

## Silent Shadow

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# Silent Shadow

by [tunafishprincess](#)

## Summary

All Might is too late to stop the Sludge Villain the second time, leading Izuku Midoriya to die in his childhood friend's arms.

Good thing for the League of Villains. A fresh Quirkless body is exactly what they need for their new round of Quirk replication experiments. After all, why have one warper when you can have two?

## Notes

Disclaimer: Don't own BNHA or any of its characters.

Big thanks to Isa, the person who inspired me to write this fic and Memequeen, my best friend and beta who helped me fix up certain parts. Ya'll are fantastic.

This fic is oneshot but I will be writing a sequel to it in the near future (say thanks to Isa again, because they loved this so much they wanted a sequel, which I am very happy to provide. :D ).

This au was literally born last week after I noticed that fandom has a thing for dads for Izuku but very little Kurogiri dad. I did some concept art for it and a lot of people liked it. Thank you those who liked and commented on the works on Instagram, Tumblr, and Discord. You are all very lovely people.

I hope you enjoy the story! Kudos, bookmarks, and comments are greatly appreciated.

- Translation into Deutsch available: [Stiller Schatten](#) by [TreeOfDoom](#), [tunafishprincess](#), [Tunafishprincess2 \(tunafishprincess\)](#)
- Translation into Español available: [Silent Shadow \[Español\]](#) by [PlayerSh1n](#), [Tunafishprincess2 \(tunafishprincess\)](#)

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*Silent Shadow*



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Sirens wail in the distance.

Coldness seeps into his veins, vision blurring with each passing moment. Has the sky always been so blue? He feels wetness on his cheeks.

Huh.

It's warm. He reaches out to touch the source, fingers meeting something soft.

He knows he's an idiot, that all this could have been prevented if he had just done what All Might told him. However, for some reason, he's not upset like he normally would have been. He's content to have actually done something. For once in his life, he got to save someone.

There's so much commotion now. He hears someone yelling. Rough fingers shake his shirt. Bright hair brushes against his fingertips. He grasps onto it. He knows this hair.

He smoothes it down, giving the wearer a soft smile.

The name rests upon his lips.

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Glowing green eyes stare at the ceiling. His digits scratch at the area near the IV port. The fluids burn as they absorb into his skin. They used to be worse, he thinks, not that he can recall when or how. Still, there are the echoes of pain that linger, reminding him that there are greater things than death. Though he doesn't understand how there could be.



His first memory begins in the room. He doesn't remember how he arrived or how long he has been in the room, only that he started *existing* there one day. At least that is what the Doctor says.

The Doctor says a lot of things. He is rather talkative, so much so he makes enough conversation for both of them. He cannot recall their first words to each other, only vague impressions of not so pleasant feelings. He's not sure how long it's been since he came into existence, but at some point the Doctor gives him the name *Kuro* because he is the ninth one and that makes him special, even if he can't talk. Kuro writes on his little board, asking what happened to the other eight. The answer he receives makes him sad. He would have liked to have known the others. The room is lonely when the Doctor isn't around.

He doesn't like the name all that much. But he doesn't argue with the Doctor for another.

His gaze flickers from the ceiling to the walls. The room is small, with one bed and a small bathroom to relieve himself. Kuro occupies the time by drawing on his board. It's hard at first, because he doesn't really know how to draw, only the action, but he gets better. He tries to make himself the first time around. It doesn't really work out. The image comes out all splotchy with how much black marker he uses. He learns to use significantly less as he goes. He likes using reds and yellows more. The colors make him feel secure. He knows those colors best.

Sometimes he writes too, about the Doctor, about his strange body. He once dropped a pen on his leg and it ended up on the other side of the room somehow. He's not sure how he did that, only that it's part of his Quirk. Though he cannot physically vocalize, his lips can form shapes around the word: *Quirk*. A small bubble of giddiness runs through his body at the mere thought. His fingers ache to write, to analyze the Quirk he has. What sorts of uses are there? How does he activate it? He erases the words as he goes along, not wanting anyone to see. Why doesn't he want others to see? He's not sure. . .

He misses talking to the doctor. He wonders what is beyond the white door.

He wonders about a lot of things. There is nothing else to do in the room.

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Kuro is surprised when he is taken from the room. The Doctor wants him to meet someone important. Their benefactor. He calls him “Sensei“. Kuro remembers the definition of the word but lacks any visuals to back it up, like most things these days. Not that it matters. He finds out soon enough.

Sensei’s room is different from Kuro’s. There are monitors in this one, stretching from wall to wall. Below them, the light of several different machines illuminates the room’s single resident.

Everything in him is screaming at him to run away. The room’s owner emanates power, even if he doesn’t have a face. The skin from the top of his head down to his mouth is covered in scars. Kuro’s stomach churns. The older male is big, much bigger than him or the doctor. Even though he is sitting in a chair, he makes Kuro’s senses go haywire.

This man is dangerous.

His presence sucks up all the warm air in the room. Kuro tries not to flinch when the man grabs his chin, a slice of white teeth forming an imitation of a smile.

“And what do they call you little one?” He continues to hold onto the boy’s jaw. Kuro stays still, fearful of incurring the man’s wraith. In spite of Sensei’s demeanor, he can sense a more sinister nature beneath.

“We have given him the designation *Kuro*, on account that he is the ninth in the series,” the Doctor answers for him. “Amongst other reasons. . .”

The man’s grin widens. “A little on the nose, wouldn’t you say?”

“I-I thought it would fit, given the experiment’s subject matter.” He lowers his head. “I apologize if it is not to your liking.”

“I never said that, Doctor. It’s cute. You did well,” he says to the Doctor.

The Doctor twists at the ends of his mustache. “Ah, well, for the most part, yes—“

Sensei’s fingers tighten around Kuro’s jaw. He dare not look up. “For the most part? What is wrong?” He releases a small chuckle. Kuro shivers. He wants to run, but his legs do not obey him. “Don’t tell me you failed?”

The doctor trembles, hands clenched together. Kuro can feel the man’s fear. It strengthens his own.

“O-oh, no, of course not. The experiment is a success. A *wonderful* success,” he rubs his hands together. “We just have a few minor problems to work out,” he explains.

Sensei’s hand encroaches upon Kuro’s neck. The boy swallows. He would like to go back to the room now, please.

“Explain.”

Fiddling with his glasses, the doctor replies shakily, “Nothing major. He is merely unable to speak. His vocal cords are there and he can make small sounds, but . . . I suspect the broca area was damaged sometime prior to or during retrieval of the subject. Otherwise, he’s perfectly fine! All mental faculties are in working order as you requested. He still understands orders and can communicate via writing.”

The man holding Kuro’s neck relaxes. The tension drains from the room. “Good enough. We’ll put him in training immediately then. You may return to your station. I have no further need for you right now.”

“Yes, of course, sir. Whatever you say,” the doctor remarks, sending one last look at Kuro before shuffling away.

