The U.A. cafeteria, typically a vibrant hub of youthful exuberance, now thrummed with heightened, almost frantic energy. The looming Sports Festival amplified the cacophony, transforming the vast hall into an arena of fervent chatter. Strategies were whispered, Quirk matchups debated, and the tantalizing prospect of agency scouts discussed with a potent cocktail of ambition and anxiety. Tucked away in a quieter corner, an ephemeral island of calm amidst the storm, sat Izuku, Ochako, Momo, Iida, and Shoji.

Ochako, her cheeks flushed with earnest excitement, leaned forward, hands clasped tightly on the table. "I'm so excited about the Sports Festival!" she exclaimed, her voice a little louder than usual. "This is it! My big chance!" Her eyes, typically wide with innocent wonder, now held a fierce, determined spark. "If I can just get a top internship... then I can finally help my dad's business." Her voice wavered slightly. "Things have been really tough for them lately. The construction business... it's just not going well. They're struggling so much, and I just... I want to help them so much. I want to make sure they don't have to worry anymore." She trailed off, her gaze falling to her hands, a faint blush of embarrassment coloring her face.

Izuku, quietly picking at his katsudon, felt a familiar knot tighten in his stomach. The Sports Festival. It wasn't just about proving himself; it was about controlling the Agito, about not attracting the wrong kind of attention. He thought of Graviel, the entity High Lord Kagutsuchi had warned them about, the one who was "watching." The last thing he needed was to unleash something that would provoke Graviel to "intervene." But seeing Ochako's raw determination, her selfless desire to help her family, pushed his own fears aside for a moment. He reached out and gently patted her arm. "You'll be fine, Ochako-chan," he said, his voice soft but firm. "You're incredibly strong, and you work harder than anyone I know. You're definitely going to get a top internship."

Momo, ever the strategist, chimed in, her elegant posture a stark contrast to the casual cafeteria atmosphere. "Uraraka-san is absolutely right. The Sports Festival is an excellent platform. To truly stand out, one must not only showcase the offensive capabilities of their Quirk but also demonstrate strategic thinking and adaptability. Perhaps focusing on unique applications of your Zero Gravity, rather than just direct combat, could be advantageous." She tapped her chin thoughtfully. "Think about how you could use it for crowd control, or even to manipulate the environment in your favor."

Iida, chopping the air with his usual vigor, nodded in emphatic agreement. "Indeed! While strategy is paramount, let us not forget the fundamental importance of discipline! Rigorous training, adherence to a strict regimen, and unwavering focus are the pillars upon which true success is built! Every hero must embody these principles!"

Shoji, his multiple arms resting calmly on the table, offered a more practical perspective. "And observation. Pay attention to your opponents' movements, their habits. Sometimes the simplest counter is the most effective. And don't overthink it. Trust your instincts."

As the conversation flowed around him, Izuku found himself nodding in agreement. He appreciated their advice, but the underlying current of his own fear remained. He glanced around the busy cafeteria, his eyes unconsciously scanning the faces, a habit he'd developed since Kagutsuchi's warnings.

Then his gaze stopped. At the very edge of the cafeteria, near a service door, Kagutsuchi stood. He wasn't eating; he was just standing there, a faint, almost imperceptible smile on his lips. His golden eyes, usually so casual, held a sharp, knowing glint as they met Izuku's across the crowded room. There was no mistaking the unspoken warning in that look: The Lords are watching. Be careful what you unleash. A shiver ran down Izuku's spine, the cheerful din of the cafeteria suddenly sounding distant, replaced by the chilling echo of Kagutsuchi's silent admonition.

The bell signaling the end of lunch echoed through the great halls of U.A., unleashing a torrent of students. The air buzzed with heightened energy, a palpable excitement for the upcoming Sports Festival. Conversations about training regimens, Quirk strategies, and the sheer exhilaration of competition swirled around Izuku, Ochako, Momo, Iida, and Shoji as they navigated the busy corridors on their way back to class.

Momo Yaoyorozu walked with her usual calm grace, but her mind was far from the casual chatter of her classmates. Ochako's earlier confession about her father's failing construction business replayed in her mind. Momo came from a family of considerable influence and wealth, and the thought of a classmate struggling financially, especially one as earnest and hardworking as Uraraka, stirred a deep sense of responsibility in her. It wouldn't do to simply offer money directly, she mused. That would be rude and likely to be refused. But perhaps... a discreet investment? Or putting her father in touch with some of my family's more stable contacts in the industry? Yes, that could work. Something subtle, something that offered real opportunity without compromising her pride. A plan began to form in her brilliant mind, a way to use her family's resources to offer a helping hand without it feeling like charity.

Suddenly, a familiar, explosive voice cut through the din. "DEKU!"

Katsuki Bakugo, a walking embodiment of raw aggression, stomped directly into Izuku's path, his crimson eyes blazing. "Don't think you can outshine me at the festival just because you have some flashy new trick, you damned nerd!" he snapped, sparks crackling from his palms. "I'm going to be number one! I'm going to crush every single extra in this arena, and you're just going to be another stepping stone!"

Izuku barely registered Katsuki's tirade. His gaze was distant, his mind still replaying Kagutsuchi's warning, the image of Graviel's unseen presence lingering at the edge of his mind. The Agito power beneath his skin felt especially restless today. He was so preoccupied with the implications of the Lords and the potential of the upcoming festival to expose him that Katsuki's usual bluster washed over him like background noise.

Katsuki's eyes narrowed, his irritation boiling over at Izuku's blank, distracted expression. "Hey! Are you even listening, you damn idiot?! Don't you dare look at me like that! Don't you dare disrespect me!" He shoved Izuku's shoulder, a small explosion erupting from his palm. "What, too good to even acknowledge me now, huh, Mr. Big Shot Quirk-User?"

Izuku blinked, finally brought back to reality by the physical contact, a wave of annoyance washing over him. "Bakugo, what is your problem?!" he retorted, his voice sharper than usual. "Why are you still so obsessed with this?! We're not kids anymore! Can't you just focus on your own performance instead of trying to tear everyone else down?!"

Before Katsuki could unleash another angry retort, Izuku simply shook his head, a feeling of profound tiredness settling over him. "Forget it," he muttered, stepping around Katsuki. He didn't have the energy for it, not with the nagging fear of the Sports Festival and the Lords. As he walked away, a faint, almost imperceptible hum echoed from deep within his chest, a subtle response to an eerie, almost shift in the air, a presence that only he seemed to register.

Momo, who witnessed the entire exchange, exchanged a quick, worried glance with Ochako. The tension emanating from Izuku, the uncharacteristic way he had ended the argument, was disturbing. It was clear that something much heavier than a rivalry with Bakugo was weighing on their friend.

"Izuku-kun, are you okay?" Ochako asked quietly, falling in step beside Izuku, her usual cheerfulness muffled by concern. "Bakugo-kun seemed... especially aggressive just now. Is everything okay between the two of you?"

Momo, Iida, and Shoji gathered around her, their expressions mirroring Ochako's concern. "Indeed, Midoriya-kun!" Iida chopped the air, his voice firm. "While competitive spirit is admirable, Bakugo's behavior borders on harassment! As your classmates, we are naturally concerned!"

"His explosions were pretty close together," Momo added, her brow furrowed. "Does that happen often?"

Izuku sighed and ran a hand through his unruly green hair. He hated to talk about it, but their concern was genuine. "It's... complicated," he mumbled, looking down at his feet. "Bakugo and I... we've known each other since we were kids. He's always been like that, especially after... well, after I was diagnosed as Quirkless. I was an easy target for him, I guess. Someone he could always feel superior to." The words came out reluctantly, tinged with a lingering bitterness he tried to hide.

Shoji, who had been listening intently, spoke with a quiet empathy that surprised them all. "I understand this feeling. Before U.A., many people treated me differently because of my appearance, my Quirk. They saw me as monstrous or something to be feared. It's hard when others judge you based on something you can't control, isn't it?" His multiple arms shifted slightly, a subtle gesture of shared understanding.

The group was silent for a moment, absorbing Shoji's unexpected revelation. Then Ochako gasped softly. "Izuku-kun... you were Quirkless, right?"

Izuku winced uncomfortably. "It's... a long story. But the thing is, back when I was Quirkless... no one really cared. The teachers at my old school, they just... let Bakugo get away with it. Ignored it. It was only after... after I manifested my power, after the Sludge Villain incident, that everyone suddenly started looking at me differently. Like I was worth something." The last part was spoken almost in a whisper, a raw admission of the apathy he had faced.

