

count your blessings, not your flaws

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by [PitViperOfDoom](#)

Summary

Midoriya Izuku has never been asked out, confessed to, or flirted with, except as a joke.

Shouto knows he isn't good at this.

He never has been. He can't tell whether this is just the way he is, or it's one more thing he can blame on his father, but he knows that he isn't good at this. People call him stoic, and cold. Some even call him mysterious. Others call him emotionless.

It's not that he doesn't feel. He does feel, but it all gets locked inside and none of it ever shows. Sometimes it's because he can't show it. Other times it's because he's afraid to.

Take now, for instance. Midoriya isn't even looking at him, too engrossed in the notes he's going over, and yet Shouto can feel his mouth go dry and his tongue turn to lead. In moments like this, watching Midoriya's face, the way his brows knit together in concentration and his eyes flicker with each thought, Shouto feels things extra-sharp.

He's been thinking about this for weeks. Months, even. Shouto isn't good at showing what he feels, or saying what he feels, so he locks it away and thinks instead. But with Midoriya...

With Midoriya, it's okay. No matter how bad he is at this, Midoriya listens. Midoriya understands. Whatever else happens, Shouto is safe.

And that is what tips the scales in the favor of courage. Midoriya has given him many things, but he has never stopped giving him courage.

Midoriya stands up, closing his notebook, and it's only then that he realizes that Midoriya has been speaking, and Shouto—lost in thoughts and feelings—has barely caught a word. “—and anyway, what do you think?”

“Me?” The scales teeter dangerously.

“Yeah. I want to hear your thoughts.”

They are alone in the dorm commons, so there is no one else around to hear. The words come out blunt and wooden, but Midoriya understands, Midoriya always understands. “I think I like you, and I want to go out with you.”

He holds his breath, watching for a reaction, waiting for a response. His friend blinks at him, eyes widening in confusion, and then disbelief.

And then Midoriya barks out a laugh and walks away.

The first time it happens, Izuku is twelve years old, it's his second week of middle school, and Nanase-senpai in Class 2-B is the prettiest girl he's ever seen. He likes her smile, and the glitter clips in her hair, and her laughter makes him want to smile even if he's still shaking off Kacchan's mockery.

He never talks to her, of course, because she's beautiful and a whole year older than him, and just like Kacchan and everyone else in this school, she has a quirk and he doesn't. Izuku isn't angry about that; it's just the way things are. It's not Nanase-senpai's fault that she can move things without touching them, nor is it her fault that Izuku can't do anything. He's okay with this. Nothing is ever going to change.

Until, for about five seconds, he thinks it might.

He thinks that because suddenly Nanase-senpai is walking over to his lonely table at lunch, with her pretty smile and glitter clips in her hair, and says, “Hi! You're Midoriya-kun, aren't you?”

Izuku can only stare at her, awestruck and maybe a little bit afraid because *Nanase-senpai knows his name*.

“You know, you're kinda cute!” Has he mentioned that her smile is wonderful? “Want to go on a date with me?”

His mind goes blank then, his eyes big and round and maybe a little watery. And he thinks, maybe Mom was right. Maybe middle school really will be better than elementary school and maybe—

Nanase-senpai's pretty face crumples, and she tries to hold in a laugh but it sputters out of her anyway, and she turns and darts back to a neighboring table where a cluster of girls have been watching the whole thing.

“I'm sorry!” she calls, without bothering to look back and see that Izuku and half the cafeteria can hear her. “I'm sorry—I tried to hold it together but I couldn't help it—did you see his face?”

“It's okay, Nanase!” another girl answers. “You still did it—a dare's a dare!”

Nanase-senpai laughs again, and suddenly it doesn't sound as pretty anymore.

It must have become a running joke at school, after that. Akiyama-san comes up to him in class weeks later, tall and broad and big-boned enough that Izuku can't help but shrink back when she looms over him. And then the first thing out of her mouth is "Want to eat lunch together, Midoriya-kuuun?" in a voice that almost trills, and Midoriya perks up in his seat because he can't remember the last time he had the chance to make a friend.

This time, he gets as far as "Um," before Akiyama thumps his desk with her hand and spins around on her heel to march back to her seatmates.

"Did it!" she calls. "Told you I'd do it! Pay up, Naoka!"

"You were supposed to ask him on a *date*, Akiyama."

"Oh come on, I have my limits. A bet's a bet."

This time Kacchan overhears the whole thing, and Izuku ducks his head and lets the raucous laughter wash over him again.

The next semester starts when Mihara-kun transfers into his class, and it's Nanase-senpai all over again. Izuku can't look at him long, because if he isn't careful than he'll end up never looking away at all. He has a magical few days in which Mihara-kun grins at him and treats him kindly before someone helpfully informs him that Izuku is quirkless, and even then he doesn't even switch to bullying. Once during math, he lends Izuku a pencil when his own breaks, and that's the kindest thing that anyone in Izuku's class has ever done for him.