Kuro goes to follow the doctor, but Sensei’s grip keeps him from taking another step. Sensei is not finished with him yet.

He never did return back to his room after that.

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It doesn't take long to find out why. The air in the room shifts not long after Sensei makes a call. Slowly, the area in front of them distorts as a black vortex takes form. His eyes narrow as a figure takes shape, stepping out of the darkness with seamless grace.

Kuro isn't sure what to make of the man standing in front of Sensei. His clothes are clean and proper, with dark slacks and a fitted vest that oddly suits him. That isn't what interests the boy though. His eyes travel upwards, widening in surprise at the startling sight. The figure has wispy black smoke where his head should be. Kuro looks down at his own similar form, not sure how to feel.

"You called for me." The man bows at the waist, eyes never straying from Sensei. "And I am here to serve. How may I be of assistance?"

"You've done well, Kurogiri," Sensei praises, voice akin to a friendly grandfather. "I am quite pleased with your treatment of my protege." Fingers snake around Kuro's neck. "So much so that I have a new assignment for you."

There is a shuffling of feet. It takes Kuro a moment to realize it is Sensei's. Though he is hooked up to a ventilator, he moves well enough, the hand around Kuro's neck switching to his back. He follows the guiding hand, too afraid to do anything else.

"This is Kuro-chan," he introduces to the other. He taps on Kuro's back. The boy tenses before bowing, his movements much clumsier than the other man's.

A moment of silence passes before Kurogiri remarks, "Is he—"

"Yes."

The shadowy man nods, eyes flickering down to Kuro's. They are cold and analytical, taking in his appearance. Kuro's hands fidget. He isn't used to this much attention.

"Kuro, this is Kurogiri, one of my finest employees. Obey him as you would obey me. Understood?" Sensei asks.

He nods. The words resonate with something in his mind, a cold spot that he tries to ignore most of the time. It grasps onto the words, burying them deep into the boy's psyche.

Sensei must *always* be obeyed.

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The next few weeks go as well as one would expect.

Kurogiri isn't sure what to make of the boy. He trusts Sensei but this . . . it unsettles him to see something so similar to himself. He knows, logically, that the child is cut from the same cloth, custom-made to serve their Master as he saw fit. He just hadn't thought the man would choose to make another version of *him*. Though his colors run closer to green than to purple, they more than resemble each other, abilities, and all.

Nonetheless, his master has faith in him to instruct the boy. Kurogiri knows he cannot fail him now. The League has not recovered from their last battle with All Might. Another warper could help push the balance in their favor.

They clean out the storage closet not long after the boy's arrival. It's small but it fits a bed and dresser well enough. He does wish his master had brought some clothes for the teen, but they would make do with Shigaraki's old clothes. Until the child's uniform came in.

Yet, as with most things, these changes do not come without consequences. To the surprise of no one, Shigaraki destroys one of the bar tables at the announcement of their newest recruit. The boy

never did like to share things. Sadly, despite Kurogiri's protests, the older boy treats the younger as he does the rest of the Nomu, ordering him around for no other reason than to amuse himself.

But Kurogiri makes do with what he has for this new mission. The boy takes to work well enough, cleaning floors and tables as instructed. Working inside the bar itself is another story. He isn't sure which is the worst these days: his wine bottles being in constant danger due to Kuro's accidental portaling or Shigaraki's anger issues. Truly, his Master has given him a herculean task.

Which is why he must remain on *constant* vigilance. Thus, as he has several nights this week, Kurogiri once again finds his student stuck in the ceiling, legs wiggling in vain to dislodge himself. Kurogiri sighs. With a hard pull, he extracts the boy from the vortex. It closes with a soft pop.

The child lands on his back, releasing a soft hiss. His eyes widen at Kurogiri's form. Hastily, he reaches for his little board, scribbling a quick apology.

"You said that yesterday, and the day before that, and the day before that," he drowns. Kami, he needs a drink.

At least the boy has the decency to look embarrassed. He bows his head. Kurogiri shakes his own.

"You shouldn't be using your powers outside of training," he chides as he lifts the boy up by the armpits. "You know that."

Kuro's eyes lower. Slowly, he writes out, "I want to get better."

If it was any other quirk, he might have encouraged the boy's tenacity to train, but warping was not nearly as simple. Warping requires detailed knowledge of not only one's surroundings, but also understanding exact coordinates of where the other side of the portal could end up. Otherwise, they have accidents.

He mourns the past, present, and future wine bottles this child shall destroy.



His hands rest on the boy's shoulders to keep his attention. He does not get paid enough to handle one problem child, let alone two. Shigaraki is at least predictable.

"And you will," Kurogiri promises. "But you cannot keep warping into the bar. You've already destroyed our wine rack."

"What do I do then?" He emphasizes the question with two lines beneath.

"For starters, you can clean up the mess you've made," he says, swinging his work towel over his shoulder as he gestures to the fallen glass. "After that, we can work on the basics once more."

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A soft howl of wind travels through the air. The young warper slowly rocks back and forth, mindful of how close he was too the edge. Kuro doesn't normally like heights, but this particular rooftop feels surprisingly safe. He found it not long into his arrival, trying to escape Shigaraki during one of his tantrums. It's one of the few places he feels safe in this world. The open space is so different from the world he was born into.

Kuro shifts his focus inward. Even though he is no longer in the room, he still dreams about it. He dreams about a lot of things. The lick of flames against his skin, the taste of blood, a screaming boy with eyes as red as his favorite marker. No words, no explanations.

He doesn't know what they mean, but they're important. Sacred. He has a feeling that revealing these dreams could lead to more questions from Sensei, so he keeps them secret. While he much prefers his life here versus the room, it is not without its hardships.

He tries to think of the positives. Shigaraki is no longer actively trying to kill him as he did when Kuro first arrived, but the resentment lingers like an open wound. He knows he has disrupted the other boy's routine. He is like Sensei in a way: Kuro never knows how the older boy is going to react.

Speaking of, the young warper's contact with their leader is minimal at best. Kurogiri does most of the reporting regarding his progress with his Quirk. Going by the sounds the other makes, it is not up to Sensei's standards, but he doesn't take it out on Kuro at least. He feels bad for his teacher though. Kurogiri hasn't done anything wrong. The boy releases a soft sigh. It's his own fault.

It's not as if he is blind to his uselessness. The shame clings deeply to his being. He barely knows how to use his Quirk yet. He and his teacher's power sets are similar, almost identical really, though Kuro's is not nearly as powerful or stable. Even moving from one side of the room to another takes a lot out of him, and keeping the connection open—well, easier said than done.

Kurogiri says to picture it like a telephone line, connecting one call to the other. So far there's a sensation of tugging when one opens a line. But how does one stabilize the connection? And for that matter, how does one keep more than one portal open at the same time?

