut... up."

He watched as his father's brow kicked up to his hairline, and his mouth thinned into a grim slash. He was never a kind looking man to begin with, but whatever merth he'd been able to derive from Shouto's 'accomplishments' wiped clean off his face.

"You just don't know when to quit, do you boy?"

Shouto would have laughed if he could breathe past the stifling fear in his chest.

He went to bed that night, still having not eaten, covered in bruises and scrapes and palm shaped red marks. His father hadn't laid into him that badly in a long time, hadn't stopped even after Shouto had cried out apologies and begged his forgiveness. In the end, he'd folded, just the way he always did. He'd held out longer, taken more before he simply couldn't, and he let himself call that progress. If he didn't... if he didn't take the small victories where they came he'd go out of his mind.

The knock on his door stirred him from his half asleep daze.

Groaning as he sat up, Shouto didn't bother wondering who would be at his door.

Sure enough, when he pulled it open, Fuyumi was there looking nervous as she held out a covered plate for him. It was clear she wasn't supposed to be doing this, but had forced herself into bravery for his sake anyhow.

He loved his sister.

"Here." She whispered, "It's not a whole lot, but it's better than going hungry."

"Thank you." He whispered back, taking the offered plate gratefully.

For a second Fuyumi hesitated, but then let herself reach out for him, cupping his cheek in her palm.

"Why do you make him so mad, Shouto?" Her thumb rubbed gently at the scar under his eye, "You know what he'll do to you, so why?"

"I can't help it." He replied, "I get mad too."

Fuyumi sighed, dropping her hand, "I know. He's... I wish you could just endure it, but I understand. Please though, for our sake, don't get yourself hurt anymore than you have to."

Half of Shouto wanted to scream, wanted to tell her he couldn't just stand by while his father's cruelty raged unchecked. The part of him that hoped to be a hero some day to save people from men like his father refused to go quietly. And it was getting louder every day.

"I want to." His shoulders sagged, "But I can't. I'm sorry Yumi, but I can't keep letting him do this. You know it's wrong too... don't you?"

She drew in a deep breath, her grey eyes stormy like the clouds that had started to roll in late that afternoon. She tucked her hair behind her ears, even though it was already there, and adjusted her skirt which was already pristine.

"Of course I do." Her voice quavered, "I hate that I have to ask you to let him do this, just to keep you safe. I know it's wrong and I know you s *hould* fight him. But I also know how impossible that really is."

She glanced up at him for half a second before looking quickly away.

"I just don't want to see it get worse." She all but whispered, "I don't want to see you end up like T-"

"Thanks for the food, Fuyumi." Shouto interrupted, "I think I should eat and go back to bed."

Fuyumi winced just the slightest bit, before her shoulders also slumped, defeated.

"You're welcome Shouto."

Chapter End Notes

Todoroki battles Bakugou but more so himself, loses on purpose, and ends up in Recovery Girl's office. He takes some time to contemplate who he might be becoming. Endeavor punishes him for his loss and Shouto fires back just a little, beginning to come into his own. He then has a late night talk with his concerned sister who, while well meaning, is not entirely helpful.

World Behind My Wall

Chapter Notes

****TRIGGER WARNING**** Mentions of suicidal thoughts and actions!!! If this bakes your biscuit there will be a summary at the end of the chapter.

Sorry this took so long y'all. Shit has been bonkers all around. You'd think quarantine would have made writing easier. Nope.

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

The next day Shouto was tempted to skip class.

He was hurting badly enough that walking seemed like it may actually kill him, not to mention how hard a time he'd have explaining why he was still limping even after he'd been healed. There was only one person likely to ask, but it was also the only person he couldn't just ignore.

But if he skipped class on top of everything else he'd pulled this weekend, he might as well throw himself in The Box and save Endeavor the trouble.

Maybe he'd be able to avoid him instead.

But of course, Shouto had never had anything resembling luck on his side.

Almost as soon as he was on campus, who should bound up to him but Midoriya himself. He was still pretty well bandaged up, but he looked in high spirits despite the slight limp slowing him down. It was more pronounced than the one Shouto had been trying to conceal, but he acted like he hardly even noticed it.