His quirk makes his eyes change color depending on how he's feeling. Izuku doesn't have enough time to nail down the patterns before Mihara-kun turns to him one day and says, "Hey, Midoriya-kun, I really like you. Want to go on a date after school?" And because of that, Izuku doesn't know that orange means he's joking until his face lights up and Mihara-kun bursts out snickering at the sight. "Oh my God, I'm just kidding, stop looking at me like that."

"He's like a really stupid puppy," someone else says, and Mihara-kun laughs.

It doesn't end there. Once in a great while, some pretty girl or pretty boy will surprise Izuku with a love confession or ask for a date, to settle a bet or fulfill a dare, before running off to laugh with their friends because no one wants to date quirkless Midoriya Izuku, but it sure is funny to make him jump. Akiyama laughs whenever she sees it happen, as if each time is the first.

And Izuku smiles and ducks and stays silent, and meets every joke with sincerity and delight because his hope springs eternal.

Or at least, it springs until he's a second-year, and Shinoda-san darts up to him during lunch with her eyes alight with excitement.

"Meet me by the basketball court after school," she says, in a hushed voice like she's sharing a secret. "I need to tell you something." And Izuku agrees, soaking up her eagerness and missing the way she grins not at him, but at someone over his shoulder.

He hurries to the basketball court after school, heart drumming with anticipation, and finds not Shinoda-san but four third-year boys waiting for him. They surround him before he can run away.

It really shouldn't have taken a black eye, a bloody nose, and his bookbag drowned in a locker room toilet for him to get the hint, but maybe he just liked having attention that much.

But at least he stops falling for it after that. The joke keeps coming, until the girls and boys that play it finally run together and Izuku stops remembering names and faces. It's easier, he finds, to grin and laugh it off, to pretend he's in on the joke. It's easier to laugh with them than to sit silently while they laugh at him. It hurts, but it's an easier hurt, and no one can ever use the joke to beat him up again. Like everything, it gets easier with practice, and his middle school classmates give him plenty of chances.

By the time he hears it from Todoroki, Izuku is so out of practice that he accidentally lets the hope in. Just for a split second, his heart lifts and he wonders at the thought of someone as beautiful and strong as Todoroki seeing him that way. But then reality returns, as unwelcome as ever, and Izuku lets it squash his hope again. Muscle memory lets him force a laugh with relative ease, and he walks away before he can let the half-forgotten hurt show.

Shouto stares at Midoriya's back until he can't see it anymore, and then he keeps staring because he doesn't know what else to do.

This would go one of two ways, he had thought. Either Midoriya would return his feelings, or he wouldn't. Either Midoriya's eyes would go wide, the way they always did when he was surprised and flustered, and he would mumble and stammer out an agreement—or he would fidget awkwardly and turn him down gently, apologizing even though it wouldn't be his fault. That was how Shouto imagined it, when gathering courage. That was how he comforted himself: even if he failed, Midoriya would do everything he could to keep from hurting him. He was kind like that. His voice was soft and his feelings were gentle, and even if it didn't go the way Shouto hoped, at least it wouldn't hurt.

He never imagined laughing. He never imagined Midoriya walking away without a word—not even a yes or a no.

Hot, uncomfortable shame fills him, and he sits motionless and stares as it pricks him like needles and makes him want to shrink away and hide and never look at anyone again.

His eyes sting, and then they are wet, and then they spill over and Shouto breaks free of his frozen state to wipe at them hurriedly. What if someone comes in—what if Midoriya comes back and sees —?

And now he feels like an idiot, sitting alone in the common room scrubbing at the tears running down his face. He tries to get a hold of himself, but the deep breath he takes trembles on the way in and he doesn't *want* to feel this way. This wasn't supposed to hurt. He wasn't supposed to come away from this feeling like a fool.

He's used to having his feelings treated like they don't count for anything. But he's not used to Midoriya doing it.

It hurts because this is one of those things Izuku thought he'd left behind when he started at UA. Along with bags dropped in fountains and toilets, stolen notebooks that turn up in the bushes with half the pages ripped out, lunch trays knocked out of his hands, black eyes and crushed dreams and loneliness—Izuku has spent his time in high school thinking that the prank is finally something of the past.

It hurts because it's Nanase-senpai and Mihara-kun all over again—because Todoroki is *beautiful*, with his bright hair and brighter eyes and his quiet strength. Because Izuku has spent enough time looking at him and wishing and imagining to be sure of his feelings, and it's different from his

middle-school crushes because more than anything he knows he can trust Todoroki with his life. It wouldn't hurt if he couldn't.