He drums his fingers across his writing board. Does it have something to do with him? Who was he before the room? The Doctor says he was born there, but he's already a teenager. At least, he thinks he is. He feels like one.

His gaze flickers downward. The blanket of night highlights the strange smoky tendrils that rise from his body. When he closes his eyes, he imagines the arms as solid and pale, dotted with freckles where the sun last kissed them. When he opens his eyes . . . well, it's not as if he doesn't notice the stares people give him when he does errands for Kurogiri. The worst looks are from the children, scared and uncertain by his strange appearance. He can't blame them. Even he is unnerved by what he sees in the mirror, no face or discernible features other than his eyes. It stuns him sometimes, the person in his reflection. He knows, intellectually, that it is him but there is some animalistic gnawing in the back of his head, yelling that something isn't right. He has tried to feel out his face once before, but his hands are unable to feel anything of detail. It is as though there was an invisible barrier.

He leans back against the roof. What exactly *is* he? Why does he look so much like his teacher? These questions and more swirled around in his mind. He almost doesn't notice the soft nudge to his shoulder. He freezes up before realizing who it was.

"What are you doing up here?" The older warper inquires. Kuro suspects the look on his face is one of polite judgment. If Kuro squints, he can see the bar on the other side of the warp gate. Carefully, the man climbs onto the tiled surface, wood creaking beneath his weight. "And why are you not in bed?"

“Couldn’t sleep,” he writes.

“You are not the only one,” Kurogiri remarks dryly, pressing a small cup into the boy’s hands. “But children should not stay up so late. You are a growing boy. Drink this.”

“Drugs?” He inquires, adding a small emoji with a lifted brow.

Kurogiri chuckles, eyes crinkling. “Yes, the strongest drug of all: chocolate.”

His writing board is already ready to ask, “Why do you care?”

The older man blinks. “Pardon?”

Kuro scratches the back of his neck with one hand while the other writes down his thoughts. “You treat me nicely. Shigaraki and the others don’t. They think I’m useless,” he writes.

His shoulders tighten. He must step lightly here lest he get sent back to the room. It hasn’t happened yet but the threat is there, an ever-lingering constant in the back of his mind.

“You are learning. Sensei entrusted your guardianship and education to me for a reason,” Kurogiri explains in a matter-of-fact tone.

“And what happens if I don’t learn?” He asks, letters blurring together.

He has seen what happens to the other Nomu who fail. His heart thumps wildly as the first one who failed to do as Shigaraki asked came to mind.

“You will.”

Kuro frantically scribbles another reply. “But what if I don’t?”

He can't just clean bar tops for the rest of his life. Is he defective? What if the Doctor was wrong and he really is a failure? He doesn't like being weak. It reminds him too much of—

A warm hand brushes his shoulder. He looks up, surprised to see how close the man is. “Drink your chocolate and calm yourself. Your hands are shaking.”

He obeys. Kurogiri's words ring through his mind. The sweet drink hits his taste buds, enveloping him like a nice cozy sweater. Slowly, his hands relax, followed by the rest of his body.

His eyes drift upwards to the other. Despite his polite, if cold, demeanor, there is a soft side to the older warper. Kurogiri is a unique figure in the League. He doesn't bully Kuro around like Shigaraki and the others do and he doesn't terrify him like Sensei does either, another plus.

“Are you sleepy now?”

He shakes his head but his body betrays him, a small yawn slipping out. Quirk training has taken a lot out of him, both mentally and physically. His head bobs, the heat of the chocolate flowing through his body in waves. It's nice to be cared for. Kuro could almost say it's familiar somehow, though he hasn't the faintest idea as to why.

“Would you like me to tell you a story to pass the time then?”

This time, he nods. Stories are fun.

Kuro listens to his mentor's words, the deep voice carrying into the night as he regals an oddly familiar tale; The dawn of quirks and one lone man who started a very entrepreneurial business of sharing said quirks. He isn't sure when he falls asleep on the roof, but he is glad to be back in his bed the next morning.









Comic Commission by the lovely [FruitloopChan](#).

No matter the hours, weeks, and months that pass by, the training continues. The last rays of sunlight filter through the blinds, reminding the teen how long they had been practicing. Mirroring his mentor's movements, Kuro takes a breath, shoulders relaxing as he puts himself in the proper headspace. His arms ache in protest as he raises them once more. It has taken him months to do this. He can't mess up. Not now.

Theoretically, it should be simple. He is made for this sort of thing. The Doctor said so. Mentally grasping at the image, he stretches out his senses. Sucking in air as the world around him darkens. The energy is cold and violent but it is tame under Kuro's hands, pliant to his control. Just as the tug begins in his chest a vortex grows before him, a reflection of his teacher's. Once it is big enough both males step through their own, ending up on opposite ends of the room.

Kuro releases the energy a moment later, falling to his knees. It's a good thing he doesn't sweat, otherwise, he would be drenched.

A soft whack to his head breaks him out of his thoughts. Kurogiri's disapproval almost hurts as much as his body does. "Your next break isn't for another hour. What are you doing on the floor?"

Too exhausted to write out his answer, he releases a long dry whine to emphasize his current status. Much to his surprise, the sound soon transforms into a short yelp when his teacher lifts him up by his armpits, body dangling in midair.

He looks up questioningly.

"You need to learn to stay up on your feet," Kurogiri states, setting him back on the ground once more. "No matter how tired you are. They will take advantage if you show weakness."

He tilts his head to the side, waiting for an explanation as to who they are. Kurogiri seems to catch on to the boy's body language (a phenomenon that grew more and more with each passing day), the next words out his mouth are, "Heroes. The Pro-Heroes."

Kuro doesn't notice the disdain, focusing on the symbolism behind the word instead.

His eyes perk up. It rings a bell in his mind. Heroes like the ones on television? He hasn't seen one in person yet, though he very much wants to. A delightful warmth develops in his core. What he

has seen excites him for some bizarre reason. Perhaps it was due to all their interesting Quirks? Kuro did so like Quirks. He likes everything about them really. It was one of the things he and the Doctor bonded over prior to his arrival here.

Kurogiri must have noticed his expression, going by the increased glow to his molten gold eyes.

“Toss whatever thoughts you have about them aside, child. Their true nature is government dogs whose only wish is to stamp us out,” Kurogiri says venomously, a surprising amount of emotion from the normally composed man. “They will not hesitate to kill us, that is why you must strike first.”

“What if,” Kuro starts, writing the rest of the sentence below. “I don’t *want* to kill them?”

Wrong question, he realizes too late.

The air takes on a thick taste of wrongness, setting his instincts on edge. One of the hanging lights starts to swing, shadows flickering back and forth below it, a clear warning of what will come. Kuro’s throat tightens. Fear pulses within him as he takes in his teacher’s expression, reminding him that while the man may be kind to him, he is also *not* to be disobeyed.

Sensei’s words echo through his mind.

