The open-air training field, still cool with the early morning air, shimmered under the glinting sunlight reflecting off its reinforced walls. Students, gathered for a scheduled heroics drill, filled the space with their chatter—until the sharp, measured cadence of approaching footsteps cut through the noise.

Mirai Sasaki.

He entered the training grounds with the same immaculate precision as his office: sharp suit, clipboard in hand, glasses glinting. His presence was a stark anomaly, and the sudden, hushed shift in atmosphere reflected it. Whispers rippled through the group.

"That's Sir Nighteye… Toshinori's old sidekick, right?" "Why's he here? Is he evaluating someone?"

Toshinori stood nearby, already transformed into his muscle form, his smile tight, strained. He knew why Mirai was here, though he hadn't agreed to it. Kagutsuchi, leaning casually against a railing with his mop, looked positively delighted.

In the center of the field, Izuku Midoriya stood straight-backed, waiting calmly, as if he already knew Mirai's arrival was for him.

Mirai approached, his gaze coldly assessing, clipboard tucked under his arm. "Midoriya Izuku."

Izuku met his gaze steadily. "Sir Nighteye."

"This drill will deviate from the standard curriculum," Mirai announced, his voice carrying across the field with unyielding clarity. "Today, I will be assessing Midoriya personally." His sharp gaze flicked to Toshinori, who tensed but said nothing.

Kagutsuchi's smirk widened. "Oh, this is going to be fun," he murmured under his breath, a low, pleased rumble.

Mirai turned back to Izuku, his tone calm but with an edge that resonated with every ear in the training field. "Your fight at USJ raised… questions. Questions I intend to answer." He stepped closer, his eyes narrowing slightly behind his glasses. "You claim to adapt quickly. Let's see if that's true."

Izuku said nothing, simply inclining his head once in acknowledgment.

Mirai adjusted his glasses, giving a curt nod to Present Mic, who was running the session. "Activate course Delta."

With a loud mechanical whir, panels in the training field shifted, rearranging into a moving obstacle course—a simulation designed for hero-versus-villain scenarios. But instead of the usual preset patterns, Mirai's fingers tapped rapidly on a portable console, altering the configurations on the fly, creating an unpredictable challenge.

"Move," Mirai ordered, his voice sharp.

Izuku launched forward instantly, his movements fluid and efficient. The first wave of automated drones swooped in, firing soft-impact training rounds. Izuku dodged with precise, economical motions, dismantling two drones with sharp, calculated strikes before they could even register his presence.

Mirai watched closely, his sharp eyes tracking every step, every subtle shift. "Increase speed. Randomize movement patterns."

The drones surged faster, their attack patterns erratic, a chaotic swarm. Izuku's body shifted subtly, his rhythm changing mid-stride, adapting smoothly to the new tempo. He didn't hesitate—every move was decisive, instinctive, a dance with chaos.

"Good," Mirai said softly, though his face remained unreadable, a mask of professional scrutiny. "Now… let's push him."

He keyed in another command. A heavier drone—a mock villain unit designed for upper-year students—dropped into the field, its armored plating and powerful servos making it a far greater threat. It lunged with surprising speed, a metallic predator.

Izuku met it head-on, blocking its strike with his forearm, sliding under its follow-up swing, and countering with a low sweep kick that destabilized its footing. He moved with startling precision, his body reacting faster than most pros would have managed, a blur of controlled power.

Mirai's jaw tightened. "Increase difficulty again. Full combat protocol."

Toshinori stepped forward slightly, alarm crossing his features. "Mirai, that protocol is for third-years—"

"He can handle it," Mirai said firmly, his gaze never leaving Izuku, his voice cutting off Toshinori's protest.

The drones reconfigured, now moving in coordinated squads, a relentless assault. The armored unit re-engaged, attacking with brutal speed. Izuku's breathing deepened, his movements sharpening further, as if the increasing pressure only honed him faster, more efficiently.

"Fascinating," Kagutsuchi drawled from the sidelines, golden eyes glinting with amusement. "He's learning in real-time. Look at him go."

And Mirai was watching—his usual detached calm wavering just slightly as he noted how Izuku's movements grew smoother with every exchange, how he predicted the drones' adjusted patterns after mere seconds, a terrifyingly rapid assimilation.

Then Izuku did something Mirai hadn't anticipated.

He stopped reacting.

Instead of dodging, he stepped into an attack, deflecting the armored unit's swing in a way that redirected it into another drone, toppling both at once. His green eyes sharpened, calculating. His body language changed, not just adapting—controlling.

Within moments, the field went still, disabled drones littering the ground like fallen leaves. Izuku stood in the center, breathing steady, eyes locked on Mirai, a silent challenge.

The silence was deafening, broken only by the distant sounds of the city.

Finally, Mirai stepped forward, his expression unreadable, though a faint crease formed between his brows. "You're… faster than yesterday's reports suggested."

Izuku tilted his head slightly, his tone calm, almost detached. "The more I fight something, the better I understand it."

For a long moment, Mirai simply studied him. His Foresight might have failed before, but this test confirmed what he feared: Izuku was evolving at a rate that defied logic, a variable he couldn't predict.

Kagutsuchi's soft chuckle broke the silence, his smirk wide and satisfied. "Told you, Mirai. He's not just keeping up—he's rewriting the rules."

Mirai ignored him, his gaze still locked on Izuku, his sharp mind already turning, calculating new possibilities, new threats. "This evaluation is over," he said finally, his tone clipped, decisive.

As Izuku inclined his head and stepped back, Mirai's eyes narrowed slightly behind his glasses.

Special doesn't always mean safe, Mirio's words echoed in his mind, a chilling premonition.

And as the students began murmuring among themselves again, Mirai's silent thought was far colder:

If this is only the beginning of his evolution… how long before even Toshinori can't control him?

The blinds filtered the late-afternoon sunlight into sharp stripes across Toshinori's desk. Papers were stacked haphazardly, a stark contrast to Mirai's immaculate precision, as the former Symbol of Peace sat behind his desk, his massive frame hunched slightly forward, his expression wary.

Mirai stood instead of sitting, his posture rigid, hands clasped behind his back. His gaze was cold, clinical, his words precise, each one a calculated strike.

"You knew he could do that."

Toshinori's jaw tightened. "I knew he was capable, yes. But not at this rate. Even I—"

"This rate?" Mirai cut him off, voice suddenly sharp, a rare crack in his usual control. He stepped closer, his glasses catching the striped light, reflecting the intensity in his eyes. "He was learning in real-time, Toshinori. Every second of that test, he grew more efficient. By the end, he wasn't adapting anymore—he was controlling the field. That's not something even seasoned pros manage consistently."

Toshinori met his gaze evenly, though his voice was quieter, a subdued rumble. "I'm aware."

"Are you?" Mirai's voice rose slightly, his frustration finally surfacing, a raw edge to his tone. "You watched the same fight I did. You saw how fast he's evolving. That kind of power isn't predictable. It's dangerous. What happens when he reaches a point where even you can't stop him?"