He must have made it obvious, if even Todoroki noticed enough to tease him about it.

And because it hurts, Izuku stays quietly angry and upset for another few hours before he finally shakes it off. Heaven help him, he can never stay upset with Todoroki for long. Especially now, with common sense pointing out that Todoroki is every bit as inexperienced with having friends as he is, if not more so. In all likelihood Todoroki just doesn't realize how hurtful it was. And why would he? It's just a dumb joke, and the only reason it bothers Izuku so much is that it's plagued him for so long. Keeping quiet certainly won't help; Izuku can't fix this by pretending that nothing is wrong.

But it's all right—the difference between then and now is that Todoroki isn't some untouchable classmate that Izuku can never talk to; Todoroki is his friend, and Izuku can always tell him when something's wrong.

Izuku goes back down to the common room just in time to find his friend shrugging into a jacket, about to head out.

“Hey, Todoroki,” he calls as he catches up. He tries to go for casual—he doesn't want to start off sounding overly accusing. “I wanted to—”

Todoroki walks by him without a word. The door shuts in Izuku's face.

Shouto knows he's being childish. Cowardly, even. Were he a braver person, he would take the chance that Midoriya gives him—and then the many chances that follow—to let his anger and hurt spill out instead of pool within him. Midoriya approaches him whenever he catches Shouto in the same room, eyes bright, mouth open to speak, but Shouto averts his eyes and shoulders past him every time, if he can't get away with turning around and leaving. He should want to talk—he should want to yell, even—but when he hears Midoriya's voice he hears dry laughter, and when he sees his face he sees that shallow, insincere smile. The hurt builds again until it nearly spills over, and Shouto leaves because that's what he's always done when he comes that close to breaking in front of someone.

He's avoiding Midoriya, plain and simple. He's not trying to hide it; he's too upset to bother. And Midoriya, who has never been stupid or unobservant, notices. Shouto tries to look away, tries to blind and deafen and numb himself to it, but with every attempt, he can feel Midoriya's frustration growing. A small, petty part of him draws satisfaction from that, and by the time they have to go back to class, Midoriya has stopped trying.

Shouto should be relieved at not having to put the effort into not looking at him anymore. But now, if chance forces them near each other, he can feel anger radiating off of Midoriya, and that only fuels his own irritation. What does Midoriya have to be angry about? Did he really find Shouto's confession that disgusting?

At least school means training, and training is a relief. In training, he can pour himself into every maneuver, every blow, every attack, until he's left heaving for breath and thinking about the ache in his lungs and limbs instead of the hurt. It's an old, reliable coping mechanism of his, to work himself hard enough that he's too tired to think about anything else.

He hasn't had to use it in quite a while, but now it's the only outlet he can see. It's somewhat less exhausting to talk about what hurts him, but that's not possible now. The only person he ever trusts

with that is Midoriya, so what is he to do when what hurts him is Midoriya himself?

“Something’s wrong.”

Ochako waits a few days to say something. She considers herself an optimist, you know? Always seeing the best of a situation, seeing the best in people. But her patience is short when her friends are in trouble, and this isn’t something that she can simply sit around and ignore until it resolves itself.

Iida blinks at her. “Well, the flow of your sentences is a bit stilted, and—oh, I see, you have a few errors in verb tense.”

They’re study buddies for the afternoon. Ochako needs help with an English assignment, and Iida has the second-best grades in their class. Also, it’s a convenient way to confide in someone.

“No, I mean—well, okay, yeah, you’re right.” Ochako erases the grammar errors that Iida points out. “But I meant something’s wrong with Deku and Todoroki.”

Iida’s no fool. “So you’ve noticed it, as well?”

“You mean, have I noticed that Todoroki didn’t eat with us at lunch today or yesterday, and that he and Deku have barely looked at each other since last weekend?”

“Er... yes.” Iida looks faintly uncomfortable. “I don’t see what this has to do with conjugation, however...”

“And you haven’t said anything?” Ochako presses. “I figured you’d be on that, like instantly.”

“I was considering it,” Iida admits. “In fact, I did ask Midoriya if something was amiss—”

“Oh? What’d he say?”

“That everything was perfectly all right, of course.” Iida actually rolls his eyes at this, and sighs softly. “Honestly, I don’t know what I expected.”

“He didn’t tell you anything?” Ochako asks, crestfallen. “But you can tell, right? Something’s up with them.”

“From what little I can tell, things have been a bit frosty between them for the past few days.” Iida taps his chin thoughtfully. “Still, it may not be cause for worry. Such things happen over the course of friendships, and it would be meddlesome of me to ask after every single disagreement. They are good friends, after all, and I’m sure that whatever it is, they are perfectly capable of resolving it.”