How often did he get hurt? As much as Shouto? More?

It was such an unsettling question that Shouto nearly missed what he was saying.

"Hey Todoroki! How are you feeling?" The boy smiled up at him from the four inch height gap between them.

"I'm fine." He replied automatically, "How... are you?"

Midoriya smiled even warmer, though it was slightly delayed like he hadn't really expected Shouto to actually answer him.

“I’m good! I uh, I tripped while I was training after the Sports Festival and twisted my ankle a bit, but otherwise I’m all better!”

Had he been a more expressive person, Shouto would likely have blinked at the boy or frowned or made some other indication of the shock that had just swept through him. Instead he only faltered in his stride for a moment before recovering.

Training? Why on Earth would Midoriya have gone right back to training after having put such an enormous strain on his body? After having been hurt so badly and then healed too, both of which took large amounts of energy. Who would even have *let* him?

“Who do you train with?” Shouto asked as casually as he could.

“Mostly by myself.” Midoriya sounded a little flustered, and when he glanced over Shouto noted that his ears had gone red, “If I’m going to keep up with everyone, I can’t afford to slow down much so I do extra training by myself.”

That seemed excessive. Midoriya was already making steady progress, and though the first few weeks of class had been dodgy for him, he’d come a long way. If there was anything he really needed to work on, it was limiting himself.

But that was hardly Shouto’s business. It wasn’t like they were friends.

“Admirable.” He said instead.

Midoriya nodded to himself, his hand clenching tight at his side. His hand which now after having been unwrapped from the bandages Shouto had last seen it in, was covered in new scars.

Class passed by like a tasteless bowl of oatmeal in the morning. It was tedious to choke down, and though Shouto knew he would benefit from it, he still wanted to throw up. Regardless, he took studious notes as always, remembering almost none of what he had written down, as always.

It was the same routine as ever, same as it had been since he was old enough to go to school. The little differences in schools, and people around him almost never registered, an ever changing beige tapestry.

It hadn’t ever really bothered Shouto before, the monotony hardly registering through the numbness. But now there was a wild streak of green brushed across the uniformity, highlighting just how dull the world had been before.

Now every aching minute chafed against Shouto’s bones on it’s way out, made him long for something more though he had no idea what he wanted. He’d started bouncing his leg for some sort of outlet for the nearly painful frustration it brought him.

And of course, he started watching him again.

Midoriya was the same as he ever was, though his same-ness was unique against the unbearable drone of the rest of the world. He moved quickly, flighty, and every new expression he made was a microcosm of subtly different faucets. Most of the emotions he showed when talking were ugly, unfiltered and...honest. Shouto hadn't thought people could be like that, not without getting hurt.

But the longer he watched him, watching him flinch if one of his friends moved just a little too quickly, or how he ducked when Bakugou yelled over something and then laughed it off when Uraraka asked about it, the more he began to realize that maybe he *had* been hurt.

By the time lunch rolled around Shouto was certain something had happened to Midoriya.

Once he thought of it that way, it was almost obvious. The way he sat curled in on himself like he was afraid to take up too much space reminded him of Fuyumi whenever their father walked in. The way he tried to forge past it like it wasn't there was like Natsuo. But the constant nervousness, the quiet panic he did his level best to hide even though the tremors in his hands told the truth, that was like Shouto.

So against all reason, Shouto felt compelled to sit beside him at lunch.

He'd told him things about his life he'd never told anyone, and Midoriya had done his best to help him even if he'd never spoken to him before in his entire life. He'd shown him kindness Shouto hadn't thought existed anymore, and it had made all the difference, even if Shouto wasn't sure what that difference would mean for him. It was something to hold onto, it was hope.

Now it was his turn to reach out.

It was the heroic thing to do.

Or at least that's what he told himself as his pulse spiked at the eyes on him as he took the open spot beside Midoriya.

"Todoroki!" Midoriya smiled at him, welcoming even through his confusion, "Since you're here, did you understand what Aizawa sensei was lecturing on earlier? Because there were a couple things I was confused on, but you always seem to pick through the longer lectures okay."

"I," Shouto hesitated for a moment, before remembering he'd come here with a purpose, "I didn't. I wrote down everything he said but I wasn't paying attention at all."