Toshinori's hands tightened slightly on the edge of his desk, his knuckles pale, a silent struggle. "…Izuku isn't like that, Mirai. He's a good kid. His heart—"

"Heart doesn't change biology," Mirai snapped, his patience wearing thin. "And this isn't about his intentions. It's about what he is. Agito or not, he's evolving into something neither of us fully understands. And if Kagutsuchi is right, if Agitos truly exist outside the Quirk Factor, then there may come a day when no one—not you, not me—can contain him."

The office fell into heavy silence, the ticking of Toshinori's desk clock unnervingly loud, a stark reminder of passing time.

Toshinori finally leaned back, his voice firm but calm, though there was a quiet edge of defiance beneath it. "Izuku isn't just power, Mirai. He's hope. And I won't let fear dictate how we treat him."

Mirai's eyes narrowed, but he said nothing for a long moment, his mind clearly working, calculating probabilities.

Then, quietly, with steel in his tone, he finally spoke. "…Hope doesn't rewrite the rules of evolution, Toshinori. And if you won't act when the time comes—"

A new voice interrupted, smooth and mocking, cutting through the tension.

"—then what? You'll lock him up? Put him down?"

Both men turned sharply.

Kagutsuchi leaned lazily against the doorway, mop propped casually on his shoulder, golden eyes gleaming with that ever-present, infuriating smirk. "My, my. You two are so dramatic. The kid's not even done growing, and you're already arguing about whether he's savior or threat. Adorable, really."

"Get out, Kagutsuchi," Mirai said flatly, though his jaw tightened at the interruption, his irritation barely contained.

But Kagutsuchi just tilted his head, feigning innocence. "Oh, don't mind me. I'm just here to clean up after all those busted drones. But between us, Mirai, I think you're right to be worried." His grin widened, almost predatory. "Because if you think this is impressive now… you haven't seen anything yet."

He gave a mock salute, then sauntered off, whistling casually as he disappeared down the hall, leaving a lingering sense of unease.

The silence that followed was heavier than before, charged with unspoken tension, a thick, palpable weight.

Mirai adjusted his glasses, his voice cold again, his resolve hardening. "I'll be watching him. Closely."

Toshinori said nothing, his gaze drifting to the window, the fading sunlight glinting off the glass, reflecting a distant, troubled world.

And somewhere far below, the distant sounds of students laughing in the courtyard felt almost alien, as if belonging to a world far removed from the quiet, growing storm above.

The campus had grown quiet as the sun dipped lower, painting the walkways in long, golden shadows. Most students had already left, their voices fading into the distance, leaving the grounds nearly empty.

Izuku sat alone on a bench near one of the smaller training fields, a half-empty water bottle dangling loosely in his hand. His usually frantic note-taking habits were absent; his battered hero analysis notebook sat closed beside him, untouched.

He stared ahead, his expression calm, but his mind was anything but.

Mirai's test replayed in sharp, unnerving detail—the shifting drones, the way each wave had grown more aggressive, and most of all, the unblinking, calculating stare that had followed his every movement. That hadn't been training. That had been dissection. Every second, Mirai had been testing not just how he fought, but how he learned to fight.

Izuku exhaled slowly, the quiet sound almost lost in the rustling of the trees, a faint sigh of realization.

He wasn't watching to see if I could win… he was watching to see how far I'd go. How much I'd show.

And he had shown him plenty. By the end, his body had been moving on pure instinct, not just reacting, but controlling the flow of the fight, a terrifying, beautiful mastery.

His grip on the bottle tightened slightly, his green eyes narrowing just a fraction.

He knows now. He understands what I can do… maybe even more than I wanted him to.

The thought didn't frighten him, not exactly, but it left a heavy weight in his chest, a sense of being observed, categorized. Mirai hadn't looked at him like a student. He had looked at him like a variable—something to be solved, or contained.

Izuku finally stood, tucking the bottle under his arm and picking up his notebook. The warm evening air felt heavier than usual as he started toward the gates, the quiet campus feeling vast and empty around him.

If Mirai-san sees me as a risk… then I have to make sure I prove him wrong.

The sun slipped lower behind the U.A. buildings, casting his figure in long shadow as he walked down the empty path, the faint echo of his footsteps swallowed by the growing quiet of the evening.

The steady tick… tick… tick of the wall clock filled the pristine silence of Mirai's office. The city lights glimmered faintly through the tall windows, but inside, the room was all order—neatly stacked files, pens aligned perfectly on the polished desk, and the massive whiteboard dominating one wall.

Mirai stood in front of it, sleeves rolled to his elbows, marker in hand. His sharp eyes scanned the branching flowcharts and timelines already drawn with immaculate precision, every line a path he had calculated, every name a piece in a future he had painstakingly built.

At the center, written in bold, was the name TOGATA MIRIO, surrounded by carefully structured arrows and probabilities.

But now, a new name stood opposite it, circled twice in red.

MIDORIYA IZUKU.

Beneath it, he had added a single word in neat, block letters:

VARIABLE.

He stared at it for a long moment, his usual calm mask barely concealing the tightening of his jaw, the subtle clenching of his hands.

The test replayed in his mind—the boy weaving through drones, growing faster, sharper, more efficient with every passing second. By the end, Midoriya hadn't just been adapting; he had been dictating the flow of the battlefield, a force of nature.

Mirai's pen hovered over the board, his thoughts cold and methodical, dissecting the data.

"Unpredictable rate of growth. Real-time learning efficiency beyond normal Quirk development. Instinctive combat intelligence approaching pro-level experience…"

He wrote quickly, underlining each phrase before stepping back to examine the growing list beneath Midoriya's name.

Then, after a pause, he added one final line, almost reluctantly, a concession to a new, unsettling truth:

Potential exceeds current projections for Mirio.

The marker clicked softly as he capped it, his expression unreadable, a silent battle raging within him.

He stood still for a long moment, the weight of that single line heavy even for him, a disruption to his carefully constructed future. Finally, he spoke aloud, voice low and steady, as if saying the words might help cement them into the quiet order of the room.

"Special doesn't always mean safe."

His gaze hardened behind his glasses, a glint of grim determination.

Toshinori's hope won't save us if he's wrong. If Midoriya loses control—or worse, if he evolves beyond what we can predict…

He adjusted his glasses with a precise flick, his voice colder now, the steel of his resolve returning, unyielding.

"Observation continues. If Toshinori refuses to act when the time comes…" His eyes lingered on Midoriya's name, the red circle around it stark against the board, a warning. "…then I will."

The office was silent save for the ticking clock, the city lights glittering faintly outside the windows, a distant, indifferent world. Mirai stepped back from his whiteboard, studying the red-circled MIDORIYA IZUKU with his arms crossed, his sharp gaze distant, calculating.

The faint click of the door broke the quiet.

Mirai didn't look up. "I didn't authorize anyone to come in."

"Good thing I don't need authorization," came Kagutsuchi's voice, smooth and amused, his presence a disruption.

The so-called janitor sauntered in as if he owned the place, his coat draped lazily over one shoulder, golden eyes glinting with that infuriating, predatory smirk. His mop clattered carelessly against the wall as he leaned on the desk, uninvited, a casual invasion.

Mirai's eyes flicked to him briefly, his voice clipped, laced with irritation. "If you're here to gloat, you can leave."