A stunned silence fell over the group. The casual indifference of his former school, the sudden shift in perception only after he gained power—it was a stark, ugly truth.

"This is outrageous!" Iida declared, his voice rising in indignation, his arm chopping vigorously. "This is blatant discrimination! Such negligence from an educational institution is unacceptable! We must report this immediately, Midoriya-kun! This cannot stand!"

Izuku shook his head. "No, Iida-kun. It's okay. It's in the past. I just... I want to move on. It doesn't matter anymore." He tried to dismiss it, but the faint buzzing beneath his skin grew stronger, a silent reminder that the past, and the future, were far from settled.

The late afternoon sun cast long shadows on the pavement in front of the imposing gates of U.A. Students streamed out, their voices a happy cacophony, but Izuku barely registered them. He walked slowly, his backpack slung over one shoulder, his mind a whirlwind of thoughts. The Sports Festival loomed, a double-edged sword: an opportunity to prove himself, but also a potential stage for the Agito Force to draw unwanted attention. Graviel. The name echoed in his head, a constant, low rumble of fear beneath the surface.

"DEKU! HOLD IT!"

The roar was unmistakable. Izuku sighed, a tired exhalation, and stopped, turning to see Katsuki Bakugo charging towards him, his face a mask of furious determination. Katsuki's usual entourage was nowhere to be seen; this was a personal confrontation.

"What is it now, Bakugo?" Izuku asked with a flat voice, his patience already worn thin by the day's worries.

"Don't you 'what is it now, Bakugo?' me, you damn nerd!" Katsuki snarled, stopping just inches from Izuku, sparks already popping from his palms. "What was that back there, huh?! Looking at me like I'm some kind of background noise! You think you're better than me now, just 'cause you got a Quirk?!" His voice grew louder, drawing curious glances from passing students. "You think you can just look down on me, the guy who's always been ahead?!"

Izuku rubbed his temples. "I wasn't looking down on you, Bakugo. I just... I have other things on my mind right now. Things way more important than our stupid childhood rivalry."

Katsuki's eyes widened fractionally, then narrowed into furious slits. "Stupid?! You think our rivalry is stupid?!" He lunged forward, grabbing Izuku's shoulder with a hand that felt like a vise. "Don't you dare dismiss me, you damn wannabe!"

It happened in an instant. Before Izuku could consciously react, his body moved on its own. Instinctively, he jerked his shoulder away from Katsuki's grip, a sharp, almost violent movement. A faint golden aura, barely visible to the naked eye, flickered around his hand for a split second, and his eyes, usually wide and serious, narrowed to a chilling, almost predatory glare. For a fleeting moment, a raw, primal hint of killing intent, strange and terrifying, flickered in their depths.

Katsuki froze, his hand still in the air, his eyes wide with genuine shock. The sudden, unexpected force, the brief flash of gold, and the sheer, uncharacteristic intensity in Izuku's gaze had taken him completely by surprise. He took an involuntary step back, his usual bluster momentarily gone.

The silence between them stretched, thick with unspoken tension. Then Katsuki's face contorted, masking his discomfort with a new burst of aggression. "What was that, you damned nerd?! Trying to pull a cheap trick on me?! You think that will scare me?! You're still just a pathetic Deku!" His voice was louder now, almost desperate, trying to reassert his dominance, but the slight trembling in his hands was barely perceptible. Izuku just stared back, his expression unreadable, the faint humming of the Agito power a silent echo of the unseen presence that continued to watch.

The late afternoon sun, a tired orange, bled across the sky above the city, casting long, distorted shadows that stretched like grasping fingers. Izuku Midoriya walked, his backpack a familiar weight, but his usual thoughtful pace was underscored by a subtle, internal hum – the Agito senses, a constant, low thrum beneath his skin, now growing more insistent. It was a familiar feeling, almost like a sixth sense for trouble, and right now, it was pinpointing a very specific, very volatile source.

Kacchan.

He didn't need to turn around. The furious, almost tangible static of Katsuki Bakugo's emotions, a mixture of simmering rage and competitive obsession, was a palpable presence far behind him. It wasn't just the sound of his heavy footsteps, but the raw, unbridled energy that only Katsuki could emit. Izuku sighed, a weary sound. He wasn't in the mood for another confrontation.

But then, the hum intensified, shifting in frequency. It wasn't Katsuki's familiar, explosive energy. This was colder, deeper, like a silent, predatory chord struck in the air. A Lord. The realization sent a cold dread through him, making the hairs on his arms prickle. Kagutsuchi's warnings echoed in his mind: They are watching.

Izuku's eyes darted, scanning the familiar street, now suddenly alien under the encroaching shadows. He needed to shake Katsuki, and quickly. The last thing he needed was for his childhood rival to stumble into a Lord encounter. With a quick decision, he veered sharply, ducking into a narrow alleyway between two nondescript apartment buildings. The concrete walls seemed to close in, amplifying the unsettling hum of the Lord's presence. He moved with a newfound urgency, weaving through the labyrinthine alleys, hoping to lose both his pursuer and, perhaps, the unseen watcher.

He emerged onto a deserted side street, the only sound the distant murmur of city traffic. The air here was still, heavy, and the orange light struggled to penetrate the gloom. He paused, his breath catching in his throat, the Agito hum now a frantic vibration in his chest. The Lord was close. Very close.

He spun, his eyes frantically searching the empty street, the alley mouth, the rooftops. "Where...?" he muttered, sweat beading on his forehead despite the cool evening air. His gaze swept left, then right, then back again. Nothing.

Then, a chilling realization slammed into him. The hum wasn't coming from ahead or beside him. It was behind him.

Izuku swung around, a choked gasp escaping his lips, his heart hammering against his ribs. He lashed out instinctively, a wild, sweat-soaked punch aimed at empty air. He missed. Whatever it was, it had vanished. His eyes darted, wide with panic, searching the now truly terrifying emptiness of the street. His Agito instincts screamed at him: Danger. Dangerous foe. Unseen.

A faint, almost imperceptible shimmer in the air caught his eye, a distortion just beyond his peripheral vision. He barely had time to register it before a dark, serpentine form coalesced from the shadows, a staff materializing in its hand. The Lord, a creature of unsettling design with a cobra-like head and ancient, regal attire, moved with horrifying speed. The staff, tipped with a golden cobra head, arced down, a blur of polished gold and ancient power, aimed directly at his head.

Izuku threw himself to the side, a desperate, unthinking dive, the wind of the nearly-fatal blow whipping past his ear. He scrambled back, pushing himself against the grimy brick wall of the building, his breath ragged. His eyes, wide with terror and a dawning, horrified understanding, finally got a clear look at the creature.

The Lord stood before him, tall and imposing. Its skin was a deep, mottled blue, like ancient stone, and its head was that of a cobra, complete with a flared hood and piercing, golden eyes that held an unnerving intelligence. It wore what looked like ancient Egyptian regalia – a white kilt, blue sashes, and intricate gold armbands. In its hand, it still held the staff, the golden cobra head glinting menacingly in the fading light. A faint smirk played on its reptilian lips, as if it found his fear amusing.

"So, the fledgling awakens," the Lord hissed, its voice a dry, rustling sound, like sand blowing over ancient stones. It took a slow, deliberate step forward, its golden eyes fixed on Izuku. "You sense me. Good. It makes the hunt more... engaging."

Izuku didn't wait. He launched himself into motion, his unarmored body surprisingly agile as he dodged another swift, brutal strike from the staff. The golden cobra head whistled past his temple, a mere inch from his skin. He weaved, ducked, and spun, his movements a desperate dance of evasion. The Lord was fast, impossibly fast, its strikes precise and heavy, each one carrying a chilling intent. He could feel the air crackle with the raw power behind every blow.

Sweat stung his eyes, blurring his vision, but he couldn't stop. He couldn't even think. It was pure instinct, a primal surge of self-preservation. He slid under a sweeping horizontal strike, then twisted to avoid a downward thrust that would have impaled him. The staff slammed into the asphalt where he'd been a split second before, cracking the pavement.