Midoriya whined, his hand sliding down his cheeks, "Oh god we're doomed."

"We're not *doomed*." Iida cut in, "We will simply have to have a study session and combine our joint knowledge to bridge the gaps in our individual notes."

"That sounds like a longer way of saying we're doomed." Uraraka said around a bite of her sandwich, "Can we get snacks first?"

“We’re in the middle of lunch and you’re already thinking of snacks.” Iida sighed long suffering.

“I’ve been training a lot lately!” Uraraka pouted out her lips, “I need the extra fuel.”

Just like that they launched into an entirely different conversation, Shouto’s presence in their space having hardly caused so much as a hiccup in their normal routine. It was the oddest thing he’d ever seen. It wasn’t as though they were ignoring him, but they didn’t seem terribly bothered by him either. It was the most confusing reaction he could remember having seen someone have to him.

Midoriya seemed to be the only one still aware of his presence as he turned his attention back to Shouto.

“Since you kinda missed the lesson too, did you want to come along?” He asked, looking nervous as he fiddled with his chopsticks, “I’d understand if you were too busy or anything, especially since asking super last minute is kinda rude, but I just figured it might help you out to, I mean not that I think you really *need* help, not like you’re dumb or anything I ju-”

“I’d love to.”

“What?”

What?!

His mouth had answered without his mind’s say so. He’d noticed Midoriya edging towards hysterical as he kept rambling, and he’d wanted to stop him before he really began to panic and he’d spoken without thinking.

There was no *way* he’d just be allowed to just spend time somewhere other than home after school. Much less with *Midoriya* of all people.

“I mean-”

But Midoriya was smiling at him now, a different one than his usual sunshine grins and the campfire feeling was back in his chest. He was half worried that he already knew he’d start a riot to keep that little fire burning. The other half was pleased that it seemed like he *finally* had something he would fight to keep.

“That would be so cool!” Midoriya flapped his hands beside himself, before seeming to notice and stop himself, “There’s a few things I wanted to ask you about too, if you don’t mind!”

“I don’t mind.” He replied just as automatically as this morning.

The painkilling effect Midoriya had on him was so much more potent up close. He wasn’t even nervous about having to find a way to make his dad agree to this. It was as if his Quirk was actually neutralizing negative emotions. At this rate Shouto was going to get addicted to his presence.

When lunch was over though, all the panic came rushing right in as Shouto tried to think of a way to pull this off.

In the end he was less than proud of his methodology.

He'd told his father he'd found a unique opportunity to scout out Midoriya's weaknesses, so he would be home late. Of course, he'd gotten a one word affirmative answer on his 'mission' with a follow up text to be home by eight regardless to report.

He felt sick as he replied that he would be.

Really he'd just traded one problem for another, delaying the issue, but for now he told himself to forget about it. There would be no point in having done this if he didn't accomplish his *actual* goal.

While he'd agreed out of a breakneck instinct to help Midoriya, he'd thought it out and concluded it would be a good chance to help him for real. From what he'd observed, Midoriya's friends were well intended and loyal, but they didn't seem to grasp what was actually wrong. Not that he really did either, but he had an idea. An idea that he sorely hoped was wrong.

It should be simple, find a chance to talk to Midoriya alone about whatever it was that caused him to look so sad when he thought no one was looking. Should be a cakewalk with both of their stellar social skills and inability to have a normal functional conversation.

Shouto nearly banged his head on his desk.

Why did he have to care? Why now? Why *this* kid, the *one person* he knew he was going to have to pit himself against? Why did he have to be such a rebellious problem child? Why was he always *like this*?

The questions and their answers swirled themselves up into a jumbled tornado of jagged edges in his head until he felt sick with it.

He wanted a nap, he wanted to nap until he was old enough to move out and forget any of this ever happened.

He stood up and collected his books as the bell rang, head full of static, limbs full of cotton and eyes full of that familiar green mop of hair.

Two steps into Midoriya's house and Shouto already had his first question answered.

Mrs. Midoriya greeted them at the door with a smile on her face that her son had definitely inherited. She was small, older, and very round, radiating a kind of maternal warmth Shouto had all but forgotten. She bustled about the kitchen, chirping little comments to them to make themselves at home as she fixed snacks.