*Obey him as you would obey me.*

Kuro bows low. A distinct shiver runs through his body when he hears the echo of the other’s footsteps, growing louder with each step until they are right below Kuro’s line of vision. He gulps.

“You do not have a choice in the matter. You will do as you’re told or else you will be disposed of,” his teacher states, voice devoid of emotion. “Do you understand, little shadow?”

Kuro shivers but nods. The room seems to lighten at his response, the tension clearing between them. He lifts up, back ramrod straight as he waits for his teacher’s next act.

He is thankful his teacher does not hold his words against him, moving onto the next topic seamlessly. “Good. I’m glad we’re on the same page. You’ve made good improvements on your gate creation and coordination.”

His eyes lighten at the compliment.

“Which means you are ready to start combat training. Shigaraki has been antsy lately.”

Kuro resists the urge to cry.

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A sudden rush of pain jolts throughout Kuro’s body. The flip leaves him breathless but it is the sucker-punch that does him in, making the teen lose his lunch moments later.

He hates this. Fears this. Training with Kurogiri is so much nicer. At least he doesn’t try to actively kill Kuro. Aren’t they all on the same side?

“Disgusting,” his attacker grumbles, adjusting the hand on his face. “He’s too weak. He’s practically Quirkless.”

Kuro coughs as he gets up from the floor. His side is killing him, but he can’t quit just yet. Shigaraki’s words light a fire inside him.

“Not weak,” Kurogiri answers from across the room. “Untrained. You were like him not so long ago.”

“Don’t compare me to this creature,” Shigaraki hisses, throwing another fist in the boy’s direction. Kuro narrowly dodges the punch, rolling several feet away. His side throbs, reminding him of the damage he took.

“Kuro is not a creature. *He* is Sensei’s subordinate, as are you,” the older warper reminds.

A fast kick drops Kuro to his knees. He groans.

Everyone here is so much stronger and faster—*better* than him. How can he ever hope to reach their level? He tries to rise again but his left leg gives out, causing him to fall back to his knees. Not that it matters. Shigaraki has already started walking away.

“This is boring,” the older boy says, scratching at the side of his neck. “I’m going out.”

“Shigaraki, wait—” Kurogiri’s words fall flat as the door slams behind him.

The room is silent apart from Kuro’s gagging. A rush of shame finds him as his stomach empties itself.

He wants to sleep forever. Though he cannot see it, he is fairly certain his body is covered in bruises. His everything hurts. Is that even possible? Soft footsteps draw his attention upwards. A firm hand rubs circles into his back, the other handing him one of the bar towels. He takes the item, using it to wipe down Kuro’s mess.

Trembling fingers draw out his writing materials. Though the writing is less than neat, the words are legible enough to make out. “It’s my fault.”

“No, it’s not,” his teacher remarks. “Shigaraki merely wants to prove himself to Sensei.”

Kuro’s pen moves as the other talks, having an answer right as the man finishes his sentence. “He’s right though. I’m weak.”

“As I said, you are not weak, merely untrained,” Kurogiri states plainly. “Everyone has to start somewhere.”

“Why does he hate me such much?”

His teacher flexes his fingers, picking up the soiled towel and tossing it into an awaiting portal. “It has nothing to do with you specifically.” He releases a deep sigh before adding, “I do wish he would take preparations seriously.”

This perks Kuro’s interest. “Preparations? What are we preparing for?”

Something tickles the area above his head. It takes him a moment to realize it is Kurogiri’s hand. “Nothing you need to worry about right now. Focus on bettering your Quirk.”

The boy takes his words to heart, though he cannot help but feel curious as to what he spoke.

---

There are only a few things in life that interest Shigaraki. Video games hold a special place in his heart, the variety of genres and consoles giving him great pleasure. Especially ones where he can demolish his enemies for ultra-rare weapons and armors. The screams of the weak also bring him great joy; the frightened brat in front of him is one of them. He wonders how many different sounds he can extract from the little warper, but fate has other plans. Seconds after he disintegrates the little Nomu’s left shoe he’s back in the portal. Another fluke.

“Come out, come out, wherever you are, *Kuro-chan*,” he mocks, twisting around. It’s been so long since he’s been able to let loose. Sensei can always make another, right?

The room is quiet. Too quiet. As loathe as he is to admit it, Kurogiri’s baby clone has learned from their first encounter. His warping is getting better.



But not good enough, he thinks, as he catches the boy in the corner of his eye.

Dried lips split into a wild grin. He reaches out—

And grasps air. Damn it! NPCs aren't supposed to be this elusive. Shigaraki is practically a high-level character at this point. It should not be this hard for him to grab a level 1 newb.

“Not fair!” He yells in frustration, stamping his foot. This is becoming less like a hunt and more of a game of hide and seek. Why did his Sensei even see the need of making another warper? Kurogiri was enough.

Too many damn NPCs in his life. It doesn't help that this brat keeps stealing his old shoes. While they no longer fit him, the theft remains one of several points of contention between the two. Something about Kuro just set him off. Maybe it was his innocent way of viewing the world, or perhaps it was his obsession with the fakes who called themselves heroes—it scratched at the inner parts of Shigaraki's soul in a way he detested.

That's why, when the warper tries to dip by again, he is already there to greet him, four fingers latching onto the tail end of a shirt. He jerks it back, dragging the little warper out of the sanctuary of his gate and onto the cold hard ground.

He relishes the look of fear in the other boy's eyes. They're much more expressive than Kurogiri's.

“Did you think you could escape?” He states, one hand balled into a fist.

Kuro blocks his first punch but not the second, groaning when it hits his diaphragm.

“No last words? Oh, I'm sorry. Should I get you a pen instead?” He mocks.

Dumb little Nomu. The Doctor must be losing his touch if he can't even make a good knock-off of Kurogiri. He hears the sound before he feels it against his face, a warm wetness. His index goes to touch it, not believing what he sees.

“Did you. . . did you just spit at me?” Shigaraki asks.

He swears the little bastard is grinning behind that foggy ass face of his. He rubs it off, noting the reddish color. His lips stretch into a sinister smile.

“Oh, so you can bleed.” He pulls back his arm, all five fingers at the ready. The Nomu’s eyes bulge. “Good.”

He brings it down—

And his fingers meet concrete, the warper disappearing back into the mist once more. The material crumbles beneath his touch as he roars. This is a pain in the ass of the highest level. How the hell did he not see the emerging portal? Absolute fucking cheat code right there. And how dare the newbie make him look like a fool?

Shigaraki flexes his fingers. Looks like this won’t be their last fight after all.

---

Convenience stores would be the death of him. He instantly recognizes the look on the cashier’s face. It is one he has faced several times before. His gaze immediately travels to the door. Can he make a run for it?

“I didn’t know you had a son,” the cashier gushes, the wrinkles around her eyes crinkling. “How sweet. He looks just like you!”