"Oh, I am here to gloat," Kagutsuchi said cheerfully, circling the desk like a bored cat. "Not about the kid, though. You already know he's impressive. No, no…" His grin widened, a flash of sharp teeth. "…I'm here because you're wasting all this brainpower worrying about the wrong thing."

Mirai's jaw tightened slightly, but he remained silent, waiting. Kagutsuchi gestured lazily at the whiteboard with its precise timelines and branching calculations. "You're obsessing over Midoriya's evolution, writing all those pretty little flowcharts, when the real issue isn't the boy. It's Toshinori."

Mirai's eyes narrowed, but Kagutsuchi pressed on, his tone softening into something almost… pitying, a cruel twist.

"You know it as well as I do, Mirai. Toshinori's body may be healed, but time?" Kagutsuchi tapped his temple. "Time doesn't rewind. He's making up for lost years, burning through himself like a rookie trying to relive his glory days. And you…" Kagutsuchi tilted his head, smirking again, a knowing glint in his eyes. "…you're smart enough to know exactly how this story ends."

Mirai didn't respond, his expression unreadable, but his silence spoke volumes, a grim acknowledgment.

Kagutsuchi leaned closer, his voice dropping to a low, almost conspiratorial murmur. "You want to protect your golden boy? Maybe stop worrying so much about whether Midoriya's a threat… and start worrying about whether Toshinori has enough time left to matter."

The two locked eyes for a long, tense moment, a silent battle of wills. Then Kagutsuchi straightened, his smirk returning full force, triumphant.

"Food for thought," he said lightly, snatching his mop and heading for the door. "Oh, and don't stay up too late, Mirai. You're starting to look almost as old as your friend."

The door clicked shut behind him, leaving the office silent once more, the air thick with the weight of Kagutsuchi's words.

Mirai stood motionless, his gaze fixed on the whiteboard. But this time, he wasn't staring at Izuku's name. His eyes lingered instead on the corner where TOSHINORI YAGI was written in neat, bold letters—circled in black, a silent, ominous prophecy.

For the first time that night, his expression faltered, just slightly, a flicker of genuine concern.

The training gym was almost pitch-dark, save for the harsh white light of a single overhead lamp flickering above the weight racks. Most of the faculty had gone home hours ago, the campus quieting into stillness. But here, the silence was broken only by the heavy sound of ragged breathing and the dull clank of metal plates hitting the floor.

Toshinori Yagi stood in his restored muscle form, his broad frame drenched in sweat, steam rising faintly off his skin in the cool air. His once-pristine hero tracksuit clung to him, soaked through at the chest and back, a second skin of exertion.

He was pushing himself harder than he had in years—pull-ups, weighted squats, and now another brutal set of deadlifts. His hands, raw and reddened, trembled as he gripped the barbell, but he gritted his teeth and pulled again, veins straining along his forearms as the weight rose, slow and shaky, a testament to his desperate will.

"Come on…" he muttered under his breath, his voice a low growl, more desperate than determined, a plea to his own body. "Come on…"

The barbell hit the floor with a dull thud, rattling against the mat. Toshinori staggered back, gasping, sweat dripping from his chin, his chest heaving. His reflection stared back at him from the mirrored wall—a tall, imposing figure, yes, but not the same Symbol of Peace who once carried the world effortlessly on his shoulders.

He stared at himself, chest heaving, and for a long moment, said nothing. His fingers flexed at his sides, his gaze drifting to the faint streaks of gray at his temples, to the lines at the corners of his eyes, signs of the time he couldn't outrun.

Kagutsuchi's words, Mirai's cold logic—they haunted him, even here, in the sanctuary of his struggle.

He clenched his fists, slamming them against his thighs, as if to drown out that thought with sheer force of will, a desperate denial. "I can still do this," he whispered, his voice cracking slightly, fragile hope clinging to each word. "I have to do this. There's still time… there has to be."

He moved to the treadmill next, starting it at a punishing sprint. His legs pounded against the belt, each footfall a defiance against reality, against the inevitability he refused to accept, a desperate race against the clock.

But deep down—beneath the resolve, beneath the heroic smile he still forced for the world—Toshinori knew Mirai was right.

Time waited for no one. Not even for All Might.

The soft hum of the vending machine and the faint aroma of fresh coffee filled the otherwise quiet room. Toshinori Yagi sat at the table, a steaming cup cradled in his large hands. He looked tired, his posture slightly hunched despite his still-imposing muscle form. The faint shadows under his eyes spoke of another night spent training long after everyone else had gone home.

The door slid open with a soft whoosh, and Kagutsuchi stepped in, his janitor's uniform as casually worn as ever, mop slung over his shoulder. His golden eyes immediately locked onto Toshinori, glinting with that usual predatory amusement.

"Well, well," Kagutsuchi drawled, striding in as if the room belonged to him. "Still trying to squeeze two decades of heroics into a single night, Toshinori?"

Toshinori sighed, clearly not in the mood, but didn't look up. "I'm not in the mood for your games today, Kagutsuchi-san."

"Oh, this isn't a game," Kagutsuchi replied smoothly, leaning his mop against the wall before taking a seat across from him. He tilted his head, studying Toshinori with infuriatingly casual ease, a knowing glint in his eyes. "I'm just curious how long you plan on lying to yourself."

Toshinori finally looked up, his blue eyes narrowing, a spark of defiance. "And what exactly am I lying about?"

Kagutsuchi's grin widened, sharp and knowing, a predatory smile. "About why you're really hesitating. About why you're still clinging to this ridiculous hope that you can reclaim what you lost."

Toshinori's jaw tightened, but Kagutsuchi continued, his voice calm but cutting, each word a precise jab.

"You think I didn't notice? You're not training for Midoriya's sake. You're not training because the world needs All Might back at his prime. You're training because you want it. You want to feel like that invincible symbol again. You want to taste those glory days one more time."

Toshinori flinched slightly, but his glare hardened, refusing to break. "I'm trying to make sure I'm strong enough to protect this world, Kagutsuchi-san. Nothing more."

Kagutsuchi chuckled, low and mocking, a dismissive sound. "Don't lie to me, Toshinori. You saw it yourself when we fought over Midoriya's autonomy, remember? Even after I healed you, even restored that broken body of yours to peak condition, you still couldn't lay a hand on me. You couldn't keep up with something that isn't even trying to kill you."

Toshinori's hands tightened around his coffee cup, knuckles white, but he stayed silent, the truth a bitter taste.

Kagutsuchi leaned forward slightly, his golden eyes locking with Toshinori's, his tone softening just enough to sound almost genuine, almost sympathetic. "And you know what? It's not your fault. It's unfair, I admit it. You're a man trying to compete with something that's practically divine. You're playing by human rules against powers that rewrite them. And no amount of training, no miracle healing, will ever change that."

For a long moment, neither spoke. The only sound was the faint hum of the vending machine, a mechanical heartbeat in the quiet room.

Finally, Kagutsuchi sat back, his smirk returning, though there was a faint glimmer of something resembling respect in his eyes, a strange, fleeting acknowledgment. "You've done more than anyone could have asked of you, Toshinori. But stop pretending this is about the world. Stop pretending it's about Midoriya. You just don't want to let go of being All Might. And that…" His grin widened, almost pitying, almost cruel. "…is what's really going to get you killed."