From the way Midoriya looked at her, affection unconcealed, whatever was hurting him wasn't coming from her. Shouto breathed a little easier, though he hadn't realized he'd been so tense.

"Alright!" Iida began as they laid their things out across the dining room table, "Since we're all struggling in different areas, I took the liberty of creating a line up that will best benefit us! If each of us takes a subject and explains it to the group this will not only help the group understand it, but it will reinforce the concept to the individual teaching!"

"Iida have I ever told you I love how your mind works?" Uraraka said, looking as though she might cry, "Because I do. That's perfect."

Iida beamed at her before catching himself and adjusting his glasses, "It was the most efficient route to take. Thank you for the compliment."

They began to work on the course load quickly after that. Shouto was unaccustomed to having someone to answer his questions outside of class, and therefore it took him a little longer to ask the questions he had. It was still odd, interacting with them too, though each of them was polite and patient with him.

To his surprise, they were also incredibly knowledgeable. Iida's command of language was already evident, just in how he spoke but having him break down the finer points of English allowed Shouto an ease he'd assumed he'd never have with the language. Suddenly he felt much less like he was fighting his tongue to get certain words out.

Uraraka similarly was nearly a genius when it came to math and physics. It made sense, seeing how her quirk worked, putting her far above the level required of them for likely their entire schooling career. She explained things colloquially, which made understanding the subject go much smoother and faster. Though she did seem surprised when Shouto complimented her as she had done with Iida earlier.

When Midoriya began explaining quirk biology however, Shouto focused in to likely an unnerving degree.

"So, even though we're still not fully sure what caused quirks, most quirk studies experts have a unified theory they work from. Mutations are not uncommon in humans, although one to this degree, this widespread is just about unheard of. So while most people originally thought it to be something like this, that's likely not the case. It's controversial but quirks were most likely something that was intentionally created." Midoriya lectured, his eyes bright and his expression engaged, "We're not sure who could have done it, which is why this theory is still just a theory. Some people think it was the Chinese government trying to create super soldiers, or a private company working to engineer the next big advancement in genetics. Maybe they were trying to create immortals. We don't know."

He drummed his fingertips against the cover of the notebook Shouto had almost never seen him without, "Whatever the cause was, it changed the world forever."

Uraraka raised her hand eagerly, causing Midoriya to laugh a little before he 'called on her'.

“Deku, you spend a lot of time researching heroes and quirks and stuff, and you know, like, way more about them than anyone else I’ve ever met. What do *you* think happened?”

Midoriya puffed out his cheeks and scratched his fingers through his hair before answering.

“Well, honestly I’m not entirely sure either. But I agree that it had to be intentional. Genetics don’t work the way people make them out to in movies. You don’t just get a random mutation like this that’s not only strong enough to be carried on to the next generation, but also stable enough not to kill people too. Usually mutations are harmful more than helpful. Something on the scale of a quirk would have to be carefully designed, and I’m talking *decades* of work here. This would have been a project someone worked their whole life to have one successful subject. And even then, genes vary so widely between people, it would have been difficult if not impossible to replicate.

“Which is why I’ve always thought of quirks as living things. Did you know that there are viruses that can monkey with DNA? Well, honestly *most* of them do, but on way smaller levels. If someone were able to engineer a virus that the human body hardly took notice of and program it to target only specific parts of the DNA, that could trigger a mutation that would cause lower level quirks for sure. It would account for the huge variations in quirks and also quirklessness, though I’m really just speculating here with that. It would make accounting for more phenomenal quirks a lot harder though, like emitter quirks, because honestly no amount of DNA altering genetically modified anything should allow you to turn off gravity or for Todoroki to hurl fire and ice. But it’s as close as I can think of for an explanation.”

The room was silent for a long moment, which Shouto hardly noticed as he tried to digest everything Midoriya had just said. He talked quickly, which usually made him a little hard to follow. But it was even worse when he was excited, and downright impossible when Shouto barely knew what he was talking about in the first place.

“That’s certainly some food for thought.” Iida cleared his throat, “Have you ever considered studying quirks, Midoriya? You seem like you’d take to the subject naturally.”