A chilling epiphany struck him then, a cold, undeniable truth that settled deep in his bones. This wasn't a test. This wasn't a warning. This Lord meant to kill him. Every strike was aimed to maim, to crush, to end his life. The sheer, unadulterated malice radiating from the creature was unlike anything he had ever felt, even from the most dangerous villains. This was a hunt, and he was the prey.

The realization ignited something fierce within him, a burning, desperate will to survive. He couldn't keep dodging forever. He had to fight back.

"Henshin!" Izuku roared, the word tearing from his throat, raw and desperate.

A blinding golden light erupted from his body, consuming him in an instant. The familiar hum of the Agito Force surged, roaring through his veins, empowering him. Just as the Lord brought its staff down in a skull-crushing overhead blow, a wave of black and gold materialized around Izuku. The sleek, segmented black armor snapped into place, the golden chest plate and crescent crest forming with a resounding clink.

The staff slammed into his newly formed golden helmet with bone-jarring force. The impact jolted through his entire frame, sending a shockwave through his muscles, but the armor held. A low growl rumbled in his chest, a sound of defiance.

Izuku braced himself, his legs wide, his armored fists clenching at his sides. Adrenaline surged through him, replacing the terror with a fierce, unyielding resolve. He was Agito now. And he would endure this fight.

"You merely delay the inevitable, fledgling," the Lord hissed, its golden eyes gleaming with cold amusement. It lunged, its staff a blur, aiming for Izuku's midsection.

Izuku met the attack head-on. His armored forearm shot up, blocking the staff with a thunderous CRACK that echoed through the deserted street. The force of the blow still vibrated through his bones, but he stood firm. He was no longer just dodging; he was fighting. He parried another strike, the staff clashing against his golden gauntlet with a metallic shriek. The Lord, surprised by his newfound resistance, recoiled slightly.

"Hmph," the Lord grunted, its amusement fading into irritation. It lashed out with a clawed hand, a savage swipe aimed at Izuku's chest. Izuku twisted, the sharp talons raking across his golden chest plate, leaving a faint scratch, but the armor held. The Lord's claws gouged deep furrows into the asphalt where Izuku had been standing a moment before.

Izuku seized the opening. He lunged forward, a powerful, bone-crunching kick aimed directly at the Lord's midsection. The impact sent a sickening thud through the air, and the Lord staggered back, a surprised, guttural hiss escaping its throat. Izuku's movements were fluid, relentless, a testament to his rapid growth and the raw power of the Agito. He was no longer the terrified boy; he was a force to be reckoned with.

The Lord roared, its cobra hood flaring in fury. It unleashed a furious flurry of strikes, its staff a whirlwind of deadly intent. Izuku met each blow, blocking, parrying, and deflecting with a newfound precision. The air filled with the clang of metal on metal, a brutal symphony of combat. One strike, a glancing blow, caught him on the cheek, and a thin trickle of blood, bright against the black armor, seeped from a cut. The pain was a sharp, invigorating jolt, fueling his resolve.

He saw an opening. As the Lord reeled back from a blocked strike, Izuku drove his armored elbow forward in a devastating smash, connecting squarely with the side of the Lord's head. The creature staggered, its golden eyes widening in shock and pain.

This was it. Izuku channeled every ounce of his burgeoning power, every ounce of his resolve. The golden energy of the Agito Force surged, concentrating in his right fist. It began to glow, a brilliant, pulsating aura, reminiscent of All Might's signature smashes. He drew back his arm, the air around his fist crackling with raw power.

"Texas Smash!" he roared, his voice amplified by the Agito's power, echoing through the desolate street.

He unleashed the blow, a golden projectile of pure force. His fist slammed into the Lord's chest with explosive power. There was a deafening BOOM, a blinding flash of golden light, and then the Lord didn't explode, but rather began to dissolve. Its form shimmered, the deep blue skin and ancient regalia turning translucent, as if made of smoke. The golden eyes, still wide with a fleeting moment of surprise, faded into nothingness. Its staff clattered to the ground, then too, dissolved into ethereal motes of light that drifted upwards, vanishing into the twilight. The air shimmered, then settled, leaving only the faint scent of ozone and a profound, unsettling emptiness.

Izuku stood panting, his chest heaving, the golden armor still humming with residual energy. His body ached, and the cut on his cheek throbbed, but he was alive. He had won.

He slowly turned, his gaze sweeping the now truly empty street. His eyes landed on the corner of the alley he had emerged from.

Katsuki Bakugo stood there, frozen, his face a mask of utter, unadulterated shock. His crimson eyes were wide, staring at the dissipating dust where the Lord had been, then at Izuku, still encased in his black and gold armor. The fury and competitive fire that usually burned in his eyes were completely extinguished, replaced by a profound, terrifying disbelief.

The golden light around Izuku flickered, then began to recede, the sleek black armor retracting back into his skin, leaving him in his U.A. uniform. The cuts and bruises on his body, though minor, were now visible, stark against his pale skin. Sweat and the faint trickle of blood from his cheek mixed, streaking his face. He took a deep, shuddering breath, the adrenaline slowly draining, leaving him with a bone-deep exhaustion. The fight was over, but the implications of it, the raw, brutal reality of what he had just done, settled heavily upon him. He was about to turn and walk away, to process this alone, when a furious roar ripped through the quiet.

"What the fuck just happened?!" Katsuki Bakugo stormed forward, his voice hoarse with a mixture of rage and utter bewilderment. He closed the distance in a few furious strides, his hands clenched into fists, sparks already popping from his palms. "What did you do?! Why'd that guy dissolve?! Did... did you kill him?!"

Izuku's head snapped up, his green eyes, still wide and a little wild from the battle, meeting Katsuki's furious gaze. The exhaustion, the pain, and the sheer mental strain of the encounter snapped something inside him. His patience, already stretched thin by the day's events, shattered.

With a surprising burst of speed and strength, Izuku lunged, grabbing Katsuki by the front of his shirt and slamming him against the nearest brick wall. The impact was jarring, knocking the wind out of Katsuki, his eyes widening further in shock. Izuku's voice, usually timid and stammering around Katsuki, was now low, fierce, and utterly devoid of his usual deference.

"I don't give a damn what you think anymore," Izuku snarled, his grip like iron, his face inches from Katsuki's. His breath was still heavy, his body trembling slightly from the aftershocks of the fight, but his eyes burned with a cold, dangerous fire Katsuki had never seen. "Get involved in what you don't understand, and you might just regret it."

He held Katsuki there for another tense moment, the air thick with unspoken threats and a raw, primal anger. Then, with a final, contemptuous shove, Izuku released him. He turned away, a slight limp in his step, and began to walk down the deserted street, leaving Katsuki Bakugo stunned and speechless, slumped against the grimy brick wall, his mind reeling from the impossible, terrifying display he had just witnessed.

On a nearby rooftop, overlooking the deserted street where the dust of battle still settled, Graviel watched. His boyish face, usually animated, was set in a glazed stare, his golden eyes fixed on the figure of Izuku Midoriya below, who was just releasing a stunned Katsuki Bakugo. The faint scent of ozone still lingered in the air, a testament to the raw power that had just been unleashed.

He sighed, a long, drawn-out exhalation, and scratched at his dark, unruly tresses. "As predicted," he muttered, his voice a low, almost bored murmur. "Though the speed of his progress... truly astonishing."

A ripple in the air beside him, and then Kagutsuchi materialized, as effortlessly as a shadow detaching itself from the night. His dark coat, a stark contrast to Graviel's simpler attire, fluttered in the gentle breeze. His hands were buried in his pockets, and the faint, serene smile that often played on his late-twenties face was present, a stark contrast to Graviel's diminutive, almost childlike frame.

"You seem… pleased," Kagutsuchi observed, his voice smooth and calm, his golden eyes reflecting the fading light.

Graviel scoffed, not looking away from the street below. "Pleased? Perhaps. Amused, certainly. He's a fascinating variable, isn't he? But now, while he's still raw, still vulnerable, is the time to eliminate him." He finally turned, his gaze sharp and impatient. "The Divine Decree is clear. He is an anomaly. We should not allow him to fully blossom."

Kagutsuchi merely shrugged, his smile widening almost imperceptibly. "And deny ourselves the entertainment? The curiosity? No, Graviel. I find myself rather invested in young Midoriya's path. To interfere now would be to spoil the grand design."

"Grand design, my ass," Graviel grumbled, turning back to the street. "You're just playing games, as usual. This isn't a game, Kagutsuchi. This is… management." He paused, then a glint entered his golden eyes. "Very well. If you insist on observing, then observe. But I think a personal visit to U.A. is in order. In the coming weeks, perhaps."