Toshinori stared at him, his jaw tense, his eyes a storm of defiance and something quieter, something dangerously close to guilt. But he said nothing, the words hanging heavy in the air.

Kagutsuchi stood, picking up his mop and slinging it over his shoulder again. "Face it, old dog. Time's moving on, whether you like it or not. The kid's the future. Not you."

With that, he sauntered out, leaving Toshinori alone in the quiet room, staring into the dark reflection in his untouched coffee, the bitter truth settling deep within him.

The door slid shut behind Kagutsuchi, leaving only the hum of the vending machine and the faint ticking of the wall clock. Toshinori sat motionless, staring into the dark surface of his coffee, a silent, internal battle raging.

The words still echoed in his head.

You just don't want to let go of being All Might.

His hands tightened around the cup, his reflection in the dark liquid rippling with every faint tremor of his grip. He wanted to deny it, to dismiss Kagutsuchi's words as just another one of his calculated barbs—but he couldn't.

Because it was true.

Healing had given him more than just his body back. It had given him hunger. Not just for food, though even that was a temptation he struggled to control.

He thought of the first week after Kagutsuchi's miracle. For the first time in years, he had eaten without fear of pain—real food, solid food, flavors he thought he'd never taste again. A simple bowl of katsudon had nearly brought him to tears, and he had devoured it like a starving man. Since then, every meal had been a quiet battle to control himself, to not gorge like someone desperate to reclaim years lost to the hollow misery of liquid diets and fragile health.

And it wasn't just food.

Every run on the treadmill, every weight lifted in the empty gym, every time he flexed his fingers and felt that familiar strength surging through him again—each one whispered the same seductive lie.

You can still be him. You can still be All Might.

He had told himself it was for Izuku, for Midoriya's sake. That he needed to stay strong to guide the boy, to protect him, to set an example. But sitting here, with Kagutsuchi's mocking voice still fresh in his ears, Toshinori couldn't lie to himself anymore.

This wasn't about raising the next generation. That was just the excuse.

This was about him. About clawing back everything he had lost to injury, to time, to inevitability. About chasing the feeling of standing unshaken against villains, of being the unyielding pillar everyone looked to. About proving, if only to himself, that the Symbol of Peace hadn't truly faded.

His fingers loosened around the coffee cup as his shoulders slumped, the weight of the truth settling over him, heavy and undeniable.

He was trying to relive his glory days.

And that—Kagutsuchi was right—wasn't just foolish. It was dangerous.

Toshinori closed his eyes, exhaling slowly, the quiet hiss almost drowned out by the vending machine's hum.

Midoriya deserves better than this, he thought, the first honest thought he'd had all day. If I keep clinging to this, I'll only drag him down with me.

When he finally opened his eyes again, the look in them had changed—not lighter, not resigned, but grimly resolved, a new, difficult path laid bare.

He couldn't let this selfishness dictate his choices any longer. But whether he could truly let go… that was a question he wasn't ready to answer yet.

The sun hung high overhead, baking the concrete training ground in warm light. A soft breeze rolled through, rustling the sparse trees along the perimeter, but it did little to cool the heat of the sparring session unfolding in the center.

Izuku Midoriya stood in a loose fighting stance, sweat already beading across his forehead. His breathing was heavy, uneven, his green curls sticking damply to his temples. He wasn't in his Agito armor—not this time. Kagutsuchi had insisted on "keeping it fair."

Fair.

The golden-eyed Lord stood opposite him, hands casually tucked into his coat pockets, his stance relaxed, almost lazy. Yet every time Izuku lunged, every strike, every attempt to grab him, Kagutsuchi moved like smoke slipping between fingers—effortlessly weaving, twisting, stepping just out of reach with infuriating ease.

Whff! Izuku's fist cut through the air, grazing nothing.

Kagutsuchi sidestepped smoothly, almost lazily, his smirk widening. "You're already panting, kid. And here I thought you were supposed to be the pinnacle of human evolution."

Izuku grit his teeth, resetting his stance, his chest rising and falling in heavy bursts. "This… this is just the first time! I'll—hah!—I'll get better!"

"Sure you will," Kagutsuchi replied smoothly, ducking under another punch with barely any effort. He flicked a finger against Izuku's wrist as he passed, the lightest of taps that somehow sent Izuku stumbling off-balance. "But you're fighting with your head, not your instincts. You're overthinking. An Agito's body is supposed to flow. Right now, you're as stiff as a rookie martial arts student."

Izuku growled, trying again, adjusting his approach—shorter jabs, quicker steps. Kagutsuchi tilted his head slightly, letting each strike pass within an inch of his face, his golden eyes glinting with predatory amusement.

"Better," he said approvingly, stepping aside and letting Izuku's own momentum carry him forward. "But you're still trying too hard to be a fighter instead of just fighting. You know who else has that problem?"

Izuku barely had time to process the words before Kagutsuchi casually tripped him with a sweep of his leg. Izuku hit the mat with a thud, groaning.

Kagutsuchi crouched beside him, his grin sharp but his tone dropping to something quieter, almost conversational.

"Toshinori."

Izuku's eyes widened slightly, but he stayed silent, catching his breath as Kagutsuchi continued.

"He trains like a man trying to outrun time," Kagutsuchi said, golden eyes watching Izuku closely. "And here's the sad truth—he's not training for you, kid. Not really. That's just the excuse. He's chasing ghosts. Trying to claw back his glory days, to feel like All Might again."

Izuku sat up slowly, his breathing ragged, his expression caught between protest and quiet understanding.

"That's not fair…" he said softly, though the words lacked conviction.

Kagutsuchi shrugged, standing and offering a hand to pull Izuku up. "I admitted as much to him. It isn't fair. The man gave everything for this world, and now he wants to feel alive again. Who can blame him?"

Izuku accepted the hand reluctantly, standing, his chest still rising and falling with heavy breaths.

"But you," Kagutsuchi said, straightening, his smirk returning, "you don't get to make that mistake. You don't have the luxury of chasing the past. You're evolution in motion. Keep looking backward, and you'll never survive what's coming."

Izuku tightened his fists at his sides, his resolve steeling even as exhaustion weighed down his body. "Then I'll… I'll keep moving forward."

Kagutsuchi's grin widened, sharp and satisfied. "Good answer. Now—again."

Before Izuku could catch his breath, Kagutsuchi lunged forward, faster than before, forcing Izuku to react on instinct rather than thought.

The training wasn't over. Not by a long shot.

From the upper observation deck, Toshinori Yagi stood with his arms crossed, his broad frame shadowed against the setting sun filtering through the glass. Below, on the training mats, Izuku lunged again at Kagutsuchi, sweat flying as he pushed himself harder with every strike.

Toshinori's sharp blue eyes followed every movement, his expression unreadable to anyone who might have seen him. But inside, his thoughts churned.

Izuku was adapting—fast. Even unarmored, even clearly exhausted, the boy's footwork was already beginning to shift, growing sharper, less deliberate. He was starting to flow, letting instinct guide him rather than overthinking every move. Kagutsuchi, weaving effortlessly around him, smirked like a proud teacher every time Izuku came just a fraction closer to landing a strike.

It should have filled Toshinori with pride. And it did—his chest swelled watching the boy he had chosen for this path evolve before his eyes. But alongside that pride was something else, something heavier and harder to swallow.