At that the green haired boy’s shoulders slumped a little.

“I thought about it.” His voice was subdued, “For a long time I thought that would be the only thing I would be able to do.”

“With a quirk like your’s?” Uraraka frowned, “You’re really smart Deku, but I think you’re better suited to be a hero.”

Shouto felt his throat tighten as he watched tears begin to rise to Midoriya’s eyes before a smile broke over his face.

“Thanks Uraraka.” He nodded, “I really hope I am.”

The evening took much less time than Shouto wanted it to.

It took him a bit, but he had started to warm up to Uraraka and Iida as well as Midoriya. And it seemed like they'd warmed up to him too. Uraraka had told the group about her goal of beating Bakugou, which if Shouto was honest he sincerely hoped she did. Iida as well had shared his hope of becoming a great hero like his brother one day, which sparked Todoroki's recollection of why Iida seemed vaguely familiar all this time.

As Uraraka headed towards her home and Iida towards his after she declined his offer to be walked home, Shouto found himself hesitating on Midoriya's doorstep.

"Thank you for coming." Midoriya scratched at the back of his head, "It was really nice, having you hang out. And I think you're the first person to ever make heroics laws interesting."

"I don't know that I would go that far." Shouto shook his head, "But thank you."

Midoriya nodded, smiling just a little, though his eyes nervously darted away from Shouto's after a couple seconds.

"Midoriya..." He started, having no idea where he was going to steer this sentence.

"Yes?"

He was going to have to say something. If he didn't, then this whole evening, as nice as it had been, was going to have been for nothing.

"I came here for a different reason than studying." He began, aware that his phrasing was probably alarming, but unable to fix it, "During the Sports Festival, you helped me. More than anyone ever has. And since then I've been watching you and I think... you might need help too."

Unlike himself, he plowed on, knowing that if he stopped to look at the face Midoriya was bound to be making he'd lose his courage. He'd come too far now to let that happen.

"I've noticed something seems wrong. I don't know what happened or when. But I want to help. I don't know how, even though I came here trying to figure it out. I'm not... good at whatever it takes to help someone in this situation... in *our* situation, but I just wanted you to know I'm here... you're not alone."

He wanted to make himself look up at Midoriya but honestly he didn't think either one of them could handle the eye contact. It already felt like his heart was trying to come out through his mouth, he didn't need the extra strain.

"T-to-todoroki-"

Before he could process the hitch in Midoriya's voice and even *try* to react to it, there were arms wrapped around him.

Shouto honestly could not recall the last time someone had hugged him. His father certainly didn't, and his siblings weren't allowed close enough to him. At school he gave off an air of

untouchability that kept people far from him as well. His mother had held him, but she'd been gone for years.

Midoriya was a head shorter than him, and his hair tickled under his chin. It was soft though, and it smelt like some generic coconut shampoo. His arms around Shouto were firmer and stronger than the boy looked like he should have been, squeezing hard enough to make his ribs complain just a little.

He started to let go, seeming to panic about what he'd just done, resulting in Shouto panicking as well. His own arms wrapped around Midoriya, holding him close, unwilling to let go so soon.

"It's okay." He found himself saying, "I don't mind."

It took a few seconds but Midoriya relaxed against him, his own hands clutching at the back of Shouto's shirt.

They stayed like that for longer than Shouto thought most people would be comfortable with before Midoriya pulled back.

He pawed at his eyes with the heel of his hand, trying to rub the tears out of them even as a wobbly smile tried to make it's way across his lips though it didn't quite stick.

"It's kinda a l-long story." He sighed, "You want to come back inside?"

He shouldn't. He had a half hour before he was supposed to be home, which was just enough time to walk back. His father would be furious, and he'd be punished again. But he was starting to find with alarming regularity, he didn't give much of a fuck about how his father felt.

"Sure."

Midoriya led them back inside and upstairs to his room.

Somehow Shouto wasn't entirely surprised that his room was more of an All Might shrine than an actual bedroom. Every surface that could be covered with the hero's face had been. There were hundreds, if not thousands, of All Might collectibles arranged in perfect order around the room, though clothes and notebooks and pens were strewn haphazardly around the floor. He wondered how Midoriya had fared when All Might himself had turned up for his first day teaching them. He hadn't been focused on him at the time, but he also hadn't heard any undue screaming so it was anyone's guess.