Kagutsuchi chuckled softly. "As you wish. Just try not to cause too much of a stir." With another shrug, he shimmered, his form dissolving into the twilight, leaving only the faint scent of something ancient and clean.

Graviel watched him go, then sighed again, scratching his head vigorously. "Always with the cryptic nonsense," he grumbled to himself, his gaze still on the distant U.A. gates. "And now I need coffee."

The soft glow of the kitchen light spilled into the hallway as Izuku Midoriya stumbled through the front door of his apartment. Evening had fully settled, painting the sky a deep indigo, but the darkness outside felt less oppressive than the exhaustion weighing him down. His U.A. uniform was torn in several places, subtle rips that hinted at the brutal clash he'd just endured. Bruises, unseen beneath the fabric, throbbed with every step, and a pronounced limp betrayed the lingering pain from the Lord's attacks. He tried to force a smile, a weak, trembling curve of his lips.

"I'm home," he managed, his voice a little hoarse.

Inko Midoriya, who had been setting the table for dinner, instantly turned at the sound of his voice. Her face, usually soft and gentle, crinkled with immediate concern. She rushed towards him, her eyes, so like his own, widening in alarm as they took in the fresh cuts on his face, the faint smudges of dirt, and the undeniable strain in his posture. Her hands fluttered, hovering, unsure where to touch.

"Izuku! My baby! What happened?!" she cried, her voice shaky with worry. She reached out, her fingers tracing the small cut on his cheek. "Your uniform... you're limping! Are you hurt?"

Izuku flinched slightly at her touch, the raw skin protesting. He forced another weak smile, trying to sound more convincing than he felt. "Ah, Mom, it's nothing! Just a really... really rough training session today. You know, with the Sports Festival coming up, everyone's pushing themselves." He tried to wave her off, but his hand trembled.

Inko, however, was not so easily fooled. Her brow furrowed, her gaze unwavering as she scanned him from head to toe. "A rough training session? Izuku, this isn't just 'rough.' Let me see those cuts properly. And why are you limping? Did you twist something? You're hiding something from me, aren't you?" Her voice was soft, but laced with a mother's deep, intuitive concern. She gently but firmly guided him towards the sofa.

"No, really, Mom, I'm fine," Izuku insisted, though his shoulders slumped with the effort of standing. He sank onto the sofa, wincing slightly as his bruised leg protested. "Just a bit tired. I promise, I'll be extra careful for the Sports Festival. I know you worry."

Inko knelt before him, taking his face gently in her hands. Her eyes welled up, but she blinked back the tears. "Izuku, you're my son. Of course, I worry. You're always pushing yourself so hard. Just... please, promise me you'll talk to me if something is wrong. You don't have to carry everything alone." She pulled him into a tight hug, her warmth a comforting balm against his aching body. He leaned into it, the familiar scent of her, of home, a brief respite from the chaos of his day.

He closed his eyes, the image of the dissolving Lord flashing behind his eyelids, followed by Katsuki's shocked face. How could he tell her? How could he explain any of it? The Lords, the Agito, the impossible, terrifying reality he now inhabited. He couldn't. Not yet.

He pulled back slightly from the hug, gazing at his mother's worried face. A new resolve, cold and sharp, settled in his heart. He had to get stronger. Strong enough to protect her, to protect everyone, from the things she couldn't even imagine.

"I will, Mom," he said, his voice a little steadier now. "I promise." He managed a more genuine, albeit tired, smile. "I'm just going to head to my room and rest for a bit before dinner, okay?"

Inko nodded, still looking concerned, but she let him go. Izuku pushed himself up, his limp more pronounced now that the adrenaline had completely faded, and slowly made his way down the hall, the weight of his secret pressing down on him.

The morning after, U.A. High School hummed with its usual vibrant energy, oblivious to the silent, terrifying battle that had unfolded just beyond its walls. Izuku Midoriya strode into Class 1-A, his steps confident, his posture straight. The cuts and bruises from yesterday were gone, healed by the Agito's accelerated recovery, leaving his skin unblemished. He moved with a quiet confidence, a subtle shift in his demeanor that only those who knew him well might notice.

At his desk, Katsuki Bakugo sat unusually subdued. His explosive personality was muted, his usual scowl replaced by a distant, thoughtful expression. His crimson eyes, usually blazing with aggression, flickered towards Izuku, then away, then back again, filled with unspoken questions and a profound, unsettling awe from yesterday's encounter. Izuku, for his part, deliberately ignored him, his focus elsewhere.

The pre-class chatter filled the room—students discussing homework, upcoming heroics training, and the ever-present buzz about the Sports Festival. As the bell for the first break rang, Izuku quickly gathered Ochako Uraraka, Momo Yaoyorozu, Tenya Iida, and Mezo Shoji. He pulled them towards a quiet corner of the classroom, away from the general hubbub, and lowered his voice to a hushed tone.

"Guys," Izuku began, his voice serious, "I need to tell you something about yesterday." He recounted the encounter, the unarmored evasion, and then the brutal, relentless intent of the Lord. "It wasn't like the others," he explained, his eyes darkening slightly. "Tristis, the others before, they were more like tests. This one... this one was trying to kill me. Every strike was aimed to end it." He paused, taking a breath. "Based on what Kagutsuchi told me, and how different this felt, I think it must have been a Minor Lord, but under Graviel's direct authority. He's another High Lord, like Kagutsuchi, but... different."

Iida's hand chopped the air, his face etched with growing worry. "Another Lord?! Midoriya-kun, this is becoming utterly insane! We must report this! To the authorities, to Principal Nezu, or even to All Might! This is far beyond what we can handle alone!"

Izuku shook his head, a weary but firm expression on his face. "No, Iida-kun. Not yet. Things are complicated enough as it is. Kagutsuchi said Graviel is 'watching.' If this was a direct order from Graviel, it was a test of a different kind. He won't act recklessly. We can't afford to bring more attention to this than necessary. Not until I understand more, and get stronger."

The group exchanged uneasy glances. The weight of the secret, of the terrifying, otherworldly forces at play, settled among them. Ochako looked pale, Momo's brow was furrowed in deep thought, and Shoji's multiple eyes were fixed on Izuku, absorbing every word. Just then, the bell rang, signaling the end of the break and the start of the next class, pulling them back to the mundane reality of U.A. High, a reality now shadowed by a dangerous, hidden war.

The air in the dimly lit café was thick with the scent of roasted coffee and faint, lingering cigarette smoke. Outside, the city hummed with the slow winding down of evening, but inside, a quiet intimacy settled around a small, unassuming table tucked away in a corner. Kagutsuchi sat with an almost languid grace, his dark coat draped casually over the back of his chair, a cup of untouched tea steaming gently before him. His relaxed demeanor belied the ageless, powerful presence he truly was.

Across from him, Jin, perpetually rumpled even in the soft light, nursed a mug of black coffee. He took a slow sip, the warmth a comfort against the chill of the evening.

"So, Jin," Kagutsuchi began, his voice smooth and even, "how's the job treating you?"

Jin grunted, setting his mug down with a soft clink. "It's got its ups and downs, same as any other. But I'm doing well enough. Got a roof over my head, food on the table. Grateful to be working and earning a living again, you know? After... after the hard times." His gaze drifted, a flicker of something distant and painful in his eyes. He paused, then looked directly at Kagutsuchi, his voice softening, a rare vulnerability creeping in. "Thank you, by the way. For that. For finding me that day. Out on the street, mumbling like a lunatic."

Kagutsuchi waved a dismissive hand, a ghost of a smile touching his lips. "Don't worry about it." His golden eyes, usually so sharp, softened just a fraction. "Just live from now on, Jin. It may not be glamorous, but it's a good, humble life. That's all that matters."

Jin nodded thoughtfully, his gaze falling to his coffee mug. His mind drifted, replaying fragments of that dark period, the despair, the madness. He shuddered almost imperceptibly, imagining what might have become of him without Kagutsuchi's unexpected intervention. "Still... sometimes I wonder. What if you hadn't... what if I'd just stayed out there?" He looked up, a flicker of genuine worry in his eyes.

Kagutsuchi's blank stare, which had been fixed on some unseen point across the room, shifted, a faint, knowing smile now fully gracing his lips. "Nothing good, I'd say."