Guilt.

He's already surpassing every expectation… and I almost let my own selfishness get in his way.

Kagutsuchi's words from the break room replayed in his mind, cutting through him sharper than any blade:

You're not training for Midoriya's sake. You just don't want to let go of being All Might.

He wanted to deny it. He had denied it, for weeks now, even to himself. But watching Izuku move, watching Kagutsuchi—an ancient being with power that dwarfed even his prime—effortlessly guide the boy's growth, Toshinori couldn't escape the truth.

Healing had been a miracle, yes, but it had also been a curse. It had given him back everything he thought he had lost—strength, stamina, even the simple joy of eating a real meal again—and with it came that very human, selfish drive to take it all back. To reclaim what time had stolen.

And in chasing that… he had almost forgotten why he started down this path in the first place.

His hands tightened around his biceps, fingers digging into his own arms as he exhaled slowly.

"This isn't about me," he murmured under his breath, his voice low, resolute. "It can't be about me."

Below, Izuku stumbled, catching himself mid-roll before springing back into position, determination blazing in his eyes. Kagutsuchi laughed—not mockingly this time, but with genuine approval.

Toshinori's expression softened, pride finally winning out over guilt, though the weight in his chest didn't vanish.

"You're the future, young Midoriya," he said quietly, almost to himself. "Not me. I just need to remember that."

He stayed there a moment longer, watching in silence as Izuku charged forward again, the boy's movements growing sharper with every attempt. Then Toshinori turned away, his tall figure slipping into the shadows of the observation deck, leaving Izuku to continue forging his own path under Kagutsuchi's merciless tutelage.

The last vestiges of sunset bled from the sky, painting Toshinori's office windows in hues of deep violet and bruised orange. Inside, the room was quiet, save for the faint hum of the building's ventilation system. Papers lay scattered on his desk, untouched for hours.

Toshinori sat slumped in his chair, no longer in his muscle form, the gaunt figure of his true self silhouetted against the fading light. His eyes, usually so vibrant, were shadowed, fixed on the old, rotary-style phone on his desk. He picked it up, his thumb hovering over the dial, a tremor in his hand.

Kagutsuchi's words, sharp and mocking, echoed in his mind: "You just don't want to let go of being All Might."

And then, Izuku's determined face, pushing forward, adapting, evolving.

He closed his eyes, exhaling slowly, the weight of his own stubborn pride pressing down on him. He had to do this. For Izuku. For Mirio. For the future he'd almost let his past consume.

His thumb pressed down, dialing the familiar sequence. Each click of the dial felt impossibly loud in the silence.

The line clicked after two rings.

"Mirai," came the calm, precise voice on the other end.

Toshinori hesitated for only a second before speaking, his voice low, quieter than usual, stripped of its usual bravado. "Mirai… we need to talk."

There was a pause, long enough for Toshinori to picture Mirai's sharp eyes narrowing behind his glasses.

"This isn't about another argument, is it?" Mirai asked, his tone clipped but wary.

"No," Toshinori said firmly, leaning back in his chair. "No more arguments. I just… I need to speak with you. Face to face. And… I'd like to see Mirio while I'm there. If he's available."

Another pause, shorter this time, followed by the faintest exhale from Mirai. "You've changed your tune."

Toshinori's hand tightened slightly around the phone, his gaze distant, fixed on nothing in particular. "I've been… reminded of some things. Kagutsuchi… he—" Toshinori stopped, shaking his head. "It doesn't matter. What matters is, I need to talk to you. About Midoriya. About… everything."

There was no immediate reply, but Toshinori could almost feel Mirai weighing his words on the other end of the line. "You want to see Mirio? After all this time? What, have you finally decided to acknowledge the path you should have chosen?"

Toshinori flinched, but held his ground. "I understand your skepticism, Mirai. But I need to see him. And I need to… to talk. Seriously."

Mirai sighed, a short, sharp sound. "Very well. Tomorrow, after classes. But be warned, Toshinori. There are some hard truths you'll have to face. And not just about Midoriya."

Toshinori exhaled, nodding even though Mirai couldn't see it. "Thank you, Mirai."

"Don't thank me yet," Mirai said flatly. "If you're finally ready to listen, then come prepared to hear the truth. All of it."

The line clicked off before Toshinori could reply.

Toshinori sat in silence for a long moment, the phone still in his hand, his expression grim but resolved.

"Tomorrow, then," he murmured to himself, setting the phone down with a quiet click. His gaze drifted toward the darkening skyline outside the window.

For the first time in a long while, Toshinori wasn't thinking about training, about pushing his body past its limits. Tomorrow wasn't about trying to reclaim what he had lost.

Tomorrow was about facing the future he had been avoiding.

The next day dawned with a crisp, clear sky, but a heavy weight settled in Toshinori's chest as he approached the sleek, modern facade of the Nighteye Agency. It was a building that exuded Mirai's precision—all sharp angles and polished glass, a stark contrast to the familiar, comforting chaos of U.A.

He pushed open the heavy glass door, the faint chime echoing in the quiet, minimalist lobby. The air was cool, faintly scented with something clinical and clean. A receptionist, equally precise in her movements, looked up from her desk.

"Good afternoon, Yagi-san," she greeted, her voice calm. "Sir Nighteye is expecting you. Please, follow me."

Toshinori nodded, his hands clasped loosely in front of him, resisting the urge to transform into his muscle form. He was here as Yagi, not All Might. This conversation required honesty, not a facade of invincibility.

He was led down a silent corridor, past closed doors, until they reached a familiar, frosted glass door. The receptionist gave a polite knock, then opened it.

Mirai's office was as immaculate as ever, bathed in the cool, even light from a large window overlooking the city. Files were stacked in perfect order, pens aligned on the desk. Mirai himself sat behind it, his posture rigid, eyes sharp behind his glasses. He made no move to stand.

"Toshinori," Mirai greeted, his voice devoid of warmth, a flat statement rather than a welcome.

Toshinori stepped inside, the door closing softly behind him. The air in the room was thick with unspoken history, a tension that had simmered between them for years.

"Mirai," Toshinori replied, his voice quiet, genuine. He took the chair opposite the desk, the soft leather sighing under his weight. "Thank you for seeing me."

Mirai steepled his fingers, his gaze unblinking. "Let's not waste time with pleasantries. You said you were ready to talk. So, talk. What has brought about this sudden change of heart? Or is it simply a change of tactic?"

Toshinori's jaw tightened. He knew Mirai wouldn't make this easy. "It's… it's not a tactic, Mirai. It's… a realization." He paused, searching for the right words, the ones that didn't sound like excuses. "Kagutsuchi… he was right. About me. About… chasing something that's already gone." The admission was subtle, indirect, but the weight of it hung heavy in the air.

Mirai's expression remained impassive, but a flicker of something—perhaps a grim satisfaction—crossed his eyes. "Indeed. I told you this years ago, Toshinori. Time is a relentless opponent. Even with your body restored, you are not the man you once were. You cannot outrun inevitability." His voice was firm, unforgiving, forcing Toshinori to confront the brutal truth. "Your obsession with reclaiming your past glory risks not only your life, but the future you claim to protect."