"I- sorry about the mess." He tittered nervously, kicking the clothes into a semblance of a pile.

"It's fine." Shouto took a spot on the bed, trying not to think about the pattern of it, or where his ass was actually sitting, "My brother is much messier than you."

“You have a brother?” Midoriya joined Shouto on the bed, tilting his head in surprise.

Shouto nodded, “Two. And a sister.”

“Older or younger?”

“All older.”

“Are any of them heroes too?”

“No.” Shouto tried to keep the emotion from his voice, “None of them inherited both quirks like I did.”

Midoriya nodded slowly but wisely didn’t continue to try the subject.

“So,” Midoriya began with a breath, “How did you... how did you notice something was up?”

“I spend a lot of time watching you.” He explained before sighing internally. Even he knew that sounded bad.

“You’re the only thing I’ve found that really interests me,” He tried again, though this wasn’t much better, “So I spend a lot of time trying to figure you out to distract myself from... that. And I noticed how you react to certain things reminds me a lot of how my siblings react to things, how I react to things.”

Shouto couldn’t for the life of him remember talking so much at once. God he was bad at it, there was a reason he usually stuck to one or two word answers. He sounded lost, adrift in a sea of words.

Midoriya nodded though, like none that had been odd. But then, maybe to someone so prone to word vomit, it wasn’t.

“That makes sense.” He reached behind himself and pulled out an All Might plushie, hugging it in his arms, “I was worried I’d done something.”

“Done something?”

The green haired boy met his eyes just as briefly as he’d done earlier, though this time as he looked away he seemed to deflate a little.

“It started a few years ago. I- my quirk is really volatile so I’ve never really used it much. So a lot of the people I went to school with thought I was quirkless and they gave me a really hard time about it. It started off just kid stuff, teasing, name calling, that kind of thing. But as we got older it got... worse.”

That made sense. Shouto hadn’t known very many quirkless kids growing up, he’d been mostly home-schooled until UA really. He’d only ever seen brief snippets of a kid getting pushed down or taunted.

Midoriya fidgeted with the plushies eyebrows, “They’d all gang up on me so I couldn’t get away. Sometimes they’d just call me names and tell me how useless I was and how I’d be better off giving up on being a hero since someone like me could never make it. And of course I’m an idiot and I can’t keep my mouth shut so I’d argue and they’d beat the crap out of me. After a couple times like that they just started skipping to the beating the crap out of me part.”

An unreasonable spike of anger speared through Shouto before he could stop it. Reasonably he knew it must have been something like this, but it was different to hear about. Someone like Midoriya shouldn’t have had to go through this. No one should, but especially not him.

“They kept that up for a couple years before my mom talked to the main kid’s parents and threatened to have him arrested. After that they just switched to saying things that made me want to do it for them.”

Shouto’s attention whipped up at that.

Midoriya was staring down at his plushie, and his voice was softer than Shouto had ever heard it. There were no tears in his eyes, but he looked so sad it hurt to see.

“They got in my head. I don’t know why it worked so well, but I guess I really just am weak to that kind of thing. Just before I got into UA, they told me there was no way a school like that would ever take a quirkless loser like me. That it would be better for me, and for everyone else if I just gave up. If I just-”

He choked himself off, the tears that hadn’t come before, now streaming down his cheeks.

“They told me to kill myself.” He whispered, “And I almost- I almost listened.”

Shouto couldn’t react to that, had no idea how to. The idea of Midoriya having followed through on such a terrible thing stole the breath from his lungs.

“I went up to the roof.” He continued, as though unable to stop. “I looked over the side and I tried to list the reasons that I shouldn’t. I thought of my mom, how heartbroken she’d be if I died and that was it. She was the only person who I knew for sure would miss me. I couldn’t think of anything else. I didn’t have friends, I don’t have any other family, and the goal I’d been telling myself I’d reach no matter what seemed like a pipe dream. If not for her I think I would have done it.”

He breathed out, slow and wet, “But I climbed down, and as I was walking home a villain attacked me.”