“That... might be true,” Ochako says, brushing eraser dust from her paper. “But I’ve never seen Deku stay upset with someone for more than a day, you know? I feel like something’s really wrong this time.”

“You... may be right,” Iida admits. “To be honest, I am somewhat worried about Todoroki.”

“Really?” Ochako frowns. “I... guess you’re right. Can’t put my finger on why, though. He’s just as cool and stoic as he always is.”

“He’s been throwing himself into training with a bit more... er... *intensity* than normal,” Iida says. “I thought I was imagining it at first, but I heard Aizawa-sensei remark upon it as well.” He shrugs.

“If I didn’t know better, I would say Todoroki was attempting to distract himself—‘i’ before ‘e’, Uraraka.”

“Oh right, thanks.” Ochako erases again. “So... Todoroki’s upset about something, then, right?”

“That seems to be the case, though I don’t see how it’s any of our—”

“That doesn’t worry you?” Ochako asks.

“Of course it worries me,” Iida says, blinking in surprise. “But... what exactly are you getting at, Uraraka?”

“I mean, have you *met* them?” Ochako asks, twirling her pencil between her fingers. “What’s the one thing that always happens when Todoroki’s upset about something?” Iida’s eyes narrow in thought, and Ochako pushes on. “Deku shows up, you know? He’s always on it. It’s like he’s got an extra Todoroki’s-in-trouble sense or something. And if he doesn’t, then Todoroki goes to him. They’re super close like that. So...” She frowns, and her worry grows. “If Todoroki’s upset about something, but he can’t talk to Deku about it, then no wonder he’s been acting sort of off.”

“Yes, I believe you’re right.” Now Iida’s frowning too, schoolwork nearly forgotten. “Perhaps he needs someone else to talk to for the time being.”

“Tell you what,” Ochako offers. “How about we split this into two prongs—you try and talk to Todoroki, and I’ll see if Deku has anything to he wants to say about all this.”

“It can’t hurt,” Iida agrees. “A fair plan, Uraraka. But for now—oh! Remember that this is an irregular verb. It doesn’t follow the normal conjugation rules.”

“Oh, damn it, I keep forgetting.”

Ochako gets lucky the next time she sees Deku, because All-Might is already there, unwittingly setting up her opening.

They’re just chatting, in the hallway after class has ended for the day, nothing private-looking, and that’s why Ochako hears All-Might ask, “Is something troubling you, my boy? You’ve seemed out of sorts.”

“N-no more than usual!” Neither of them seem to be keeping their voices down or watching for eavesdroppers, so Ochako doesn’t feel self-conscious about approaching.

“Really?” she chimes in. “You’ve been looking kind of down lately.”

“Oh.” Something like alarm flashes in his eyes for a split second. “R-really? I can’t think of why...”

Ochako can tell by the look on All-Might’s face that he doesn’t believe him any more than she does. “That doesn’t seem likely, young Midoriya,” he says patiently. “You do know you can talk about these things if you need.”

“Thanks, All-Might, but really, there’s nothing to talk about.” Deku’s not doing a very good job of lying, which means to Ochako that deep down, he really *does* want to talk about it.

“I’m pretty sure there is,” she says, bulldozing right along. “Todoroki’s been really upset lately, too. I haven’t seen you guys say two words to each other since last weekend.”

There's another flash of something, but it's gone before Ochako can identify it. "It's fine. We've just been pretty busy this week, that's all."

Ochako has been friends with Deku long enough to recognize that tone. That's the *I'm-upset-and-I-want-you-to-stop-noticing* tone. "He hasn't eaten with us at lunch for the past couple of days," she presses.

"I'm not the boss of him," Deku says, a little shortly. "Todoroki can eat wherever he wants." Is that a hint of bitterness she's hearing?

"Ah, I see," All-Might says, sighing a little. "Having a disagreement with a friend?"

"Guess so," Deku mumbles.

"Why not talk to him about it, then?" their teacher suggests. "It's best to nip these troubles in the bud, you know? Resolve them early before they spiral out of control. It helps no one to put it off."

"I would *love* to talk to him about it." Frustration bubbles up from Deku, catching Ochako off guard. "I've been trying since Sunday, but I can't talk to him if he keeps giving me the cold shoulder whenever I try!"

Ochako coughs lightly. "Uh, was that a—?"

"That was not a pun," Deku sighs.

"May I ask what happened on Sunday?" All-Might asks.

"N-nothing happened on Sunday, it was stupid and it's hard to explain anyway..." Deku's voice trails off when All-Might gives him a Look. For a moment Ochako thinks he's going to turn and flee from both of them, but in the next, his shoulders slump a little in resignation.

"Hey." She touches his arm gently. "Whatever it is. No judgments, you know? Not from me."