The first time it happened, Kurogiri was swift to correct the mistake. The second time occurred like the first, as did the third, and the fourth, and . . . he stopped around the twentieth. It doesn’t help that the Doctor named the boy after him, despite his protests. Did he think it was a joke? It’s not as

if he could explain why either. He doubts Sensei would be happy about him spreading information regarding Nomu creation.

Such a bother. People didn't annoy him when it was merely him and Shigaraki. The older boy makes most people unnerved. But alas, Shigaraki isn't here now to buffer the comments and Kurogiri is too polite to say otherwise.

Kuro lifts his head at the mention, cocking it to the side. The white scarf around his neck hides most of his face from view, giving him an almost comical resemblance to Onigiri. It would be cute if the wearer wasn't hiding something.

"How old is he?"

Oh dear. That's a good question. He remembers the Doctor saying that the child was young, but he never got an exact age. Based on his physical growth charts, he estimated that he is somewhere in his early to mid-teens. Kurogiri makes sure to keep his head straight, lest he miss the boy's quick fingers as he lies, "Fifteen. He'll be starting high school in the Spring."

Yes, fifteen seems appropriate.

The woman makes a cheerful sound in response before continuing on with the conversation, much to Kurogiri's consternation. As expected, Kuro takes that time to act. His hand disappears into the air just below the counter. A bold move. Moments later, the hand pulls back, prize in hand. He tries to sneak the item onto the countertop of groceries, but Kurogiri swiftly intercepts the action, though not without catching the eye of the clerk.

"What have I told you about unhealthy foods?" Kurogiri mumbles beneath his breath.

It doesn't take words to know the boy is flustered. His hands move about erratically. If anything, the clerk seems even more gushy.

"Hungry, dearie?" She laughs, picking up the first item in line to scan. "Oh, my son loves Katsudon too. I swear, growing boys eat anything and everything."

“Ha, ha . . . Indeed,” he replies, wishing he could be anywhere else right now.

Kurogiri inwardly groans. He is only here to pick up groceries. It doesn't help that Kuro is pushing the food forward, giving the older warper the ghostly equivalent to puppy-dog eyes.

A stronger man would refuse. Any other day, a fully caffeinated Kurogiri would do the same. But he is not either of those men today.

The woman rings up the food swiftly after his humiliating defeat. He wonders if he should kill the woman but decides against it. Too many witnesses.

The winter air hits them as they walk out. Both males shiver. The Doctor clearly didn't perfect the homeostasis issue in the second generation either. Perhaps it cannot be solved due to their cold-blooded nature? He zips up his coat, stepping onto the frost-covered pathway. As always, Kuro follows a few steps behind.

Right before he can open a portal he feels something tug at sleeve. He looks down.

“Can I ask you a question?” says the boy's board. “I've been thinking about something for a while.”

“You may always ask me things, child.”

“Are you my dad?”

Kurogiri stops functioning.

“No, no of course not,” he answers. “How on earth did you arrive at that conclusion?”

He is thankful he is not drinking anything at the moment, though he very much would care for a good, strong gin and tonic right now. Where did . . . the convenience store. The other times people

mistook them for family. It is a conversation that was bound to happen sooner or later, he realizes grimly. Not soon enough apparently.

“We are not genetically related. You were made from my blueprints. Your Quirks are copies of mine,” he explains, gesturing between them.

Kuro scribbles another question, tucking the board underneath his chin as he shows it to him. “So . . . I’m your clone?”

“No. We are not exactly alike, are we?” He brushes a hand through the mist above the boy’s head to emphasize. The green and purple wisps repel against each other like oil and water. “Our base parts are different.”

“Who was my base then?”

“I am not privy to that sort of knowledge,” Kurogiri answers truthfully. Master and the Doctor receive Nomu components from various places: morgues, hospitals, battle scenes, the occasional dumpster. He does not ask where. It is above his station.

“Who’s your base then?”

“I . . .” He changes the subject, not wishing to dive into that particular past. He is Kurogiri now. Nothing more. “That is not important. We were made to serve Sensei. That is all you need to care about. Come. We have more errands to run.”

He opens the vortex, hoping that this is the last time he has to deal with parentage questions regarding his young charge.

It’s not.

---

Shigaraki groans. Of all the NPCs he has to be stuck with today, it's the kid again.

He claws at his neck, trying to keep from falling prey to his instincts. Stupid brat, stupid game, stupid Kurogiri leaving him to babysit. He should be outside, getting rid of more of those stupid Pro-Heroes, not stuck in his room with a midget of a Nomu.

Just his luck too, as his screen blacks out after the twelfth time he's challenged the level's boss. "Game Over" flashes across, taunting him with his failure. On instinct he throws the game across the room towards the eyesore. The Nomu's eyes widen, but he catches it before it hits the wall.

"Bring it," he commands.

His babysitter's miniature does the opposite, pulling out his stupid board again. Ugh! Typical. Stupid NPC can't even follow easy directions. He flops back down on his bed, legs kicked up against the wall.

Why is he the one who has to stay? Hasn't he proven himself to be a field leader yet? How aggravating. His fingers inch up to the corner where his neck and head intersect, pulling at the day-old scab there. It's not fair.

A shadow obscures his vision. He rolls over to snap at the brat, but the words fail to leave his mouth as he looks over at the boy's writing.

"What are you playing? Is it fun? Can I play?" He jots down more words. "Can I help you somehow?"

Several thoughts pass through Shigaraki's mind: One, the Nomu was actually more sentient than the other trash, even if his writing was utter crap; Two, the Nomu is interested in video games, which makes him a step up from the rest of the League's NPCs; And three, as loathe as he is to admit it, he really needs a Player 2 to play cannon fodder to the ridiculously OP boss who made him throw the game in the first place.



It is a win-win scenario when it comes down to it.

“Just don’t die or I’ll kill you,” he grumbles, handing over the second controller.

---

It is at the first sign of Spring that Kuro realizes how much time has passed. How many months has he been here now? Over a year, he thinks, or maybe a little less than that. He’s grown a few inches since his arrival, filled out a little in some places as he put on muscle from training. Not much, but he’s getting there. It’s a nice change. He likes it.

And he’s even gotten better with his Quirk! Sensei seems pleased at least. He’s not nearly on his teacher’s level yet, but he can at least move himself and items up to a certain size through the warps. And he doesn’t get stuck in them nearly as much! Another plus!

If only the sparring sessions with Shigaraki were as productive. Sadly, at best all he can do is evade the older boy, though he has gotten a few hits in as well. Not enough however, going by their win-loss ratio.

But at least he’s not some Quirkless Deku anymore. He’s . . .

Wait. He pauses mid-sweep. Where did that thought come from?

The doorbell chimes, breaking Kuro’s confused thoughts. At first, he thinks it’s an actual customer, a rarity given their real profession, but that notion soon corrects itself when he sees the face, or rather, the hand on the face.