Shouto’s eyes went wide, even though the stinging sensation in them hadn’t gone away.

“It was terrifying,” He winced, “A slime villain. He was trying to take over my body. He was in my mouth, my nose, my ears, everything. I couldn’t breathe, and we were far enough off the main road no one would be able to see. I thought I was going to die, right after having decided not to. And I should have been scared, and I was, but I think it was my body panicking more than I was. I felt... calm. Happy almost that I was going to get to die anyway

without having to do it myself and make my mom even more sad. That sounds awful, but it's what I was thinking in the back of my head."

A deep breath that Shouto made himself take along with Midoriya to help against the crushing heaviness in his chest.

"I would have died there, but of all the people to save me, it was All Might." Midoriya smiled reflexively at the mention of the hero, "He fought the villain off of me and stayed with me until I came to. But most importantly, he gave me back the hope I'd lost that day. I asked him the question I'd asked everyone else I'd met, I asked him if someone like me could ever be a hero. Up until then everyone had always told me no, to think about the danger I'd be in, that it just wasn't possible no matter how bad I wanted it. He told me no too, actually, but after a really crazy afternoon, involving me throwing my backpack at that same slime villain and trying to rescue Kacchan of all people, he told me that I had what it took. He told me that I could become a hero too, that I'd proven it by what I'd done."

He wiped his eyes again with the back of his hand before giving up and grabbing a tissue.

"That's why I work so hard." He explained, "Because I don't want to be a failure again. I don't want to feel useless or hopeless like that ever again. I don't want to let All Might down, and I want to be able to stand beside everyone and feel like I really belong there."

They were silent for a long moment as Shouto took in everything the other had told him. It explained a lot about him, nearly everything, though it made Shouto's chest ache in an all too familiar way.

He still couldn't understand how after having been hurt so much, Midoriya could still stand to leave himself open. How could he possibly still trust people when people had been what had torn him apart in the first place. It was obvious to Shouto at least that Midoriya still had yet to heal from what had been done to him. He was reckless to a degree that was truly only explained by knowing he didn't think of his own life as being worth anything outside of how he might help others. It had to still be hurting him, and yet he let his defenses down, like he was doing with Shouto right now.

It was inexplicable.

"Thank you." Shouto began when he figured out how to loosen the knot in his throat, "For telling me about it."

"You've told me about your tragic backstory, it was only fair." Midoriya tried for a smile.

Shouto shook his head, "No, you didn't have to. Thank you, for trusting me with something so painful."

Midoriya's expression morphed into shock, which meant it was Shouto's turn to talk. He just hoped he didn't screw it up.

"Pain is a hard thing to let other people see." Shouto explained, "Especially when it was other people who caused the pain. I told you what I told you because I couldn't keep it in anymore,

and I see that better now. But you told me this because you trust me, and I want you to know that I'm grateful for that. It's something I don't understand at all, but I'm happy for it anyway."

Midoriya seemed to consider that for a moment before he spoke again.

"I'm not very careful with my heart. It's something I've been told a lot. It gets me hurt a lot, but honestly I would rather take the pain than miss a friendship. Especially if it's with someone like you."

He smiled then and Shouto finally understood why.

He smiled like All Might smiled, defiant of pain, radiant in the face of darkness, and brave before every scrap of fear and doubt lingering in his own heart. He didn't smile because he was ignorant of all the bad things in the world, he smiled in spite of them. He was strong, stronger than Shouto had imagined even though he'd seen it first hand.

The campfire in his heart, the part he'd so jealously guarded as the little flames struggled against the arctic cold, roared to life.

It was shaky, new, and awkward on his lips, but Shouto smiled back.

Chapter End Notes

TLDR; Shouto spends some quality time with the Deku-squad by studying and starts to actually make friends. He lied to his Dad to get to hang out, decided meh haters gonna hate, and stayed out past his curfew to have a heart to heart with Midoriya about why the kid acts like he'd been beaten. Midoriya tells him all about the bullying he's been through and the extent of what it did to him, while skirting some key details about how he got his sense of hope back. Shouto understands Midoriya a lot better now and the boys bond over a smile, Shouto's first.

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