Jin chuckled softly, a dry, raspy sound that held a surprising warmth. The weight of the past, for a brief moment, eased. They sat in comfortable silence, the quiet hum of the café a backdrop to their shared, unspoken understanding.

The dim, sterile light of the prison cell cast long, distorted shadows across the cold metal bench where Tomura Shigaraki sat. His hands, encased in reinforced, unyielding gloves, rested limply in his lap. His pale blue hair, unkempt and messy, fell over his face, obscuring the furious glare in his red eyes as he stared at the unyielding gray walls. The silence of the cell was a heavy, suffocating blanket, broken only by the ragged sound of his own breathing.

Why? Why hadn't Sensei come for him yet? The question gnawed at him, a festering wound in his already volatile mind. Every passing hour of confinement fueled a simmering, venomous rage. He was Tomura Shigaraki, the leader of the League of Villains, and he was trapped. The humiliation burned hotter than any physical pain.

His thoughts twisted, turning inevitably to the architects of his current misery. All Might. The very name was a curse, a bitter taste on his tongue. That overwhelming, ridiculous power. It had shattered his plans, crushed his ambitions, and left him here, festering in this pathetic cage. The memory of the Symbol of Peace standing triumphant, his smile mocking, sent a fresh wave of loathing through him.

And then there was him. "Beetle Boy." The unexpected, armored strength that had appeared at USJ, turning the tide, ruining everything. He remembered the golden gleam, the impossible resilience, the way that power had just appeared out of nowhere to thwart his carefully laid plans. It was an insult, a glitch in the grand design, and he hated him for it.

His gloved fists clenched, the reinforced material groaning under the pressure. A low, venomous growl rumbled in his throat. "I'll make you pay," he muttered, the words barely audible. "Both of you. All Might... Beetle Boy... you'll regret this. I'll tear down everything you stand for. I'll make you decay." He imagined it, the satisfying crumble of their heroic facades, the dust of their broken dreams.

A heavy sigh escaped him, deflating some of the immediate fury. He leaned back against the cold wall, forcing himself to calm. Sensei wouldn't abandon him. No. Sensei was strategizing. Sensei was patient. He just needed to be patient too. When he was free, when Sensei finally pulled him from this hell, he'd work on that. On patience. Just as Sensei would advise. The thought, cold and bitter, was the only comfort he could find in his confinement.

The Class 1-A classroom hummed with a relaxed, almost lazy energy during the mid-morning break. Sunlight, filtered through the tall windows, painted warm rectangles on the polished floor, and the faint scent of chalk dust and old textbooks hung in the air. Recent tensions, though still lingering beneath the surface for some, had given way to a more casual atmosphere. Students chatted quietly, some stretched languidly, others simply rested their heads on their desks, enjoying the brief reprieve. Izuku Midoriya, at his desk, was utterly engrossed in his hero analysis notebook, the tip of his pencil scratching furiously across the page as he diagrammed a new combat scenario, his brow furrowed in intense concentration. Nearby, Ochako Uraraka and Tenya Iida were deep in conversation, their voices hushed but earnest as they discussed potential training regimens and strategies for the upcoming Sports Festival, their excitement a palpable undercurrent. Katsuki Bakugo, true to form, was slouched in his chair, feet propped up on his desk, headphones clamped over his ears, pointedly ignoring everyone and everything, a silent, explosive island unto himself.

Suddenly, the heavy classroom door slammed open with a resounding BANG that reverberated through the quiet room, making every head snap up in unison. The casual atmosphere shattered instantly. A wave of students in crisp U.A. uniforms, clearly from Class 1-B, poured in, their expressions a mix of eager curiosity and thinly veiled challenge, their chatter abruptly silenced by their leader's entrance. Leading them was Hitoshi Shinso, his purple hair slightly disheveled, his eyes sharp and determined, burning with an almost desperate ambition. He strode to the very front of the room, his presence immediately commanding attention, cutting through the lingering echoes of the door.

"Listen up, Class 1-A!" Shinso's voice sliced through the stunned silence, clear and resonant, carrying an undeniable edge. "You've been riding high on your USJ survival, haven't you? Thinking you're hot stuff just because you faced some villains. Thinking you're the elite." His gaze swept over them, a challenging glint in his eyes, lingering for a moment on Izuku, then shifting pointedly to Bakugo. "But don't think that makes you untouchable. Don't think you're the only ones with potential here. Don't think you're the only ones who deserve to be in the hero course."

He took another deliberate step forward, his eyes narrowing with fierce intent, his voice dropping slightly but losing none of its cutting power. "I'm here to prove Class 1-B can take you down—starting with the Sports Festival. We're coming for your spots."

A stunned, heavy silence fell over the room, even the usually boisterous Class 1-B students holding their breath, waiting for the inevitable explosion. Then, the reactions began.

Katsuki Bakugo scoffed, a low, guttural sound of pure disdain, as he slowly pulled off his headphones, his crimson eyes now blazing with a familiar, dangerous fire. "Huh? What's this extra talking about? 'Take us down'? Don't make me laugh." He pushed himself up, his chair scraping loudly, and stomped forward, sparks already popping from his palms. The bravado was a practiced mask, but a subtle tremor in his hand, a fleeting uncertainty in his eyes, betrayed the unsettling memory of Izuku's Agito form from the previous evening. "You think you can just waltz in here and spout off, you damn brainwasher?! You want our spots, you'll have to pry them from my cold, dead hands! And trust me, you're not strong enough to do it!"

Iida, ever the stickler for rules and decorum, shot to his feet with a dramatic flourish, chopping the air with indignant vigor. "Shinso-kun! This is highly inappropriate! Such disruptive behavior is not befitting a U.A. student, nor is it conducive to a respectful rivalry! This is a classroom, not a battleground! And Bakugo-kun, your aggression is equally unwarranted!"

Ochako Uraraka and Momo Yaoyorozu exchanged worried glances. Ochako's brow was furrowed with concern, her gaze flicking between the two classes, sensing the deeper tension that went beyond simple rivalry. Momo, ever strategic, remained outwardly calm, but her eyes narrowed slightly as she assessed the volatile situation, her mind already calculating potential outcomes.

Izuku, however, remained seated, his pencil now still, his hero analysis notebook forgotten. His green eyes, thoughtful and observant, were fixed intently on Shinso. He wasn't just hearing a challenge; he was seeing the raw ambition, the desperate need to prove something that resonated deeply with his own past, his own Quirkless struggles. His body ached, a dull throb beneath his uniform, a constant reminder of the Minor Lord's brutal attacks. He bit his lip, a slight tremor in his hand as he gripped his pencil, the memory of the creature's lethal intent still vivid.

The confrontation threatened to boil over, the air thick with challenge and simmering aggression, when the classroom door opened again. Aizawa-sensei stepped in, his perpetual exhaustion etched on his face, his capture scarf already half-unfurled. He didn't need to say a word. A single, withering glare swept across the room, silencing both classes instantly.

"That's enough," Aizawa's voice was a low growl, devoid of patience. "The Sports Festival is not a playground for your petty squabbles. It is a stage. And the stakes are higher than any of you realize. Focus. Train. Because there will be challenges you haven't even begun to fathom." His gaze, sharp and piercing, lingered on Izuku for a fraction of a second.

Izuku barely heard the rest of Aizawa's warning. His Agito senses, already on edge, caught a fleeting, cold shiver, a subtle ripple in the air that no one else seemed to notice, a chilling reminder of the unseen war he was entangled in, a war that stretched far beyond the confines of U.A. High.

As the class began to disperse, the Class 1-B students retreating with a mix of grudging respect and renewed determination, Izuku's resolve hardened. He had to master the Agito power before the Festival. Not just to compete, not just to prove himself, but to protect his friends from threats they couldn't even fathom. Yet, the weight of Katsuki's wary, uncertain glances, and his own bone-deep exhaustion, threatened to crack his determination. He knew the coming weeks would be the hardest of his life.

The late afternoon sun hung low over U.A. High, casting a warm golden glow across the sprawling courtyard, where students lingered in small clusters, their voices a soft hum of post-school chatter. Izuku Midoriya walked with a measured pace, his backpack slung over one shoulder, flanked by Ochako Uraraka, Momo Yaoyorozu, Tenya Iida, and Mezo Shoji. The group's conversation was light, centered on training plans for the Sports Festival, but Izuku's mind was elsewhere. The dull ache of yesterday's battle with the Minor Lord lingered in his muscles, and the faint, restless hum of the Agito Force pulsed beneath his skin, a constant reminder of Graviel's unseen gaze. Despite his calm exterior, his green eyes flicked occasionally to the shadows, half-expecting another serpentine figure to emerge.