The look Deku's giving her reminds her of a stray puppy hiding under a cardboard box. "I-I mean, it's just..." His eyes flicker to the side, looking to All-Might, and he takes a breath and seems to rally himself. "Okay, you know that feeling you get when someone does something completely innocuous but for reasons you don't ever talk about it just bothers you and your first instinct is to get *really really* upset about it even though that person had no way of knowing it would upset you?"

"Um." Ochako blinks at him, several times. "S-sort of?"

"I know the feeling," All-Might says. "Is this something that Todoroki—?"

"Let's... just call it a hypothetical," Deku says quietly.

"Would you like me to speak with him?" All-Might offers. "You're both my students, and—"

"No," Deku says quickly. "No, no—thanks, All-Might, really, but... no. We'll be fine, honest. L-like I said, it's not even anything big, and... I can deal with it. I promise."

All-Might looks him in the eye for a few seconds. It still doesn't look like he believes him, but there's no arguing with Deku sometimes. "If you're certain, my boy."

"I am," Deku answers. "I really, really am."

Ochako doubts that very much. But, she's not here to fix the problem instantly; she's just here to find out what's going on, and Deku has told her a lot more than she knew before. Deku is the nicest, most open, outgoing person she's ever met, but he can keep a secret like nobody else.

She hopes Iida is having better luck.

"Todoroki, are you and Midoriya having an argument?"

"No."

"Oh. Are you sure? There seems to be some tension, and the two of you haven't been speaking..."

"Can't have an argument if you don't talk."

"Todoroki, you know that's not what I mean."

"It's fine, Iida, don't worry about it."

"Well I can't help but—"

"There's nothing to talk about."

"But—"

"Iida. Drop it."

"Well... all right. If you insist."

It gets worse, to the surprise of pretty much no one. By Wednesday, half the class can tell that something's up with Todoroki. By the day after, it's gotten around that he and Midoriya are avoiding each other like the plague, and no one's really sure where Todoroki is eating lunch anymore.

It takes a lot of straws to break this particular camel's back, but then Midoriya nearly wipes out during a training exercise (and takes Mineta down with him) when Todoroki ignores a signal from him and blows past them. The two of them endure a scolding from Aizawa-sensei and spend the rest of the class as far away from each other as the training field will allow, and after that it's Yaoyorozu who finally declares that she's had enough.

"If this continues, it's going to negatively affect the class as a whole," she says, after school is over and several members of the class (none of them being Midoriya and Todoroki) are gathered in the common area.

"It already is," Jirou points out. "Mineta's been complaining to anyone who stands still long enough to listen."

"Are you guys sure you aren't just blowing this out of proportion?" Kaminari asks. "I mean, it's not like the whole class is gonna go down in flames just because two people are having issues with each other."

"That might not be true—*kero*," Tsuyu chimes in. "We build each other up, remember? We motivate each other. And nobody motivates people like Midoriya does."

"And even if that wasn't true," Yaoyorozu adds. "Collaboration is key now, after all. We have a

responsibility to help each other, if it's needed."

Heads turn toward Uraraka and Iida.

Uraraka makes a little noise of frustration. "I talked to Deku about it," she says. "Sort of. You know that thing he does where there's clearly a problem but he talks about it like it's no big deal?"

"Yeah, it's pretty much the worst—*kero*."

"At least he's talking about it at all," Iida sighs. "I tried to speak with Todoroki about it, but he's been absolutely impenetrable."

"Is it really our business, though?" Kaminari points out. "Like, maybe it's super private or something. If they really don't want us to know about it, then we can't force them to spill."

"We don't *need* them to spill to us!" Uraraka says. "We want them to talk to *each other* so they can work this out! One of the things Deku told me was that he's been trying, but he can't get Todoroki to listen to him."

"Well all right then." Jirou shrugs. "Half the problem solved. Why don't we help him out?"

"I could attempt to mediate between them," Iida offers. "I'm fairly close with both of them, after all. Not to mention that, as class rep, mediating disputes and keeping peace in the classroom is one of my responsibilities."

"Mm, that only brings us back to the problem where they don't want to talk to us about this," Uraraka reminds him.

"I have an idea."

Heads turn again, this time to Yaoyorozu.

"If Midoriya has already tried to talk to Todoroki, then that means he wants this resolved just as much as we do," she continues. "We just need to give him that chance, and I think I know a way." She frowns thoughtfully. "We'll need Sero's help, though."

Jirou sits up from her slouch and leans forward. "I'm listening."

"Here's what we do..."

Izuku is hungry for a distraction, and that's probably why it's so easy for his classmates to trick him.