“Aw, was *Kuro-chan* expecting someone else?” Shigaraki leers, taking the boy’s broom and disintegrating it as he heads toward the bar.

The teen can't help but stare at the remains of his broom. This is the third time this month! Shigaraki might not have to clean the bar but Kuro did and destroying his cleaning supplies was not helping. A wave of frustration flows through him. He discretely flips both middle fingers at the man's back, right in the view of Kurogiri. The older warper shakes his head.

"Get me a glass of the strongest thing you have," Shigaraki orders.

Kuro writes down a recommendation on his writing pad that draws a snort from Kurogiri and a glare from Shigaraki.

"Cute, knock-off. Real cute," he mumbles, taking the drink Kurogiri prepares him and taking a deep sip. In one fluid movement he drops a newspaper onto the bar. Kuro has to strain his neck to see it.

His eyes widen in excitement as he recognizes the person on the front page.

"Did you see this joke?" Shigaraki states while laying his drink over the newspaper. "It says he's a teacher now."

Kuro tenses up at the simmering anger beneath the other's tone. It's no secret that no one else in their group likes All Might like Kuro does.

How can he not though? The man deserves admiration. His powers are immense. Kuro swallows up whatever information he can find on the hero, taking notes on his abilities along with the rest of the Heroes. What he would give to have a powerful Quirk like that. Not that he dislikes his Quirk or anything!

Yet . . . he would never admit it to Kurogiri but using his powers never feels exactly right. Maybe it's because Kuro isn't the real thing?

"Hey, what do you think will happen when the mighty Symbol of Peace is finally killed by the villains?" Shigaraki suddenly asks out of the blue.

Kuro freezes. That's . . . is that what they've been preparing for? His stomach twists at the thought. But All Might is the top Pro-Hero.

It leaves him feeling out of sorts. He knows his place here. He's a weapon, a tool for Sensei and the League. He hasn't been around to see the killings but he's there to clean up the aftermath. This is his life.

"What do you think about that, Kuro-chan? Nothing to say? Oh, that's right, you're a mute," Shigaraki says in a cutting tone, lifting his glass at the boy.

Kuro resists the urge to throw the remains of his broom at the older boy's head. Instead, he focuses on wiping down the bar stools, viciously attacking the imaginary dust there.

"Stop antagonizing him. Focus your energy elsewhere, Shigaraki. We have more important matters afoot," Kurogiri scolds.

"You let him get away with everything, even though he's a goddamn hero sympathizer," Shigaraki accuses.

He tries not to react. Uh oh.

"Lies and slander," Kuro writes across his board, hoping his handwriting doesn't betray his nervousness.

Red eyes scan his form before a dirty smirk emerges on Shigaraki's face. Slowly, agonizingly so, he pulls out a very familiar book. "Oh really? What is this then?" He slams it onto the table, his alcohol spilling across the newspaper. "You've been holding out on us, brat."

His notebook. Kuro's fingers twitch. How did Shigaraki get a hold of it? A flare of anger took hold. He went into Kuro's room! He went through Kuro's stuff! Oh, if looks could kill . . . Kurogiri's eyes narrow. Kuro watches in dismay as the man starts going through the pages. Kuro scrambles to provide an excuse. "I just like to take notes. It's not only Heroes."

“Indeed,” Kurogiri snorts, showing one particular page with their resident hand specialist on it. While Kuro is no professional artist, he likes to think he gets some resemblance right, though he may have exaggerated on this one.

Shigaraki’s brows cross, mouth pulling into an irritated scowl. “Is this supposed to be me? I do not look like that.”

Kurogiri closes the book but does not give it back to either of them. Instead, he remarks in a pleased tone, “These are quite detailed. Sensei will need to know of this.”

Kuro wants to die. His heart clambers inside his chest, threatening to break out and run for the hills. These are his personal writings! It feels weird enough that Kurogiri seems interested in them. What on earth could Sensei want with his analyses?

He communicates this on paper. “Am I in trouble?”

Shigaraki and Kurogiri give him conflicting answers. The former huffs, dissatisfied he can’t get Kuro in trouble while the latter sighs, sticking the book underneath his arm lest Shigaraki get a hold of it again.

“On the contrary,” his teacher begins, “I believe this could prove useful to our endeavor. I’ll alert Sensei of your findings, Shigaraki. Perhaps young Kuro may be of use this week.”

The look of horror on Shigaraki’s face would be priceless if it weren’t for the fact that Kuro was being roped into something.

“You can’t be serious,” Shigaraki sputters.

He can tell Kurogiri is pleased by the reaction. Suddenly, Kuro wonders if the biggest sadist in the room isn’t their resident handyman. “I think it’s about time *both* of you did some fieldwork.”

---

He breathes, in and out, trying to calm his terrified nerves. The other members make him weary. He's not used to being around so many people. The bar is completely full, past legal capacity even. Not that anyone here cares about legality. Nothing about what they're going to do is legal.

Invading the Unforeseen Simulation Joint gives Kuro a lot of misgivings. They would be going right into Hero territory. Even if they would only be dealing with students and a few teachers, they were still heroes in training. Sure, they have numbers, but numbers didn't matter when the Heroes have All Might. The man is practically an army himself. If he even shows up. Sure, he might be teaching class then but who knows what could happen. Shigaraki brushes off his thoughts the moment they are written. He can't fathom losing, Kuro thinks. He's so wrapped up in thinking of this as a game.

But it's not.

Kuro pulls at his shirt sleeve. He isn't used to the newness yet. His mentor says the outfit is a gift from Sensei. They are much nicer than his normal work uniform. The pants and vest are nicely fitted. How Sensei knows his exact measurement, he's not sure. It doesn't matter, he supposes. The shoes actually fit him too, not like the hand me downs from Shigaraki's closet. They're a pair of nice red high tops that match the tie, completing the outfit. Now, if only he could get it on straight.

Familiar dark hands take on the job for him.

"You're doing it wrong," Kurogiri remarks. "Allow me to fix it."

Kuro's fingers curl around the new phone in his pocket. He's used them before but this is his now. It is a nice change from the writing board.

Kurogiri's hands settle on his shoulders. He leans down to eye-level. "You look tense. Is something wrong?"

"Nervous," he types. "Scared."

The man gives a firm squeeze to his shoulders. “Good. Use that as fuel. Heroes will not take mercy on ones like us.”

His thumbs type quickly. “What should I do?”

“What did Sensei tell you to do?”

“Observe,” he types out. There isn’t much else to say. Their Master was pleased by his notetaking skills, so much so that he assigned Kuro to the invading squad. Lucky him.

“Then observe.”

“What does that entail though? Do I take notes on the battle? Or does he want me to account for the students? Maybe both? Do I need to help out with the others? What do—”

A large hand covers the screen. The artificial light is completely blocked by the black mists.