Ochako's cheerful voice cut through his thoughts. "Izuku-kun, you're so quiet today! Are you thinking about your strategy for the Festival?" Her smile was bright, but her eyes held a flicker of concern, catching the subtle tension in his posture.

Before Izuku could respond, a familiar, explosive shout shattered the courtyard's calm. "DEKU! HOLD IT RIGHT THERE!"

Katsuki Bakugo's voice boomed across the open space, drawing startled glances from nearby students. Izuku stopped, his shoulders tensing slightly, as he turned to see Katsuki charging toward them from the school's entrance. The blonde's crimson eyes burned with a mix of fury and something else—hesitation, uncertainty—his usual swagger faltering as he approached the group. For a moment, he slowed, his gaze flickering over Izuku's companions—Momo's poised stance, Iida's rigid posture, Ochako's wide-eyed concern, and Shoji's quiet, watchful presence. His jaw tightened, and he seemed to wrestle with himself, fists clenching at his sides.

Gathering his courage, Katsuki surged forward, his heavy footsteps echoing on the pavement. "Deku!" he barked, stopping just short of the group, his voice dropping to a low, seething growl. "You're gonna explain what the hell I saw yesterday. Right now. That… thing you fought. That armor. The way it dissolved." His eyes narrowed, a dangerous edge in his tone. "What was that? You don't get to just walk away after that!"

Ochako, Momo, Iida, and Shoji exchanged quick, worried glances. They knew about Izuku's encounter with the Lord, his hushed confession from earlier that morning still fresh in their minds. Ochako's hands twitched, as if ready to step forward, while Momo's brow furrowed, her mind racing to assess the risk of Katsuki knowing too much. Iida adjusted his glasses, his expression stern, and Shoji's multiple arms shifted subtly, a silent warning. They all sensed the same thing: Katsuki was dangerously close to a truth he wasn't ready for, a secret that could unravel everything.

Izuku, however, remained eerily calm, his green eyes meeting Katsuki's with an uncharacteristic steadiness. He tilted his head slightly, his voice low and even. "I told you yesterday, Bakugo. Don't involve yourself in things you don't understand."

Katsuki's face contorted, a snarl twisting his lips as sparks popped from his palms. "Bullshit!" he snapped, his voice a low, threatening hiss, barely audible to the students lingering nearby. "I saw what you did, Deku. That thing—it wasn't human. And you… you made it disappear. Poof. Gone. What the hell else am I supposed to call it but murder?" His eyes gleamed with a mix of accusation and desperation, his usual confidence undercut by the raw shock of what he'd witnessed.

Izuku raised an eyebrow, his calm facade unshaken, though the Agito hum spiked briefly, a faint echo of his lingering fear. "So, what? You're threatening to blackmail me now, Kacchan?" His use of the old nickname was deliberate, laced with a quiet challenge. "You're gonna run to the teachers? The police? Tell them what, exactly? That you saw something you can't explain?"

Katsuki's fists trembled, the sparks intensifying, but his expression faltered, a flicker of disgust crossing his face. Blackmail wasn't his style—it sickened him to even consider it—but he was out of cards, cornered by the impossible reality he'd stumbled into. "Don't play games with me, you damn nerd," he growled, stepping closer, his voice barely above a whisper. "I know what I saw. You're hiding something, and I'm not letting it go until you spill."

Ochako couldn't stay silent any longer. "Bakugo-kun, stop it!" she interjected, stepping forward, her hands clenched into fists. "You don't know what you're talking about! Just leave Izuku-kun alone!" Her voice trembled with protective fervor, her usual warmth replaced by a rare edge.

Katsuki's head snapped toward her, his eyes blazing. "Stay out of this, Round Face!" he barked, his tone sharp enough to make her flinch. "This is between me and Deku, so mind your own damn business!"

Shoji's deep voice rumbled, low and firm, as he took a step forward, his multiple arms flexing subtly. "Watch what you say, Bakugo." His tone was calm but carried an unmistakable warning, his eyes narrowing as he loomed protectively over the group. "You're crossing a line."

The U.A. courtyard, bathed in the fading golden light of late afternoon, crackled with tension as Katsuki Bakugo's accusation hung heavy in the air. Izuku Midoriya stood firm, his green eyes locked on Katsuki's furious crimson glare, the faint hum of the Agito Force a restless undercurrent beneath his calm exterior. Ochako Uraraka's fists were clenched, her protective outburst still echoing, while Momo Yaoyorozu's furrowed brow betrayed her strategic concern. Tenya Iida's rigid posture screamed disapproval, and Mezo Shoji's multiple arms remained poised, a silent warning to Katsuki. The surrounding students had drifted away, sensing the brewing storm, leaving the group in a bubble of charged silence.

Izuku let out a heavy sigh, his shoulders slumping slightly as he relented. "Fine, Kacchan," he said, his voice low but steady, cutting through the tension. His friends' heads snapped toward him, eyes wide with worry, but he raised a hand, palm open, calming them. "It's okay, guys. I've got this."

Scratching the back of his head—a familiar, almost boyish gesture to ease the suffocating atmosphere—Izuku met Katsuki's gaze again. "You really want to know what's going on, Kacchan? No take backs. You sure about this?"

Katsuki scoffed, folding his arms, his smirk sharp and defiant. "Don't play dumb, Deku. You know me better than that. I don't back down, and I'm not letting you dodge this." His voice dripped with challenge, but his eyes flickered with a mix of curiosity and unease, still haunted by the dissolving Lord and Izuku's golden armor.

Izuku nodded, his expression resigned but resolute. "Alright. But first, we settle this another way." He paused, letting the words sink in, then straightened, his voice firm. "Let's have a match. You and me. No holds barred."

A beat of stunned silence followed.

Ochako's jaw dropped, her hands flying to her mouth. "Izuku-kun, what?!"

Momo's eyes widened, her analytical mind racing.

Iida's arm froze mid-chop, his glasses glinting with shock.

Shoji's multiple eyes narrowed, his deep voice rumbling, "Midoriya, are you serious?"

Katsuki, caught off guard, blinked, his usual fire dimmed by sheer disbelief. Then, slowly, a predatory grin tugged at the corner of his lips, his eyes gleaming with a dangerous excitement. "Did I hear that right, Deku? You're challenging me?" His voice was low, almost gleeful, as if he'd been handed a long-awaited gift.

Izuku's expression remained dry, unflinching. "Yes, Kacchan. You heard me. A duel. Just us." He raised a finger, his tone shifting to one of quiet authority. "But not here. Not at school. We'll go to Dagobah Beach. We'll take a taxi."

The group erupted into protests. "Izuku-kun, this is crazy!" Ochako cried, stepping forward, her voice trembling with worry. "You're still hurt from yesterday! And this… this isn't like you!"

"Midoriya-kun, this is highly reckless!" Iida declared, chopping the air vigorously. "Such an unsanctioned confrontation violates U.A.'s regulations! We must resolve this through proper channels!"

Momo's voice was calmer but no less concerned. "Izuku, you've just been through a traumatic encounter. A fight now, especially with Bakugo, could be dangerous—for both of you."

Shoji, silent until now, added quietly, "You're pushing yourself too hard, Midoriya. You don't need to prove anything to him."

Izuku shook his head, his gaze never leaving Katsuki's. "No. This is something we need to do. Right, Kacchan?" His voice carried a weight, an acknowledgment of their shared history, the years of rivalry and resentment that had built to this moment. "You've been itching for this for a long time. I can feel it."

Katsuki's grin widened, though a flicker of offense flashed in his eyes. "Damn right, Deku. But where the hell did you pick up the stones to challenge me?" He leaned forward, his voice a low growl, sparks popping faintly from his palms. "You think you can just call me out like that?"

Izuku's calm didn't waver, but his words cut deep, laced with a quiet, unflinching truth. "Since I realized how petty you can be, Kacchan. All this time, you've been trying to prove you're better than me, tearing me down to feel bigger. I'm done running from it. Let's settle this. I'll give you what you want—a fight to sate that drive of yours."