He ought to wonder why the dorm commons feel so empty for a Saturday, but when a sheepish Sero comes to him for help with his math homework, Izuku puts it out of his mind and follows. At some point, Kaminari and Uraraka join them, and he thinks nothing of it because they often need study help, too.

Sero's room is on the fifth floor, and Izuku feels an uncomfortable pang at the sight of Todoroki's door. It's been a week and they still aren't talking, and Izuku would be lying through his teeth if he claimed to be okay with that.

To his surprise, Iida is there, lowering his hand as if he's just finished rapping on Todoroki's door. To his alarm, he sees it open, and spots Todoroki's distinctive hair right before everything goes pear-shaped.

Kaminari moves first, giving him a light zap that still leaves him too startled and disoriented to react to anything else. Uraraka grabs him then, and he feels himself go weightless just for a moment, long enough for Uraraka and Kaminari to lift him bodily and hurl him through the open doorway as Iida springs out of the way. Uraraka releases her quirk's hold on him, and Izuku goes crashing straight into Todoroki before someone slams the door shut behind him.

With a yelp, he springs back and grabs the doorknob, but now it's jammed shut somehow. "You guys, what gives!" he yells.

Sero is the first to answer from the other side of the door. "Midoriya I'm so sorry I told them not to do this but they made me help them and—"

"*Sero, you narc!*" Kaminari yells.

"This isn't funny!" Izuku can feel his heartbeat in his throat. He's been wanting to talk to Todoroki all week, but *not like this*. "Open the door and let me out!"

"Nope!" It's Uraraka speaking this time. She sounds oddly cheerful. "Not until you two talk to each other and work out whatever it is you need to work out!"

"Are you *kidding* me?" Izuku's voice almost jumps an octave.

"Don't worry!" Iida says. "You'll have complete privacy! Yaoyorozu called an emergency study session in Shouji's room for this exact purpose! No one will listen in."

"Then how—?"

"You can come out when you send Tsuyu a nice selfie of you two getting along!" Uraraka almost sing-songs back at him. "If you try to fake it she'll know and we move on to making you hold hands in front of everyone!"

"Uraraka!"

"Bye Deku good luck!"

And that's it. Voices and footsteps fade, and Izuku is left with his face in his hands, locked in Todoroki's bedroom.

After what feels like an eternity squashed into a few seconds, Izuku raises his head and turns to find a disheveled, sulky Todoroki scowling either at the door or at him.

"I was trying to *nap*."

It's the first thing he's said to Izuku in almost a week, and to Izuku's ears it sounds like an accusation.

"It's not like I *asked* them to throw me in here." His reply comes out more peevish than he really means, and he stops short to shove down the hurt in his chest before it can get out of control.

"Look. Clearly things are messed up enough that everyone's noticed. So unless you feel like breaking your door down, we're stuck here until we... work this out. I guess." He has to drag his eyes from his feet to Todoroki's face. "For what it's worth, I've been trying to talk to you since Sunday."

Watching Todoroki's eyes in that moment gives Izuku the same feeling as seeing heavy iron doors slam shut. "What's there to talk about?" he asks. "You made yourself clear already."

“I—no I didn’t.” The hurt grows again, as he thinks of that stupid, pointless joke that shouldn’t matter to him but does. “You didn’t give me a chance—”

“*Yes I did.*” Todoroki steps forward, and Izuku’s shocked by the anger in his eyes. What, did the joke not get the reaction he wanted?

Well, tough.

Izuku steels himself. “Look, Todoroki, I get that you wouldn’t understand, but—”

“You’re absolutely right.” Todoroki cuts him off, and something in his voice makes the words die in Izuku’s throat.. “*I don’t* understand. There is *so much* I don’t understand, and you know that, and you know why, and I thought—I thought *you’d* understand.”

Unease grips him, and he’s not sure why. “Understand what?”

“That it’s *hard* for me!” Todoroki doesn’t quite raise his voice, but Izuku still feels it like a lash. “It’s hard, to talk about things like that, and it’s... it’s...” His teeth clench. “...frightening, sometimes.” His fists are tight at his sides, and ice spreads along his right forearm. “I’m not... good, with people. I just thought you’d understand. You *always* do.”