“You’re overthinking this.” He places a hand on Kuro’s back, rubbing familiar rhythmic circles.  
“Take a deep breath.”

The boy does as he’s instructed. Kurogiri must be obeyed. His shoulders loosen. The tension is still there but it’s no longer leaking out like before.

“Feel better?”

Kuro nods.

“Good. Keep hidden and take as many notes as you can. Do not engage the heroes or students unless absolutely necessary,” his teacher instructs, pulling away. Kuro follows after, joining him at the front.

“And what happens if I do engage them?” He texts.

Kurogiri throws him a long stare, eyes narrowing. “You know as well as I do what you have to do.”

His throat grows dry. He’s probably the only one in the group right now that hasn’t killed someone. He really hopes it doesn’t come to that today. Or any day, really. Does that make him defective?

“Are the preparations done?” Shigaraki asks. He is tense, scratching at both sides of his face. The skin around his jaw looks raw.

“We are ready when you are,” Kurogiri states, back straightening. The molten gold of his eyes makes Kuro shiver. He looks almost pleased to be heading into what could very well be their demise. Or the massacre of pro-heroes and children alike.

Kuro wonders if he should take a shot of Kurogiri’s special whiskey. Maybe he has enough time to fake illness?

“Let’s go.” A monstrous grin spreads across Shigaraki’s cracked lips, manic eyes darting “I’m done waiting.”

It’s decided. Kuro’s arms fall to his sides. *Sensei must be obeyed*, his mind instructs, over and over again until his body loosens, nervous thoughts drifting away. Black mist spreads out from Kurogiri, surrounding the group. There is no running away from this. Kuro must obey.

Even if he doesn’t want to.

---

It goes as well as Kuro expects it to.

Badly.

All Might may not be there but Eraserhead certainly is (he immediately pulls out his notebook to start analyzing the man's Quirk) but Kurogiri warps him out of the man's path before he can write down a single word, transporting Kuro into an unknown area within the facility.

The buildings are the only complete things and even they look less than sturdy. Everything else is worn and crumbled, artificially decayed to match the bleak atmosphere. Kuro gulps as he wanders the grounds. He's not used to being alone like this. Sure, he was left alone in his room back at their base, but this is completely alien territory. The crunch of gravel beneath his feet is louder than he expects it to be. His pace slows.

Should he return to Kurogiri's side? No, the man sent him here for a reason. If he truly needed Kuro's help he would have already warped him back. That is, if he knew the boy's location . . .

Right, focus on the mission. Things aren't over yet. Noticing commotion in the west, he warps closer, choosing a small ledge on a nearby building to avoid detection.

Their group is attacking a student it seems. And, to Kuro's surprise, he's actually holding his own. The spiky red hair makes him pop out against the dreary scenery.

As Shigaraki would say, the redhead is an absolute tank. Kuro starts jotting down what sorts of Quirks the boy may possibly have. Strength-enhancer? Muscle-builder? There's a rock-like appearance to his skin. He taps the pencil against the sheet. He's not sending the people flying, so it's not an offensive or reactive Quirk. Defensive then. Maybe some sort of self-strengthening of the skin?

The fight inevitably travels inside the building and going by the sounds he is hearing, it is not going in their favor. Not that Kuro truly minds. He's more interested in the boy's Quirk.

Until an even more interesting power arrives.



The building shakes at the arrival of a new opponent. Kuro's interest peaks. All the nervousness and fear is replaced with pure unadulterated adrenaline. Judging the distance, he warps closer, arriving on the floor above the two children. The scent of gunpowder and sweat permeates the air.

Kuro peers over one of the holes in the ground. He's so close now. Dangerously close. And yet he wants more. There's something screaming in the back of his mind that he has to see this.

The newcomer roars and Kuro stumbles back at the intensity of it. Emotions flood his body. Anger, fear, excitement, regret, sadness . . . it's all too familiar, though he doesn't know why.

He returns to spying on the two, enthralled by the fight before him. It's messy and uncoordinated but there is talent there. Raw talent. The blond's blasts are strong, knocking out every fighter he comes across. And he's only a first-year student. A strange mix of admiration and jealousy form in his gut.

Fire-based, he thinks as the boy knocks back a particularly large man with one hand. Explosion-related? It's as flashy as Endeavor's Quirk, that's for sure. There are so many things Kuro wants to ask. How does he create the explosions? How many can he make? Is there a limit?

His lips move soundlessly. He desperately wishes he could talk, now more than ever. Sounds develop in the back of his throat.

Kuro is so busy analyzing that he almost doesn't notice the thinning ranks. Soon, they knock out the final few. A little worse for the wear but otherwise unharmed. Amazing.

"Is that all of them?" The blond says. "So fucking weak."

After a quick heel-turn, the redhead asks, "Everything all clear?"

The other rolls his eyes. "What do you think, idiot?"

"Alright!" He pumps his fist, either ignoring the blond's comment or not paying attention to it, Kuro isn't sure. "Let's go save the others. If we're here then everyone else should be in the USJ

too.” The red one balls a fist. “I’m super worried. What’s gonna happen to our guys with less offensive abilities? Shit, we really screwed up. We slowed Thirteen down when we ran off ahead. Damn it. As men, we have to take responsibility and help the others.”

“If you want to go, then go.” The blond remarks, voice getting lower. “I’m going after that warp gate bastard.”

The red one’s eyes widen. “Seriously? That’s so childish, bro.”

“I’m not your bro, Shark Week,” he growls.

“But that guy’s attacks are—”

“Shut up!” He faces the redhead, obscuring Kuro’s view. He leans closer. In the corner of his eye, he notices someone moving. A member with an invisibility quirk? Kuro feels the urge to warn them but his teacher’s orders are firm. “That misty-ass dickwad is the enemy’s way in and out. I’m gonna cut off their getaway route when the time comes. We stop him, and the others can’t escape.”

“Maybe you should watch out for yourself brat!” Screams the invisible attacker. “Stop the chit-chat and—”

He doesn’t even get time to finish his sentence. The blond captures him by the head with one hand, firing out a burst of fire and smoke a second later. “If this is all they have then the others will be fine. Trust in your classmates, idiot.”

“Wow, Bakugo. Nice save . . .” The other boy states in wonder. “You’re surprisingly calm and rational.”

Kuro blinks. The name rings against the confines of his mind. He *knows* this name. There is something else the blond goes by, a soft voice in the back of his head reminds. What was it again?

Bakugo lifts an annoyed brow. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Well, normally you’re either like, super depressed or super angry, you know?” Shark Week (Is that his hero name? Kuro isn’t certain) answers.

“I’m always calm and rational you spiky-haired bastard!” Bakugo growled.

“There he is!”

Kuro giggles.

Both heroes freeze. Instantly, Kuro covers his mouth. But the damage is done. They know someone is here.

*Idiot*, he inwardly berates himself.

“Did you hear that?” One of the two voices asks.