Katsuki's grin faltered, his face twisting with offense, the words striking a nerve. "Petty?!" he snarled, taking a step closer, his voice rising. "You think you can talk down to me like that, you damn nerd? You're gonna regret those words when I blast you into the sand!"

Izuku merely nodded, his expression unreadable, the faint hum of the Agito Force a silent undercurrent in his chest. "Dagobah Beach. Tonight. We'll settle it there." He turned, gesturing for his friends to follow, leaving Katsuki standing in the courtyard, his fists trembling with a mix of rage and anticipation.

The moon hung low over Dagobah Beach, its pale light casting a silver sheen across the scattered debris and smoothed sand, a far cry from the junk-strewn shore Izuku Midoriya had once cleared in his pre-U.A. days. The distant hum of city traffic was a faint murmur, drowned out by the rhythmic crash of waves and the sharp, salty tang of the sea air. Izuku stood near the water's edge, his U.A. uniform jacket discarded on a nearby rock, his white shirt slightly rumpled from the taxi ride. His green eyes were steady, but his body ached faintly from the Minor Lord's attack the previous day, the Agito Force humming restlessly beneath his skin, a low thrum that pulsed in time with his heartbeat. He felt the weight of what was coming—not just a fight, but a reckoning.

Katsuki Bakugo stood opposite him, his silhouette sharp against the moonlit sand, his school tie loosened and sleeves rolled up, sparks already crackling at his fingertips. His crimson eyes burned with a volatile mix of anticipation, anger, and something deeper—uncertainty, still shaken by the image of Izuku's golden armor and the dissolving Lord. The taxi's taillights had long faded, leaving them alone in this isolated arena, the tension between them thick enough to choke the air.

"You ready to eat sand, Deku?" Katsuki growled, his voice low and dangerous, a predatory grin spreading across his face. But there was a flicker in his eyes, a crack in his usual bravado, as if he wasn't entirely sure what he was facing.

Izuku exhaled slowly, his posture calm but resolute, his hands flexing at his sides. "Let's get this over with, Kacchan." His voice was steady, devoid of his usual stammer, carrying a quiet authority that made Katsuki's grin falter for a split second.

Without warning, Katsuki lunged, his palms erupting in a blinding explosion that lit up the beach like a flare. The blast roared toward Izuku, kicking up sand and debris. Izuku dove to the side, his movements sharp and instinctive, the Agito Force sharpening his reflexes. He hit the ground rolling, springing back to his feet as the sand settled, his eyes locked on Katsuki.

"Not bad, nerd!" Katsuki snarled, already charging forward, another explosion building in his hands. "But you're gonna have to do better than that!"

Izuku didn't respond. He ducked under a sweeping blast, the heat singeing the air above him, and closed the distance. His fist snapped out, a quick, precise jab aimed at Katsuki's chest. Katsuki twisted, deflecting the blow with his forearm, but the force surprised him, his eyes widening as he stumbled back a step. "What the—? Since when do you hit that hard?!"

Izuku didn't let up. He pressed forward, his movements fluid, almost predatory, driven by the Agito's instincts. He threw a series of rapid punches, each one forcing Katsuki to block or dodge, the blonde's explosions bursting in defensive flashes. The beach became a chaotic dance of light and shadow, the crack of explosions mingling with the thud of fists against flesh or sand.

Katsuki roared, his frustration boiling over. "Stop holding back, Deku!" He unleashed a massive explosion, a wall of fire and force that tore across the beach, sending a wave of sand into the air. Izuku threw himself backward, the blast grazing his arm, searing the fabric of his shirt. He winced but didn't falter, his green eyes narrowing as the Agito hum grew louder, more insistent, urging him to unleash it.

"Not yet," Izuku muttered under his breath, clenching his fists. He couldn't transform—not here, not now. Katsuki had seen too much already, and revealing the full extent of the Agito would only complicate things further. But the power was restless, clawing at the edges of his control, reacting to the intensity of the fight.

Katsuki seized the moment, launching himself into the air with a propulsion blast, his palms blazing. "You're done, Deku!" He aimed a concentrated explosion downward, the force like a meteor strike. Izuku rolled to the side, the impact cratering the sand where he'd stood, the shockwave knocking him off balance. He scrambled to his feet, his breath ragged, the cut on his cheek from the Lord fight reopening, a thin trickle of blood mixing with sweat.

"Had enough yet?!" Katsuki landed heavily, his grin wild, but his eyes betrayed a flicker of unease. Izuku wasn't fighting like the Deku he knew—there was a ferocity, a precision, that felt… wrong. "What's with you, huh? Where's this coming from?!"

Izuku wiped the blood from his cheek, his expression unreadable. "You wanted this, Kacchan. You wanted to prove you're better. So prove it." His voice was calm, but there was a sharp edge, a challenge that cut deeper than any explosion.

Katsuki's face twisted, his rage flaring. "Don't you dare talk down to me!" He charged, his palms igniting with a series of rapid, pinpoint blasts, each one aimed to overwhelm. Izuku weaved through them, his body moving almost on autopilot, the Agito's instincts guiding him. He caught Katsuki's wrist mid-blast, twisting it to redirect the explosion into the sand, and delivered a swift knee to Katsuki's midsection.

Katsuki grunted, doubling over, but retaliated with a point-blank blast that forced Izuku to release him and leap back. The two stood panting, circling each other, the beach scarred with craters and scorch marks. Katsuki's grin was gone, replaced by a grim determination, his mind racing. He's not just dodging. He's matching me. How the hell is he matching me?

Izuku felt the Agito Force surging, a golden flicker dancing at the edges of his vision, begging to be unleashed. His body trembled, not from fear but from the effort of holding it back. "Kacchan," he said, his voice low, almost pleading. "This doesn't have to go further. You don't understand what you're asking for."

Katsuki spat into the sand, his eyes blazing. "Don't give me that crap! You think you can just brush me off after what I saw? That thing—you killed it! You're not some wannabe hero, Deku. You're something else, and I'm gonna find out what!" He raised his palms, a massive explosion building, the air crackling with heat.

Izuku's resolve hardened. He couldn't let Katsuki push him into revealing the Agito—not yet. But he also couldn't let this drag on. He took a deep breath, channeling the Agito's strength without transforming, his muscles tensing with raw power. "Fine," he said, his voice a low growl. "Let's end this."

He launched forward, faster than before, his fist glowing faintly with a controlled pulse of golden energy. Katsuki's eyes widened, but he reacted, unleashing his explosion. The two forces collided—a golden fist against a roaring blast. The impact shook the beach, a shockwave rippling outward, sand and water spraying in all directions. When the dust settled, both boys stood, breathing heavily, Izuku's fist inches from Katsuki's chest, Katsuki's palm still smoking from the blast.

For a moment, neither moved, the only sound the crash of waves and their ragged breaths. Katsuki's eyes searched Izuku's, looking for answers, for the truth behind the power he'd just felt. "What… are you?" he whispered, his voice hoarse, the question no longer an accusation but a genuine plea.

Izuku stepped back, the golden flicker fading from his hand, his expression heavy with exhaustion and resolve. "I'm still me, Kacchan," he said quietly. "But there's more at stake than you know. If you want answers, you'll get them—after this. But you have to trust me."

Katsuki's fists clenched, his jaw tight, but he didn't attack. The fight had drained some of his fire, leaving him with more questions than answers. He glared at Izuku, then turned, stalking toward the rocks where his jacket lay. "This isn't over, Deku," he muttered, his voice low but lacking its usual venom. "You owe me."

Izuku watched him go, the Agito hum settling into a faint whisper. He sank to one knee, the adrenaline fading, leaving only the ache of his bruises and the weight of his secret. The moon cast long shadows across the beach, and for a fleeting moment, he felt a cold, distant presence.

The streetlights flickered to life as Katsuki Bakugo stormed through the quiet Musutafu streets, his heavy footsteps echoing in the cool night air. His U.A. uniform was disheveled, his tie hanging loose, and his jacket slung over one shoulder, the faint smell of smoke and sweat clinging to him. The fight at Dagobah Beach replayed in his mind like a relentless loop: the golden flicker in Deku's fist, the impossible strength that matched his explosions, the way the sand had cratered under their clash. His hands clenched into fists, sparks popping faintly, as his crimson eyes burned with a volatile mix of rage, confusion, and something he refused to name—fear.