Toshinori nodded slowly, his gaze dropping to his clasped hands. "I… I know. I see that now. It's… it's been difficult to accept." He looked up, his eyes meeting Mirai's. "But I'm trying. I truly am."

Mirai studied him for a long moment, then, surprisingly, his posture relaxed infinitesimally. "I received Mirio's report on Midoriya's latest training session. His observations were… insightful." A faint, almost imperceptible shift in Mirai's tone, a hint of grudging acknowledgment. "Midoriya's rate of adaptation, his instinctive combat intelligence… it is indeed beyond my initial projections. He is… a variable I did not fully account for."

Toshinori felt a surge of something akin to relief, but it was quickly tempered by Mirai's next words.

"However," Mirai continued, his voice regaining its steel, "unpredictable does not equate to reliable. He is still raw. Unrefined. And the stakes are too high for experimentation."

Just then, a knock sounded at the door.

"Come in," Mirai called, his gaze still fixed on Toshinori.

The door opened, and Mirio Togata stepped in, his bright smile instantly lighting the room. He wore his U.A. uniform, his posture confident and relaxed.

"Sir!" Mirio greeted Mirai, then his eyes widened slightly as he saw Toshinori. "All Might! It's good to see you." His voice was warm, respectful, but Toshinori could detect a subtle awareness in his eyes, a recognition of the tension in the room.

"Mirio, my boy," Toshinori said, a genuine smile touching his lips, a stark contrast to his earlier strained expression. He felt a pang of affection, and something deeper—a quiet ache of regret. This boy, so bright, so capable, so perfectly suited.

Mirai gestured to a chair. "Mirio, Toshinori wished to speak with you."

Mirio took a seat, his gaze shifting between the two older men, a silent question in his eyes.

"Mirio," Toshinori began, his voice softer now, almost paternal. "I… I wanted to see you. To see how you're doing. And to… to tell you how proud I am of the hero you've become." The words were heartfelt, a truth he had perhaps not voiced enough.

Mirio's smile softened, a genuine warmth radiating from him. "Thank you, All Might. I'm just trying to live up to the example you set."

Toshinori looked at Mirio—the vibrant energy, the unwavering optimism, the sheer power that hummed beneath his calm demeanor. He saw a hero ready, truly ready, to inherit One For All. He saw the very embodiment of the future. The realization hit him with a fresh wave of clarity, and a painful question: Had he made the wrong choice?

Mirai, observing the exchange, cleared his throat. "Mirio, perhaps you could demonstrate some of your recent training. Toshinori is… interested in your progress." There was a subtle emphasis on "progress."

Mirio nodded enthusiastically. "Of course, Sir! I was just heading to the training room." He stood, his movements fluid and powerful. "Would you like to join, All Might?"

Toshinori hesitated, then shook his head. "No, Mirio. I… I'll watch from here. I need to finish my conversation with Mirai." He needed to see Mirio in action, yes, but he also needed to process the stark reality of what he was witnessing.

Mirio gave a cheerful thumbs-up and exited the office, heading for the agency's private training facilities.

As the door closed, the silence returned, heavier than before. Toshinori turned to the large window, watching as Mirio, a bright blur of motion, began his training in the courtyard below, moving with a speed and precision that was breathtaking.

He's ready. He's so incredibly ready. He could bear One For All right now. He could be the next Symbol, without all the pain, without the struggle Izuku is going through.

The thought was a sharp, undeniable truth. And yet…

But Izuku… Izuku is something else. Something new. Something that adapts, that evolves beyond what we understand.

Toshinori's heart ached with the conflict. His mind, now clear, saw Mirio's undeniable suitability. But his heart, the same heart that had seen a Quirkless boy leap into danger without a second thought, still insisted on Izuku.

Mirai watched Toshinori, his expression unreadable. "He is indeed impressive," he said, his voice quiet, almost gentle, acknowledging Toshinori's internal struggle. "A true hero. Ready to carry the torch."

Toshinori nodded, still staring out the window. "He is."

"But time, Toshinori," Mirai continued, his voice hardening slightly, the warning returning. "Time waits for no one. And the future… it is coming, whether you are ready for it or not. Or whether your chosen successor is."

Toshinori closed his eyes, the image of Mirio's powerful, confident movements burned into his mind. He knew Mirai was right. He knew the stakes. But the path he had chosen, the boy he had chosen, felt like destiny.

He opened his eyes, a grim resolve settling over his face. The conversation was unresolved, the path forward still fraught with uncertainty. But for the first time, he was facing it, not running from it. He would steel himself for whatever tomorrow brought.

The training hall of Sir Nighteye's agency was a gleaming expanse of polished floor and reinforced walls, bathed in the cool, even light of overhead panels. It was immaculate, every piece of equipment precisely aligned, reflecting the meticulous nature of its owner.

Toshinori Yagi stood near the observation window, his tall, gaunt frame oddly subdued. His arms were crossed, his gaze fixed on the center of the hall. Beside him, Mirai stood, hands clasped behind his back, his posture as rigid and precise as ever, glasses glinting in the bright light.

Below, Mirio Togata moved.

He was a blur of motion, weaving through a complex array of combat dummies designed to simulate high-speed villain attacks. His Permeation Quirk was a dance, a seamless flow of phasing in and out of solid objects. One moment, he was gone, the air shimmering where he'd been; the next, he reappeared, delivering a precise, concussive strike to a dummy's pressure point, sending it toppling with a soft thud. He didn't just avoid—he flowed through, striking from unexpected angles, his movements fluid, confident, near flawless. Each takedown was clean, decisive, radiating an unyielding, bright energy that filled the vast hall.

Toshinori watched, a complex mix of emotions churning within him. A genuine smile, small and fleeting, touched his lips. Pride, deep and undeniable, swelled in his chest. Mirio was everything One For All was meant to be—a symbol of unwavering hope, a pillar of strength, ready to carry the world.

But with that pride came a sharp pang of guilt. He's so ready. So perfectly suited. The thought was a bitter echo of Mirai's long-held conviction. And I chose… I chose differently. Because of my own stubbornness. My own selfish desire to cling to the past. His jaw tightened, a muscle twitching. He knew Mirai was right; logically, Mirio was the safest, most logical choice. The most reliable. And yet…

But Izuku… his heart insisted, stubbornly, fiercely. Izuku is different. He's the one who can adapt to anything.

Mirai's voice cut through his thoughts, quiet but sharp, without turning his head. "You see it, don't you? This is what stability looks like. The future could be safe with him."

Toshinori kept his gaze on Mirio, his own voice equally quiet, edged with a conviction that defied logic. "Safe isn't always what wins, Mirai. Sometimes… it's the ones no one expects."

Just then, Mirio finished his circuit, the last dummy falling with a soft crash. He straightened, his chest heaving slightly, but his bright smile was undimmed. He turned, spotting them, and gave a cheerful thumbs-up, his optimism a stark contrast to the heavy mood between the two older men.

Toshinori forced a smile back, raising a hand in acknowledgment, but his eyes, fixed on the vibrant young hero, betrayed the immense weight of his decision, the silent battle still raging within him.

Mirai adjusted his glasses, his sharp, analytical gaze studying Toshinori's face carefully. He said nothing more, no further arguments, no overt warnings. But the unspoken tension, the profound disagreement, hung heavy in the air, leaving the conversation, and the future, profoundly unresolved.