Kuro doesn’t take another minute to spare. He’s already forming a gate with his free hand. His feet take a step back. If he can just—

Piercing red eyes emerge from the hole he was spying from. A feral smile and smoking hands are all the warning Kuro gets before the ground explodes. Dust obscures his vision. He looks behind. His gate is almost done. Just a few more seconds.

Heavy footfalls tear his attention back to the boy. “I see you, Warp Bastard. Think you can run from me?”

His warp wavers. Shit! The floor shakes as the other boy runs at him. Kuro pulls back, trying his best to evade the explosive teen. On instinct, he dodges Bakugo’s right hook, rolling away from the scene and back onto his feet.

Rumble falls from the ceiling. Kuro looks around frantically. All the commotion destabilized the structure. It's about to collapse!

"Get back here!" Bakugo makes a rush for him, murder in his gaze. Kuro can't think. His heart clamors in his chest.

The ceiling begins to fall. Thick cement pieces rain down. Kuro can only watch as it catches the blond by surprise. He blasts the first piece but the remains knock him down to the ground.

"Watch out, Bakugo!" His compatriot tries to make the distance.

It's not enough. There's no time.

There's a slight tremor in his hand. This is too familiar. An unknown memory bleeds into his vision. Imaginary fire licks at his skin. A monstrous creature has a young boy in a stranglehold. Their eyes meet.

Kuro . . . *remembers* this.

His hand extends.

---

Memories pound against the back of his skull as he summons the gate. It's smooth, smoother than anytime before. His hand changes, forming into mist as it surrounds the other boy. Kuro pulls. They fall through the blackness.

The void of the warp is a stranger to sound and light. All he can feel is the arm he grabbed. His heart races inside his chest. What is he doing? It's his first time warping two people together. They don't get very far.

Moments later, USJ's artificial lighting blares down on them. Kuro blinks, mind hazy. They're out of the building but still in the Ruins Zone. Kuro feels a wave of relief wash over him. He's alive. They're alive.

*Even though you're Quirkless, you're still pretending to be a hero, Deku?"*

The voice again. It's on the tip of his tongue. He doesn't have long to dwell on it. There's a rush of wind and he's being lifted up by rough hands. The taste of gunpowder lingers on his tongue.

"Tell me why I shouldn't just kill you right here and now, warp bitch," Bakugo snarls. He pushes Kuro against one of the still-standing structures.

*Fucking Deku. Damn it. You're not allowed to die you Quirkless loser. Fuck, there's so much blood. Why is there so much blood? Stupid idiot. Why didn't you just stay away? Why did you have to play the hero?*

The words come to him amidst the memories. He has to say it. Though his tongue is unused to forming words, he croaks out, "Kahhh . . ."

His voice is raspy, alien to his mind. But it's his. He pushes forward.

Bakugo's brows cross in mild confusion. "Did you shrink or something? Wait, you were behind that guy in the fight. You Warp Bastard's Bastard?" He shakes the boy, forcing Kuro to gasp as more memories sank in.

*You said you wanted to be a hero, right? You can't leave now. Please.*

His childhood friend. His bully. The images merge with the boy in front of him.

"Ka. . . cchan," he rasps, the first words he has spoken in over a year.

It's strange to see Kacchan so shocked. The anger falls from his features as something more vulnerable takes form. The body language becomes less hostile as the seconds grow longer.

“What did you just say?”

He says it again, this time more confidently. “Kacchan.”

He can speak. The name reins free on his tongue. He remembers this name and this boy. Where once mere fragments existed is now becoming whole. It terrifies and excites Kuro. He has a past. He's more than just a shadow.

The other boy makes a sound with his voice that Kuro can only identify as pained. “No. It's not . . .”  
“There is a break in his voice. “D-Deku? Is that you?”

“Kacchan,” Kuro says, realizing it is now the only word he can say. Is Deku his name? No, that's a nickname, a childish taunt. It fits better than Kuro though. Even with the bad feelings associated with it, he feels attachment.

Kacchan grabs his arms, scanning over the boy. He squeezes, once, twice, as if he's not certain what he sees is real. “You're alive. What happened? Why do you look like this? What's—”

Mist rises from the ground. It is not his own. Kuro's hands tremble. There's so much he wants to tell Kacchan. But the words cannot reach his lips. His eyes scan the horizon as a bitter realization dawns.

Kuro isn't Deku. Not anymore. Because. . .

Because he died. The Sludge Villain. The Fire. The memories play across his mind's eye. He didn't just lose the fight, he lost his life. And . . . The Doctor made him new. And now he's indebted to them. Forever.

“Kacchan,” he whispers mournfully.

Kurogiri's form flickers into view.

The other boy doesn't notice his change in tone. "We have to tell your mom. She's been so broken without you. Dek-*Izuku*, about what happened before, I can't, fuck how do I put this into words . . ." He closes his eyes. Through clenched teeth, the words leave his lips, "I'm sorry. I fucked up. I'm so sorry."

He can feel Kurogiri's eyes on him. Watching. Waiting. His expectations weigh heavily upon his heart.

They're on different sides now. Kacchan belongs to the heroes. It suits him. Kuro is envious but happy for the other boy.

"Time to go," Kurogiri's voice echoes, startling both teens. "Reinforcements have arrived."

Kuro rises to his feet. There is judgment in his teacher's steady gaze. Kuro looks away. Did he hear everything? This will not be forgotten. He tries to step forward towards his teacher, but a hand grasps his own.

He blinks in surprise, looking down at his friend. "Kacchan."

"Don't leave," Kacchan whispers. Kuro's heart aches at his old friend's broken expression. "Please."

The mist grows heavier. Kuro can hear his pulse inside his head. Everything is happening at once. The voices of Pro-Heroes travel through the vicinity. Those must be reinforcements. The redhead appears in the distance, leading those forces.

There's no guarantee help will come in time for Kacchan, Kuro thinks, so long as he holds onto Kuro's hand.

Coldness snakes around his body, the darkness extending its reach. Something wet drops from his face. He's surprised to find it's coming from him. This situation would almost be humorous if it weren't so sad. He remembers his dream again, his burning desire to help others rising like a tide over the blank spots of his mind.

His name isn't Kuro. It isn't Deku either.

He's Izuku Midoriya. And he knows what he has to do.

Rough fingers clench his hand. The smell of gunpowder brushes against his senses.

Izuku lets go.

The mist overtakes the area he stands in. His friend is screaming his name again. He reaches out, but there's nothing there. His stunned face is the last thing Izuku sees before he returns to his teacher, returns to face the punishment he will receive for disobeying orders.

Izuku smiles.

The name rests upon his lips.

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*Artwork by Calladraws*

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Check out my [discord](#) for sequel updates, my other fics, concept art, fanart and more! I'm also on Tumblr, Instagram and Twitter under the username Tunafishprincess if you would like to see more art for this fic and my other ones.

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