He reached his house, the familiar glow of the porch light doing nothing to ease the storm in his chest. Slamming the front door behind him, he ignored his mother's shout of "Katsuki, don't break the damn house!" and stomped upstairs to his room. The door rattled as he kicked it shut, collapsing onto his bed, his breath still uneven from the fight. His room—posters of All Might, a cluttered desk of hero analysis notes, and a punching bag in the corner—felt too small, too ordinary, for the chaos in his head.

What the hell was that? The question gnawed at him, sharp and unrelenting. He'd seen Deku—pathetic, Quirkless Deku—turn into something else. Not just the golden armor from the alley, not just the way that snake-thing dissolved into nothing, but tonight, that raw, unyielding power. The way Deku's fist had glowed, the way he'd matched him, blow for blow, without breaking a sweat. Katsuki punched the mattress, a low growl escaping his throat. "Damn nerd," he muttered, but the words lacked their usual venom.

He sat up, running a hand through his spiky blonde hair, his mind racing. Deku's words echoed: "I'm still me, Kacchan. But there's more at stake than you know." What stakes? What was he hiding? Katsuki's jaw tightened, his pride stinging like an open wound. All his life, he'd been the best, the strongest, the one destined to surpass All Might. But tonight, Deku had stood toe-to-toe with him, unflinching, and it shook him to his core.

He grabbed his phone from his pocket, the screen lighting up his scowl. His thumb hovered over the search bar, hesitating. Strange creatures Musutafu. Golden armor hero. Dissolving monsters. He typed the words, then deleted them, slamming the phone onto his desk. "Stupid," he growled to himself. What was he gonna find? Some conspiracy thread on the internet? He wasn't some nerd like Deku, chasing ghosts. But the image of that snake-thing, its golden eyes and ancient staff, wouldn't leave him. And Deku's cold, steady gaze, telling him to back off—it was wrong. All wrong.

Katsuki stood, pacing the room, his fists clenching and unclenching. He'd always been ahead, always better. Deku was supposed to be the weak one, the crybaby following in his shadow. But now… now he wasn't so sure. That power wasn't just a Quirk. It was something else, something bigger, and it pissed him off that Deku was carrying it like it was nothing. Like he didn't owe Katsuki an explanation.

He stopped at his window, staring out at the dark city skyline. The Sports Festival was coming. He'd crush everyone, prove he was still number one. But the thought of facing Deku again, of that golden flicker, sent a shiver down his spine—not fear, he told himself, just adrenaline. "You owe me, Deku," he muttered, his voice low, a promise to himself. "I'm gonna find out what you're hiding. And when I do, you're done."

He turned away from the window, his resolve hardening. He'd train harder, push further, and when the Festival came, he'd make Deku show his hand. No more secrets. No more holding back. Katsuki Bakugo wasn't going to be left in the dark—not by Deku, not by anyone.

The early morning sun filtered through the budding cherry blossom trees in U.A. High's courtyard, casting a soft, dappled glow across the cobblestone path. In a secluded corner, away from the hum of student chatter about the upcoming Sports Festival, Izuku Midoriya stood surrounded by Ochako Uraraka, Momo Yaoyorozu, Tenya Iida, and Mezo Shoji. Their faces were a mix of worry and resolve, forming a tight circle that shielded their conversation from prying ears. Izuku's U.A. uniform was pristine, the Agito's healing having erased the bruises and cuts from his fight with Katsuki at Dagobah Beach, but a quiet exhaustion lingered in his green eyes, a shadow of the strain from pushing his body and the Agito to their limits. His hands fidgeted, the faint hum of the Agito Force pulsing softly, a reminder of the power he was struggling to control.

Ochako broke the silence, her voice trembling with a mix of fear and frustration, her brown eyes glistening with barely restrained tears. "Izuku-kun, how could you?!" She stepped closer, her fists clenched at her sides, her usual warmth edged with urgency. "We heard from some second-years—you and Bakugo-kun took a taxi to Dagobah Beach last night! You fought him, didn't you? After that Lord nearly killed you?!" Her voice cracked, a tear escaping down her cheek. "You're pushing yourself too hard, and it's scaring us!"

Izuku winced, his hand instinctively rising to scratch the back of his head, a nervous habit that felt inadequate against the weight of her words. "Ochako-chan, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to worry you guys. I just… I had to deal with Kacchan." His voice was low, steady but tinged with guilt, the memory of Katsuki's shocked "What… are you?" still ringing in his ears.

Iida's arm sliced through the air, his glasses flashing with indignation. "Midoriya-kun, this is utterly reckless! An unsanctioned duel violates U.A.'s regulations and endangers your well-being!" His voice softened, his concern breaking through his usual rigidity. "You told us about the Agito, about the Lords. We know the danger you're in. Why risk exposing that power to Bakugo-kun, especially when he's already suspicious? You could have been seriously hurt!"

Momo, her posture poised but her brow furrowed with worry, nodded in agreement. "Izuku, we understand the Agito makes you a target, but fighting Bakugo now was a dangerous choice. He saw you use it against that Lord, and if he saw it again last night, it could draw unwanted attention—maybe even from people we don't yet understand." Her voice was calm but firm, her analytical mind already calculating risks. "The Sports Festival is days away. We need you at your best, not taking unnecessary risks."

Shoji, his multiple arms crossed, spoke in his deep, steady voice, his multiple eyes meeting Izuku's with quiet empathy. "You don't have to prove anything to Bakugo, Midoriya. We know what the Agito is, what it means. You're not alone in this, but you're acting like you are." His words carried a weight of shared experience, echoing his own past struggles with being judged. "Let us help you carry this."

Izuku's throat tightened, their concern and trust chipping away at the walls he'd built to protect them. He glanced around the courtyard, ensuring no one was close enough to overhear, then met their eyes, his voice low and earnest. "I know I messed up. I'm sorry for scaring you. Kacchan… he saw the Agito when I fought that Lord. He thinks I did something terrible, like I killed someone human. I fought him last night to show him I'm still me, to keep him from digging deeper." He paused, his hand clenching as the Agito hum stirred, a faint warmth in his chest. "But I pushed too hard. The Agito… it's hard to control sometimes, especially when I'm tired or angry. I didn't want him to see more than he already has."

Ochako's tears spilled over, and she lunged forward, pulling Izuku into a tight hug, her voice muffled against his shoulder. "Izuku-kun, you can't keep doing this! You told us about the Agito, and we're with you, okay? No more secret fights! You have to promise us!" Her grip trembled, her warmth a stark contrast to the cold weight of his secret.

Momo stepped closer, her voice steady but urgent. "Izuku, we need to work together, especially with the Sports Festival coming. If the Agito slips under pressure, it could expose you to everyone—heroes, scouts, maybe even worse." She tapped her chin, a plan forming. "I can create training equipment to simulate high-intensity scenarios, help you practice controlling the Agito's output. We'll make sure you're ready."

Iida adjusted his glasses, his tone resolute but softer now. "Indeed! As aspiring heroes, we must support each other! Midoriya-kun, your strength is inspiring, but true heroism lies in teamwork. Let us help you master this power before the Festival. We cannot allow you to face these dangers alone!"

Shoji nodded, his multiple arms relaxing slightly, a rare warmth in his voice. "You're one of us, Midoriya. The Agito doesn't change that. We'll keep your secret, but you need to let us in. No more going off on your own."

Izuku's eyes softened, the Agito hum settling into a gentle pulse, as if soothed by their bond. He looked at them—Ochako's tear-streaked face, Momo's determined gaze, Iida's steadfast conviction, Shoji's quiet strength—and felt a flicker of relief amidst his exhaustion. "You're right," he said, his voice steadying, a small, genuine smile breaking through. "No more secret fights. I promise I'll tell you if something's wrong. And… thank you. For not giving up on me, even with all this." He returned Ochako's hug briefly, then stepped back, his resolve hardening. "Let's train together for the Festival. I need to get stronger—for all of us."

The bell rang, its sharp chime echoing across the courtyard, calling them to class. The group exchanged nods, their pact sealed, and began to disperse, Ochako wiping her eyes with a determined sniff, Momo already sketching training ideas in her mind, Iida adjusting his posture with renewed purpose, and Shoji offering a subtle nod of support. Izuku lingered for a moment, his gaze drifting to the cherry blossoms, their petals swaying gently. The Sports Festival loomed, a test of his control over the Agito and his ability to protect his friends from the dangers he knew were coming, even if he couldn't name them yet.