Izuku can only stare at him, hopelessly confused. “Todoroki, I just—”

“I was *scared.*” Todoroki’s voice shakes. “And that’s why I didn’t tell you sooner, and I only got past that because it’s *you*, and if I can’t be honest with you then I can’t be honest with anyone and I thought—” He stops talking because his voice breaks, and Izuku *jumps* at the sound. Todoroki’s eyes are lowered, narrowed, but he can still see tears gathering in them, and the confusion is rapidly turning to dread. “And then I finally got it out, and you didn’t even answer me, you just laughed and walked away and didn’t even look at me again for hours—”

“Todoroki—”

“It’s fine if you don’t feel that way!” There’s a sheen of ice on his face now, too. “You don’t have to feel the same way—I didn’t even expect you to, I just thought you wouldn’t hate me for it, or mock me for it, and then—then you did, and...” On one side of his face, the tears freeze; on the other, they turn to steam. With a quiet curse, Todoroki wipes them away. “Damn it. Sorry.” He tilts his head back, looking toward the ceiling like he’s trying to keep the rest from falling from his eyes. “Well. This is why I’ve been avoiding you. I didn’t want all of this coming out during lunch. Or ever.” He shuts his eyes and lowers his head, breathing in harshly. “And that’s why there’s nothing to talk about—because it’s simple. I feel stupid. I hate feeling stupid. I hate that *you* made me feel stupid, because I thought it’d be safe to talk to you about that, and it wasn’t, and...” His voice trails off, and he presses his palms to his eyes again.

And Izuku can only stare at him, speechless.

When he finds his voice again, all he can manage is a quiet “Oh, shit.”

It slips out a second time when Todoroki finally looks at him again, and Izuku sees him with renewed clarity, without the resentment and years-old hurt clouding everything. “Oh shit, you were serious.”

Todoroki’s face goes blank at that, frozen with shock. “What do you mean, I was serious.”

“I-I...” Izuku’s arms move as if on their own, curling around his head as if he can hide from Todoroki’s hurt and his own stupid warped judgment.

“Why wouldn’t I be serious.” Izuku can hardly tell the difference between the cold in Todoroki’s voice and the cold wafting off his right side. “What, do you think I’d tell you that if I wasn’t serious?”

“I-I mean, I...” And Izuku can’t answer, because foresight is hazy but hindsight is sharp and clear, and how could he have been so stupid? This is *Todoroki*. With Todoroki, the tiniest things mean everything, and emotions are a trial, and no matter what else there is between them, there’s trust more than anything. How could he have thought for one second that Todoroki would joke about something so important? “Um, I just. Thought you were kidding.” It comes out weak and feeble, like a half-baked excuse because that’s kind of what it is.

Because he just hurt Todoroki badly enough for tears, and there’s nothing that can justify that.

“You thought I was *kidding*?” Todoroki’s voice cracks again, and Izuku’s heart breaks a little more. “Are you serious?”

His arms feel like lead, and he lets them fall to his sides. “Todoroki, I just—”

“What did I do to make you think that badly of me?”

“N-nothing! You didn’t do anything, I—”

“Then why would you think that?” Todoroki demands. “Why would you ever think that I’d tell you I’m in love with you as a *joke*?”

“Because that’s the only reason anyone’s *ever* said that to me!”

The words are out before Izuku has time to realize how they sound—how sad, embarrassing, and pathetic he must sound saying them. Todoroki blinks at him, and the hurt in his eyes is softened by confusion.

“What?”

“I-I mean...” He hasn’t felt this small in so long. “Um.”

Todoroki’s looking at him oddly now, like he’s come across a new question and isn’t sure how to go about asking it. “Midoriya,” he says. “What do you mean by that?”

“N-nothing. It’s not—um.” He feels pressure behind his throat, and he swallows against it desperately. Now is not the time to cry. “It was stupid. I-it was really stupid, and—and you’re right, I should’ve known better, and I’m sorry, and—”

For the first time, Todoroki takes a step closer. “Midoriya.”

The stammering cuts off.

Todoroki watches his face, as if searching for something. “I, um. You’ve been wanting to talk to me. I don’t think I’ve really let you.”

Izuku has spent the past week wanting to tell him what’s wrong, to present his hurt feelings and explain why hurt is hurt, no matter how meaningless it seems, but now he feels petty and oversensitive and all that comes out is, “It’s nothing.” Todoroki keeps looking at him, until more words tumble out. “I-it was just—a joke, that got played on me. A lot. I-in middle school. Just kids being dumb, y-you know? Just, pretending to c-confe—asking me that sometimes, t-to see if I’d fall for it. And I did, a lot until... I stopped. But they didn’t, and I just... you asked me that, and I

just assumed... because that's how it always is, and..." His voice peters out.

Todoroki keeps staring, quiet and incredulous.

"B-but you're right." Izuku almost has to choke it out, because the painful pressure in his throat is getting to him. "I should've known better, because—none of them were my friends, but you are, and I trust you, and... I'm sorry. I'm so sorry, I didn't..."

The silence stretches between them. Izuku has spent a week imagining what he would say to Todoroki given the chance, but it didn't come out like he'd thought, and now he can't think of anything more to say.

"I'm just having trouble understanding," Todoroki says quietly.

"I-I know." Izuku's voice breaks. "I know, I should've known better, I don't know why I didn't—"

"No, I mean—" Todoroki meets his eyes, looking lost. "I don't understand—why would anyone joke about being in love with you?"