The city lights outside Mirai's office window began to glow, a sprawling tapestry against the deepening twilight. Inside, the room was quiet, the only sound the soft click of Mirai's pen as he reviewed data on his desk. Two holographic screens floated before him, one displaying Mirio's meticulously tracked progress, the other, Izuku's more erratic, yet undeniably rapid, growth.

A soft whoosh of the automatic door, unannounced, broke the silence.

Mirai didn't look up immediately, his fingers steepled, his gaze fixed on the data. "I didn't expect you, Kagutsuchi."

The so-called janitor sauntered in, mop propped casually over his shoulder, a faint, infuriating smirk playing on his lips. He leaned against the doorframe, golden eyes glinting with amusement. "Oh, I just had a feeling you'd be here, stewing. And since I'm already on cleaning duty…" He gestured vaguely with his mop. "Might as well check on the future of the world, hmm?"

Mirai finally looked up, his expression cool, precise, but with a barely concealed edge of irritation. He adjusted his glasses. "If you're here to gloat about Toshinori's… realization this afternoon, you can save your breath. We've already discussed it."

Kagutsuchi chuckled, a low, knowing sound. "No, no, that was merely a pleasant appetizer. I'm more interested in the main course. The succession. You still cling to your golden boy, don't you, Mirai? The one who fits all your neat little projections." He gestured to the holographic screens. "Mirio. Experienced. Stable. Predictable."

Mirai's jaw tightened. "He is the logical choice. He is ready. He possesses the emotional fortitude and the combat prowess to bear One For All immediately, without risking the world on… an unknown." His gaze flicked to Izuku's data, a flicker of something that could almost be apprehension.

"Logic," Kagutsuchi drawled, pushing off the doorframe and circling Mirai's desk like a predator. "Such a human limitation. Logic doesn't win wars, Mirai. Evolution does. Midoriya's adaptability, his Agito instincts, his very unpredictability—that is what will matter against All For One. He is a force that cannot be charted, cannot be foreseen."

Mirai's fingers tightened, almost clenching. "You speak of chaos as if it's a virtue. One For All is not a toy for experimenting with human evolution. It is the world's last bastion. The world cannot afford to gamble on a boy who might not even be able to hold it without destroying himself, or everything around him."

Kagutsuchi stopped, leaning over Mirai's desk, his smirk widening. "Ah, there it is. The fear. You're scared of chaos, aren't you, Mirai? You want to keep the world neat and predictable, tucked away in your little flowcharts. But safe futures don't create heroes. They create statues."

Mirai's gaze hardened, meeting Kagutsuchi's golden eyes. "And reckless gambles create ruins. Midoriya's power is untamed. It's dangerous."

Kagutsuchi's smirk softened, a hint of genuine, if unsettling, understanding in his gaze. "Precisely. He is dangerous in a way Mirio isn't. And that, Mirai, is why you worry. Because you know, deep down, that sometimes, the greatest threats require the most unexpected answers." He straightened, adjusting his coat. "But heroes aren't born from caution, are they? They're forged in the crucible of the unknown."

He turned, heading for the door, his mop clanking softly against the floor. "The future's already moving, Mirai. Whether you like it or not."

The door hissed shut behind him, leaving Mirai alone in the quiet office. He stared at the holographic charts, his gaze lingering on Izuku's data, the red-circled VARIABLE pulsing faintly. His confidence, usually unshakeable, was indeed shaken. But his resolve, the core of his being, hardened. He would not yield to chaos. He would find a way to ensure stability, no matter the cost.

The sun hung low in the sky, bathing the U.A. gates in a warm, golden light. Students streamed past, their chatter a fading murmur as they dispersed for the evening. Izuku Midoriya waited off to the side, a half-empty water bottle dangling loosely in his hand, his hero analysis notebook tucked under his arm. His gaze was calm, but a subtle tension hummed beneath the surface.

A bright voice cut through the lingering sounds of the campus. "Midoriya-kun!"

Mirio Togata jogged up, his signature wide grin in place, waving cheerfully. He wore his U.A. uniform, looking as energetic as ever. "Hey! How was your last class?"

Izuku offered a small, polite smile. "It was good, Togata-senpai. And yours?"

"Same old, same old!" Mirio chuckled, scratching the back of his neck. "Just finished up some extra combat training. Man, I'm starving!" He bounced slightly on the balls of his feet, then his expression grew a little more serious, though his cheerfulness didn't entirely fade. "So… Mirai-sensei's been talking to me. About… you know. One For All."

Izuku's eyes, already suspecting this conversation was coming, remained quiet, letting Mirio continue.

Mirio let out a slightly sheepish chuckle, rubbing his neck again. "He thinks I might inherit it. Guess that's… kind of a big deal, huh?"

Izuku responded calmly, almost matter-of-factly, his gaze steady. "He's not wrong. I can't inherit One For All."

Mirio's eyebrows rose in genuine curiosity, and he leaned in slightly. "Because of this whole 'Agito' thing, right? I've been hearing bits and pieces, but honestly… I don't get it."

Izuku hesitated, his internal conflict briefly visible in his eyes. He looked down at his water bottle, then back at Mirio, and finally spoke quietly, his voice a low, steady murmur. "Agito… it's not a Quirk. It's… something older. A different kind of evolution for humanity. It changes your very being, your biology, your essence, beyond what Quirks do." He paused, searching for the right words. "My body, my existence, is fundamentally incompatible with Quirk transfer. One For All is a Quirk, even if it's a special one. It was never meant for me." He met Mirio's gaze directly. "So… yes. It naturally falls to you."

Mirio processed this, his bright expression briefly serious, a thoughtful frown creasing his brow. The weight of Izuku's words, and the implications, settled between them. But then, true to his nature, his trademark grin returned, brighter than before.

He laughed, a light, easy sound, rubbing the back of his neck. "Well, guess that solves that! But hey… you don't need One For All to be a hero, right? You're already doing your own thing. Honestly, I think you'll be a hero people look up to—just like All Might. In your own way."

Izuku, genuinely surprised by Mirio's easy acceptance and sincere words, felt a warmth spread through him. A rare, genuine smile touched his lips, softening his usually serious features. "Thank you, Togata-senpai. I'll… do my best."

As they left the U.A. grounds, the golden light of sunset began to deepen, painting the urban landscape in long, violet shadows. They walked through a quieter stretch of the city, the sounds of traffic and distant conversations fading, replaced by an unusual stillness. The air, which had been warm, now felt heavier, almost oppressive.

Izuku suddenly stopped mid-step, his eyes narrowing slightly, scanning the deepening shadows of a narrow alleyway to their left. The silence around them seemed to hum with a faint, unnatural sound, almost imperceptible, like distant, grinding stone.

Without alarming Mirio, Izuku casually placed a hand on his senpai's shoulder, gently guiding him toward the side alley. His tone stayed even, almost casual, but there was a quiet urgency in his green eyes. "Let's take this way. Quicker."

As they moved, Izuku's senses sharpened further. The presence of a Lord, cold and ancient, grew closer, its unnatural aura pressing down on him. He subtly adjusted his grip on Mirio's shoulder, ensuring his senpai moved away from the approaching danger, preparing to slip off and confront the threat alone.

The golden light of sunset had given way to the bruised purples and deep blues of twilight, casting long, distorted shadows across the quiet urban street. The distant hum of the city was a faint backdrop to the sudden, sharp tension that now filled the air.

Izuku suddenly slowed, his eyes narrowing, scanning the empty street ahead. His posture stiffened almost imperceptibly.

Mirio, ever perceptive, noticed immediately. "Midoriya? What's wrong?"

Izuku kept his voice calm, but the seriousness in his tone was undeniable. "A Lord. It's close. Don't panic—he won't hurt you. I'm the target."

Mirio blinked, his usual cheerful demeanor momentarily replaced by a look of stunned gravity, but he nodded, trying to process the sudden shift to danger.

From around the corner, a figure emerged, walking with a slow, predatory grace. His form was a sleek, obsidian black, like a jaguar carved from shadow, with sharp, angular lines that hinted at immense power. A vibrant yellow scarf, almost unnaturally bright against his dark body, fluttered faintly around his neck, and a flickering halo of golden light hovered above his head, casting an eerie glow as something emerged from it, which shortly revealed itself to be a spear, which he grabbed and spun with one hand.

His voice was deep and smooth, resonating with a dangerous, almost purring edge. "Hello. I am Tristis. So, you are the one… the Agito who killed Luteus?"

Izuku stood firm, his body tensing, every muscle coiled. "Yes."

Tristis tilted his head, his golden eyes gleaming with an almost amused, detached curiosity. "Then I'll simply do better than Luteus."

Without another word, Tristis exploded forward. He moved with terrifying, animalistic speed, faster than Luteus had ever been. The pavement cracked and splintered under his powerful stride, sending shards of concrete skittering.

"Move!" Izuku shouted, his voice a sharp command. He shoved Mirio aside with all his strength just as Tristis barreled toward him, razor-sharp claws gleaming in the dim light. The impact sent Izuku sliding back several meters, his shoes scraping loudly against the rough concrete, leaving faint trails.

Tristis pressed his attack, a blur of black and yellow. He struck with wild, animalistic ferocity, a flurry of claw swipes and powerful kicks, punctuated by the glint of his Greed Spear. Izuku, still unarmored, was forced into a desperate, constant dodge. He parried some strikes with his forearms, the force jarring his bones, but Tristis' overwhelming speed and raw power left him strained, his movements calculated but barely keeping pace.

Seeing Izuku struggle, Mirio rushed in, his heroic instincts overriding his initial shock. He activated his Permeation Quirk, phasing through a pile of rubble effortlessly, aiming to pass through Tristis for a counterattack.

But when he tried to phase through the Lord, his body slammed into Tristis instead, as if hitting a solid wall. His Quirk failed entirely. Shock flashed across Mirio's face, his eyes wide with disbelief as he stumbled back, thrown off balance.

Tristis glanced at him, his golden eyes glinting, an almost amused smirk playing on his dark features. "Your tricks won't work on me, human."

Taking advantage of the brief distraction, Izuku roared, tackling Tristis with a burst of raw strength, pushing the Jaguar Lord back several meters. He landed in a crouch, panting, his eyes blazing as he glanced sharply at Mirio. "Stay back! He's after me, not you!"

Mirio, still stunned by his Quirk's failure but unwilling to back down from the fight, hesitated, torn between retreating to safety and helping despite his sudden vulnerability.

The fight escalated as Tristis, now grinning, pressed harder, his strikes becoming even faster, a relentless assault. Izuku's breathing grew ragged, his unarmored body already pushed to its limits. A cold dread settled in his stomach. He couldn't keep this up. He realized, with a growing sense of urgency, that he might have to use his Agito form in front of Mirio, something he had desperately tried to avoid.

Izuku, panting heavily, his unarmored body aching from Tristis' relentless assault, knew he couldn't keep dodging forever. He glanced at Mirio, who was still recovering from the shock of his failed Quirk, his face a mixture of confusion and determination. There was no other choice.

A low hum began to emanate from Izuku's waist as the golden belt buckle at his core flared with an intense light. Black, segmented armor flowed across his body like liquid metal, rippling over his skin, forming sleek, muscular contours that hardened into a protective shell. A golden chest plate locked into place with a sharp, resonant click, its stylized wings spreading subtly across his pectorals. Golden bands formed around his wrists, and the powerful, armored gauntlets extended over his hands. Finally, the helmet sealed over his head, crowned with the iconic golden crest that swept back like a formidable horn. Crimson eyes, glowing intensely, flared to life behind the visor, piercing through the fading twilight.

The transformation ended with Izuku standing tall, his Agito Ground Form radiating a controlled, predatory power that almost mirrored Tristis' own animalistic presence.

Tristis' grin widened, a flash of sharp teeth in the dim light. He tightened his grip on his Greed Spear, his stance shifting, a newfound excitement in his golden eyes. "Finally… the real fight begins."

The two charged at each other in a blur of motion, a high-speed clash of raw power and predatory precision. Tristis' Greed Spear met Izuku's armored forearm with a deafening clang, sparks flying into the air. Izuku countered with a rapid series of strikes, each punch carrying immense force, forcing Tristis to weave and dodge with his terrifying speed.

Izuku's instinctive combat ability, now amplified by his Agito form, grew with each exchange. He predicted and countered faster, his movements becoming more fluid, gradually adapting to Tristis' unpredictable rhythm. Tristis, amused and visibly impressed, increased his speed further, moving almost faster than Izuku's crimson eyes could track, a black and yellow streak against the darkening cityscape.

After a final, dizzying high-speed exchange, a flurry of blows that blurred into a single, violent current, Tristis suddenly halted mid-strike, stepping back with an almost casual air. His posture relaxed completely, his Greed Spear lowering.

Izuku, still in his fighting stance, his crimson eyes blazing, blinked in confusion. "What… why are you stopping?" he demanded, his voice a low growl from behind his helmet.

Tristis straightened, brushing imaginary dust off his arm, his movements unhurried. His tone turned utterly casual, almost cheerful, as if they had just been having a friendly chat. "As much as I'd love to continue, I promised my wife I'd be home for dinner. Sukiyaki night. Can't be late."

Both Izuku and Mirio froze, their jaws dropping in perfect unison. A beat of stunned silence, then their voices ripped through the air: "HUH?!"

Tristis turned slightly, giving them a polite nod, his golden eyes still holding a hint of amusement. "You're improving fast, Agito. I'll try harder next time. Stay alive until then."

With that, the Jaguar Lord simply walked away, his sleek black form vanishing into the deepening shadows of the city, leaving only the faint echo of his departing footsteps.

Mirio, now fully aware of his own nakedness from using his Quirk, awkwardly covered himself, his face flushed, still processing the surreal encounter. He glanced at Izuku, who remained armored, both of them staring after the spot where Tristis had disappeared.

Mirio finally broke the silence, his voice filled with disbelief. "Did… did he seriously just stop fighting because of dinner?"

Izuku, still in Ground Form, let out a slow, exasperated sigh as the golden plates of his armor retracted back into his body, leaving him in his U.A. uniform once more. "…Yeah. Lords are… weird."