That's what breaks him, and the tears that Izuku's been fighting come flooding out, bringing all his shame and guilt and hurt pouring with them. Love—that's the word that Todoroki uses. Not *like*, or *crush*, or *feelings*, but love. Todoroki is in love with him. Todoroki told him he was in love with him, and Izuku laughed and walked away.

Izuku spent his childhood being laughed at, being treated like his feelings were some kind of game, being told through words and actions that his feelings don't matter, and now he's done the same to Todoroki.

His vision goes blurry. Drying his eyes does nothing when the tears won't stop.

"I—" His voice catches on a sob. "I really hurt you, didn't I."

"A little." Todoroki's voice sounds closer now. "But, um... you were trying to talk to me, this whole time. And I think if I'd stopped to listen to you, this would've been cleared up faster. So... I'm sorry."

"It's okay," Izuku says quickly. "I-it's okay, really, I get it, you had e-every right to be mad, and... yeah."

"Yeah."

Todoroki falls silent again, waiting while Izuku's tears finally slow down enough for him to dry his face properly. When his eyes are clear, he finds Todoroki still watching him, eyes bright.

"Um. M-Midoriya." Todoroki steps closer again, hesitantly. "Now that you know, that it wasn't a joke, do you... have an answer?"

Izuku blinks at him, wide-eyed. "I—so, you mean I didn't put you off? Or anything?"

Todoroki's eyes flicker to the side for a moment, and his brow furrows. "I think if it was that easy to make it go away, it wouldn't have hurt this much."

Somehow Izuku manages not to flinch. He closes his eyes, briefly, but too long to be mistaken for a blink. "I'm so sorry," he whispers.

"I know."

When his eyes open again, Izuku searches his face, probing every inch for some kind of clue, some secret that will let him wrap his head around what he knows. *Todoroki is in love with him*. Just six words, and yet somehow it's a struggle.

"Midoriya." Todoroki frowns. He must see the struggle on Izuku's face. "You... do believe me, right?"

"I believe you," Izuku blurts out. "Of course I do, it's just..." His words sputter out when Todoroki takes another step toward him, and he is so close now.

Todoroki looks a little scared, and his left hand shakes as he lifts it toward Izuku's face. "Would it help if I proved it to you?" he asks.

Izuku doesn't answer—can't answer, not with Todoroki's eyes so close and bright. Not with Todoroki already leaning in.

So he doesn't answer. He sees what's coming, and lets it happen.

Shouto moves quickly, before he can think better of it or talk himself out of it. With Midoriya's green eyes that close, it's almost a shame to shut his own, but he's too afraid to keep them open.

Midoriya's lips are soft, and he goes still when Shouto presses his mouth to them. But he doesn't pull back or push Shouto away, so Shouto lets his left hand brush lightly against Midoriya's jaw, guiding him into the kiss with a touch.

He means for it to be light and brief, just enough to prove that his feelings are real and not a joke (who would joke about something like this?) but then Midoriya sighs softly and melts against him, and Shouto is *gone*. The world around him vanishes, and all that feels real is Midoriya's mouth and hands and endless warmth.

He comes back to the feeling of scarred hands cradling his face. One of them pulls back first—Shouto isn't sure who—and they stand with their foreheads pressed together, breathing the same air. Shouto feels Midoriya's thumb softly caress his cheek, and he leans into the touch, into the rough warmth of his hands, and opens his eyes to find Midoriya looking at him like Shouto's face is his whole world.

Staring into those eyes, it takes a moment for Shouto to remember how to use his voice. "So, does this mean—?"

"Yes." Midoriya ducks a little, tucking his forehead into the side of Shouto's neck. "Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. And I'm still sorry for laughing, I'm sorry for... for letting stupid past stuff get to my head."

Shouto blinks. "Have you *met* me?"

Midoriya laughs softly against him, and Shouto can think of no reason not to lean down and taste the laughter on his lips.

Tsuyu's phone chimes, and the entire room shifts as everyone trips over each other for an ideal vantage point to look over her shoulder.

The message is a single photo—sent from Todoroki's phone. Midoriya's grin is brighter and wider than it's been all week, and his eyes are shut as if he was caught mid-laughter. Todoroki is close

enough that their faces are touching. He isn't looking directly at the camera, but he's trying to hold back a smile of his own and failing miserably.

Curiously, the background of the photo shows them to be sitting not in Todoroki's dorm room, but in a cafe booth.

A text message pops up beneath it.

We went out the window and went to get cake . Tell Yaoyorozu to please take the bolt off my door before we get back.

It's Sero who breaks the silence.

“They were on the *fifth fucking floor*.”

Works inspired by this one

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